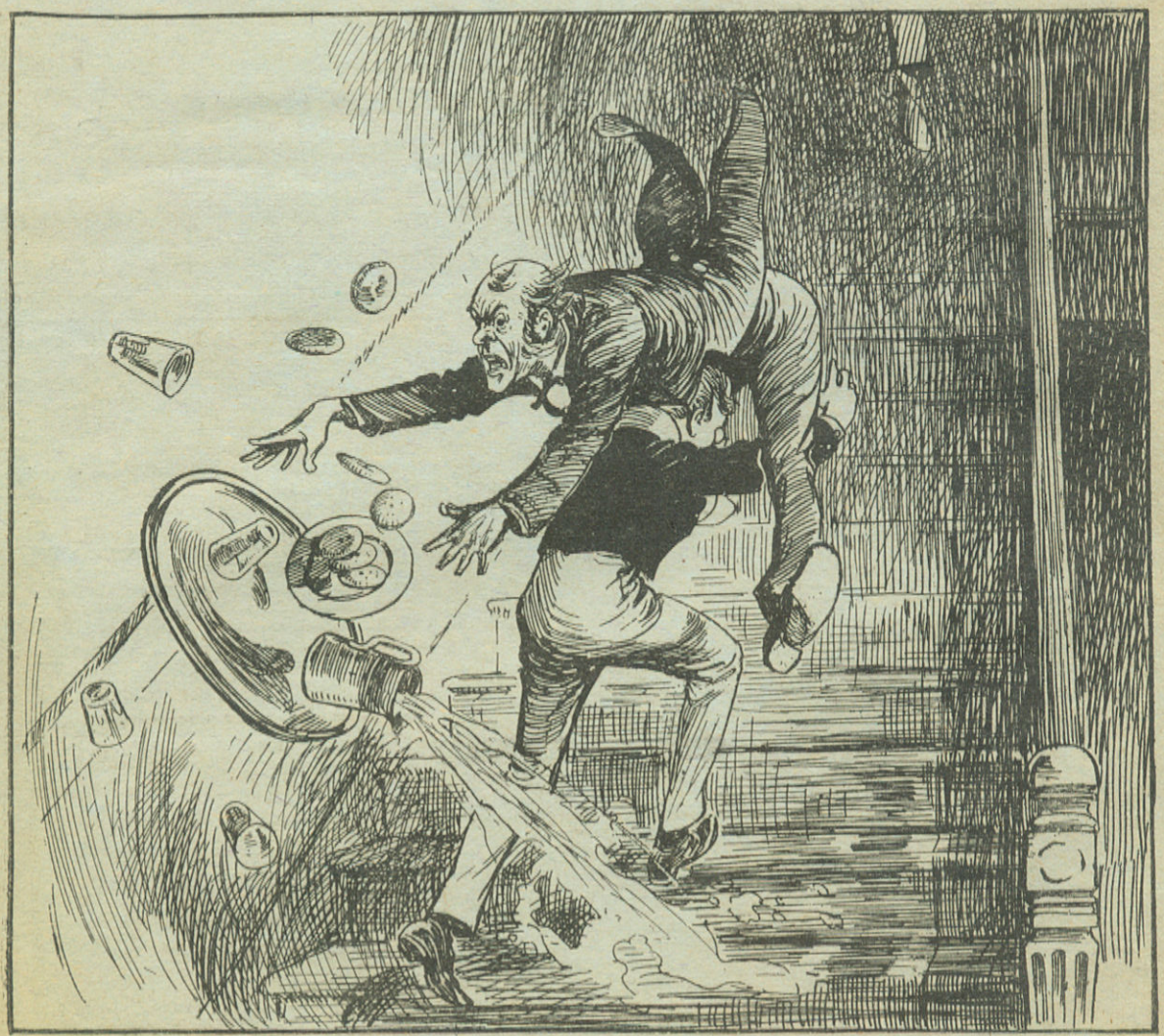
TOM MERRY & Co. IN LANCASHIRE.

THE GEM LIBRARY 1d.

NEW SERIES NO. 60. VOL. 3.

A Grand, Extra Long, Complete School Tale.



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dashed on, and ran right into the waiter, and Albert staggered, and there was a terrific crash of smashing glass. "Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's.

£1,000 TO BE GIVEN AWAY

in Prize Watches to all clever readers who can solve this puzzle. The letters, when correctly arranged, spell the names of three well-known **fruits**. If your answer is right we will give you a **Real Lever Simulation Gold Watch**, guaranteed **10 years, entirely free of cost**. Send your answer **now**, with stamped addressed envelope for our reply. Remember, you are not asked to sell anything for us, but winners must comply with our one simple condition, and promise to show the Watch to their friends as a sample of our wonderful Bargains.

P	M	L	U
P	R	A	E
D	T	E	A

Address—IMPERIAL SUPPLY CO. (Dept. 2), 42, Junction Road, London, N.

BLUSHING.

FREE, to all sufferers, particulars of a proved home treatment that quickly removes all embarrassment, and permanently cures blushing and flushing of the face and neck. Enclose stamp to pay postage to Mr. D. TEMPLE (Specialist), 8, Blenheim Street, Bond Street, London, W.

AMNUM SILVER

KEYLESS WATCHES FREE

We give you absolutely FREE an amnum SILVER KEYLESS WATCH—a perfect timekeeper—a genuine watch—not a cheap toy—for selling or using 60 of our beautiful Pictorial Postcards at One Penny each within 28 days. As soon as you have sold or used the 60 cards, and sent us the 5/-, you get the watch. If you do not want a watch, we have many other presents as per list we will send, but do not fail to send a postcard with your full name and address at once. Send no money. We will trust you.

THE CARD CO. (Desk 31), Willesden Junction, London, N.W.

LEVER WATCHES FREE.

We will give to any person selling or using **6 articles of Jewellery, at 1/- each**, such as Gem Rings (in velvet-lined cases), Art Brooches, Scarf Pins, &c., any of the beautiful gifts in the large list we will send, including Real Lever Watches (ladies' or gent's), Air Guns, Melodeons, Alarm Clocks, &c., &c. We send whichever gift you select as soon as we receive the **6/-. SEND NO MONEY. WE TRUST YOU.** A postcard will do, but write to-day, with full name and address—

THE ARTISTIC CO. (14 Dept.), 42, Park Parade, Harlesden, London.

A REAL GEM

GOLD WATCH FREE.

In this puzzle you see three lines of letters. These have to be so arranged that each line spells a Girl's Christian name. A MAGNIFICENT WATCH, Lady's or Gent's (guaranteed 5 years), will be sent free of charge to readers of this paper who solve this puzzle and conform to our condition. IT COSTS YOU NOTHING TO TRY. Send your answer, together with stamp, that we may send you result. All failing to do this will be disqualified. SEND NOW.

E	R	S	O
R	Y	A	M
M	D	U	A

"BARGAIN" WATCH CO. (32 Dept.), 89, Cornwallis Rd., London, N.

A REAL LEVER SIMULATION

GOLD WATCH FREE

To All Clever Readers of 'The Gem.'

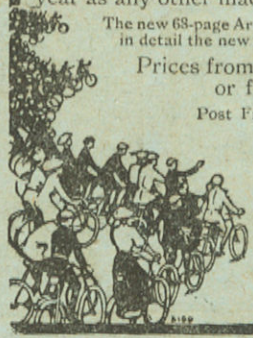
The four lines of letters in this square stand for two boys' and two girls' names. We will send you **Absolutely Free**, one of our famous simulation 18-ct. **Gold Watches** (ladies' or gents') if you send us the correct names; but you must comply with our one condition, and promise to show the watch to your friends, as we wish to advertise our goods. **It costs you nothing to try**, so send your answer at once, with your name and address. A postcard will do.—THE LONDON GENERAL SUPPLY ASSOCIATION (Dept. A), 72, Finsbury Pavement, London, E.C.

C	J	K	A
E	T	R	B
T	K	E	A
S	O	R	E

Rudge-Whitworth
Britain's Best Bicycle

The Vote of the Majority

is cast for Rudge-Whitworths of which twice as many are sold every year as any other machine.



The new 68-page Art Catalogue describes in detail the new features of 1909 Rudge-Whitworths.

Prices from **£3 15s.** cash to **£14 12s.**, or from 7/- per month.

Post Free from

Rudge-Whitworth, Ltd., (Dept. 331) Coventry.

LONDON:—
230 Tottenham Court Road, W.
23 Holborn Viaduct, E.C.
160 Regent St., W.

By Appointment

GIVEN AWAY FREE!
A STAMP COLLECTOR'S COMPLETE OUTFIT, including the Philatelic Souvenir (as p r illus.), 96 pages, 250 illustrations, a Packet of Genuine Stamps from all parts of the world, a Perforation Gauge, and a Packet of Stamp Mounts. Sent free on receipt of **Two Penny Stamps** for Postage, &c.—
HENRY ABEL & CO., WHITSTABLE.

IF YOU WANT Good Cheap Photographic Material or Cameras send postcard for Samples and Catalogue, FREE.—Works: **JULY ROAD, LIVERPOOL.**

A CYCLE for 1/-
DEPOSIT & 1/- WEEKLY.

As an advertisement we will send to first 1,000 applicants our **£6 8s. 0d.** "ROYAL EMBLEM" CYCLE for **1s. DEPOSIT**, and on last payment of 81 weeks at **1s.**, making **£4 5s.** A HANDSOME PRESENT IS SENT FREE. Cash with order, **£3 15s. 0d.** only. Write for Illustrated Catalogue of Latest Models.

ROYAL EMBLEM CYCLE DEPOT (C30), GREAT YARMOUTH.

FOR 2/6

Masters, Ltd., will supply you with one of their World-famed 30/- Lever Watches on Easy Terms—pay 2/6 on delivery and 2/6 monthly. Gent's or Lady's size, Keywind or Keyless, and you have the watch to wear while paying your monthly instalments.

Masters' "Veracity" Watches have Lever Movement, Bold Dial, Dust-proof Cap over the works, SOLID SILVER Extra Heavy Cases, 27/- Cash, or 30/- Easy Terms, as above. Send 2/6 now and have a 30/- Watch built by experts which you will be proud to own. Catalogue, Watches & Rings, FREE.

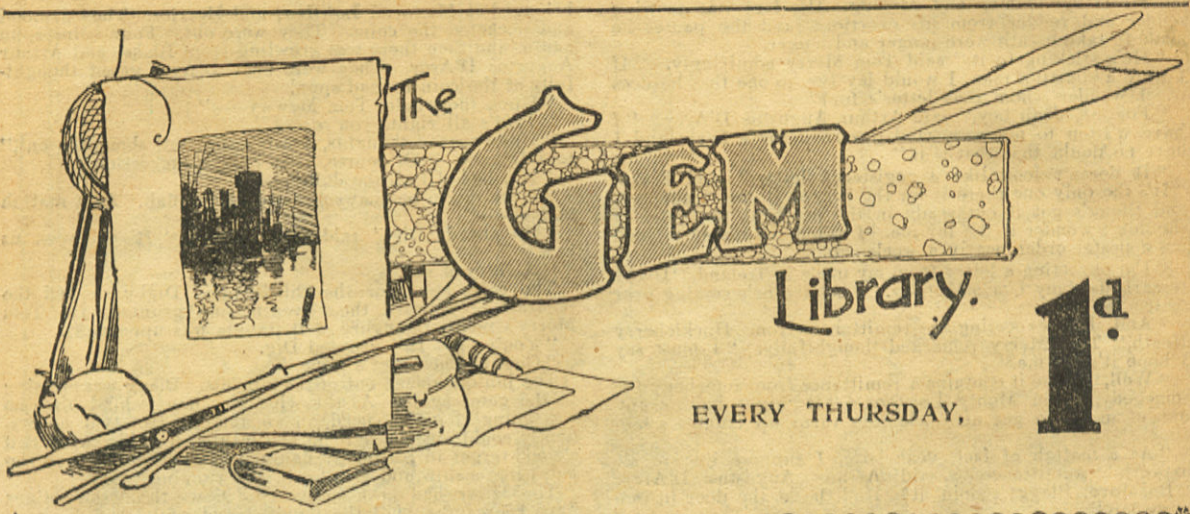
MASTERS, Ltd., 97, HOPE STORES, RYE.

MONEY MADE QUICKLY.

FLOWER AND VEGETABLE SEEDS.
LARGEST PENNY PACKETS IN THE WORLD.

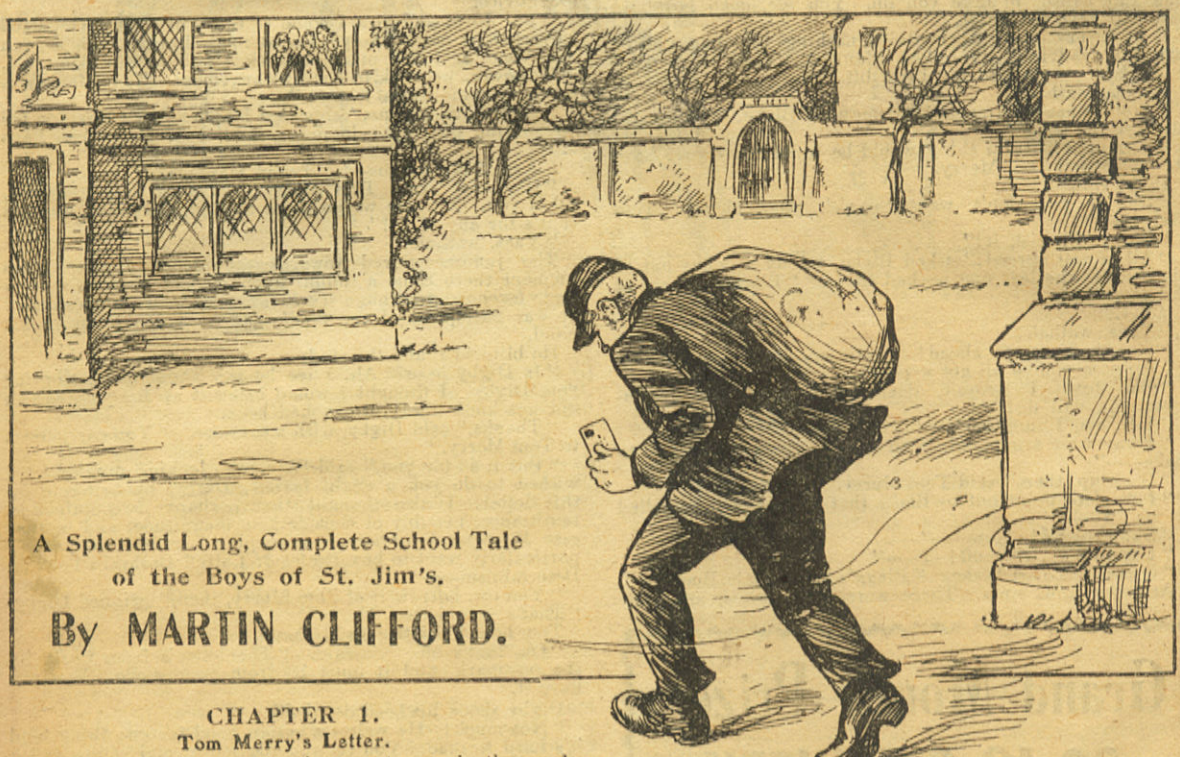
Send No Money. We Trust You.

We have reduced our 2d. and 3d. Packets of Flower and Vegetable Seeds **All to One Penny per Packet** in order to still more popularise them. All you need to do is to send us a postcard with your full name and address, and we will send you per return post 72 Packets Assorted Seeds. Use or sell the Packets of seeds at 1d. per packet within 28 days (**We Trust You**), and we will reward you according to terms on our new 1909 list. All **Prizes Free.** Real Phonographs, Watches, Rifles, Musical Instruments, Cameras, Footballs, Hall-marked Umbrellas, etc., etc. Be sure and state whether Flower or Vegetable Seeds required. Send postcard AT ONCE to **GEROME & CO., Ltd.**, Dept. 48, **87, Fleet Street, London, E.C.**



Complete Stories for Everyone, and Every Story a Gem!

TOM MERRY & Co. IN LIVERPOOL.



A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
Tom Merry's Letter.

THE March wind was blowing great guns in the quadrangle at St. Jim's. The old elms, on which the spring green was beginning to show, groaned and creaked. The wind wailed round the chimney-pots, and shook the windows of the School House. Blagg, the postman, zigzagged across from the gates with a letter in his hand. The wind was strong, and Blagg was stout and short of breath, and he crossed the quad in a series of short tacks like a heavy old "wind-jammer" beating up the river against the wind. From a study window in the School House, half a dozen juniors watched his progress with great interest.

It was the window of Study No. 6, and its owners—Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form—were all there. Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners, of the Shell, were also in the study. The juniors were all looking out of the window, discussing the interesting question whether Blagg, the postman, would ever reach the School House, or whether the March wind would be too much for him.

The struggle was doubtful. Blagg came on valiantly, but a furious gust would catch him and stop his career, and

leave him floundering and gasping. His face was growing redder and redder from his exertions, and the pauses he made to take breath were longer and longer.

"He's sticking to it," said Tom Merry admiringly. "If I were a sporting man, I would lay two to one that he does it. I wonder whom that letter's for?"

"For me, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I have w'itten to my wespected governah for a fivah, and I have no doubt that that is it."

"It doesn't look like a registered letter," said Blake. "It's the only one there is for the School House, I suppose, and Blagg's got it out ready in the porch at the gate. I shouldn't wonder if it's for me. I asked the mater to send me a postal order nearly a week ago."

"I'm expecting a letter from my uncle in Ireland," Digby remarked—"my Uncle Murphy. I believe he's coming over to see me."

"And I'm expecting a remittance from Huckleberry Heath," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully. "I must say I hope it's for me."

"Well, I hope it contains a remittance from somebody for somebody," said Monty Lowther. "It might be for any one of us. I've got an uncle who turns up trumps sometimes."

"As a mattah of fact, deah boys, I suppose we are all expectin' wemittances," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, Blaggy's doin' it! He'll be at the door in one more lap."

"Tell you what," said Blake suddenly. "The letter may be for any of us——"

"Or none of us," said Lowther.

"Exactly. It may be for any of us, and if it contains a remittance, it will come like—like corn in Egypt in these hard times."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I'll tell you what—I'll toss you fellows, odd man out, for the letter," said Blake. "What do you say?"

"Rats!" was what Lowther said.

"Bai Jove," said Arthur Augustus, "it's a sportin' offer, and I'm willin' to take you on. You see, deah boys, we can't all have the letter."

"And very likely it contains nothing but parental or avuncular advice," remarked Manners, "and if it does, anybody's welcome to my little bit."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, what do you say?" demanded Blake. "We can't all have the letter."

"The most natural thing would be to let the owner have it," suggested Tom Merry.

Blake sniffed.

"Oh, if you don't want to risk your chance, Tom Merry——"

"Rats! I'll risk it!"

"All of you agreed?" asked Blake, taking a penny out of his pocket—the last one he had there. "Blagg's nearly at the door."

"Yes."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! Then go ahead! Heads are out," said Blake. "I suppose you've all got a penny?"

"Bai Jove, I haven't, deah boy! I suppose half-a-soveweign will do?"

"Yes, ass, I suppose it will. Go ahead!"

"Pway wait a moment, deah boys. I have a wemark to make——"

"Buck up, then," said Tom Merry. "What is it?"

"I want to point out to Blake that I wefuse to be called an ass. I——"

"Oh, ring off! Now——"

"I wefuse to wing off! I——"

"Order!" roared Blake. "Blagg's knocking! Buck up!"

And the coins spun. There were three heads, and they belonged to Manners, Lowther, and Herries. They grunted and pocketed the coins. They were out. Four coins spun again, and then there was growling from Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. They were out. D'Arcy gazed thoughtfully at the coin he had spun.

"Upon the whole, Tom Mewwy——"

"That's all right, you're out."

"Upon second thoughts, I think that tail should be out," said D'Arcy. "Of course, it is only a suggestion."

"Ha, ha! Of all the duffers——"

"I decline to be chawactewised as a duffah. As a mattah of fact——"

"Go ahead, Dig," said Tom Merry. "It's between us now."

"Right you are."

The coins spun for the third time. Digby showed the portrait of Edward the Seventh, and grunted. On Tom Merry's penny the figure of Britannia was uppermost.

"You've got it," grunted Dig.

"Good! The letter's mine."

The juniors looked out of the window. Blagg was crossing to the gates again. As the wind was now behind him, he was going along at speed, in an ambling trot that he evidently could not check if he had wanted to. The wind had a good target in his portly figure, and he bore down on the gates like a ship under full sail, and running free.

The letter had been delivered. Now, the letter might have been for any of the hundred odd souls that dwelt in the School House at St. Jim's; but the juniors in Study No. 6 had a feeling that it was for them. They were so badly in want of a remittance that they would have taken it as a distinct grievance if the letter had not been for one of their number. D'Arcy's half-sovereign was the last coin of any great value that remained among them.

"Well, it's Tom Merry's letter," said Digby. "If it's from my Uncle Murphy, Tom Merry will have to receive him when he comes to St. Jim's, that's all."

"And if it's from my pater, with a shoal of advice to extravagant youths," said Blake, "Tom Merry can follow the advice."

"Bai Jove, and now I come to think of it, my wespected governah is more likely to send me a lecture than a fivah this time, as I had one last week," said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, we stick to the awwangement. Tom Mewwy is quite welcome to the lecture."

"And if it's for me," chuckled Herries, "it's a recipe for preventing distemper in dogs. And Tom Merry can have it."

"And if it's for me——" began Manners.

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "You're jolly generous, all of you. Suppose we go down and get the letter, and see if it's for any of us?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors moved towards the door. At the same moment there came a thump upon it, and a youth with a huge forehead, and huge spectacles ornamenting it, came in. It was Skimpole, of the Shell, and he had a letter in his hand.

He blinked round the study.

"Is Digby here? Ah, I see he is. There is a letter for you, Digby. I thought I would bring it up for you, as you did not know the postman had been."

"Thanks," said Digby, with a grimace. "You can give it to Tom Merry."

"But it is for you," said Skimpole, looking puzzled. "I wished to do you a slight favour, Digby, by bringing up this letter. I also thought that perhaps it contained a remittance, possibly of considerable magnitude, and in that case I intended to borrow a couple of guineas of you. I particularly want to buy Professor Lottoff Boshski's book on Determinism——"

"You can borrow it of Tom Merry, then," grinned Digby. "That's your letter, Merry."

Tom held the letter in his hand.

"Oh, that's off!" he said. "The letter's from Cork, by the postmark, and it must be from your uncle. You can have it."

Digby shook his head decidedly.

"Not much! He writes a rotten hand for one thing, and it's hard to read. You've won the letter, and you're going to read it."

"Yaas, wathah! We all wefuse to allow Tom Mewwy to go back on his bargain."

"Oh, very well," said Tom Merry, laughing; and he opened the letter.

It was clear at once that there was no remittance in it. It contained a letter in a decidedly cramped hand, and the signature was Michael Murphy.

"Now, look here, Dig., it's your letter——"

"Rats!" said Dig cheerfully. "I'll listen, if you like, if you prefer to read it out loud. But I'm blessed if I'm going to read it!"

"'Old on a minute, sir!" gasped the ragamuffin. "You gimme this 'arf-suvrin 'stead of a tanner, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wead it out, Tom Mewwy! There is no wemittance in it, but that may turn out to be an ovahsight. If it does not turn out to be an ovahsight, I should wecommend Digby to w'ite a cwushin' weply."

"Here goes, then."

And Tom Merry glanced over the letter, and a glimmer of fun came into his eyes as he did so. There was evidently something of great interest in that letter from Dig.'s Irish uncle.

CHAPTER 2

Digby Interviews the Head.

"'MY dear nephew——'"

"That's me," said Dig., with a nod.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry warmly. "It's me. This letter is m'ne, isn't it?"

"Ye-e-es; but——"

"Very well, then, I'm the dear nephew. Don't interrupt me when I'm reading out my uncle's letter," said Tom Merry severely. "'My dear nephew.—As I told you in my previous letter, I shall be in England on business for a few days; but I find that the time will be too short for me to visit London as I originally intended. As my business is connected with shipping from Liverpool, I shall have to remain in that city during the short time I am in England——"

Digby whistled.

"Then I sha'n't see him."

"Blessed if I know what you want to see my uncle for," said Tom Merry. "You seem to take a lot of interest in my relations."

"Oh, get on with the washing!"

"'In England, I wish, however, to see you very much, and I have written to Dr. Holmes, your head-master, to ask his permission for you to come up to Liverpool and meet me here.'"

"Hurray!"

"'I will take you about and show you the city as far as possible, and, anyway I hope you will enjoy your visit to the greatest commercial city in the world.'"

"Won't I, rather!" shouted Digby, executing a double shuffle in his delight. "My hat, it will be ripping!"

"Blessed if I know what you're capering about," said Tom Merry. "Of course, it's kind of you to take an interest in my little excursion."

"Eh? Your what?"

"My little excursion."

"Your—your—— Eh?"

"Of course, I'm going," said Tom Merry blandly. "This is my letter, you know."

Digby's face was a study. There was a general roar of laughter.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy's wight," said D'Arcy. "It's his beastly lettah!"

"Still, I may be able to take Digby," said Tom Merry condescendingly. "Listen to the rest of the letter. 'As it would be a long journey for you to make alone, I have asked Dr. Holmes to allow some of your friends to accompany you, and I have little doubt that he will accede to my request. I, of course, shall undertake to be responsible for the party while in Liverpool. I shall meet the train which arrives in Lime Street Station at 5 p.m. on Tuesday. As

there will probably be a crowd, you and your friends must wait in one spot till I come to you, after alighting from the train. I have enclosed a banknote for £20 in my letter to Dr. Holmes, for the expenses of the journey.'"

"Twenty pounds!" roared Digby.

"Bai Jove! Twenty pounds, deah boys!"

"Oh, the railway fares are very expensive," said Tom Merry airily. "I shall probably need it all."

"You—you will probably need it," said Digby. "You—you will need my banknote?"

"Whose banknote?"

"Why, mine—that is—I—of course, yours," said Digby. "Of course, it's all right; it's yours."

"Bai Jove, I wegard you as a weal sport, Dig.," said Arthur Augustus admiringly. "That's playin' the beastly game, by Jove!"

"It will be a lesson to you not to be so reckless in the future," said Blake.

"Why, you ass, you proposed it all!" exclaimed Digby.

"Well, you see—er——" said Blake, a little taken aback. "You see——"

"Yes, I see a howling ass," said Digby crossly. "But it's all right—I'm not the fellow to complain. It's Tom Merry's letter, and Tom Merry's banknote."

Tom Merry burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! You shrieking ass, Dig! Do you think I would touch the banknote?"

"But it's yours!"

"It isn't. We tossed up for the letter and what was in it. The banknote isn't in it."

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy's wight!"

"Besides," said Tom Merry seriously, "if there had been money in the letter and we had tossed up for it, that would have been gambling."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"

"I don't mean to say that I'm more particular than other chaps," went on Tom Merry, "but I bar gambling. And if anybody suggests to me tossing up for money, he will get a dot on the nose. Of course, with a letter it's a different thing. This is my letter, and I'm going to meet my uncle at Lime Street Station, wherever that may be."

Digby grinned.

"If I'm to take my friends, of course I shall take all you lot," he said.

"If I'm to take my friends," said Tom Merry serenely, "of course I shall take all you lot—especially Dig. Dig can pay the expenses out of his twenty-pound note, and introduce me to my uncle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Digby," said Skimpole, who had been trying to make his voice heard for some time, "if you have received so considerable a remittance, I suppose you will be able to lend me two guineas to purchase Professor Lottoff Boshki's great volume——"

"Yes—I don't think," said Digby. "I wonder if the Head's got nunky's letter yet? It must have come by an earlier post, I suppose."

"Really, Digby——"

"Look here, Skimpole, you can go and eat coke!" said Digby. "All the Determinism, and all the books on the subject, and all the people who believe in it, aren't worth two guineas—or the hundredth part of two guineas! Cut!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Skimmy as an ass!"

Skimpole had more to say on the subject—a great deal more. They left him saying it, as they walked out of the study. Binks, the School House buttons, met them in the passage. He informed Digby that the Head wished to see him in his study. Digby whistled.

"It's about the letter from nunky, of course," he said. "I'm jolly glad I've had this letter, or I should have thought I was wanted in the Head's study for something else."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose I'd better go," said Tom Merry, thoughtfully.

"You?" said Dig, staring. "Don't be an ass, you know!"

"Well, it's my letter. Still, as a matter of form, you can go, Dig, as the Head would probably be surprised to see me."

And Digby went. The rest of the juniors, anxious to hear the verdict, followed him as far as the Head's door, and waited there for him to come out. Dig knocked and went in, and Dr. Holmes turned his chair round to face the junior.

"Ah, it is you, Digby! I have had a letter this morning from your uncle, Mr. Murphy, but I have only just found time to attend to it."

"Yes, sir," said Digby.

"Mr. Murphy is in Liverpool to-morrow morning, and he wishes to see you there. I see no reason for not acceding to his request."

"Thank you, sir."

"He suggests that you should take some of your companions with you," said the Head, musingly. "That is a good idea, but I must know whom you would select, so that I can consult their Form-masters. Only boys whose progress in their studies permits of an extra holiday being taken can be allowed to go. Whom would you suggest, Digby?"

"Blake and Herries and D'Arcy, sir."

"Very well, I will speak to Mr. Lathom on the subject."

"And—and perhaps it would be safer, sir, to have some Upper Form fellows," ventured Digby.

The Doctor nodded.

"Quite so, Digby, and I am glad to see you thus thoughtful. Juniors as a rule prefer to keep by themselves, and not to go with the seniors. I suppose you are thinking of someone in the Sixth—some prefect?"

"N-n-n-no, sir," stammered Digby. "I—I was thinking of the Shell, sir—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther."

"Ah, a junior Form! I thought——"

"I shouldn't like to bother anybody in the Sixth, sir," said Digby eagerly; "or—or the Fifth, either. The seven of us will be able to look after ourselves."

"You have—er—no one else to suggest?"

"Oh, yes, sir! There's Figgins & Co., of the New House——"

"Ahem! I did not mean exactly that. I am afraid I could not possibly extend permission to more than seven juniors," said Dr. Holmes. "I meant—— But no matter, I will consult the Form-masters, and if they permit their boys to leave for a couple of days, you have my consent. Your uncle has sent a remittance to pay the expenses. I thought it a very large one, but if you are taking so many companions you will need it all. I will hand it to you to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir," said Digby; and he left the study, highly delighted. He closed the door and rushed off to communicate the good news, and rushed into the crowd of juniors eagerly waiting just outside.

There was a collision, and sounds of pain and wrath. Digby sprawled over the upset form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and gasped. A stifled voice came from beneath him.

"Ow! Gerrup, you wottah! You are spoilin' my clothes!"

Tom Merry dragged the dazed Digby to his feet. Arthur Augustus slowly sat up. His clothes were dusty, and his collar and necktie were disarranged. He slowly assumed a perpendicular attitude, and jammed his eyeglass into his eye and fixed a look upon Digby that might have frozen a stone monument.

"You—you uttah ass! What did you wush into me like that for?"

"What were you standing in the way like a fatheaded duffer for?" demanded Digby indignantly. "I hurt my face banging down on you like that!"

"If you call me a fatheaded duffah, Digby——"

"Well, I do, and a dangerous lunatic as well."

"Then I shall have no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin'——"

"Here, come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "There'll be trouble if you start rowing outside the doctor's study."

"I wefuse to come on until I have thwashed Digby."

"This way, ass——"

"If you persist in chawactewisin' me as an ass, Blake, I shall thwash you aftah I have thwashed Digby! Pway hold my eyeglass, Hewwies!"

"I'll hold your collar!" said Herries. "Come on!"

"Welease me at once, Hewwies, or I shall lose my tempah and stwike you!"

"I'll risk it. Come on!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort! I uttahly—— Welease me, Hewwies! Let go my ears, Blake! You feahful wottahs, I uttahly wefuse to stir a step——"

"Hold your row, you ass—the Head will hear you!"

"I distinctly wefuse to hold my wow! I—oh—ow——"

"Cave!" gasped Digby.

The Head's study-door opened. In a moment the juniors were sprinting down the passage for all they were worth. Dr. Holmes looked out into the passage, and his glance fell upon D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's had stopped to put his collar straight, and he was fairly caught.

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir?" gasped D'Arcy.

"You have been making a disturbance here, outside my door——"

"I am sowwy, sir!"

"That does not alter the fact, D'Arcy. I——"

"I twust I did not disturb you, sir."

"But you did disturb me," said Dr. Holmes tartly; "you disturbed me very much, and I shall cane you! Step into the study."

"Excuse me, sir," said D'Arcy, with dignity, "I have apologised for the involuntawy offence, and as one gentleman to anothah, I should weally wegard that as sufficient."

The Head looked at him. There was a curious expression on the master's face. He seemed to be struggling with a smile that would not be denied.

"You may go, D'Arcy."

"Thank you vewy much, sir."

And Arthur Augustus walked away. Dr. Holmes shut his study-door and laughed.

CHAPTER 3.

Digby is Very Popular.

DIGBY of the Fourth had never realised before how many friends he had at St. Jim's, or how affectionately they were attached to him. They had been, perhaps, shy of showing their deep attachment before, but since the arrival of the twenty-pound note and the invitation to take a little party to Liverpool, they were no longer backward in coming forward.

Fellows he hardly knew nodded to him most affectionately; chaps whose names he couldn't remember slapped him familiarly on the back and addressed him as "old fellow"; Fifth-Formers—usually very stand-offish towards the Fourth—made an exception in favour of Arthur Digby. There was something about Digby that a fellow liked, Lefevre of the Fifth declared. And when Blake inquired if it was a twenty-pound note, and Digby chuckled, Lefevre looked daggers and walked away.

The invitations to a study tea that reached Digby that evening would have more than satisfied Fatty Wynn of the New House. Gore, the bully of the Shell, assumed an amiable smile that must, according to Blake, have caused him considerable pain in the facial muscles, and pressed Digby to visit him. Mellish of the Fourth remarked that he knew Liverpool like a book, and would be glad to place his services as cicerone completely at the disposal of old Digby. Whereat old Digby grinned, and did not accept the services of the obliging Mellish.

And it wasn't only in his own House that Digby found a remarkable number of friends he had not known before. Fellows came over from the New House to renew acquaintance and talk over things with their old friend. French remembered a footer match in which Digby had kicked wonderful goals, and Pratt talked glibly of a rabbiting excursion they had had together, which Digby did not remember. Dig had quite a reception that evening in his own study, and wherever he went. When he was in the common-room the fellows listened to him with unusual respect. Hancock of the Fourth was talking football and laying down the law, when Digby happened to make a remark on the subject. Gore called for silence at once.

"Shut up, Hancock!" he said severely. "Can't you see Dig's speaking?"

"Oh, sorry!" said Hancock at once. "Go on, old Dig, I could listen to you for hours!"

"So could I," said Mellish. "Some of the seniors think they know a lot about footer—Kildare and the rest—but when it comes to a real, sound knowledge of the game, I say Digby's the man!"

"If you say I know as much about football as Kildare, you're a silly ass, Mellish!" said Digby, in his frank way.

"Of course he is," said Hancock; while poor Mellish looked somewhat green. "You don't know much about the game——"

"If you say I don't know much about footer, Hancock, you're jolly well on the right road to geting a thick ear!" said Dig warmly.

"Oh, he's a young ass!" said Gore, with a scornful glance at the crestfallen Fourth-Former. "What I think is this, that——"

But Digby walked away, and never had the advantage of knowing what Gore thought.

"Jolly lucky I'm not a conceited ass like Gus," Digby remarked to his friends. "I should get my napper turned with all this buttering-up!"

"Weally, Dig——"

"Ow!" gasped Digby. "Who's that lunging at my ribs?"

"Me!" said a cheerful voice; and D'Arcy minor—the cheery, inky Wally of the Third Form—met the expressive glances that were directed towards him with a genial smile.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon his hopeful younger brother. Wally was as soiled about the collar and as inky about the fingers as usual, and the elegant swell of St. Jim's eyed him with considerable disfavour.

"You should not say me, Wally."

"I didn't say you, Gussy; I said me."

"You should not say me. What kind of gwammah do they teach you in the Third Form, I wondah? You should say I."

"But I meant me," said Wally. "I wasn't talking about you at all. You talk about yourself enough to satisfy anybody."

"Weally, Wally! I mean you should use the nominative case and not the accusative case in answerin' Dig's question."

"Or a violin case," suggested Monty Lowther, "or a cigarette case."

"Weally, Lowthah, undah the circs.——"

"Oh, don't jaw!" said Wally. "I hear that Digby is making up a party to go to Liverpool. I'm coming."

"Are you?" said Digby, with emphasis.

"Yes. Can I bring my chums, Dudley and Jameson and Gibson?"

"Better bring the whole Third Form," suggested Tom Merry. "We should like to go to Liverpool with a Bank Holiday party of inky fags."

"Well, I'm coming," said D'Arcy minor composedly—"Pongo and me."

"You should say Pongo and I, Wally."

"Pongo wouldn't go with you. Pongo's a jolly good dog, and he knows his master."

"You uttah young ass, do you think I would take that unspeakable mongwel?"

"I can't let you have him, Gus," went on Wally, deliberately misunderstanding. "You can ask me for anything else. You can have Herries' bulldog."

Digby took the hero of the Third by the collar.

"You cut off," he said; "you're not coming. The number's fixed, for one thing. Linton and Lathom weren't any too pleased to let off seven of us. And I wouldn't take Pongo to Liverpool for anything, unless it was to throw him into the Mersey."

Wally chuckled.

"All the same, I'm coming!" he remarked. And he departed whistling. Arthur Augustus looked uneasy.

"I'm afwaid there will be twouble," he remarked. "That young wagamuffin could nevah get permish. fwom his Formmastah, but it is just like him to wun away and follow us."

"He'll get warmed up if he does. Hallo, what's this?"

"This" was a spare youth, with a keen face and bright, grey eyes. It was Buck Finn, the American chum in the Shell at St. Jim's.

"I guess I've heard about it," he remarked. "I've never seen Liverpool. I hear it's a hefty place. Can I come?"

"Number's fixed."

"Oh, figs! I guess I wanted to come along."

"So do about a hundred other kids," said Digby, grinning. "I can't take the whole school."

"You mean I can't take the whole school," suggested Tom Merry. "This is my party."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I guess—— Hallo! New House kids!"

Three youths had entered the common-room—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, of the New House.

In view of the keen rivalry between the two Houses at St. Jim's, it was not exactly a safe place for Figgins & Co. to venture into. Several fellows reached for inkpots, and books, and other missiles; but Figgins held up his hand hurriedly.

"Pax!"

"You bounders want anything?" asked Tom Merry. "There's nothing here for New House wasters but a choice selection of thick ears."

"Thick heads is all I can see," remarked Kerr.

"Order!" exclaimed Figgins. "We didn't come here to row. We hear that you kids are going to Liverpool to-morrow, and we can't bear the thought of your going alone into danger."

"Danger! What danger is there in Liverpool?"

"Well, there might be; and anyway, it's a long journey, and you want us to take care of you. So we're coming."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Can't be did. Dig tried to fix it for you with the Head; but he wasn't taking any."

"Honest Injun!" said Dig.

Figgins & Co. looked considerably disgusted.

"So we've come over to this mouldy old casual ward for nothing," grunted Figgins.

"Still," remarked Wynn, "as we're here, we'll stay to tea."

"You've had tea!"

"Yes, I know I have, Figgins; but if these chaps haven't had tea yet, there's no reason why we shouldn't feed with them. I like a chap that's sociable. Besides, I get so jolly hungry in this March weather. I'm ready for tea."

"We've had tea," grinned Blake. "And it wasn't much of a one, either. Funds are short here just at present."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I say, Digby!" It was the voice of Lefevre, of the Fifth, as he came into the junior room. "I want to speak to you particularly."

Digby made a grimace at his friends, and allowed the genial Fifth-Former to draw him aside. Lefevre was looking very friendly.

"We're getting up a bit of a feed in my study," he said. "Turner and Raynes are with me. We want you to come."

At any other time, the invitation to a feed in a Fifth Form study would have been flattering indeed to a Fourth-Former. This evening Dig was not impressed.

"Thanks," he said, quite coolly, "but——"

"You can bring your friends if you like," said Lefevre.

Dig hesitated a moment; then a glimmer of fun shot into his eyes. The Fifth-Former was thinking of his study-mates, of course—three friends. Dig was thinking of something else.

"Right-ho!" he said cordially. "That alters it, of course. If I can bring my friends, I'll be jolly glad to come. What's the feed like?"

"Ripping, though I say it—and plenty."

"Good; we'll come. When is it?"

"Say a quarter of an hour from now?"

"Right you are."

And Lefevre walked away looking satisfied. Digby rejoined his chums, and explained, both about Lefevre's invitation and the idea that had come into his mind. And there was a chuckle among the juniors that would have made the Fifth-Former suspicious if he had been still there to hear it.

CHAPTER 4.

Digby Brings a Few Friends.

"JOLLY good!" said Lefevre, in a tone of satisfaction. He looked round his study. The table was laid, with a spotless cloth and gleaming cutlery. Plates and cups and saucers were there in abundance. There were good things on the table, and heaps more of good things on the bookshelves, turned into a sideboard for the time being.

Turner and Raynes shared Lefevre's satisfaction. It was a large study, and well supplied, for none of them were short of money. And it was worth while standing a good feed to a few juniors for the sake of a trip to Liverpool. Freedom from school restraints for a couple of days, and an exciting excursion thrown in—it was really worth the trouble of making much of a Fourth-Form kid.

"It's a bit of a come-down to our personal dignity," Lefevre remarked. "The other fellows will chip us for having Fourth Form fags to tea. But it's worth it. That's what I say."

"Yes, rather!" said Raynes.

"If we were only sure," said Turner musingly. "You see, we mayn't get to Liverpool over it after all."

"We shall have to work it. Of course, a Fourth Form kid will be flattered, and perhaps lose his head at being taken so much notice of by us."

"Yes, I suppose he will."

"And then we can—— Sh! Here he is."

Digby tapped at the door, and entered the study. He had a clean collar and a genial smile on, and his hair was nicely brushed.

"Hope I'm in time," he remarked.

"Good time," said Lefevre. "Glad to see you."

"Glad to see you," said Raynes and Turner.

"Thank you!" said Dig. "Very pleased to come, I'm sure."

"Your friends—aren't they able to come?" asked Lefevre, who wouldn't have been disappointed if it had turned out so.

"Oh, they're coming!" said Digby blandly. "They may get here different times, as I insisted upon all of them putting clean collars on. We don't have tea in a Fifth Form study every day, and of course we want to do you credit."

"Of course!" assented Lefevre unsuspiciously.

The door was pushed wider open, and Monty Lowther came in. He had the cleanest of clean collars on, and his smile was a smile that wouldn't come off. He nodded in his genial way to the Fifth Form fellows, who stared at him.

Lefevre was just about to ask him what he wanted, when Dig explained.

"One of my friends, Lefevre."

"Oh!" said Lefevre. "I understood——"

"Exactly! The others are coming."

"Oh!" said Lefevre.

Manners came in with Herries. Lefevre exchanged glances with his study-mates, but all three of them screwed up polite smiles, and greeted the guests with great courtesy.

Chairs were placed for them at the table, and they sat down demurely in a row.

"May as well make the tea, Raynes," said Lefevre. "This is the lot."

"Oh, not at all!" said Digby with an agreeable smile. "The others will be here in a jiffy, though, and so you may as well make the tea. Jolly good of you fellows to invite a party of us like this."

"Oh, don't mention it!" murmured Lefevre.

Tom Merry came in next, with Figgins, of the New House. The sight of a New House fellow made Lefevre jump; but Dig, with a wave of the hand, presented his friends. Tom Merry and Figgins, after saying how pleased they were to come, sat down at the table. The table was getting a little crowded now, but the juniors cheerfully squeezed up to make room.

A minute later three juniors strolled in—Kerr and Wynn of the New House, and Jack Blake. Lefevre smiled a sickly smile, and Raynes murmured something in a confidential tone to the teapot.

"We may as well begin," said Lefevre, in a marked tone. "We're all here now."

"The others won't be long," said Digby cheerily.

"The others?" said Lefevre, Raynes, and Turner simultaneously.

"Yes; you said I was to bring my friends."

"Oh, of course!" said Lefevre hastily.

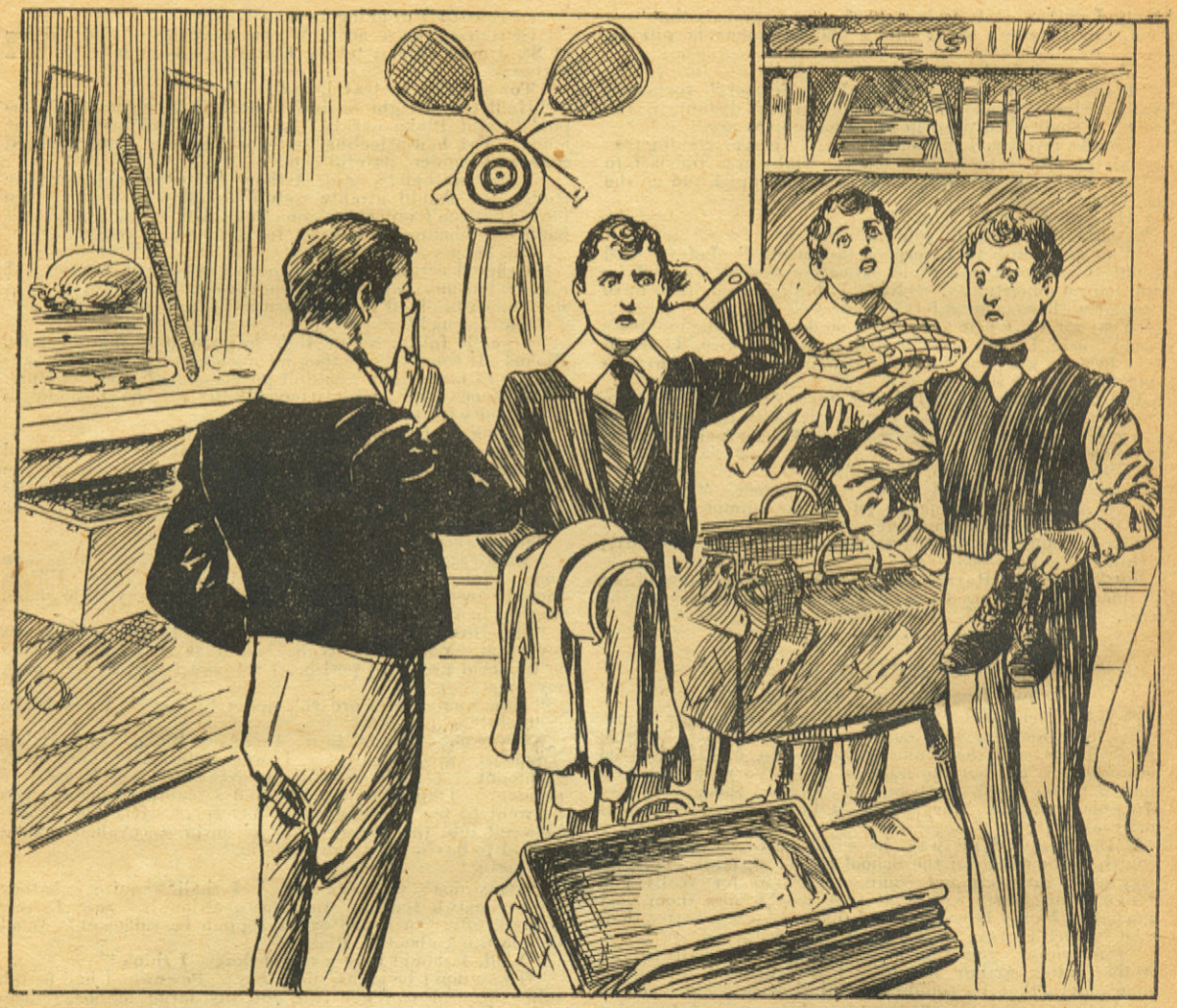
"Gussy and his young brother are coming, and Finn, of the Shell. I thought you'd like to see Finn, of the Shell. He'll tell you wonderful stories about things that never happened in Arizona. And Skimpole—— Hallo, here they are!"

Buck Finn came in with Skimpole. The latter blinked round amiably through his big spectacles.

"Dear me, quite a party," he said. "This is very hospitable of you, Lefevre. It leads me to hope that my propaganda has not been without fruit, and that you are slowly but surely learning the great truths of Socialism."

Lefevre murmured something indistinctly. The door opened once more, to admit the swell of the School House and his cheerful young brother. D'Arcy major was in evening-dress, to do full honour to the occasion; and D'Arcy minor had washed his face, combed his hair, and changed his collar, and looked very much the better for it.

"Vewy glad to see you, Lefevre, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the unhappy owner of the study. "It's weally wippin' of you to entahtain the Lowah Forms in this genewous way. I think we're all here now, deah boys."



Arthur Augustus surveyed the three juniors with rising wrath. "I wegard you as a set of wottahs!" he said, in measured tones. "Do you wefuse to acquaint me with the whereabouts of my twavelling bags?"

"Yes; that's the lot," said Digby. "I'm afraid we're a bit of a crowd, Lefevre."

"Oh, n-n-not at all!" stammered Lefevre.

But, in spite of Lefevre's polite assurance, the Fifth-Formers looked blue. The juniors, by squeezing and sitting on one another's knees, managed to find room round the table. But there was no room for any of the three hosts, and it did not look as if there would be anything for them to eat if they could find room. Generous as the supplies were, Digby had brought enough of his friends to easily dispose of everything in the study.

The juniors appeared to be quite unconscious of causing any embarrassment to their hosts. Lefevre, Turner, and Raynes waited on them, supplying them with eatables, and filling up their cups. Lefevre borrowed more cups and plates along the passage, and some of the juniors willingly shared the same cup to save trouble. They seemed to have brought pretty good appetites with them, too. The three Fifth-Formers were kept pretty busy supplying their wants.

Want of nerve had never been the weakness of any member of the party. They asked cheerfully for what they wanted.

"You can fill my cup again, Lefevre."

"Yaas, wathah; and mine, too!"

"Ham this way!"

"Pass the eggs, you fellows!"

"Cake! Cake!"

"I say, Raynes, old man, another cup of tea, please!"

"You can fill mine while you're about it!"

"I weally think I should like anothah—ah—apple!"

"Don't stand on ceremony," said Digby encouragingly.

"My friend Lefevre only wants to make you comfy. Don't you, Lefevre?"

Lefevre made no reply. Perhaps he was too busy. The piles of eatables steadily decreased, and the frequent calls for tea reduced the contents of the teapot to the colour of water. There was a general complaint on that subject, and Lefevre put in more tea.

"That is wathah bettah," said D'Arcy. "I don't dwink much tea, as a wule, as it is bad for the beastly nerves, you know; but as Lefevre is so pwessin'——"

"Exactly!" said Lowther. "I can't refuse a host who presses things on you and looks so jolly agreeable all the time. I will have some more ham!"

There was a babel of tongues in the study. Fellows came along the passage in amazement and looked in, wondering what was up; and they stared at the sight of the convivial party of juniors and the red, perspiring faces of Lefevre, Raynes, and Turner.

The only junior who was not talking was Fatty Wynn.

Fatty Wynn was too busy to talk. He was hungry, and the amount he stowed away seemed to make very little difference to his hunger, for he went steadily ahead without slackening speed.

"I guess this is O K!" Buck Finn remarked, as he pushed his chair away from the table at last.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I hope you've enjoyed yourselves," said Digby. "When my friend Lefevre invites a little party, he likes them to enjoy themselves. Don't you, Lefevre?"

"Well, I suppose we must be going," said Tom Merry. "We don't like to tear ourselves away."

"I've never enjoyed anything so much in my life," said

Monty Lowther. "It isn't only the feed, though that was good, but Lefevre's sweet smiles and boundless hospitality——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I don't often feed with a Fifth-Former," remarked Wally, "but I really think I've been too distant to the Fifth. I shall often drop in and see Lefevre now!"

"Thanks awfully, Lefevre, old chap! It was ripping!"

And the guests took their leave. Digby was the last to go, and he was at the door when Lefevre tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hold on a minute, Digby!"

"Certainly!" said the junior.

"You are going to Liverpool to-morrow?" Lefevre had meant to approach the topic delicately during tea, but he had had no opportunity. "Now, I think you ought to have a senior with you, for safety's sake——"

"Yes; ain't it a pity the party's made up and the number's fixed?" said Digby. "If it had been otherwise, I should have been so glad for you to come, Lefevre, after the stunning feed you've stood us."

And Digby marched off before Lefevre could find his voice to reply. The Fifth-Former turned back into the study, and surveyed the wreck of the feast. Then he looked at his study-mates.

"What do you think?" he said.

"Don't ask me what I think," said Turner. "I couldn't express it in polite language. Of all the chumps——"

"Of all the insufferable duffers!" said Raynes.

"How could I help it?" demanded Lefevre indignantly. "How could I foresee——"

But Turner and Raynes did not listen. They stamped out of the study, leaving Lefevre alone with the wreck of the feast.

CHAPTER 5.

Arthur Augustus is Unable to Pack.

THAT evening the juniors were busy making their preparations for the journey northward. The Terrible Three, and the chums of Study No. 6, had received permission to go, but the number of the party was strictly limited to the seven of them. Dr. Holmes thought it very probable that Mr. Murphy would be surprised to see as many as that.

If Dig had had his way, he would have taken half the Fourth. The chums of the School House were all sorry that Figgins & Co. were not coming; and, as for Wally and Pongo, Tom Merry said that they would miss them very much, and Monty Lowther added that a miss was better than a hit in such a case. But Wally was undisturbed.

"I'm coming, you know!" he remarked casually to his brother, after Arthur Augustus had explained to him at some length that he couldn't possibly come. The swell of St. Jim's jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and turned a tired look upon the youngest scion of the house of D'Arcy.

"I have explained to you, Wally, that you can't come," he said. "I twust you do not wish me to wepeat my wemarks on the subject all ovah again?"

"Not much!" said Wally fervently.

"Then pway do not be a young ass! Although you are a considewable twouble to me, and your dog is a feahful beast, I should be glad to take you, but it is against ordahs. Therefore you must stay here!"

"No fear!"

"I twust, Wally, that you do not intend to bolt!"

Wally winked one eye.

"I'm coming to Liverpool!" he said.

"I wefuse to allow you to do anythin' of the sort! I expwessly command you to stay here like a—like a good boy!"

Wally whistled, and walked away with his hands in his pockets, and a grin on his face that made Arthur Augustus decidedly uneasy. He went along slowly to Study No. 6, where Blake and the others were packing the things they required on their journey to Liverpool.

They were to start early in the morning, for they had to go to London first to catch the train on the London and North-Western to the northern city.

"I think one bag will do between the lot of us," said Blake. "We shall be away only a few days, and it's no good taking a cartload of things. We'll shove 'em all into one bag, and Herries can look after it, as he's the strongest."

"Good idea!" said Digby, with cordial approval.

Herries did not seem so pleased with the suggestion.

"I sha'n't be able to look after any old bags," he said; "I shall have Towser to keep an eye on!"

Blake left off in the middle of folding a shirt to stare at Herries.

"Towser! How can you look after Towser when you're in Liverpool?"

"Of course; I'm going to take him!"

"Of course, you're not! We have enough of that bulldog at St. Jim's, without taking him hundreds of miles to be a bother!"

"Towser likes to travel, and——"

"He'll travel right on into a dock if he comes to Liverpool!" said Blake darkly. "I warn you to leave him at home! I've had a feeling for some time that Towser would come to a sudden, painful end!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, entering the study. "I should uttahly wefuse to allow Towsah in the party! I don't object to some dogs, but I like a dog that has some tincture of wespect for a fellow's twousahs!"

"Oh, hang your trousers!"

"I should certainly wefuse to do anythin' of the sort! I always put my twousahs in the pwess. I wegard it as a shockin' example of thoughtlessness to hang twousahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally fail to see anythin' to gwin at in that wemark, Blake! If some fellows took as much care of their twousahs as I do of mine, they wouldn't go about with such feahfully baggy knees. But, I say, young Wally says he is comin' to Liverpool with us to-mowwow!"

"Young Wally can go and eat chips!"

"Yaas; but what I'm afwaid of is, that the young wascal may do a bolt, you know, and we may find him in the twain. Then there is certain to be a feahful wow. His Form-mastah doesn't like Wally vewy much alweady, for some weason."

Jack Blake laughed.

"I dare say the reason's not hard to find. But I'll manage young Wally. I'll speak to Figgins & Co. about it. I'll get them to keep an eye on him, and if he tries any little game, they'll nip it in the bud."

"Bai Jove, that's a wathah good ideah! It quite welieves my mind. You see, if Wally bolted, it would place us all in a doocid awkward posish. I suppose I may as well pack my bags?"

"How many pairs are you going to take?" asked Blake innocently.

"I was not weferrin' to my twousahs, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity; "I was weferrin' to my portmanteaux! I shall wequire an extwa toppah, in case of accidents. I know a chap who had a feahful accident when he went to see someone off at Liverpool. His silk toppah blew off into the Mersey, and he never wecovahed it, and he had to buy a cap to go home in."

"Awful!"

"Pway don't wot, deah boy! I shall wequire a hatbox for my extwa toppah. But the question is," said D'Arcy thoughtfully, "will one extwa toppah be sufficient? What do you think about it, Blake?"

"Well, I should take a round dozen, I think!"

"Pway don't be an ass, deah boy! Pewways I had bettah take two. I can get two into my large hatbox. You wemembah the time we spent a vacation at sea, Blake, and owin' to a sewies of unfortunate occuwwences, I was out of toppahs. I have nevah forgotten that time. I don't want to wisk anythin' of the sort again!"

"Suppose you telegraph ahead to have some hatters waiting at Lime Street Station, with an assortment of toppers——"

"I wish you would be sewious on a sewious subject! I shall wequire evenin'-clothes, of course, and I suppose half a dozen shirts will do. If I wequire any more, I can purchase them in Liverpool."

"But won't you look a little—well, odd with more than six shirts on at a time?"

D'Arcy did not deign to reply to this frivolous question. He was pondering over the rest of the luggage he would require.

"A couple of extwa coats, and thwee suits of clothes ought to see me thwough if it's for only a few days," he said meditatively.

"And a couple of dozen pairs of boots," suggested Digby.

"And a gross of collars."

"Weally, deah boys——"

Blake rose from the bag he had been cramming.

"There you are, Gussy! There's a little bit left for you."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the bursting bag.

"I fail to compwehend you, Blake.

"I've left you all the room I could. Of course, if you dawdle and do your packing last, you can't expect much room in the bag."

"Weally, Blake——"

"We're only going to take one bag, and that's it," explained Blake. "I don't know whether you'll be able to cram two coats, three suits of clothes, and a couple of toppers in there, but you're welcome to try."

"I shall insist upon takin' four bags, at least. We can cawwy one each."

"I don't think," remarked Blake. "Hallo, Skimmy! What do you want? We can't talk Socialism now—we're packing."

The genius of the Shell blinked into the study.

"I have come to suggest that I should join your party to-morrow," he remarked. "After the hard work I have done I require relaxation, and the fresh sea-breezes at Liverpool will set me up. Unfortunately, I have no money, but I should not object to Digby paying my expenses."

"Digby might object, though," observed the owner of that name. "I think very likely he would."

"I hope you will not be mean in the matter, Digby. It is, of course, ridiculous that there should be any expense in the matter. Under Socialism the railways will be nationalised, and anybody who wishes to go to Liverpool can go there then as freely as he can now walk down a street. Railway fares are as absurd as charging a toll for using a road. However, if you object to defraying my expenses, I will repay you the whole sum out of the profits of my book on Socialism, shortly to be published."

"Rats!" said Digby.

"For your own sakes you had better take me along. With my wonderful knowledge of natural history, I shall be able to act as guide, for instance, in the museum in St. George's Hall. I hear that they have a splendid museum there, and I am very anxious to see it. I am also desirous of viewing the overhead railroad at the Liverpool docks, as I wish to see whether it resembles the overhead railways we travelled on in New York."

"We'll tell you all about it when we come back," said Herries generously.

"That will hardly be as effective as viewing it at first hand, Herries. But if the number of the party is limited to seven, I have another suggestion to make. Suppose Herries stays behind?"

"That's a very likely thing, too," said Herries sarcastically.

"Or perhaps D'Arcy or Blake would like to give up their place to me."

"Bai Jove!"

"H'm! Do you think your uncle would be as pleased to see me, as yourself, Digby, if I went in your place?"

"Delighted, I should think," said Digby. "But I wouldn't give him so much joy all at once. I'm afraid for his health."

Skimpole blinked from one to the other, and went thoughtfully out of the study. He left the chums of the Fourth chuckling. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was soon serious again. He had his packing to think of.

"I twust you are only jokin', Blake, in wefewence to that bag," he said. "I wegard it as a good ideah for you fellows to pack in one bag. But I shall wequire four at least. I am willin' to make one concession. I will not take any extwa hats. If anythin' happens to this toppah, I will purchase another in Liverpool. If I find that Liverpool is at all behind the fashion in silk hats, and I have to wear somethin' out of date, I shall lay the whole wesponsibility on you."

"Oh, Gussy!"

"Leavin' toppahs out of the question, I can make thwee bags do. Where are my bags?"

Arthur Augustus looked round the study. He had a number of bags of various sizes, from the smallest and neatest travelling-bag to the bulkiest gladstone, and from the trimmest cabin-trunk to the hugest leather-and-cane monster large enough to contain the wardrobe of a regiment. He had brought the medium-sized bags into the study, intending to make a selection, but he observed now that they were not in sight.

He turned his eyeglass in various directions, but there were no bags to be seen. He turned it upon his chums, and found three faces as solemn as Sphinxes.

"I wegard this as a wotten joke," said Arthur Augustus. "Where are my bags?"

"You're wearing them."

"I wefer to my twavellin' bags."

"Aren't you going to travel in those?"

"I believe you are delibewately misappwehendin' me, Blake. I bwought a numbah of bags to this study, and they are gone."

"Dear me!"

"I cannot help suspectin' that you wottahs have placed them somewhere out of sight," said the swell of the School House.

"My word!" said Digby. "He suspects that we have placed them out of sight, Blake."

"My hat!" said Blake. "He suspects that we have placed them out of sight, Herries."

"Great Scott!" said Herries. "He suspects that we have placed them out of sight, Dig."

And the three juniors shook their heads sadly. Arthur Augustus surveyed them with rising wrath.

"I wegard you as a set of wottahs!" he said, in measured tones. "Do you wefuse to acquaint me with the whereabouts of my bags?"

"Do you refuse to acquaint him with the whereabouts of his bags, Herries?"

Herries turned to Digby.

"Do you refuse to acquaint him with the whereabouts of his bags, Dig?"

Digby fixed an inquiring look on Blake.

"Do you refuse to acquaint him with the whereabouts of his bags, Blake?"

"You uttah wottahs——"

"Did you speak, D'Arcy?"

"If you wefuse to acquaint me with the whereabouts of my bags," said D'Arcy, "I shall have no wesource but to take a twunk instead."

"Dear me!" said Blake. "He will have no resource but to take a twunk instead, Herries."

"By Jove!" said Herries. "He will have no resource but to take a twunk instead, Dig."

"My word!" said Digby. "He will have no resource but to take a trunk instead."

And the three juniors looked as grave as owls.

Arthur Augustus gave them a look that might have brought a blush to the cheek of a gargoyle, and turned on his heel, and strode haughtily from the study. He went up to the box-room in quest of the trunk, having, as he said, no other resource. He rather thought that the sight of the trunk would make his humorous chums produce the hidden bags.

Blake, Herries, and Digby chuckled. But they became quite grave again when a patter of hasty feet was heard in the corridor, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy burst into the study looking very excited. The manners of the swell of St. Jim's, for once, had lost the repose which, according to Tennyson, stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

The three juniors looked at the excited swell of the School House with grave inquiry.

"Anything wrong?" asked Blake affably.

"You—you uttah wottahs! The box-woom door is locked, and the key taken out!"

"Dear me!" said Blake. "The box-room door is locked, and the key taken out, Herries."

"By Jove!" said Herries. "The box-room door is locked, and the——"

"I cannot get my twunks!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"He cannot get his trunks, Herries."

"He cannot get his trunks, Dig."

"He cannot get his——"

But Arthur Augustus stayed to hear no more. He went out of Study No. 6, slamming the door with unnecessary force, and leaving Blake, Herries, and Digby laughing like hyenas.

CHAPTER 6.

Off to Liverpool.

EARLY in the windy March morning the seven juniors were ready to start. They had to leave St. Jim's before first lesson, and so there was quite a crowd to see them off. They looked very cheerful and fit in their coats and travelling-caps—with the exception of Arthur Augustus, who, of course, sported the shiniest of silk toppers, careless of the danger it was exposed to in the wind. The swell of St. Jim's looked a perfect picture, as he always did. Blake had relented at the last moment, and allowed him one bag; and Arthur Augustus had contented himself as well as he could with that small concession. A crowd of fellows belonging to both Houses accompanied the seven adventurers to the gate. Dr. Holmes had given Tom Merry full directions as to trains and other matters, and he knew that he could rely upon the hero of the Shell. And as each

member of the party knew that he could rely upon himself, they were sure to be quite safe.

Figgins & Co. took an affectionate leave of the School House chums. Blake whispered to Figgins as he caught sight of Wally with his coat on, and Figgins grinned and nodded. Skimpole was not to be seen.

Herries wore a slightly worried look. He had given way to general persuasion on the subject of Towser, and he anxiously reminded Kerr of a promise to look after the bull-dog while he was away. Kerr reassured him, but Herries couldn't help feeling a little uneasy. He had a premonition that Towser would bite Kerr, and that after that the Scottish junior wouldn't be so tender with him.

"Well, off you go," said Figgins. "Wish you a jolly time."

"Thank you vewy much, Figgins, deah boy!"

"And I say!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn anxiously. "You won't forget the toffee, Dig."

"The toffee?" said Digby, who had already forgotten.

Fatty Wynn looked at him with keen reproach.

"The Everton toffee," he said. "I've tasted most kinds of toffee in my time, but I haven't had any of the genuine Everton toffee from Everton. You're going to Liverpool, and so you'll be at Everton, and you can get it on the spot."

"Of course," said Dig. "I won't forget."

"You can bring as much as you like," said Fatty Wynn.

"Yes, rather! I'll make a special point of it," assured Digby.

And the juniors set out.

The crowd watched them from the gates, and waved their caps. There was a sudden pounding of feet on the road, and a plump youth raced after the juniors. Tom Merry & Co. were already some distance up the lane when they heard the footsteps, and they stopped and turned round.

Fatty Wynn—for it was he—halted breathless.

"What is it?" called back Tom Merry.

"The toffee!" shouted Fatty Wynn. "You won't forget the toffee—the Everton toffee?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

And the juniors tramped on again.

There was a struggle proceeding in the gateway when Fatty Wynn reached it, returning. Wally was wriggling in the grasp of Figgins and Kerr.

"No, you don't," said Figgins genially.

"Leggo!"

"Rats!"

"Look here, I can go out on the road if I like."

Figgins chuckled.

"Yes, but you can't go to Liverpool. You're staying here, my son. I've promised Blake."

"Leggo!" roared Wally.

"More rats!"

And Figgins & Co. gently marched the glaring, but helpless, Third-Former back to the School House. There they stopped, and Figgins wagged a warning finger at him.

"You'll stay here," he said. "I've saved you from a flogging. You bolted once before. You won't get off so cheap another time. Now——"

"I'll jolly well punch your head."

"Oh, no; hit a chap your own size!" said Figgins good-humouredly. "I'm not going to leave you till class-room bell."

And he didn't. When the bell rang for first lesson, Wally had to take his place in the Third Form, much against his will.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry & Co. had reached Rylcombe Station, and boarded the train for London. Although they would have been glad to have some more of their friends with them, they were cheerful, and, in fact, in the best of spirits. D'Arcy was a little worried about Wally; but when the train glided out of the station, without a sign of D'Arcy minor, he was relieved.

"That young wascal is safe enough now," he said. "I am weally vewy much obliged to Figgins. He would have got into a feahful wow if he had bolted. Bai Jove, how windy it is! I have nearly had my hat blown off a dozen times!"

"Well, your travelling-cap's in your bag," said Blake.

"I should wefuse to go to Livahpool in a cap."

The juniors had to change trains several times to reach Euston. At the first change—at Wayland Junction—D'Arcy was the last to get into the new carriage. He was delayed a moment by a gust that nearly took his hat off. As he was about to step in, he glanced in amazement at a figure that was popping into a carriage some distance down the train.

The swell of St. Jim's put his foot back on the platform, and stared along the train.

A porter was running to close the door, and Tom Merry grasped D'Arcy by the shoulder and yanked him in, and the door slammed behind him.

Arthur Augustus sprawled across several pairs of knees, his hat flying off, and his monocle dangling at the end of its cord.

"Just in time," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You'd have been left behind in another tick."

D'Arcy extricated himself from many legs and feet and rose, looking somewhat crumpled and very excited.

"Tom Mewwy, I wegard you as a beast!"

The hero of the Shell looked surprised.

"But I've saved you from being left behind, Gussy."

"You have wumpled my coat, and weduced me to a vewy dusty state. I wegard you as a howwid wottah!"

Tom Merry grinned as he settled back in his seat. The juniors had the carriage to themselves. The train was rushing along at a great rate Londonwards, and D'Arcy, who had some thought of stepping out again, changed his mind. He sat down, and dusted the knees of his trousers, and then polished his hat on a velvet pad he extracted from an inner pocket of his coat.

"What on earth were you hanging back for?" demanded Lowther.

"I saw someone skippin' into the twain."

"Well, we didn't expect to be the only passengers."

"That is a fwivolous wemark, Lowthah! I mean I saw someone I know—someone I was vewy much surpwised to see," explained D'Arcy.

"Who was it—your tailor?"

"It was Skimpole."

There was a general exclamation of amazement.

"Skimpole?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Surely the ass cannot have followed us!" exclaimed Tom Merry, wrinkling his brows. "He was saying something yesterday about guiding us round Liverpool. I never thought of asking Figgins & Co. to look after him as well as Wally."

"Oh, I dare say Gussy was mistaken!" said Blake. "He generally is—as you will admit yourself, Gussy."

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort. I wemembah when we were in Amewicah——"

"Travellers' tales are barred," said Monty Lowther.

"I wemembah when we were in Amewicah," said Arthur Augustus, unheeding, "that wascal, Captain Puntah, was followin' us, and I saw him on the twain, and none of you saw him; and I was wight, and you were w'ong."

"Which only proves that you're wrong now," said Blake. "Miracles never happen twice in the same place. Skimmy's in the Shell-room at St. Jim's, grinding Latin."

"Vewy well, you will see."

At the next change they all looked out for Skimpole. There were only two minutes for the change, and they had no time to waste. Tom Merry and Blake at the same moment caught sight of a pair of thin legs, a shabby overcoat, and a big pair of spectacles, as a youth skipped into the train.

There was no doubt on the subject now. It was Skimpole!

"The utter ass!" said Tom Merry, as the train rushed on. "He'll get into a row over this. He'll have to go back from London."

The juniors alighted at Euston. Their train was to start from the London and North-Western station, and they had twenty minutes before the start. They filled it in at the buffet, laying in a supply of provisions—internally—to last them for the first half of the journey.

Then Tom Merry went to the telegraph-office to wire for lunch-baskets to be placed in the train for them at two different points. Arthur Augustus suggested that one lunch-basket midway would be sufficient, but Tom Merry shook his head.

"I assure you that my governah has only one lunch en route," said D'Arcy; "and he has made the journey sevewal times."

"Lord Eastwood is more than fifteen, isn't he?"

"I wegard that question as widiculous!"

"Exactly the way I regard you, old chap. You see, your noble governor probably didn't get so hungry as we shall."

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that!"

The juniors had planted their belongings down in the compartment of the corridor train. While at the buffet, they kept an eye open for Skimpole. Five minutes before the train was timed to start, Tom Merry caught sight of a hurrying figure in the distance, and at the same moment the genius of the Shell caught sight of him. Tom waved his hand, and Skimpole hurried towards him.

"Dear me!" gasped Skimpole. "I was afraid I had lost you. I think I must have got into the wrong station, as after I got into the train I learned of the guard that it was going to Hampstead."

"To where?"

"Excuse me, sir," said D'Arcy, with dignity, "I have apologised for the involuntawy offence, and as one gentleman to anothah, I should weally wegard that as sufficient."

"Hampstead. I got out just in time."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "The ass has wandered into the Tube station. Did you think you were going to Liverpool underground, Skimmy?"

"Well, really, I was very much surprised at going down in the lift," said Skimpole; "but I was thinking of the important bearing of the discovery of the Determinist theory upon human relations, and so did not pay much attention to my surroundings. I am very glad I have found you, however. This is probably the right station?"

"Yes, probably. There's our train, at all events."

"And it's very kind of you to come all this way to see us off, Skimmy," said Manners solemnly. "It will be a long, lonely journey for you back to St. Jim's."

Skimpole blinked at him.

"Really, Manners, I have no intention of going back to St. Jim's."

"Going to take lodgings in London?" asked Lowther.

"Certainly not. I'm going to Liverpool. I felt that it was my duty to accompany you, in order to give you the benefit of an older and wiser head; and, besides, the journey would be gratifying to me personally."

"I hope you didn't forget to ask permission," grinned Blake.

"I had no time to do so; and, besides, it would probably have been refused. I trust," said Skimpole, "that you are as pleased to have me with you as I am to come."

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry. "We should naturally rejoice in your company, Skimmy, especially if you tell us all about Determinism on the way; but I really think it would be—well, healthier for you to get back to St. Jim's, and apologise to Mr. Linton, while you've got the chance."

Skimpole shook his head.

"Really, Merry——"

"Here, we've got to get in!" exclaimed Digby. "Come on!"

The juniors ran for the train. Skimpole ran with them, and boarded it with them, and plumped into the special corner seat that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had reserved for himself. The swell of St. Jim's looked at him expressively, but the short-sighted junior did not notice it.

Tom Merry shook him by the shoulder.

"Look here, are you really coming, Skimmy?"

"Yes; of course. I've taken my ticket."

"By Jove, then, that settles it! Where on earth did you get the tin from?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Gore lent it to me. Gore seemed to think there was something very humorous in my following you, and he lent his assistance. I did not see where the humour came in, but I was glad of his financial assistance. I assured him that Digby would repay him."

"Did you?" said Digby grimly. "Then you had a jolly lot of assurance; and Gore must be an ass!"

"Well, I gave him my microscope as security," said Skimpole. "He can sell it for three pounds if he wishes, so he does not stand to lose."

"And have you any tin to come back with?"

"None at all."

Tom Merry did not ask any more questions. It was useless to argue with Skimpole.

The train glided out of the station a couple of minutes later, and the juniors of St. Jim's were en route for Liverpool.

CHAPTER 7.
Through England.

THE train dashed on at a great speed, and London was soon left behind. As the hours of the journey passed, the Midland counties were one by one opened to the view of the juniors from the windows.

Skimpole sat in his corner, with a huge book open on his knees. He was studying the important subject of Determinism, as expounded by the famous Russian professor, Lottoff Boshski, and his frequent audible ejaculations of delight showed how he followed the able reasonings of the professor, and what mental enjoyment the subject afforded him.

Manners and Lowther were playing chess. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been slowly and carefully polishing his silk hat for some time. Herries was relating to Digby some marvellous stories of Towser's sagacity; but Digby did not mind, as he was reading, and not listening. Tom Merry and Blake strolled down the corridor on a tour of inspection, while the train rocked and jolted on its rapid way.

"Marvellous!" exclaimed Skimpole. "Dear me, I really must tell you fellows this."

"Shut up!" growled Manners. Manners was busy with his chess, and he was always annoyed if anyone spoke to him at such a time. "There you are, Lowther."

"Pooh! I'm all right. Up goes my rook."

"It's ripping!" said Skimpole. "Did you ever hear such a perfectly clear exposition as this? To the Determinist——"

"Check!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I shall nevah get this hat quite wight again. A howwid wottah bwushed against me, and knocked it against a lamp-post, and I am afwaid the mark won't come out."

"And Towser never even looked at it," said Herries. "He knew it wasn't good to eat. You can't take Towser in."

"Mm-m-m-m-m-m!" said Digby, who was deep in his story.

"To the Determinist," said Skimpole, "the position is perfectly clear. As man is the product of the combined forces of his heredity and his environment—his inward and his outward circumstances—he cannot justly be held responsible for any of his actions."

"Well, nobody ever supposed you were responsible for your actions!" snapped Lowther. "Shut up!"

"Really, Lowther——"

"Yaas, wathah; I endorse our fwiend Skimmay's wemonstwance. Although Skimmay is an uttah ass, and talks feahful wot, it's a fwee countwy, and a fellow ought to be allowed to talk wot if he likes."

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry, looking in. "But Skimmy ought to be merciful. There's rot and rot, and he ought to draw the line at Determinism."

"Man, the creature of his training, cannot justly be blamed for any of his acts," said Skimpole. "That is as clear as—as—as——"

"Mud!" suggested Blake.

"A criminal cannot be guilty. He ought not to be punished. He is only acting as his nature directs. It is quite clear."

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "So you would leave all the criminals loose?"

Skimmy smiled pityingly

"You do not comprehend, Merry. Under Determinism the criminal would not be punished by imprisonment, as under the present system. But he would not be allowed to go loose, as a danger to society."

"Blessed if I can see any middle course."

"My dear fellow, he would be restrained, and deprived of his liberty until he had learned how to use it well."

"And what's the difference between depriving a man of his liberty and imprisoning him?" demanded Tom Merry.

Skimpole scratched his head.

"I—I haven't worked that out yet," he confessed. "You see——"

"Oh, chuck that rot out of the window!" said Tom Merry. "I'm getting ready for that lunch-basket."

"Same here," said Digby.

Monty Lowther emitted a fierce growl.

"Will you chaps shut up? If I lose this game I shall put it down to you."

"Oh, rot!" said Manners warmly. "You've practically lost it already."

"Now, look here, Manners, don't be a silly ass."

"It's no good asking you that, as you're born one and can't help it. I suppose Skimmy would put it down to your hereditary environment."

"Heredity and environment," corrected Skimpole gently. "Quite so, Manners. Lowther's want of sense is undoubtedly due to—— Ow!"

Lowther had reached out with his boot, and Skimmy left off, to rub a damaged shin. Lowther moved a piece, and jammed it down on the chess-board as if he wanted to plant it there.

"There!" he said.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Manners cheerfully. "The situation's much the same as it was that time when Buck Finn upset the board, and I nearly had you——"

"You mean when I had you mate in two, if that Yankee ass hadn't tumbled the board over?" asked Lowther.

"No, I don't mean anything of the sort. I mean the time when I had you mate in three if Finn hadn't——"

"Look here, Manners, if you can't talk sense——"

"Oh, pway don't wow!" said Arthur Augustus. "It's a wemarkable thing to me that you Shell-fish can't play chess without quawwellin'. I've played hundreds of games, and nevah lost my tempah."

"Oh, ring off!"

"I wefuse to wing off," said D'Arcy indignantly. "I wegard you as a beast, Lowthah. I shall have to sewiously considah whethah I can bwing you out again."

Lowther snorted. He made a move, and Manners made a counter-move, and exclaimed "Check!" Lowther started, and it was a fatal thing to do. The chess-board was a folding one, and the players were supporting it on their knees.

It folded up, and the pieces and pawns were swept together, and board and chess went to the floor. Manners gave a howl.

"You—you ass! I had you in one move."

"Rot! Bosh!"

"Look here, Lowther——"

"Look here, Manners——"

Tom Merry rushed between.

"Hold on, you dummies! Stop it, or I'll knock your silly nappers together."

And the threatened scrimmage was stopped. Lowther grunted and collected up his chess. The train was slowing down, and ten minutes later the juniors were discussing the contents of the first lunch-basket.

CHAPTER 8.
The Arrival.

THROUGH the windy, sunny day and the dusk of the afternoon the train dashed on and on. The journey seemed endless, and even the cheerful juniors began to be tired of it. The corridor enabled them to stretch their legs at times, and the ample lunches satisfied the wants of the inner man. The ever-varying landscape was of keen interest to the young travellers. But hour upon hour of railway travelling tells upon the most cheerful disposition. They were longing for Liverpool and rest.

Skimpole, indeed, was happy in his book. He was following the powerful reasonings of Professor Lottoff Boshski, and when he wanted a rest from reading, he worked out social problems in his head. He had not yet told Tom Merry the difference between imprisoning a man and depriving him of his liberty, but perhaps that was one of the problems he had not worked out.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy persisted in looking out of the window, to the imminent risk of his topper. He was interested in the advertisements along the line, and, indeed, it was curious to watch how they began and ended. Some wonderful specifics were advertised for a distance of a hundred miles from London, on station walls and hoardings, and certain baking-powders and ketchups accompanied the juniors as far as Rugby. Then at various points new advertisements would begin, belonging to northern advertisers, and accompany the travellers for a certain distance, and then cease. Only a famous soap and an equally famous brand of pills, so far as D'Arcy observed, stretched all the way from London to Liverpool. And curiously enough the advertisements, ugly enough as they were, gave the juniors a feeling that they weren't so very far from home.

Blake, indeed, who belonged to the north, felt more at home the more he drew north of the Trent; and he spent some time in explaining to Tom Merry that though the country they were travelling through was ripping, it wasn't half so ripping as some parts of Yorkshire he could point out.

The long journey was nearing its close when two accidents happened in quick succession. Arthur Augustus, leaning out of the window to catch a better view of a tall factory chimney, clutched at his tall hat too late as the wind caught it. It went whirling away down the line, and D'Arcy gave a cry.

"My hat!"

"Gone!" said Tom Merry. "Hard cheese! By Jove, how it gets along! It seems to have solved the problem of aerial navigation on its own."

"Dear me!" said Skimpole, who had invented an airship in his spare time. "I must see that. Perhaps some great secret of aerostatics may be discovered by watching——"

He gently jerked D'Arcy away, and leaned out of the window. His cap was caught by the wind, and he grasped it just in time, but the valuable volume of Professor Lottof Boshski slipped from his hand as he did so, and dropped beside the track.

"Dear me! My book!"

"My hat!"

"My book!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "They're gone together. Never mind, Skimmy. Some platelayer may pick up the book, and learn the marvellous truths of Determinism."

Skimpole brightened up.

"You are right, Merry. If this accident has the effect of opening one mind to the great truths of Determinism, I shall not regret the loss of the book. I——"

"My hat!"

"Lucky you've got a cap with you," said Tom Merry. "I've expected that topper to go for some time. What are you doing?"

"I am goin' to pull the communicator——"

They dragged him away just in time.

"Pway welease me, deah boys. If the twain isn't stopped at once, it may be too late to wecovah my toppah."

"You utter ass!"

"Wats! Pway welease me."

"I'll jam you under the seat, and keep my feet on you, if you try to touch that cord," growled Blake. "There's a fine if you stop the train for nothing, you howling duffer!"

"I uttahly wefuse to be called a howling duffah. Besides, I wasn't goin' to stop the twain for nothin'. I want to wecovah my hat."

"You must wait till we get to Liverpool," grinned Digby. "Shove your cap on."

"I wegard you as a set of wottahs. It is too late now to stop the twain; the hat would be lost. I wegard you as sewewally wesponsible. Now I shall have to meet Dig's uncle without a toppah!"

"My uncle won't mind," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Your uncle!" said Digby.

"Yes, certainly. Have you forgotten that I tossed up for him? Hallo! We're getting in now. I shall be jolly glad for one to get on dry land again."

"Yaas, wathah!"

As they drew nearer to their destination, the juniors became more and more eager. Arthur Augustus even forgot the loss of his silk hat, somewhat comforted by Blake's assurance that in the north everything was quite as up-to-date as in Bond Street.

"And by the way," went on Blake, "there's a mid-week match on at Anfield Road Ground to-morrow, and we shall have to go. Fancy seeing Liverpool play on their own ground. That's all right—eh?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "It will beat hollow anything we saw in America."

"Do you play football in the north of England?" asked Manners innocently.

Blake glared.

"I don't know whether you admire the present shape of your nose, Manners," he observed. "I don't. But anyway, it will be considerably altered if you make any more funny remarks."

"Yaas, I wegard your wemark as fwivolous, Mannahs. There are two great teams in Liverpool that I have seen in the south—Livahpool and Evahton. I have seen both of them play in a way that I could not have beaten myself."

"Go hon!"

"I am speakin' quite sewiously. But Livahpool is famous for othah things, too. Mr. Gladstone was born there. I do not wholly appwove of that gentleman's opinions, but he was a vewy gweat man. I believe there are some docks or somethin' at Livahpool, too."

"Do you?" said Blake sarcastically. "You surprise me!"

"Yaas, wathah! And there's a wivah—the Mersey, I think, and docks on both sides of the wivah. I intend to take a little stwoll all wound the docks when I have half an hour to spare."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for your wude laughtah, Blake."

"You'll see it, my son, when you see the docks, and start walking round them in half an hour!" grinned Blake.

"Why, you ass——"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

"You—— Hallo! Here we are, by jingo!"

The train had been slowing down, and it clattered to a halt.

"Lime Street Station!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! It isn't as big as St. Pancras."

"I dare say it's big enough for the traffic," said Tom Merry.

"That's where you're mistaken," said Blake. "It isn't! It's going to be enlarged. Everything in the north is growing, you see. We don't stick in the mud like you chaps in the south. Everything swells——"

"Including the heads?"

"Look here, Tom Merry——"

"Gather your props, my son. I expect to see my uncle every minute," said Tom Merry, unheeding the wrathful tone of Jack Blake. "Dig, don't forget to point out my uncle as soon as you see him, as I've never seen him before."

Digby chuckled.

"Right you are!"

The juniors gladly enough tumbled out of the train. The station was crowded, and people jostled one another every inch of the way. The juniors, mindful of the warning in Uncle Murphy's letter, kept together. Skimpole, it is true, started wandering off, but Blake took an affectionate grip on his ear, and stopped him. Arthur Augustus, too, thought he had better rush off to a hat shop before meeting Mr. Murphy, but Digby and Herries linked arms with him, and anchored him to the spot.

The crowd gradually cleared off, and a little later a stout gentleman, with a ruddy, jovial face, decidedly auburn hair, and a silk hat, came quickly towards the group of juniors from St. Jim's.

"Faith, and I've found ye!" he exclaimed, in a rich accent. "Dig; is that you, you young rascal?"

"Hallo, nunky!" said Dig. And he shook hands with the stout gentleman, and presented his friends in turn.

Tom Merry had a feeling that Mr. Murphy might be surprised at the numbers of the party; but the jovial Irishman seemed to think that the more there were the merrier it was. He welcomed them all heartily, and having seen that they had all their belongings, he marched them off out of the station. Half an hour later the juniors, having removed their travel-stains after the journey, sat down as spick and span as a row of new pins to an excellent dinner at the Palatial Hotel, where Mr. Murphy was staying; and Dig's Irish uncle proved an excellent host.

CHAPTER 9.

In Liverpool.

"UP you get!"

"Bai Jove! It isn't wisin'-bell, deah boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Where do you think you are?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—— Bai Jove, I forgot we were in Livahpool!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. "What's the time?"

"Nine o'clock."

"Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus yawned. The others kept him company. Tom Merry was the only fellow up, so far. Mr. Murphy had wisely determined to allow the juniors to have a long sleep after the day's journey. They had gone to bed early the evening of their arrival, and had slept like tops, and had not been called in the morning. Tom Merry was usually an early riser, but he did not turn out till nine.

"Yaw-w-w-w-w!" said Arthur Augustus sleepily. "I weally hope Mr. Murphy will not wegard it as bad form on our part stayin' in bed like this."

"Groo-oo-oo!" said Jack Blake. "Quiet there! As it's so late, we may as well stay in till ten o'clock while we're about it. Ow! Leggo those bedclothes, Tom Merry, you sweep!"

"So I will when they're off."

"Leggo! Ow! It's cold! Leggo, you beast, and I'll get up!" And Jack Blake tumbled out of bed, and yawned, and shook himself together. "Now, then, you lazy bounders, get up!"

"Lemme alone!" said Lowther drowsily.

"No fear! Blessed if I can see what a chap wants to stick in bed for on a fine, sunny March morning," said Blake. "Out you come!"

"Leggo!"

"Oh, rats! Come out!"

Blake had hold of Lowther's ankles, one in each hand, so he hadn't much choice about coming out. He bumped on the floor, and there was a yell. Blake turned his kindly attention to Manners, but Manners skipped out of bed without waiting for assistance.

Tom Merry had helped Digby and Herries out, and they were rubbing the parts of them that had come into violent contact with the floor. Skimpole was still in bed, and seven

juniors gathered round him. All those who were up felt, of course, a virtuous indignation at the laziness of anybody who wasn't. But Skimpole was not asleep. He blinked at them.

"Don't disturb me for a while," he said, "I am thinking. I am turning over in my mind some of the pressing social problems of the hour. Under a Determinist regime, I am trying to think whether there would be any other way of depriving a man of his liberty except by imprisoning him. I am turning over——"

He was; he turned over bodily, and rolled out of bed.

"Really, Blake—really, Tom Merry——"

"Time to get up!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Are you going to leave breakfast to lunch-time?"

"You have caused me to come into contact with the floor in a way that has produced considerable pain in my bones."

"Sorry! It's my heredity, I suppose, or Blake's environment. Anyway, as a Determinist, you can't possibly blame either of us; so don't complain."

And Skimpole began to think that out; and the hero of the Shell turned away grinning. Skimpole was a Socialist, and his chums did not object to his Socialism; but when he started as a Determinist, they thought it was time to draw the line. One "ism" was enough for anybody at a time. Besides, Skimpole's latest "ism" was, as far as his chums could see, more cranky than any that had gone before. Skimpole himself was not very clear on some points, Professor Lottoff Boshski having neglected to explain in his book how a man could be imprisoned without being deprived of his liberty, or deprived of his liberty without being imprisoned.

The juniors went down to breakfast. They were feeling pretty fit after their long rest, and quite ready for adventures. Mr. Murphy, who was filling up his short stay in Liverpool with business, had gone out; but a benevolent waiter had the interests of the juniors at heart. Arthur Augustus had named the waiter Albert, because he resembled a man he had met named William. Albert looked after the juniors as if he had been their parent, moved thereto by a substantial tip from Mr. Murphy, and an expectation of another.

From the windows the juniors could catch an early glimpse of the great city—of St. George's Place, and its magnificent spaces and buildings.

Arthur Augustus was much impressed.

"Bai Jove, that looks like the Nelson Monument in Twafalgah Squah ovah there!" he said. "What is it, Blake, deah boy?"

"Wellington Monument."

"Bai Jove! And what's the weally handsome, big buildin'?"

"St. George's Hall."

"Bai Jove! And I see you have electric twams here."

Blake did not reply to that. He found no suitable words ready at the moment.

"Where are the slums?" asked D'Arcy. "I hear that you have slums in Livahpool quite as bad as in London, you know."

"Are you going slumming?" asked Blake sarcastically.

"Bai Jove, I don't see why not! I expect to weceive a wemittance fwom my governah here, and I should like to make somebody feel glad that I came to Livahpool," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I should like to see the slums. I have seen the slums in London, and when I grow up and get into the House of Lords—if I evah do, which is not vewy likely, as I have an eldah bwothah—I shall have the mattah seen to. I have felt for a long time that most of the pwessin' pwoblems of the pwesent day are due to the existence of the House of Commons."

"Well, of all the precious duffers——"

"I wefuse to be wegarded as a pwecious duffah. I have a vewy stwong feelin' that the House of Lords could deal with the mattah all wight if we were given a fwee hand," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "When I gwow up, I shall take a pwominent part in politics, and I shall go to the countwy with a pwoposition to mend or end the House of Commons."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause for wibald mewwiment in that wemark. And I have quite made up my mind to see the slums before I leave Livahpool. As a future politician, and pwobably Ministah—pewwaps Pwemiah—I wegard it as necessawy to see the weal state of affaihs, in ordah to impwove mattahs as soon as I have the powah."

And nothing could move D'Arcy from his determination to go slumming before he left Liverpool. What would happen to the swell of St. Jim's if he went investigating into the toughest quarters of the town was a question, and Tom Merry and Blake agreed tacitly to keep an eye on him, and prevent any such little excursion on his part.

"Hallo, here comes my uncle!" said Tom Merry cheerfully, as Mr. Murphy entered the room. "Good-morning, sir!"

"Good-morning, my lads, and the top of the morning to you!" said Mr. Murphy, beaming. "I hope you've had a good night's rest."

"Yaas, wathah, sir, and we feel vewy fit."

"Breakfast all right?"

"Ripping, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah! Albert is lookin' aftah us wippinly, sir."

"Albert?" asked Mr. Murphy, looking puzzled.

"Yaas, sir; the waitah, you know. I have chwistened him Albert, sir, because he beahs such a stwikin' wesemblance to a waitah at my governah's club, sir, named William."

Mr. Murphy apparently did not see the connection, but he nodded.

"Very good. Now, are you lads inclined for a little run through the city? Of course, you would like to see the Liverpool football team play? They are playing on the home ground this afternoon, as it fortunately happens—playing a visiting team from the south. Everton are playing away. I sha'n't be able to come with you, as I have business in Water Street this afternoon, but I am sure you will be careful not to get into mischief."

The juniors all looked horrified at the idea of getting into mischief. To judge by their expressions, mischief and they were complete strangers.

"But I am free for the rest of the morning," said Mr. Murphy. "I will have a cup of coffee, and then if you are ready we will start, and I will be your guide."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

While Mr. Murphy was drinking his cup of coffee, D'Arcy made a hurried and anxious inquiry of Albert as to the whereabouts of the nearest hatter's. And by the time Mr. Murphy was ready, the swell of St. Jim's came in smiling in a brand-new topper.

CHAPTER 10.

'Erbert.

LIVERPOOL was very bright and very windy in the March morning. The wind was blowing from the estuary of the Mersey. The juniors of St. Jim's looked round them with keen interest as they walked down Lime Street, past the imposing facade of St. George's Hall. Quite a gale was blowing round the corner from William Brown Street, and Arthur Augustus had to clutch at his new silk hat several times.

"Bai Jove, this is wathah wuff, you know!" he said breathlessly.

Tom Merry laughed.

"You should have stuck to the cap, ass."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wegarded it as impewative to look as wespectable as poss., in honah of our fwiend Mr. Murphy. Bai Jove, how it's blowin'!" And Arthur Augustus clutched at his topper again.

"Faith, and it's windy!" said Mr. Murphy. "This corner has been nicknamed Cape Horn, and, faith, it's deserving the name! Sure, there goes your hat!"

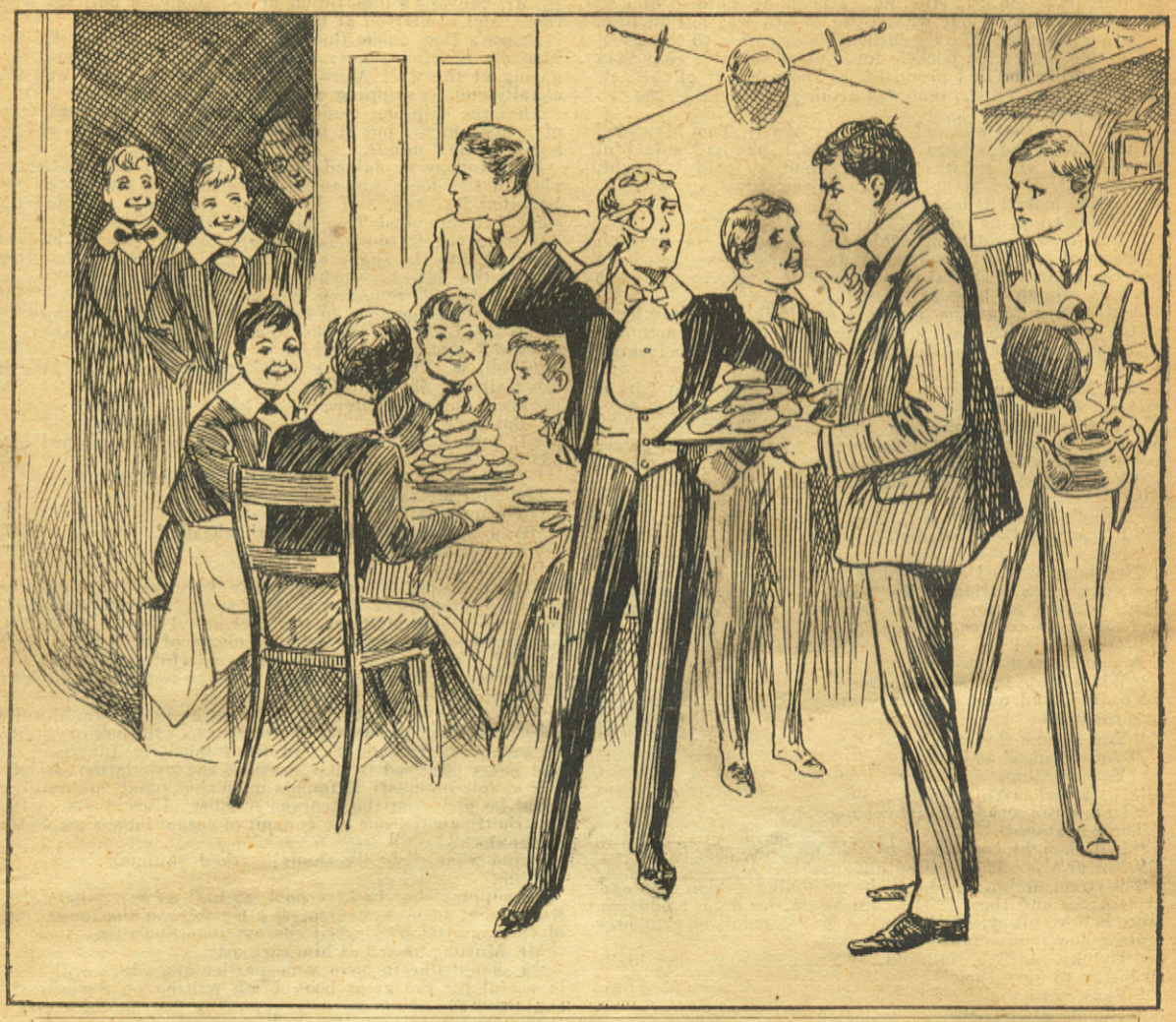
Arthur Augustus made another clutch—too late! A gust of wind lifted off his topper, and sent it spinning into the wide street.

"Bai Jove! Stop it!"

But there was no chance of stopping it. The hat was flying before the wind, and it spun out into the traffic long before it could be caught. Arthur Augustus was dashing after it, when Mr. Murphy caught him by the shoulder and pulled him back. It was necessary, for the street was busy, and Arthur Augustus had been about to rush fairly under the nose of a cab-horse.

"Hould on!" said Mr. Murphy. "Do you want to be run over?"

"Weally, my deah sir—— Bwavo, my lad! I will give you half-a-cwown if you bwing back my hat!"



"Vewy glad to see you, Lefevre, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the unhappy owner of the Study. "It's weally wippin' of you to entahtain the Lowah Forms in this genewous way. I think we're all here now, deah boy."

A ragged street urchin had dashed after the flying topper. He was a rather good-looking, though extremely dirty lad of about thirteen, in a pair of trousers which had once belonged to a full-grown man, and had been cut short for his use, and an old coat whose tails almost touched the ground. His feet and his head were bare. The stains of days—or perhaps weeks—were on his face, but from the dirt accumulated there his bright brown eyes twinkled acutely and merrily. He looked a curious little figure as he dashed in pursuit of the hat, and the juniors stopped to watch him.

Twice he nearly came up with the troublesome topper, and then the playful breeze lifted it again and whirled it on. The little ragamuffin darted amid the traffic like one who bore a charmed life. The topper was suffering—it bumped against a cart, and was kicked by a horse, and mud was trailing all over it. Still, the street arab kept up the pursuit.

"Go it!" exclaimed Blake. "On the ball!"

"Bai Jove, I am afwaid I sha'n't be able to weah that wotten hat again! I wegard this as a most unfortunate occuwwence!"

"Go it, kid!"

"Stick to it!"

The silk hat was whirling back to them now, caught by a swirl of the wind. After it came the street urchin, his face glowing with exertion, and his eyes bright with excitement. He was within a dozen paces of the juniors when his foot slipped on a piece of orange-peel thrown down by some careless passer-by, and he fell, stumbling forward, and crashed down on his face in the road. A cab was passing by, and the driver in vain tried to pull up.

What happened next passed like a flash.

While the group of juniors, petrified by the imminence of a terrible accident, stood spellbound, Tom Merry suddenly sprang into the road.

The hero of the Shell did not stop to think.

There was a life in danger—and that was enough for him—and Tom Merry acted upon the impulse of the moment, and the fortune that is said to favour the brave stood his friend in that wild moment.

His grip was on the bit, and the horse's head swung round as he dragged on it with all his strength.

The hansom turned in its own length, the horse rearing wildly over Tom Merry, and then crashing to the ground on its side.

A cry of horror broke from the juniors.

The street arab had escaped injury, the cab-wheel missing him by about an inch as the vehicle was whirled round—but Tom Merry?

For the moment it seemed as if the brave lad must be crushed under the falling horse, but he sprang away in time.

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry staggered breathlessly back towards the pavement, and Monty Lowther caught him as he fell. The horse was on the ground, struggling wildly, and the cab was in imminent danger of capsizing every moment.

The driver was quickly on the ground, but already a workman had rushed forward and caught the struggling horse, and was stilling it.

The animal was dragged to its feet, trembling in every limb. Mr. Murphy lifted the scared urchin to safety, and he stood looking dazed and bewildered.

There was a crowd round the spot in a few seconds.

Tom Merry stood breathing hard, a little flushed, but quite unhurt, and feeling considerably discomfited by the praises,

his prompt action was eliciting. His chums slapped him on the back, knocking out what little breath was left in him.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his attention to the street arab. He felt in his pockets for a more valuable coin than the half-crown he had promised for the recovery of the hat. As for the silk topper, that was a thing of the past—the cab horse had fallen on it.

"Bai Jove, that was awfully plucky of you, Tom Mewwy," D'Arcy remarked; "and this youngstah has had a feahful fwight! I am sowwy you have had a feahful fwight, youngstah! Pway accept this small weward, deah boy!"

The boy looked at him.

"I didn't get the 'at, sir!" he gasped.

"You nearly got wun ovah, though! It was wathah weckless of you. As a mattah of fact, I would wathah have lost the toppah than have had you wun ovah, though it is the only toppah I have at pwesent."

And Arthur Augustus pressed a coin into the grimy hand of the urchin. The boy, dazed from the accident, accepted it mechanically, and his fist closed over it without his looking at it.

Mr. Murphy, greatly relieved to find that Tom Merry was not hurt, gathered his proteges and resumed his way. The cabman drove off, and the crowd dispersed. Tom Merry gave the street arab a cheery nod as he turned away, and the boy stepped after him quickly.

"You stopped the 'oss, sir," he said. "You saved my life!"

"I don't know about that, kid; I stopped the horse."

"I 'ope you ain't 'urt, sir?"

"Not a bit!"

The party walked on. Arthur Augustus kept an anxious eye open for a hatter's. They had not proceeded a dozen yards when a patter of bare feet was heard behind them, and the street arab came tearing up.

"'Old on, sir!" he gasped. "'Old on a minute!"

Arthur Augustus stopped.

"What is the mattah, deah boy?"

The lad held out the half-sovereign D'Arcy had pressed into his hand.

"You gimme this, sir!"

D'Arcy glanced at it.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's a 'arf-suvrin, sir!"

"I am quite aware of that, youngstah!"

The boy stared.

"I—I thought you meant to give me a tanner, sir!"

"Not at all! That's all wight!"

The street urchin looked at the glistening golden coin and at D'Arcy, and then at the coin again, as if he could not quite believe his eyes and ears. A golden coin was evidently quite a new possession to him.

"Thanky, sir!" he faltered. "You're—you're very kind, sir! I'm to have this?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thanky kindly, sir!"

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "You are a vewy honest lad, youngstah! What is your name?"

"'Erbert, sir!"

"Herbert! But you have another name?"

The lad shook his head.

"Not as I knows on, sir!"

"But surely you are called somethin' else?" urged D'Arcy.

"Oh, yes, sir! I'm called Rags sometimes!"

"Wags! What a vewy peculiah name! The youngstah's name is Herbert Wags, deah boys! I wegard him as a vewy decent little chap! Dig, old fellow, pway give him a half-sovereign, will you, as I have wun out of cash?"

"With pleasure!" said Digby cheerfully.

'Erbert jumped as the second half-sovereign was presented.

"Oh, sir!"

And leaving the ragamuffin staring at his wonderful wealth, which seemed to him like a dream from the "Arabian Nights," the party proceeded on their way.

CHAPTER 11.

Round the Town.

MR. MURPHY knew Liverpool well, having resided in the great city once, and frequently visited it on business since then. He was an ideal cicerone, having endless good nature and a seemingly endless purse. He was very fond of his nephew, as could be easily seen, and he was willing to take any amount of trouble to make the visit a pleasant one to Dig and his friends.

After Arthur Augustus had been rendered easier in his mind by the purchase of a new silk hat, the juniors and their guide walked along Dale Street towards the docks. They passed through Water Street, and listened with great interest to Mr. Murphy's description of the immense business done there, and so arrived at the pierhead.

Prince's Dock made them open their eyes, as also did the immense landing-stages; and they could have spent hours gazing at the wide Mersey and the endless docks, and the equally endless shipping of all sizes and varieties.

That the shipping trade of Liverpool was immense they, of course, knew, but it had never been brought so clearly home to their minds.

Mr. Murphy explained that the best and most extensive view of the docks was to be obtained by a journey on the Elevated Railway, and the juniors cheerfully mounted the steps. It reminded Tom Merry of his visit to New York, but from the train-windows a glorious view was obtained that put into the shade anything he had seen on the other side of the Atlantic—to his mind, at least.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We could do with somethin' of this kind in London, you know!"

"What Liverpool thinks to-day all England thinks to-morrow," remarked Lowther.

"Well, weally, this is wippin', you know! How long is this wailway, Mr. Murphy?"

"Seven miles, I believe."

"Bai Jove!"

"It runs from Seaforth Sands to Dingle," explained Mr. Murphy.

"My hat! Are there docks all the way?"

Mr. Murphy laughed.

"Yes, certainly!"

"And some more ovah in Birkenhead?"

"Yes; heaps more!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus was not easily impressed, but he was certainly impressed now. He asked endless questions. Skimpole asked questions, too, and jotted down the answers in a notebook. Having lost the volume of Professor Lottoff Boshski, Skimmy was giving the wonderful truths of Determinism a rest, and had decided to make notes for a book of travels dealing with Liverpool.

With that important object in view, he asked Mr. Murphy questions which the worthy gentleman had to rack his brains to answer. Although he had lived much in Liverpool, it had never occurred to him to count the population, and he was unable to satisfy Skimpole upon that point, and neither could he give him the average number of accidents on the electric tramways, nor the amount of casual labour employed at the docks.

"And what about the slums?" asked Skimpole.

"Eh?"

"I suppose that in Liverpool, as well as everywhere else, the present social system presses terribly on the lower part of the population?" asked the amateur Socialist.

Mr. Murphy looked at him curiously.

"I should like to have some particulars, which will come in useful for the great book I am writing on Socialism!" explained Skimpole.

The Irish gentleman laughed.

"Isn't Socialism a little too old a subject for a lad of your years?" he hinted politely.

Skimpole shook his head.

"Not at all, my dear sir! With my remarkable brain power, I am quite able to deal with this subject. I am quite aware of the fact that social problems have puzzled heads like Mr. Gladstone's; but, as a matter of fact, I have them all at my finger-tips! I can think them out with wonderful clearness, and I place the most complete reliance upon my own judgment!"

"Dear me!"

"Oh, don't mind Skimmy, uncle!" said Digby. "He was born like that."

"Yaas, wathah! We all wegard Skimmy as an ass, sir."

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"Pway wing off, deah boy!"

"But the subject is an important one. Mr. Murphy could probably give me some details as to the number of children who perished of hunger in Liverpool during the year."

"Ow! Shut up!"

"Or the number of unemployed who have been reduced to starvation——"

Tom Merry took a grip on Skimpole's shoulder.

"Look out of the window, Skimmy."

"Yes," said Skimmy, looking out of the train window, in some surprise.

"What can you see?"

"I can see the docks, Merry."

"Rather a big drop, isn't it?"

"Yes; I should say a fall would be instantly fatal. But I am in no danger of falling down there, Merry."

"That's where you make a mistake. You are. You've got to get off that subject, or I shall sling you out of the window."

"Really, Merry——"

"You are giving us all the creeps. Keep your head shut."

"But it is cowardly to turn one's back upon disagreeable problems," said Skimmy. "You cannot solve them by that method."

"We can't solve them at all, I imagine, while we're at school, so keep off the grass, and don't jaw on unpleasant subjects. Ring off."

"But really——"

"Out you go, then!"

"Ow! Oh! Pray don't be so rough! I will refrain from——"

"Good! Mind you do!"

And Skimpole was silenced for the time.

The juniors could very well have spent hours on the overhead electric railway, but there were other attractions; and after a short journey, they descended. Mr. Murphy guided them over an immense ocean liner lying near the pier-head, and then it was time to return to the hotel for lunch.

They returned upon an electric tram, a huge "double-decker," that bore them along at a spanking rate, and soon landed them opposite their hotel.

The morning's excursion had made the juniors hungry, and they were quite ready for a substantial lunch.

Albert looked after them with his usual care, and the boys did full justice to a meal that would have made Fatty Wynn's mouth water.

After lunch Mr. Murphy had to leave them; but he gave them full directions how to get to the football-ground, with the time of the kick-off, and the juniors had no doubt that they would be able to look after themselves perfectly well for the afternoon.

"We may as well start early," said Tom Merry. "There's pretty certain to be a crowd, though it's a mid-week match."

"Yaas, wathah! I am sowwy we shall not be able to see Evahton play, too——"

"They're playing away to-day."

"Yaas, it is unfortunate, as we could have obtained a supply of Evahton toffee for Fatty Wynn at the same time."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Ass! You can get Everton toffee anywhere, without going to Everton; and Everton football team don't play in Everton, anyway; their ground is up near the Liverpool Football Club's ground."

"Bai Jove, is it weally?"

"Yes, ass!"

"I should be sowwy to spoil the harmony of this expedish," said D'Arcy; "but I must point out to you, Tom Mewwy, that I uttahly wefuse to be called an ass."

"I wish you'd refuse to be one," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Why don't you try that instead?"

"I wegard that wemark as wudah than your pwevious wemark, and unless you withdwaw it, I am afwaid that I shall have no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin'."

"Oh, go and chop chips! I'm going up to put my coat on."

"I insist——"

"Right-ho! You can go on insisting; but we're starting in a few minutes."

And Tom Merry went upstairs three at a time. Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and started in hot pursuit. Tom Merry quickened his pace, and nearly ran into Albert, who was descending the stairs with a tray full of glass. He dodged just in time, and ran on; but Arthur Augustus was in too great a hurry to see Albert or his tray.

He dashed on, and ran right into the waiter, and Albert staggered, and there was a terrific crash of smashing glass.

"Ow!" gasped Albert. "My heye!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat on the stairs, looking dazed.

Albert, the waiter, clung desperately to the banisters. The tray rolled downstairs with its burden, glasses smashing on every step.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "You've done it now, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! Weally——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as wholly wesponsible, Tom Mewwy, and I shall uttahly wefuse to pay for the bweakages."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My heye!" gasped Albert. "My honly heye!"

"I am extwemely sowwy, Albert, deah boy!"

"So am I," said Albert, rubbing his aching bones. "I'm 'urt."

"I am sincerely sowwy. I twust you are not sewiously hurt."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tom Mewwy, I wegard your laughtah as uttahly heartless, when our fwiend Albert is pwobably sewiously hurt."

"I am seriously 'urt," said Albert. "I shall put them glasses down to Mr. Murphy's account; but what about my bones?"

"You can put them down to D'Arcy's account," said Jack Blake, coming on the scene. "How many broken?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"I'm 'urt," growled Albert.

"Pway accept this five shillings, deah boy, and——"

"Thank you, sir!"

Albert's countenance brightened, and his injuries seemed to vanish all of a sudden. He set to work collecting up the broken glass, and the juniors went upstairs to prepare for their excursion to the football-ground.

"You see what comes of losing your temper, Gussy," said Tom Merry admonishingly, as he towelled his face. "You might have caused Albert terrible internal injuries by biffing into him like that."

"I wegard it as wholly your fault, Tom Mewwy, and unless you make the amende honouwable, I shall thwash you."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Blake. "No time to waste now! We've got to get off, or we shall be late for the match."

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass frigidly upon his chum.

"I should be sowwy to be late for the match, but I could not let that intahfere with a question that concerned my personal dig., Blake."

"Oh, rats! Ring off!"

"I wefuse to wing off! I wegard Tom Mewwy as a wank outsidah, and I have no alternative but to give him a feahful thwashin'."

"Oh, come on, then, and get it over!" said Tom Merry, soaking a sponge with water. "I'm ready!"

"Pway thwow aside that sponge."

"You can't expect me to throw up the sponge until I'm beaten," said Tom Merry, in a tone of remonstrance. "Now, be reasonable, Gussy."

"Pway don't be an ass!"

"Come on!"

"I wefuse to come on while you hold that sponge in your hand. I have a feelin' that you intend to play some wotten pwactical joke, with the intention of spoilin' my clothes."

"Very well; then I'll come on, if you won't."

And Tom Merry, sponge in hand, advanced to the attack.

D'Arcy retreated, keeping a wary and uneasy eye on the dripping sponge. He shuddered at the thought of its coming into contact with his gorgeous waistcoat.

"Pway don't be a beast, Tom Mewwy!"

"I'm coming on! Don't run away!"

"I wefuse to be touched by that beastly sponge! Keep off, you howwid wottah!"

"Rats! You started it, and now——"

"Upon second thoughts, I will let you off the thwashin'."

"Not good enough! I don't want to be let off."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—— Pway keep away! I—I——"

"I am willing to let the matter drop if you apologise," said Tom Merry magnanimously.

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"Very well, then, here goes!"

"I—I—I—— Upon second thoughts, I apologise, you wottah!"

"Good! Pardon is granted," said Tom Merry. "But, mind, you must behave yourself better in future."

D'Arcy did not reply. He could think of nothing sufficiently expressive to do justice to his feelings. And the dispute being thus terminated, the juniors of St. Jim's put on their coats and caps, and sallied forth.

CHAPTER 12.

At the Football Ground.

TOM MERRY & CO. climbed to the upper deck of an electric tram, which bore them at a great rate in a north-easterly direction. The tram was boarded en route by a good many other people, whose conversation showed that they were on the same errand. There was a great crowd about the Anfield Road, and it was plain that though it was a mid-week match on the Liverpool ground, it was to be well attended. Tom Merry & Co. were in good time, and they obtained good seats and proceeded to make themselves comfortable. The afternoon was cold, but clear and fine—an ideal day for a good football match.

"Kick-off in five minutes," said Jack Blake, looking at his watch. "We're lucky! What are you looking like a scalded cat for, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake, I was not aware that I was lookin' like a scalded cat! I was thinkin' that I should like a foot-warmah!"

"You ought to have brought one in your waistcoat-pocket, then!"

"Pway don't be widiculous, Blake. My comfort would be considewably incweased by a foot-warmah, but I am quite capable of wuffin' it."

"You are quite right, D'Arcy," said Skimpole seriously. "The cessation of motion naturally exercises a stagnating effect upon the circulation of the blood, and——"

"Hallo, here come the boys!"

"You are interrupting me, Merry. I was explaining——"

"I know I am, Skimmy. Here they are. Shut up, old chap. I say, Blake, do you know any of these chaps by sight?"

"Yes, rather."

Jack Blake looked over the men in the red shirts and white knickers. He had seen Liverpool play before. He knew most of the men by sight, and he assumed a certain air of importance as he pointed them out to his comrades.

"That chap's Hardy—he keeps goal. Those two chaps talking are Dunlop and Hughes, backs. Good boys, both—I've seen 'em before."

"They look a wathah nice set," said Arthur Augustus. "I weally think we are pwobably goin' to see a good game."

"There's Bowyer, Griffin, Robinson, Cox, and Smith, forwards," said Blake, pointing out the men, who were punting a ball about. "Hignett, Lathom, and Raisbeck are the halves, if I remember. And they're a jolly good team, and they'll make Gussy open his eyes when they begin."

Liverpool were playing a team from the south, and they turned out in blue shirts and white knickers. They were a fine-looking set of players, too, and there was every prospect of a good game.

Needless to say, the juniors of St. Jim's looked on from the moment of the kick-off with the keenest interest. St. Jim's was a footballing school, and the juniors knew well that much was to be learned from watching good professional teams playing the game. And this game was lively and keenly interesting from the start.

Liverpool had the wind against them, but in spite of that circumstance they seemed to carry all before them in the first quarter of an hour. The visitors were confined to their own half, and the red shirts of Liverpool made determined attacks on goal, which were with difficulty checked.

There was a roar of cheering from the packed enclosures when a Liverpool forward was seen to make an almost unaided run up the field, beating the defence in a masterly way.

"Go it, Smith!"

"Good old Smithy!"

"Bravo!"

Jack Blake was on his feet now, watching. His eyes were gleaming.

"That's Smith!" he exclaimed. "That chap's an amateur! He'll be through! Hurrah!"

"Sit down there, can't you?"

It was a piping, youthful voice from behind—a voice whose tones seemed familiar to the ears of the juniors.

Blake looked round wrathfully.

Some distance behind a ragged youth was standing, and his dirty face was aglow with excitement, and his dark eyes glittering as he watched the field.

"Sit down in front, can't yer?"

"My hat, it's that kid again!"

"Bai Jove, it's Herbert Wags!"

Herbert Rags it was. The youth still wore the same vast trousers and dilapidated coat, but his face was a shade cleaner. He had evidently expended a portion of his newly-acquired wealth in a visit to the football-ground, to see his team play. Even the ragamuffin of the streets could take a pride in his own team.

"'Ere, you with the clean collar on," went on 'Erbert humorously; "you sit down!"

"Bai Jove! Cheeky young beggah!"

At that moment 'Erbert recognised whom he was addressing, and his expression changed. The impudence gave place to a look of real contrition. He touched his ragged hair to the juniors—he had no cap. Arthur Augustus raised his silk topper in reply. The lad was a cheeky little ragamuffin, but Gussy was nothing if not polite.

"You ring off, young shaver!" called out Jack Blake.

"Yes, sir. Didn't know yer, sir," said 'Erbert.

Blake sat down.

By this time the defending backs had robbed Smith of the ball, and the visitors had cleared, and the game had gone to midfield again. But the red shirts were still attacking, and the visitors had all they could do to hold their own.

"Wippin'!" said Arthur Augustus, his eyeglass never leaving the struggle. "I wegard this as weally wippin', deah boys!"

"Jolly good," agreed Blake; "but you should see a Yorkshire team!"

"Wats! I don't want to dispawage a Yorkshire team, but I weally think that this is quite up to Yorkshire form!"

"That's all you know, Gussy—and I won't give you a thick ear, though you have earned one. You see, in Yorkshire——"

"Bravo!" shouted Tom Merry. "Go it!"

"In Yorkshire——"

"On the ball! Bravo!"

"In Yorkshire, we——"

"Bwavo! Wippin'! Goal!"

And even Jack Blake left off singing the praises of his native county to cheer a goal neatly taken by Liverpool. It was the only goal of the half, and when the interval came the home team were one to nil.

Digby produced a packet of Everton toffee, which the juniors were very glad to discuss just then. Even Arthur Augustus consented to take a chunk, and to put it into his aristocratic mouth.

"Good," said Manners; "more!"

"Here you are."

"Bai Jove, I wathah like this!"

"Yes, it's good!"

"'And some over this way, then!" called out a voice from the rear.

Tom Merry turned round smiling, and sent a chunk of toffee towards 'Erbert, who caught it deftly. It was instantly transferred to his capacious mouth, and he grinned his thanks.

But the juniors were all attention again when the teams turned out for the second half.

Liverpool had the wind behind them now, and they took full advantage of it. They came down the field irresistibly, and twice the leather went in from shots that the visiting goalie could not stop.

Cheer upon cheer rang from the crowded enclosures.

Liverpool were having things all their own way now. The visitors put up a good fight, but they were outclassed. The northern team made rings round them; and yet again the leather went home.

Most enthusiastic of all, probably, was 'Erbert. He clapped his grimy hands and yelled approval in the shrillest of shrill voices—calling the players by name, and encouraging them with various slangy expressions, which were not always complimentary.

"Go it, Long Legs! Don't stand still—you ain't a telegraph-pole! Good old stick o' celery! 'E ain't taken root, arter all! Bravo! Buck up, Smithy—I'm a-watching yer! Go it, Griffin—put the speed on, Griffy!"

"Bai Jove," murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "that youngstah has cheek enough for a whole wegiment!"

The whistle went at last, leaving Liverpool victors by five goals to one—a result that was enthusiastically cheered by the crowd.

The spectators streamed out of the enclosures, and the juniors of St. Jim's went with the rest in the direction of the Anfield Road. A rough-looking man brushed against D'Arcy just outside the gates, and the swell of St. Jim's uttered an exclamation as his silk hat was nearly knocked off.

"Weally, my deah fellow——"

He set his hat straight; the man was gone. Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

"Where's your watch?"

The gold watch-chain was dangling—the watch was gone. Arthur Augustus stared at it in dismay. His coat was open, and his pocket had been picked.

"Bai Jove, that wascal has collahed my tickah!"

CHAPTER 13.

'Erbert Intervenes.

TOM MERRY looked quickly round. The crowd was thick, and the rough-looking man was gone, but only a few seconds had elapsed, and he could not have gone far. A shrill voice rang from the crowd.

"This way, young gent—'ere 'e is!"

"Bai Jove, Herbert Wags!"

The ragamuffin was clinging to a ruffian, who was striving furiously to shake him off. It was evident that 'Erbert had seen the robbery, and fastened upon the thief. In a moment the juniors of St. Jim's were on the spot, and an excited crowd gathered round. The ruffian struck the boy savagely, in the endeavour to throw him off, but Tom Merry soon put a stop to that. He caught the man by the shoulders, and, powerful ruffian as he was, the junior threw him to the earth.

The man yelled as he went down with a heavy bump that must have hurt him, and 'Erbert jerked himself loose.

"'E's got it!" he gasped. "I saw him nick it!"

"Bai Jove, give me my watch, you wascal!"

"I ain't seen it!"

"It ain't no good, Choker Bill," said 'Erbert, "I seed you. And you ain't going to have the young gent's watch."

Choker Bill struggled desperately, but Blake, Herries,

and Lowther lent Tom Merry a hand, and he was pinned down, gasping with rage.

"Search him!" exclaimed a dozen voices.

"What-ho," said Lowther; "I'll jolly soon see if he's got it!"

It did not take long to find the watch—it turned out of the first pocket that Monty Lowther plunged his hand into, and Arthur Augustus uttered an exclamation of relief. The watch had been a present from his father, and had cost twenty-five guineas, and so the swell of St. Jim's was naturally a little anxious about it.

"Thank you, Lowthah!" D'Arcy attached the watch to the chain again. "Bai Jove, I have had one or two nawwow escapes with that watch, but it would have been gone this time, but for this weally wippin' youngstah!"

"Lemme go," grunted Choker Bill.

"Hold him," said Tom Merry quietly. "Here comes a policeman."

Choker Bill struggled. But he could not get loose.

"Lemme go!" he gasped. "I won't do it no more! Oh, you just wait, Rags—you just wait! I'll do for you when I come out!"

'Erbert grinned.

"You won't come out for three months, Bill."

"I'll do you in when I come out," said Choker Bill. "You'll 'and me over, will you? You wait till I come out, and you'll make a hole in the Mersey. You wait!"

The grin died off 'Erbert's face. There was no mistaking the deadly determination in the slum ruffian's voice and look.

The policeman came up, and the circumstances being explained to him, he took the captured ruffian into custody.

The juniors had to give their names and addresses, as they would be wanted when the pickpocket appeared before the magistrate, and then Choker Bill was marched off.

The crowd dispersed, and the juniors of St. Jim's were left alone with 'Erbert. The boy was looking very thoughtful. Tom Merry dropped a hand on his shoulder.

"Aren't you afraid that brute may keep his word, Herbert?" he asked.

The lad laughed shortly.

"Can't be 'elped," he said.

"Bai Jove! I would wathah have lost the watch than harm should come to that youngstah," said D'Arcy anxiously. "It is weally vewy thoughtless of the authowities to allow a wuffian like that to go fwee at all."

"Under Socialism——" began Skimpole.

"Oh, wats! We are not under Socialism at pwesent. Where do you live, my lad?"

"Green Alley, sir."

"And where is that?"

"Off the Arker Road, sir, and that's off the Scotland Road."

"I weally do not know where that is," said D'Arcy. "But I should like your addwess, my boy. What numbah in Gween Alley?"

"No. 1, sir—old Frau Hemling's."

"Oh, I must weally turn this mattah ovah in my mind!" said Arthur Augustus. "You are a vewy decent little chap, and I cannot allow you to come to gwief on my account. Does that wuffianly person live near you?"

'Erbert grinned.

"He dosses at Frau Hemling's, sir. It's a cheap place where all sorts of folks 'ang out. 'E's a garotter and pickpocket, Choker Bill is; that's why 'is pals call 'im Choker Bill. He'll be down on me, but I don't care. 'E'll go to quod for three months over this, and I'll be far enough from Frau Hemling's when he comes out."

"Pway lend me half-a-soveweign, Digby, to pwesent to this deservin' youngstah."

"My 'at!" said 'Erbert, opening his eyes.

"I twust," said D'Arcy, "that you are expendin' the money you have earned to-day with circumspection, and not wastin' it in weckless extwavagance."

'Erbert grinned, but his grin was non-committal. Digby handed over the half-sovereign, and Arthur presented it to the ragamuffin, who departed at a pace that was a cross between a run and a hornpipe.

"Good kid," said Blake. "I wish we could do something for him."

"Under Socialism——"

"Oh, blow that!"

"Under Socialism, Blake, all poor children will be taken care of, and fed and clothed and educated," said Skimpole serenely. "The necessary cash will be raised from the superfluities of the rich. You see——"

"Is Socialism likely to come in this evening?"

"Certainly not."

"Or to-morrow morning?"

"No, of course not."

"Then what on earth's the good of talking about it?" demanded Blake. "That kid's got to live in the present, not in the future. Let's got along to the hotel; I'm jolly hungry."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the chums boarded an electric tram, which bore them swiftly on their homeward route. But they were a little less cheery now. They could not help thinking of Herbert Rags, and the injustice of fate. And Skimpole's serene predictions of what was to happen at a future date did not provide much consolation. Arthur Augustus was very glad to have recovered his watch; but when he thought of the savage face and furious voice of Choker Bill, he felt a weighing, anxious fear for what might happen to the street-arab when the thief came out of prison.

Mr. Murphy was at the hotel, and a friend was with him, when the juniors reached it, and so for the present they did not mention their adventure at the football-ground in Anfield Road.

Mr. Murphy's friend was a stout gentleman with a kindly face and very keen eyes, and the boys learned that his name was Glyn, and that he was a shipowner. He took a great interest in the juniors, and he dined with them, and turned the talk upon St. Jim's, asking them many questions about the school.

The juniors learned, with delight, that Mr. Glyn had placed a box at the Shakespeare Theatre at the disposal of Mr. Murphy and his young friends; and after dinner, when Mr. Glyn had taken his leave, they prepared to go thither.

"Faith, and you noticed that Mr. Glyn was interested in ye're school," said Mr. Murphy, smiling. "Sure he has a boy he is thinking of sending there."

"Ah, is that it?" said Tom Merry. "We'll make him welcome."

"You see, Mr. Glyn has inherited an estate in Sussex," explained the Irish merchant, "and as he's about retiring from active business, he's going there to live, and his boy will go to St. Jim's. He is a millionaire, and faith he'll be a good friend to you, I'm thinking. But it's time to get ready for the theatre."

The juniors went upstairs, D'Arcy with a cloud on his brow. He did not speak until they were in their room.

"I twust, Blake, that you are sowwy now," he remarked.

Blake stared at him.

"What am I to be sorry for?" he demanded.

"The doocid awkward posish you have placed me in."

"What's the matter?"

"We are goin' to the theatre——"

"You needn't come if you don't want to. Stay at home and talk 'isms' with Skimmy."

"Very good," said Skimpole. "I should not mind missing the theatre if D'Arcy would prefer to remain at home and have his mind opened upon important subjects. I should be glad to read him the notes I have made for the two hundred and ninetieth chapter of my work on Socialism."

"There's a chance for you, Gussy! You can't miss that!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Or I would recapitulate to him what I have already read of Professor Lottoff Boshski's work on Determinism," said Skimpole. "I——"

"Pway wing off, deah boy!"

"Really, D'Arcy, I am willing to take any trouble to improve your mind and awaken your intelligence. The task would be difficult, no doubt——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I would use my best endeavours, and I have no doubt that in the long run——"

"Weally, Skimmay, I wish you would wing off. Blake, you uttah ass, you know perfectly well that I have no intention of stayin' in to be bored by Skimpole."

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"Pway don't intewwupt me, Skimmay. What I was weferrin' to, Blake, is the howwid circumstance that I have no evenin' clothes with me."

"Horrid!"

"I was goin' to bwing evenin' clothes, but owin' to your wotten conduct in allowin' me only one bag, I was not able to do so."

"Well, we're all in the same boat," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Yaas, but I should have been vewy pleased to have at least one membah of the party lookin' wespectable. I wegard Blake as a beast. I considah that he has placed me in a doocid awkward posish."

"Sorry," said Blake. "I'll do anything I can. You've got a pair of black trousers, and I can make you an evening waistcoat. Anybody got a pair of scissors?"

"There's a pair here."

"Thanks! Now hand me D'Arcy's waistcoat."

"Don't do anythin' of the sort, Tom Mewwy. I tell you, give me that waistcoat, Blake! What are you goin' to do, you wottah?"

"I'm going to make it into an evening waistcoat for

you," said Blake, flourishing the scissors. "Now—— Don't pull it like that! Let go!"

"I wefuse to let go! If you touch it with those scissahs I shall no longah wegard you as a fwiend."

"But don't you want to go in evening-dress?"

"You uttah ass! Let go my beastly waistcoat!"

Arthur Augustus tugged at the garment in dispute. Blake let go it suddenly, and Gussy sat on the floor.

"Ow-wow!"

"Well, just as you like," said Blake, throwing down the scissors. "I only wanted to get you out of a deuced awkward position. What are you sitting down for, Gussy? If you're tired we'll see you to bed, if you like, before we go to the theatre."

D'Arcy did not reply. He could not think of words sufficiently expressive. He rose slowly, and dressed for the theatre; and though he had no evening clothes, he really looked very nice when he had finished.

CHAPTER 14.

Choker Bill Again—Arthur Augustus Makes Up His Mind.

TOM MERRY & CO. enjoyed their evening at the Shakespeare Theatre. It came to an end all too soon for them. Skimpole, indeed, was sitting at the back of the box making notes for the two hundred and ninetieth chapter of his great work on Socialism, and did not know what the play was about. But the others lost nothing of it, and they were feeling very contented when they left the theatre.

They walked back, after it was over, with Mr. Murphy. Dig walked with his uncle, and the rest of the juniors followed. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy buttoned up his coat before coming out, partly on account of the cold, but partly to secure the famous "tickah." He did not want to leave that in Liverpool when he went back to St. Jim's.

The streets were pretty full of people, and the boys jostled and were jostled. Arthur Augustus uttered a sudden exclamation as he caught sight of a rough, bristly face under a battered bowler hat.

"Bai Jove!"

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" asked Blake.

"I just saw Chokah Bill!"

"Stuff! Choker Bill's in prison, and he'll come up before the magistrate to-morrow morning," said Tom Merry.

"I have told you, Tom Mewwy, that I just saw Chokah Bill."

"Imagination, old chap."

"I wefuse to admit that it was imagination, Tom Mewwy. I just saw the wottah! He dodged into that shop doorway, and I don't think he saw us."

"Oh, rats!" said Herries. "You're always seeing things, you know. I'm ready for supper."

"Yaas, wathah, so am I; but all the same I saw Chokah Bill."

"But he's under arrest."

"He may have escaped fwom the policeman."

"Well, let's see," said Tom Merry. "If he dodged into that doorway, he's there now, as he hasn't come out."

"Very clearly put, Merry," said Skimpole. "I regard that as an exactly logical statment, worthy of Professor Lottoff Boshski himself. You see——"

"Oh, wing off, Skimmay! The wottah is certainly there, Tom Mewwy, and my ideah is that he dodged in because there's a policeman comin' along. Of course, if he has escaped awwest the police are lookin' for him."

"Well, we'll look for him, too."

And Tom Merry, carelessly enough, strode towards the somewhat deep and dark entry to a shop—now, of course, closed for the night—which D'Arcy had pointed out.

Then he started back. In the dusk of the doorway was a crouching figure; and in an instant it had sprung out, dashing Tom Merry aside, and was racing down the street.

"My hat, it's he!"

"I told you so, deah boy. Aftah him!"

It was not of much use going after Choker Bill. He was running like a greyhound, and he disappeared round a corner before the juniors could even shout "Stop thief!"

D'Arcy ran a few paces, and then stopped.

"It's no good!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you ought to have gwipped him——"

"Stuff! You ought to have stood by in case he dodged me——"

"Wats! All you chaps ought to have stood wound——"

"Blessed if I see the use of jawing about what we ought to have done!" said Herries. "He's gone now, so we may as well get in to supper."

"Good wheeze!" said Blake heartily. "Come on!"

And they hastened their steps to overtake Mr. Murphy and Digby. They arrived at the hotel together, and found supper ready, and Albert, the waiter, all smiles. At St. Jim's the juniors, when they had supper, had plain bread and cheese; but the fare was better just now. Mr. Murphy was hospitality itself—perhaps, in fact, too hospitable for the good of the youthful digestions under his charge.

Arthur Augustus was unaccountably silent during supper. Tom Merry related to Mr. Murphy the occurrence at the football ground, and the discovery that Choker Bill must have escaped from the policeman who had been taking him to the lock-up. There was no doubt that a notification to that effect would reach them in the morning, as D'Arcy was bound to appear to charge the man if he were still in custody.

"You are quite sure it was the same man?" asked Mr. Murphy thoughtfully.

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"Oh, yes," said Tom Merry; "I'd know his face anywhere. It's about the most villainous face I've seen. And I can't help thinking of that poor little chap who saved D'Arcy's watch, and what the brute may do to him."

"He is not likely to venture back into his usual haunts, as the police would look for him there," said Mr. Murphy.

And that rather relieved the minds of the juniors. But the thoughtful shade remained on the brow of Arthur Augustus. Tom Merry and Blake guessed that there was something at work in his brain, but what it was they could not guess. Nor did the swell of St. Jim's appear to be in any hurry to enlighten them.

The juniors went up to bed, Mr. Murphy bidding them good-night at the door of their room. Herries and Manners and Skimpole commenced to undress at once, but Arthur Augustus sat down with an air of reflection. And Tom Merry and Blake and Lowther and Digby watched him with interest.

"Well, what's the answer?" asked Lowther, at last.

"Eh?" said D'Arcy, starting from his reverie.

"What's the answer?"

"The answah to what, deah boy?"

"The problem, to be sure."

"I do not quite appwehend your meanin', Lowthah. What pwoblem?"

"Weren't you working out something in algebra?" asked Lowther.

"No, I was not doin' anythin' of the sort. I was thinkin', and I have decided at last what I had bettah do."

"Good! What is it? Bed is a rather good idea at this time of night, but perhaps you would prefer a stroll round the docks, or a walk to Stanley Park."

"Pway don't be funnay, Lowthah. This is a sewious mattah. I am thinkin' of that youngstah who saved my tickah."

"Don't jaw, Gussy, old chap!" said Herries, getting into bed. "We've had a pretty full day, and I'm tired. I want to go to sleep."

"I am wathah fatigued also, Hewwies, but I must considah my duty. I feel in honah bound to look aftah that youngstah."

"You can't look after him to-night."

"Yaas, wathah; that is exactly what I am goin' to do."

They stared blankly at him. There was an extremely determined expression upon the face of Arthur Augustus; and when he looked like that, they knew from of old that he was past argument.

"What on earth are you thinking of doing?" asked Tom Merry, at length.

"Pway allow me to explain, deah boys. It is perfectly clear that Choker Bill is fwee, and that youngstah pwobably thinks he is locked up all the time. Now, you know how savage the wuffian looked when he was awwested. I think that he was in earnest in all he said about gettin' even with Herbert Wags."

"Ye-es, but you remember what Mr. Murphy said—he won't dare to go back to his usual haunts, where the police will look for him."

"How do we know that they knew where he lived at all? We know because Herbert Wags told us, but the police may not know."

"Well, I didn't think of that."

"Yaas, you wequire a bwain like mine to think of these things. My ideah is that the wuffian will go back to Gween Alley, wherevah that may be, and hide there—what they call lay low, you know—till the police have done lookin' for him. And he may see Herbert Wags there at any moment, as he lives there. It is quite poss. that young Wags's life is in dangah; and anyway, the wuffian will do him some feahful injuwy if he gets a chance."

Tom Merry looked grave.

"But I don't see what we can do, Gussy."

"I know what I am goin' to do, Tom Mewwy, and you can back me up or not, as you like."

"Oh, go on!"

"I am goin' to look for young Wags."

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

"I uttahly wefuse to be wegarded as an ass. I should be sowwy to have to thwash you before startin' on a dangewous expedish, but——"

"My dear kid, you can't go; it's too late."

"It may be vewy much too late to-mowwow, as fah as Wags is concerned. If we were to hear of his body bein' picked up in the Mersey——"

"I don't suppose the brute would go as far as that, even if he got a chance," said Tom Merry, with a shudder. "At the same time, I don't like to think of the kid falling in with him. But——"

"I am goin' to Gween Alley to find him," said D'Arcy resolutely.

"But look here——"

"It's no good arguin', Tom Mewwy. I've made up my mind. I should like one of you to come with me, but——"

"If you go, I go," said Tom Merry quietly, "but——"

"I don't want to dwaw you into dangah against your will."

"Rats! I shall go."

"And I," said Blake.

"And all of us," said Monty Lowther quickly.

"Certainly!" said Skimpole. "I shall be very happy to visit this apparently low quarter, and study the customs of the natives."

"Oh, wing off, Skimmy! We can't take a large party, Lowthah, as it would attwact too much attention. Tom Mewwy and Blake will be enough."

"And I'll go instead of Gussy," said Digby.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon his chum.

"I wegard that as an extwemely wotten joke, Dig."

"It's not a joke; I mean it."

"Then I wegard you as an ass. I am goin', of course, as the affaih would be hardly likely to succeed without my leadin'. You othahs had bettah go to bed, and I twust we shall weturn shortly and bwing Herbert Wags with us."

There was some demur; but it was clear that the whole party could not very well go, and it was finally arranged that the expedition should consist of three—Tom Merry, Jack Blake, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. And this being settled, the three juniors prepared to start.

CHAPTER 15.

A Midnight Expedition.

TOM MERRY put his coat and cap on, with a doubtful expression on his face. He was concerned for the safety of the little Liverpool ragamuffin, and he was quite ready for an adventure, anyway. But he was more reflecting than Arthur Augustus, and he could not help realising how reckless the expedition was. Yet at the thought of the honest lad, 'Erbert, in the hands of Choker Bill, he felt that he would face any danger, known or unknown, to save him. The lad had earned the hatred of the savage ruffian to save D'Arcy's watch, in return for the kindness he had received at the hands of the juniors of St. Jim's. And Tom Merry could not help feeling that they were in a sense responsible for him.

What was to be done with the lad when he was found and rescued was a question the juniors did not ask themselves. Sufficient for the time was the evil thereof. The rest could be thought out later.

"I'm weady, deah boys!" said D'Arcy, as he gave his silk hat a final polish, and put it on before the looking-glass.

Jack Blake glared at him.

"Are you going down into slumland in a topper at this time of night?" he demanded.

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that!"

"Take it off, ass! We want to attract as little attention as possible."

"Yaas, wathah! I admit that you are quite wight, Blake. At the same time, I wish you to distinctly undahstand that I absolutely decline to be addwessed as an ass."

"Oh, get on with the washing!"

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "We want to get out before the hotel closes, or there will be a bother. We shall have to slip out quietly."

"Mr. Murphy would stop you if he saw you," said Lowther; "there's not much doubt on that point."

"I weally feel a little uneasy at goin' out without askin' his permish," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "But as he would pwobably wefuse it, it is no use askin' it. If our conduct appeahs in any way diswespectful, our excuse is that we are in honah bound to look aftah that youngstah."

"Good!" said Blake. "We'll start when Gusey's finished talking."

"I am finished talkin' now," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

So they started.

It was not difficult to slip out of the hotel, and they walked quickly away down the wide street, in case their departure should have been observed. Their hearts were beating with suppressed excitement.

The hour was late, and Liverpool was asleep for the most part. Here and there were lighted windows of hotels and restaurants, and cabs were still rattling about busily, picking up theatre passengers. Arthur Augustus made a sign to a cabby, and the man drew up by the pavement, at some distance from the hotel. Tom Merry caught the swell of St. Jim's by the arm.

"What on earth——" he began.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, as I am leadah of this expedish——"

"Rats! We can't go to a place like Green Alley in a cab."

"We can go most of the way in a cab, deah boy, and leave the dwivah waitin' for us at the place neawest to Gween Alley that he can get to."

"Cab, sir?" said the driver, looking down.

"Yaas, wathah! Pway get in, you chaps, while I speak to the dwivah. Have you evah heard of a place called Gween Alley, dwivah?"

"N-n-n-no, sir."

"Have you evah heard of a place called the Arkle Woad, then?"

"Arkle Road! Yes, sir. It's right up the Scotland Road—a long way from here."

"Pway dwive us there."

It was a hansom cab, but the three juniors found room in it. The driver, though evidently very much astonished, whipped up his horse. The cab dashed along by St. George's Hall, and turned into William Brown Street, and then into Byrom Street. From Byrom Street they rattled on into the Scotland Road.

Where they were going the juniors had not the faintest idea. This part of Liverpool was quite unknown to them, and in the darkness of the late night they could see little or nothing of their surroundings.

Scotland Road seemed a long road to them. Arkle Road seemed long, too, and as they passed along it, they could not help observing that their surroundings grew poorer and poorer. The few people they passed looked at the cab, as if such a vehicle was an uncommon visitor to the street. The cabman drew up at last in the gloom of the ill-lighted thoroughfare.

D'Arcy looked up through the trap.

"Are you there, cabbay?"

"This is the end of Arkle Street, sir!"

"Bai Jove! And can't you see Gween Alley?"

"No, sir. It must be one of the little turnings yonder. I should advise you not to go there, sir."

"Thank you vewy much, cabbay!"

Arthur Augustus stepped out of the cab, and his comrades followed. D'Arcy looked round him through his eyeglass.

The juniors were surrounded by mean houses, a striking and depressing contrast to the great and wealthy Liverpool they had seen during the day.

But in the gloom of the dark night little could be seen distinctly. A tattered figure came slinking along, and stopped and stared in curiosity at the lights of the hansom cab.

The juniors glanced at it, and shivered at the sight of the dirty, evil face, the torn rags through which the cold night wind blew, and the bare, chilled feet of the night vagrant.

"Pwo wottah!" murmured D'Arcy. "Here's a shillin' for you, my man!"

The vagrant took the shilling, stared at D'Arcy, and hurried off. Arthur Augustus looked up at the wondering cabman.

"I want you to wait here for us," he said. "We are going to see a fwiend in Gween Alley, and we shall weturn pwesently."

"It's a dangerous neighbourhood, sir."

"Yaas, wathah! Wait here for us."

"But——" began the cabby.

D'Arcy waved his gloved hand.

"It's all wight! You wait here."

"Yes, sir; but——"

"Come on, deah boys!"

"Wait a moment, sir!" exclaimed the cabman. "You see——"

"Weally, my deah fellow, you are a bore!" said D'Arcy. "I dare say it is a dangewous locality, but that can't be helped. It's all wight!"

"But if you please——"

"Oh, come on, deah boys; we can't stay here all night!"

"What about my fare?" bawled the cabman, speaking out at last.

"Bai Jove, I forgot about that! It's all wight, cabbay! I'll pay you all together when we come back and you dwive us home."

"Will you?" grinned the driver. "You'll pay me now, sir!"

"I twust," said D'Arcy, with great dignity—"I twust, cabbay, that you do not doubt my honah?"

"Pay the fare, then!" said the cabby.

"Weally, my deah fellow——"

"Oh, pay him, and shut up, Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You don't want to stand here arguing all night!"

"Vewy well, but I wegard it as extwemely bad form of the cabbay to hint that we might be bilkahs!"

And Arthur Augustus paid the fare, so generously that the cabdriver opened his eyes, and wondered more than ever whom his strange passengers might be. However, he was only too willing to wait now, and as the juniors walked away, they left him standing by his horse, and staring curiously after them.

Under a dim lamp, at a short distance, the vagrant was standing, biting the shilling D'Arcy had given him, apparently doubting the genuineness of a coin so easily obtained. D'Arcy tapped him on the arm, and the man turned with a start.

"Pway can you diwect us to Gween Alley?" asked D'Arcy politely.

The man stared at him.

"Yes," he said slowly; "but you'd better not go there."

"I particulahly desire to visit a fwiend stayin' at Fwau Hemling's wesidence in that stweet," said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps you could show us the way?"

The man chuckled.

"You mightn't find it so easy to get away agin," he said.

"We are willin' to wisk that. If you show us the way, I will pwesent you with a half-cwown!"

"I'm on, sir! This way!"

And the vagrant led the way at a brisk trot, and the juniors of St. Jim's followed him—two of them, at least, with serious misgivings in their breasts.

CHAPTER 16.

In Danger.

"MY hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "Where are we getting to?"

"Bai Jove, this looks wathah wotten!"

"Beastly!" said Blake. "I wish I'd thought of bringing a life-preserver or something!"

"Yaas; I should like my twusty wevolvah now!" said D'Arcy. "I dare say I shall weally need it more here than I evah did in Amewicah!"

"Jolly glad you haven't it! There may be danger enough without that."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Shut up!" whispered Tom Merry. "Your beautiful accent gives us away, Gussy. We may pass in the dark without notice if you keep your chin-music turned off!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Cheese it!"

And D'Arcy sniffed and was silent. Their surroundings were indeed sufficient to alarm anyone of weak nerves. The alley was deep and dark, evil to the sight and to the smell. The roadway, such as it was, seemed to be used as a receptacle for all kinds of rubbish and garbage by the inhabitants.

On the broken pavement a man, evidently intoxicated, lay asleep, his feet in the gutter, and breathing stertorously. From one house, or, rather, hovel, where a light burned, the sounds of savage quarrelling could be heard, and as the juniors passed, a door was flung open, and a woman with a child in her arms came rushing out, shrieking wildly. A drunken brute was in hot pursuit.

He stumbled over the man asleep on the pavement, and fell, and was plainly too far gone in liquor to rise again, for, after two ineffectual attempts, he settled down and began to snore.

The juniors shuddered. There was something horrible in realising that these were everyday scenes—that while they led their cheery life at St. Jim's such scenes were being enacted in a hundred towns—such misery and degradation were overwhelming men and women and unhappy children.

The shrieks had not alarmed Green Alley—the neighbourhood was probably too used to such outbreaks. The vagrant turned his head and looked at the juniors with a queer gleam in his eyes that they did not notice.

"There's the 'ouse, gents," he whispered.

He stopped before a rambling, brokendown edifice of hideous aspect. The windows were almost innocent of glass, foul rags being stuffed into innumerable gaps, and fluttering and rustling in the wind. Two or three lights could be seen from the building, and a raucous voice raised in a brutal song came faintly to the ear.

"That is Frau Hemling's?" asked Tom Merry.

"That's it, sir!"

"We want to see a kid who lives there," said Tom Merry abruptly—"a kid called 'Erbert, or Rags. Do you know him?"

The vagrant shook his head.

"You don't want to go in there, sir," he said, in a voice hoarse with whisky. "You don't know the kind of people there, sir. This ain't a safe place for the likes of you, sir. Look 'ere, if you like to wait, I'll go in and see if the kid's there, and bring 'im out to you!"

"Bai Jove, that's a wathah good ideah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard that as a wippin' suggestion!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Good! That's all right!"

Jack Blake nodded keenly at the vagrant. Blake was a keener reader of character than D'Arcy, perhaps than Tom Merry. There was something that the Yorkshire lad did not like in the manner of the vagrant.

But, after all, it was evidently safer for the boys not to enter the place. It was evidently a "doss-house" of the lowest type, frequented by foreign sailors and the scum of the streets of Liverpool. It was very probable that 'Erbert was the only honest person there. And it was probable, too, that Choker Bill was in the house, and if he saw the juniors he was very likely to raise a hue-and-cry against them. To be attacked by a gang of roughs was not a pleasant prospect.

"Well, go in!" said Blake shortly. "We'll wait!"

"I'll show you where to wait, gents," whispered the husky-voiced vagrant. And he pointed towards a dark yard opening beside the building. "You'll be outer sight in there!"

"Yaas, wathah! Hurry up, then!"

The juniors stepped into the yard, and the vagrant moved away. Blake looked after him, and saw him enter the house.

"Come out of this!" he said shortly.

"Weally, Blake, we have awwanged to wait here for Herbert Wags!"

"That fellow is more likely to return with half a dozen rascals of his own kidney," said Blake. "We can watch from over the way."

"Bai Jove! Do you think he would be wascal enough to give us away?"

"It's as likely as not, anyway! He can see that we're worth robbing. We ought to have got some shabby clothes for an expedition like this."

The juniors crossed the dark alley. In the shadow of one of the hovels opposite they watched the building for the reappearance of the vagrant. If he came out alone, or with 'Erbert, they would know it was all right. Otherwise——

Blake suddenly gripped Tom Merry's arm.

"Look!"

The slinking figure of the vagrant appeared from the dimly-lit doorway of Frau Hemling's doss-house. There were three other figures with it, and one of them, in spite

of the dim light, was easily recognised. That burly form and bullet head could belong to no one but Choker Bill.

"Bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus. "The uttah wascal! I shall wefuse to give him the half-cwown now!"

"We shall be jolly lucky if we get away from here!" muttered Tom Merry. "We were fools to come! Look at the villain!"

The vagrant and his companions were hurrying directly towards the yard where the juniors had been left. They disapeared into it, and then there was a sound of angry voices. They had discovered that the birds had flown.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

What was to be done? To make a run for it, and dash down the alley with three or four roughs in pursuit—it was not to be thought of. Fresh foes might appear from any corner—they would be cut off. Strategy was the only thing, and Tom Merry, as he realised it, drew his companions deeper into the shadow of the hovel.

"We shall have to hook it!" he muttered. "It's no good making a run for it; we shouldn't have an earthly!"

"You're wight, I'm afwaid!"

"Right-ho!" muttered Blake. "There's an alley beside this house—let's get into it, and there may be a way out at the back."

"What about Herbert Wags, deah boys?"

"Ass! We shall have to see about him another time. We mayn't get out of this alive as it is."

"I wefuse to be called an ass——"

"Oh, come on!"

And Arthur Augustus was dragged into the narrow alley beside the hovel. It was not more than two feet wide, and was utterly dark and noisome. There was no other way open to the juniors, for Choker Bill and his friends had come out of the yard and were looking about for them, and cursing audibly at their ill-success. Two or three semi-intoxicated men came out of the house Choker Bill had issued from, and the juniors caught a glimpse of a negro and an Italian in the gang. More than ever they realised how reckless they had been in venturing into such a place. But it was too late to think of that now.

They pressed on down the narrow alley, till Tom Merry stopped with a low, muttered exclamation of dismay. His outstretched hands had touched the brickwork; he felt round in vain for an opening.

The juniors had reached the end of a cul-de-sac—a blind alley! There was no outlet!

"My only hat!" murmured Jack Blake.

"Bai Jove! We shall have to twy another way, deah boys."

Tom Merry caught D'Arcy by the arm, and dragged him back as he was about to retrace his steps.

"Too late!" he muttered.

It was, indeed, too late. In the dim light at the end of the brick-walled passage, a burly form could be seen. It was Choker Bill! The juniors were cornered!

CHAPTER 17

Facing the Foe.

TOM MERRY gritted his teeth.

"Quiet!" he whispered. "He may not see us!"

With bated breath the juniors crouched in the dark end of the alley, close to the grimy bricks.

Choker Bill's burly form almost filled up the passage from side to side as he came in, treading lightly, his head a little bent forward to listen.

Would he see them?

He certainly could not see—the passage was dark as pitch, shadowed on one side by a high brick wall, on the other by the side of the house. And their breathing was hushed—he could not hear them.

The ruffian stopped. He seemed to be fumbling in his pockets. A voice came from the end of the brick passage.

"Can you see 'em, Bill?"

"No," grunted the ruffian.

"Come this way, then."

The juniors breathed again—then again their hearts sank as Choker Bill replied, without moving from his position:

"'Old on a tick! I'm goin' ter strike a light."

That was what he was fumbling for—his matchbox. Tom Merry's teeth came together hard. The ruffian was bound to see them now.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Tom Merry pressed his arm, as a warning to be quiet, and then stepped silently forward towards Choker Bill, his hands hard clenched.

When the ruffian saw him, he would not have time to act—Tom Merry, at least, would get his blow in first, and knock out his most dangerous foe before the rush came.

Scratch!

The match glimmered forth, and flickered on the grimy brickwork that shut in the boys and their burly foe. It showed the rough, bristly, drink-reddened face of Choker Bill, and the tense features of Tom Merry directly in front of him. The ruffian started a little, and dropped the match. At the same instant, Tom Merry struck out with all his strength, straight from the shoulder.

Crash!

The impact of the knuckles between the ruffian's eyes made Tom's hand ache, and it sent the rough reeling blindly back. And as he reeled, Tom sprang forward, and his left came up in a terrific upper-cut, which landed on the point of Choker Bill's chin, and fairly flung him out of the passage to the pavement.

The burly form of the ruffian crashed down at the feet of his followers, and Tom Merry reeled back to Blake and D'Arcy.

"Line up!" he whispered. "It's business now."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm ready," muttered Blake, pushing back his cuffs, his teeth hard set. "Let them rush us—we'll show them how we hit at St. Jim's."

But the gang seemed in no hurry to make the rush.

Choker Bill still lay on the broken pavement, nursing his jaw with his hand, and muttering curses that made the boys' flesh creep as they listened. His companions were gathered round him, and looking doubtfully into the black passage. They evidently had no taste to venture recklessly near the fists that had laid out the powerful ruffian, the terror of Green Alley, on his back.

"Hang it!" muttered Blake. "There must be a way out of this passage! They wouldn't build a blind alley for nothing! Keep on guard while I see!"

"Right you are! I couldn't find it!"

Blake felt over the brickwork with his hands. It seemed certain that there must be some outlet, but in the blackness it was impossible to see it. His hands came at last in contact with woodwork instead of brick.

"Have you found it?" whispered Tom Merry, as Blake gave a low exclamation.

"Yes; there's a door."

"Can you open it?"

"I'm trying."

And Jack Blake tried hard. But the door was evidently bolted or barred on the other side, for it would not budge an inch.

The junior hurled his weight upon it, and reeled back, dizzy from the shock. The door did not even creak.

"It won't open," he muttered desperately.

"Look out, they're coming!"

A tattered form appeared in the opening of the passage, showing dimly against the less opaque darkness beyond. It was that of the vagrant who had trapped the juniors. Tom Merry's eyes glinted. He stepped quickly forward, and delivered a blow as the rascal peered into the passage.

"Oh!"

The man cried out, and staggered back, and fell with a crash on the ground. There was an outbreak of oaths.

"Good!" whispered Blake. "Oh, if we had a few of the fellows from St. Jim's here, we'd clear out the whole gang of them!"

"Yaas, wathah! I say, deah boys, I'm sowwy I bwought you into this——"

"Never mind that, Gussy." Tom Merry's brain was working rapidly. "Couldn't we climb over this beastly wall? We might if we have time. I'll give you a bunk up, Blake."

"Right-ho! Let's try it."

Up went Blake on Tom Merry's shoulders, while D'Arcy watched for an attack. The gang outside doubtless knew that there was no escape, for they did not hurry to come to close quarters.

Blake stood on Tom Merry's shoulders, and reached his hands above. But he did not touch the top of the wall. The sound of a movement at the mouth of the cul-de-sac made him jump down quickly. The enemy were coming.

It was Choker Bill who was entering the dark recess. The ruffian, brute as he was, had pluck. The others hung back; they had not seen the juniors, and from what they had witnessed of Tom Merry's defence, they probably doubted the vagrant's information that the party consisted only of boys. Choker Bill felt his way forward in the dark with both hands outstretched. His burly form loomed up in the shadow, and the juniors, feeling that it was better to attack than to wait to be attacked, hurled themselves upon him.

A bludgeon swept through the air and narrowly missed Tom Merry's head. His fist swept up and caught the rough under the jaw, jarring his teeth together, and Choker Bill cursed and grappled with him.

But Blake kicked his legs from under him as Tom Merry closed, and the burly scoundrel went down in a heap, the juniors on top. Tom Merry wrenched the bludgeon away, and it crashed down in the dark, upon what part of the wretch Tom neither knew nor cared. But the blow hurt,

for Choker Bill gasped and yelled, and squirmed out of the grasp of the juniors, and out of the passage.

Tom Merry sprang to his feet, breathing hard.

"One up to us!" he muttered breathlessly.

There was a babel of voices now in Green Alley. The disturbance had brought a crowd to the spot, and the voices showed the juniors what kind of a crowd it was. Brave as the lads were, their hearts were heavy. For the moment they had held their own; but they were pinned in now, surrounded by the savage denizens of the place, and all escape was cut off.

There was a sound above, as of someone scraping over the high wall. Tom Merry started.

"They're coming from behind, too!" he muttered. "Look out!"

But the next moment came a whispering voice from above.

"Are yer there, young gents?"

Tom Merry uttered a cry.

It was the voice of 'Erbert!

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "It's young Wags!"

CHAPTER 18.

'Erbert is Adopted.

'ERBERT leaned down breathlessly over the wall. He had heard the voices, and knew that the juniors were there now. Tom Merry looked up.

"We're here, kid," he said. "Can you help us?"

"Rather," said 'Erbert. "I'm glad I've found yer, young gents. I've crep' over the wall from the old ware'ouse. There's a door be'ind yer, and I'll 'ave it open in a jiffy."

"That will save us."

There was a sound of 'Erbert scraping down the wall. Then a rumbling at the other side of the door.

The juniors listened with beating hearts, almost too excited to breathe. At any moment might come a combined rush of the roughs, which they could not hope to resist. Then they would be overcome, beaten, trampled on—murdered, perhaps! They knew it, and the sudden and unexpected coming of 'Erbert meant life instead of death. They had come to Green Alley to save 'Erbert, and he was saving them instead! It was a curious freak of fortune.

The fumbling ceased, and the door swung open. In the dimness of the opening the towsled head and absurd coat of the ragamuffin could be seen. He whispered hoarsely and excitedly to the juniors.

"Kim on, afore they git yer!"

The chums needed no bidding. Tom Merry pushed Blake and D'Arcy through the opening, and followed himself. 'Erbert closed the door, and shot the rusty shrieking bolts.

"Safe now, young gents," said he, with a chuckle. "You're all right! But what on earth did yer kim to Green Alley for?"

"We came to find you," said Tom Merry.

The ragamuffin stared.

"Me! Yer kiddin'."

"My fwiend Mewwy speaks the pwecise twuth, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "Havin' discovahed that Chokah Bill was not in pwison, as we had supposed, we natuwally considahed that you were in pewil fwom the wuffian, and we came to take you away to where you would be safe."

"And ran into danger ourselves, from which you have saved us," said Blake, shaking hands with the ragamuffin.

"Strike me pink!" said 'Erbert, with a chuckle. "Fancy you swells comin' to Green Alley! The wonder is you wasn't murdered. I tell yer, the perlice don't like comin' to the alley, they don't. I wasn't in no danger, nuther. I knoo Choker Bill wasn't nabbed arter all. My pals warned me he was lookin' for me, and when I kim 'ome to-night I didn't go into Frau Hemling's, where he was—not arf. I jest lay up in a doorway in the court, and that's where I was when I heerd the norful row them blokes made, and I crawled out to see what was up. Corse, soon as I heard what they was sayin' I knew you was 'ere in a fix. Choker Bill was a-cussin' you, and swearin' he'd mark you fur havin' 'anded him over to the perlice, though he got away. Then I knew it must be you young gents 'ere, and you mighter knocked me over with a toothpick, you mighter. Then I crawled over the walls to git to you, knowin' how you was fixed in Slider Smith's passage."

"And you saved our lives," said Tom Merry soberly.

'Erbert chuckled.

"Well, that gang wouldn't 'ave left much of yer," he remarked. "You're well outer that. Fancy you comin' there to save me!" He chuckled again, and, indeed, the juniors could not help admitting that his mirth was natural. "Skuse me, young gents. It was norful good of yer; I know you're real gents."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Look here, Herbert, you're not going back to Green Alley——"

"Not 'arf," chuckled 'Erbert. "No fear! I ain't got no friends there, anyway, and it's a safe place for me to keep out of, as soon as I've got my things from Frau Hemling's. I can't afford to lose them things, and I shall get a chance to dodge in and get 'em when Choker Bill ain't round."

"You're not going back there at all," said Tom Merry. "Look here, kid, wouldn't you like to cut that life—get out of it altogether, and have decent clothes to wear, and enough grub to eat, and a roof over your head, and friends who will stand by you—chaps like ourselves, for instance?"

"But—but—but," stammered 'Erbert, "I'm a ragged street kid. You young gents can't do nothin' for me!"

"We can—and will—if you'll let us."

"You—you—you're not kiddin'?" said 'Erbert tremulously.

"You can rely on us, kid," said Tom Merry. "My old governess would take you in like a shot, if I asked her."

"And I am assured that my governah would provide for the youngstah with pleasure."

"He's going to be provided for," said Blake determinedly, "if I have to take him into Study No. 6 at St. Jim's."

"If you mean it," said 'Erbert hoarsely, "I'll come—I'll come. Oh——" He broke off. The careless, happy-go-lucky manners of the street arab were gone, and the boy burst into a passion of tears.

That did not last long. With the tears wet on his lashes, and making pale streaks down his grimy face, 'Erbert looked at the juniors.

"Gord bless yer!" he whispered. "You don't know wot this means to me! But Gord bless yer!"

. . . . . .

Under the guidance of 'Erbert, the juniors reached their cab again, and were driven back to the hotel. They found the place, of course, closed; and the porter stared blankly at 'Erbert when the boys brought him in. But a five-shilling piece sent him back contented to his bed, and 'Erbert was hurried upstairs to the juniors' bed-room.

Tom Merry switched on the electric light. The sleeping juniors woke up, and their amazement at the sight of 'Erbert can be imagined. They had not believed for a moment that the mission would be a success. And their amazement intensified when they heard the story of the night's adventures.

"The young boundah saved our lives—or, at least, pwe-served us fwom severe injuwy," said D'Arcy, "and we're goin' to take care of him. We've adopted him!"

"Adopted him!"-said Digby dazedly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We're going to take care of him," said Tom Merry sturdily. "He's our chum, and if you fellows like to have a hand in the affair, you can."

"Certainly," said Lowther blandly. "I rather fancy myself in the role of adoptive parent. I'll get a book on 'How to Rear Children Successfully,' and——"

"Pway don't be funnay, Lowthah. You shall have my bed to-night, Herbert Wags, and I will sleep in your bed, Tom Mewwy."

"Certainly, Gus!"

And with the addition of 'Erbert to the party, the juniors of St. Jim's went to sleep again.

The amazement of Mr. Murphy in the morning we need not describe. The good gentleman was inclined to be angry at first; but he soon came round, and in his hearty Irish way he fully approved of the idea of "doing something" for 'Erbert. What that "something" was to be the juniors had not yet decided. Mr. Murphy proposed to start with a bath, a hair-cut, and a change of clothes, and this suggestion was carried out, producing a wonderful change in the appearance of 'Erbert. The boy himself was delighted beyond words.

"Faith, and if you take him to the south of England, he'll be out of danger from that scoundrel Choker Bill," Mr. Murphy remarked. "But what will your people say to it?"

"That will be all right," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "I haven't quite decided yet, but he could always have a home at my place, I'm certain of that."

"Very well, then, he shall come with you."

And so it was settled.

While the juniors of St. Jim's spent another day of sight-seeing in Liverpool with Mr. Murphy, 'Erbert remained safe in the hotel; and when the genial Irish gentleman saw them off on their return journey at Lime Street Station, the street arab—looking a new boy in his new garments and his new cleanliness—went with them. But of the new life that awaited 'Erbert, and of the difficulties that cropped up to perplex his adopted fathers, we need not speak here.

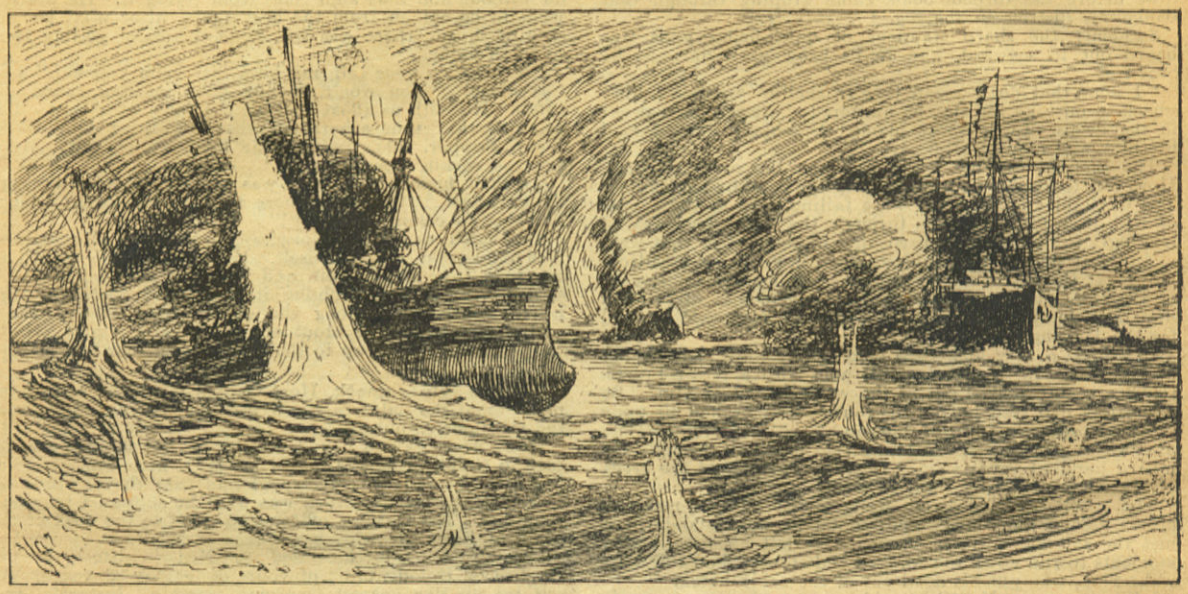
Tom Merry & Co.'s adventures in Liverpool were over—and, like Mr. Murphy, we take leave of them at Lime Street Station—but to meet them again.

THE END.

(Another splendid tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Thursday, entitled: "Smuggled to School." Order your GEM LIBRARY in advance. Price One Penny.

Let Your Friend Read the Opening of this Grand War Story.

BRITAIN AT BAY!



Another Powerful WAR Story.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Sam and Stephen Villiers, two cadets of Greyfriars School, by a combination of luck and pluck render valuable service to the British Army during the great German invasion. They are appointed special scouts to the Army, which is forced back on London by Von Krantz, the German commander.

At the time when this account opens, London had been bombarded and carried. Von Krantz had entered the City with his troops, the Lord Mayor was a prisoner at the Mansion House, and from the flagstaff on that famous building the German flag floated, where none but British colours had been seen since London was built. London Bridge was blown up, and across the great river the remainder of the British troops and the half-starved millions of London waited in grim silence for the next move.

Sam and Stephen are chafing at their enforced inactivity, when Ned of Northey, a young Essex marshman, and an old friend of theirs, sails up the Thames in his smack, the Maid of Essex, with a despatch he has captured from a German. This contains useful information of the landing of another German Army Corps, and Sam, having shown it to Lord Ripley, is given permission to go down river, and see what he can do. The boys and Ned sail down to the river mouth, and board a derelict steamer, which is loaded with petrol.

After setting adrift three dynamite hulks, the boys pour the petrol into the sea, and as the German Army Corps sail past the Nore, Sam sets light to the floating petrol. In a moment the Germans are in the midst of a river of fire.

Sam, Steve, and Ned sail away from the scene of destruction, and later on the two boy scouts go ashore in a dinghy. Returning to the smack in the dark, they are run down by a British torpedo-boat (No. 667).

The two boys are rescued, and later on No. 667 approaches Sheerness by sailing up the River Swale, and manages to torpedo two first-class German warships. In dashing away from the scene, No. 667 is fired on, and so badly damaged that they are obliged to beach her.

Lieutenant Cavendish, Sam, Steve, and the rest of the crew are rescued by Ned. While sailing away in the Maid of Essex they entice the Kaiser's yacht on to a sandbank. There is a great stir among the German boats at the mouth of the river, and Ned proposes that they should make for the River Crouch.

(Now go on with the Story.)

With the Tide.

"Ned's right," said Sam. "We've got to chance that. The tide's settin' up strong still, an' there's nowhere else we can make for."

"Well, I'm quite agreeable," said Cavendish cheerily. "You're more at home in this blessed wilderness of sands than I am. Shove us in among the soldiers if you like—I'm not particular."

"O' course, you gents'll have to keep hid," said Ned, "when we get there. There'll be sentries an' patrols about, an' it won't do for 'em to see anybody but me. If I were you, I'd turn in now, an' get some rest while you can."

Nothing loth, the boys and Cavendish went below, and in less than a minute, despite the perils that threatened, they were sleeping like the dead, for their interrupted slumbers of the afternoon had been short enough.

Ned, silent and alert, sat at the tiller, steering by compass through the haze. He was alone on deck, peering out under his sou'-wester that dripped with the fog-dew, while he cuddled the tiller under one arm, and a muffled, vigorous concert of snores came from the cabin's fore-peak.

The Maid of Essex had now passed over the Mouse Shoal into the deeper water beyond, nearer the coast. Ahead of her, again, was another great shoal—the Maplin Sands—running out five miles from the land, dry at low water, but now covered by the tide. She was now in the Swin Channel, the great highway for ships bound to the north from the Thames, and she was crossing it, making for the low-lying islands of the Essex shores, where she hoped to find refuge.

Astern, though the stranded yacht was blotted out by the haze, her siren could be heard hooting frantically, its echoes rolling along the sea. Distant hoots from the direction of the Thames began to answer it in several quarters, and the muffled beat of fast-going screws reached Ned's ears.

He knew she was calling up aid, and though there was little or no chance of her being towed off on that tide, it would certainly be a very short time before she had called up some torpedo-boats, and sent them far and wide in search of the Maid of Essex. Even now they were out on the quest.

Onward went the smack, crossing the unmarked channel of the Swin, there a mile wide or more, and capable of

carrying any ship afloat. But presently Ned took the long boathook and jabbed it over the side. He was just able to touch bottom, and felt the hard sand only eight feet below. The deep channel was crossed, and the Maid was now entering the shallow water over the Maplin Sands.

From where the smack was now a man could ride on horseback at low water over five miles of sand till he reached the land itself, and the low seawall of Foulness. Now, however, there was water enough for a shallow-keeled vessel all the way to shore, though Ned thought it would be some time before the torpedo-boats came groping through that dangerous district in the fog.

Suddenly the sharp stammer of quick-firing guns was heard out to seaward, and Ned's brow grew dark as he heard it.

"I hope that don't mean they're shellin' another fishin'-smack in mistake for us," he muttered; "there's several out in the deeps. Little those blamed Dutchies'd care—they'd fire first, and inquire afterwards."

The thought did not make him any the more cheerful. However, there was no possible help for it, so he kept going. The daylight and the wind were failing, and as the shades of the dusk filtered down through the haze, Ned looked longingly to the northward, wishing he could steer that way, and then strike out across the sea for Sir Francis's squadron. However, there was no possibility of going against the set of the tide, and at any moment a torpedo-boat might find him if he hung about over the sands, so Ned held onward for the Havens.

It seemed a very long time before they were sighted, but at last a beacon, made of a tall pole with a bushy branch tied to its top, reared out of the water ahead of him. So accurately had Ned judged his course, that he had lit upon the exact spot, in spite of tide and haze, and immediately afterwards the low Essex seawall loomed up through the mist a hundred yards ahead, with the opening of the creek of Havengore showing right in front.

The creek, as Ned knew well, joined with a maze of others among the islands, and wound its way inland till it met the salt-water River Crouch. He left his helm a few moments to run down the foresail and stow it, and the noise woke Sam, who put his head out of the cabin hatch.

"Where are we, Ned?" he said.

"Nigh on the creek, sir," whispered the marshman. "You'd better keep below. There'll be sentries about, maybe. I can take her in by myself."

"Shouldn't think there'll be much guard set over these forsaken islands," muttered Sam. "They're leagues from anywhere, an' five miles from the ship-channels out over the sands."

For all that, as the smack glided into the mouth of the muddy creek, now nearly bank-full with the tide, a shadowy form on the point of the seawall hailed them roughly.

How the Maid of Essex was Commandeered.

"Wer geht da?"

"Dunno any Dutch!" grunted Ned.

"Who goes dere?" said the voice sharply, and the click of a rifle-bolt was heard.

"Fishin'-smack Maid," replied the steersman.

Those in the cabin held their breath. It seemed, however, that there was no order to stop fishing-boats, which often used the creek, for a gruff word came back from the sentry as the smack glided past.

As soon as she was round the first bend Ned helped her right round till her head pointed down the creek again, and laid her alongside the saltings on the left bank, where he let his mainsail run down, and threw a couple of grappling-hooks ashore to hold her.

"What now?" whispered Stephen, at the cabin-hatch.

"We're here," said Ned, "an' here we've got to stop till the tide turns."

"Can't we sail right on till the creek joins the Crouch, an' down the Crouch to the sea again?" said Sam, in a surprised voice. "I've often done it."

"Ay, sir; but they've stopped that. When I was here last there was some German engineer chaps layin' big chains across the creeks, an' spiked booms, 'bout a mile above here. There's no getting past them."

"They're afraid any stray British torpedo-boats might come through by way of the Crouch, I s'pose," mused Sam.

"But, I say," put in Cavendish, "she can't stay here for good, can she? How long have six of us got to be shut up in this doghole, skipper? Whew! I could cut the air with a shovel!"

"Better'n a stretched neck, ain't it, sir?" grinned Ned. "It won't be for long. When the ebb-tide starts, we shall slide out an' away to sea. It's the ebb that'll take us the way we want to go, 'stead o' drivin' us up into the Thames among the Germans. Don't let none o' your men strike a match in there, sir. It's a big bluff we're workin', an' mighty little will give the show away."

Silence reigned on the smack for some time. They could hear from time to time, in the distance, the sound of German voices, and wondered what force there was near them, and what it was doing.

Sam could hardly be restrained from going off on a scouting expedition in the dark, to learn for himself what was afoot. It was only the knowledge that any delay in getting back would end in the smack being obliged to go off without him that kept Sam from trying it. He did not want to be cut off from the fleet again, after what he had seen of it, and there was still some chance of getting back to the Terrific.

"You sit on your tail, my buck, an' calm yourself," said Cavendish. "You won't do any good messing round the camp. It's with us afloat that all the fun's goin' now. The war's markin' time ashore, an' there's nothing doin' there. I say, skipper, tide's pretty near the turn, isn't it? What are you cockin' your ears at?"

"S-sh!" hissed Ned, who was staring intently through the darkness. "Get inside there an' shut the doors. Quick! Somebody's comin' this way!"

The hatch was drawn noiselessly into place at once, and Ned closed the doors himself. He picked up a length of sprat-net from the cockpit, and began to busy himself with shaking it out and cobbling it. Hurried footsteps were heard approaching along the embankment of the creek, and a minute later a stout officer of the German Service Corps came running up to the smack, with four men behind him.

"It is a fishing-smack, Herr Captain," panted one of the men, "and the only craft now in the creek, unless we take the marshmen's punts."

Ned's heart gave a bound, but he did not move a muscle, save to stolidly cobble away at the sprat-net. He was holding himself ready for a struggle, in case they insisted on searching the smack, which was what he supposed they had come for. The German officer sprang on to the deck of the Maid of Essex, drawing a revolver as he did so.

"Quick, fellow!" he cried to Ned in harsh, broken English. "Get dis craft of yours onder way at vonce, und put me on der nearest Charman warship. Instantly, you hear me?"

"What?" said Ned, wholly taken by surprise at the demand.

"Obey orders, fool!" snapped the officer, clapping his revolver to Ned's head. "I haf no time to waste! Take me out into der Swin Channel und hail der first ship of war, unless you wish to be shot! Cast off those grapnels, men!" he added sharply to the privates with the rifles, who had followed at his heels.

Ned did not know what to make of it for the moment, and hesitated what to do. The officer made his men cast off the mooring-hooks from the bank, and the Maid of Essex began to drift down the creek with her new crew on board.

"Up with those sails, fisherman!" cried the officer harshly.

Instinctively Ned leaned forward to hitch the jib-sheet to its cleat. He had not made up his mind whether to take his chance and try to spill the intruders overboard on the spot and get rid of them, which would certainly have resulted in his being promptly shot, for he could not tackle five armed men successfully. But as he bent over the hatch a whisper reached him through the crack close to his head, and he knew it was Sam who spoke.

"Do what he tells you. Get 'em all outside!"

"Do you hear?" thundered the officer, cocking his revolver.

"Ay, ay!" said Ned gruffly. And running forward to the mast, he ran up the jib. It was enough by itself to draw the smack along, and he darted aft to the tiller again to steer her. "I'll do what I can, if you'll keep your men out o' the way. I can't do nothin' wi' a crew o' sodgers."

The German made no reply to this, but he watched Ned keenly as, luffing the vessel out into the broader part of the creek, the hardy young marshman got the mainsail up by degrees, and steered for the haven's mouth as the night wind filled the sails. There was no hesitation about Ned now, and he wondered that he had paused at all. Sam's whisper had electrified him, and it was not hard to guess what the young scout meant to do. Ned could hardly keep back a chuckle.

The chief thing he feared was that the German might open the cabin hatch. The officer, however, seemed more concerned about getting quickly to sea than anything else, and he seated himself on the hatch so that he could face Ned, his revolver still ready in his hand.

"You are bearing news of importance on der Kaiser's service," he said with grim humour to Ned, "so be most gareful nod to make any misdakes, or it vill be der vorse for you!"

"I'm doin' my best," said Ned restraining an impulse

to knock him down with the tiller; "but you'll recollect it warn't none o' my seekin' that I'm carryin' you—sir," he added.

"Nor is it any of mine dot I make der passage in dis mud-boat," said the German sharply. "Dere is no oder craft in der creek dot can put me to sea. Vhat is it you haf got here dare in?" he concluded, rapping the hatch on which he sat with the butt of his revolver. "Fish?"

"A mixed cargo," was all Ned replied. "Where d'you want to go—sir?" He smiled to himself as he added the last word.

"As I tell you, out ter der Swin to a Charman ship. Any ship of der Kaiser vill serve, so long as she belongs to der fleet. Dere vill be ships in der Swin." He looked at his watch. "I gif you choost half an hour to find one, after which you vill return me und my guard to der shore. Half an hour, hear you?"

"I may not be able to find one in that time," said Ned, scratching his head.

"If in dirty minutes you do not find me a Charman ship, you vill be a dead man!" said the officer grimly, tapping his revolver. "You are fishermans, and can do it if you like."

"If you shoot me, you an' your sodgers won't be able to hand the smack," said Ned, in pretended alarm.

"I sha.. ot stand upon dot. If you vant to safe your life, find dot ship. Enough vorts. Do as you vas gommanded!"

The Maid of Essex was gliding gently out through the mouth of the creek. The sentry on the shore challenged, and the officer answered him. Five minutes later the beacon had been left behind, and the smack was out in the open, over the shallow water of the Maplins. The tide was just beginning to ebb, and it was still foggy. Already the shore was nearly out of sight astern.

Ned's chance of reaching the Swin and finding a German ship in half an hour would have been an uncommonly poor one, and he did not feel any the better disposed towards the officer for making the condition, for he knew something of the ways of the Germans, and saw that the man would be as good as his word. However, Ned appeared to be making his chance poorer still, for instead of keeping straight out, he luffed gradually away to the northward along the coast.

Though the German was no sailor, it began to dawn on him that something was wrong. The low shores were now out of sight in the darkness and mist, but by the direction of the wind it was plain the course had been altered, and the officer was sharp enough to take note of this.

"Vhat way vas you steering?" he said, with sudden suspicion.

"We're on the port tack," said Ned simply.

"Der course for der Swin lies surely straight out from der creek," insisted the German. And once more he covered Ned with the revolver, his slaty-blue eye glinting along the barrel. "Now mark me, Englander! If you vas playing any trick on me, den your time has come to die. I shall shoot you like a dog! I—— Donner und Blitzen!"

His speech was broken off abruptly, and a yell escaped him as the hatch on which he sat was suddenly slammed right back and sent him flying. Like a Jack-in-the-box, Sam leaped out through the opening, with Cavendish immediately behind him.

The officer had sprawled heavily on the deck, and in an instant Ned had jumped on him and pinned him down. Sam's revolver cracked twice as the men hurriedly threw their rifles to their shoulders. One fell limply, and the other plunged overboard with a choking cry. The remaining two were on the wrong side of the mainsail, and as they dashed round the mast they were met by Cavendish and two of his men, who closed with them and wrested their rifles from them before a shot could be fired.

"Potztausend! I am betrayed!" gasped the officer, struggling frantically in Ned's sinewy grip. "We are trapped!"

"You trapped yourself, old cock!" said Stephen, stooping and taking the revolver away from him, while Ned kept him spread-eagled. "How long'll you give Ned to find a German warship now—eh?"

The officer cursed savagely. He was lost in rage and bewilderment when he saw two cadets, a naval officer, and half a torpedo-boat's crew suddenly appear from the interior of an old fishing-smack that he had believed empty as a drum.

"I am disgraced!" he cried in his own tongue. "Blitzen! I am the prisoner of a dirty fish-seller, and——"

"And of the King's Navy," said Cavendish cheerfully, "though it's the fish-seller you owe your capture to, my hairy-heeled landsman; an' don't call him names, because he's a lot better chap than you are. We don't shoot fishermen in my Service. Birch, see those two lobsters are properly trussed. Tie 'em up!"

"Don't make so much row, you chaps," said Sam. "We don't want one of their T.B.'s down on us. Just hang on to that gentleman a minute, Ned. I reckon he didn't come out here in such a hurry for nothing."

Sam bent down and pulled open the officer's Service jacket, laying bare the inner breast-pocket. The German gave a yell of rage, and struggled madly, but Sam, taking no notice, drew from the pocket a missive which bore the German Imperial seal.

"Robber!" shrieked the man. "Gif dot back!"

How Death Lurked in the Fog.

"Not by a jugful!" said Sam. "I'm not manœuvring on my own account, but for the good of my side; an' you'll possibly remember that nobody invited you to commandeer this smack an' threaten to shoot the skipper."

He ran his thumb under the flap, broke the seal, and opened the paper by the light of a lantern which Stephen brought from below. He gave a whistle, and refolding the paper, handed it to Cavendish.

"Frankie'll like to see that," he said. "Give it him for a Christmas card. Written instructions for the German torpedo flotilla, by seal from German Billy. S'pose the Marconi gear has gone wrong."

"Good egg!" said Cavendish, stowing the despatch in his pocket. "Well, we don't want these ducks any longer, do we? Suppose we yardarm them," he added, with a wink. "It's what their pals propose doin' to you when they catch you."

Stephen grinned, but Sam did not respond. He thought the matter over seriously for a minute or more.

"Keep 'em on hand for a spell," he said at last. "Where are we now, Ned?"

"Pretty nigh abreast the Maplin Lighthouse," said the marshman, "though we can't see it. Tide's running down fast, but the wind's droppin'."

"Will you give your parole not to land for two hours if we let you go?" said Sam to the officer.

"No!" snarled the German. "You vos can shoot me if you like!"

"We're not so fond of butchering as you are, although we're rather fonder of a scrap. The scrap's over, however. Well, I can't blame you; you've got pluck enough to be shot, I suppose. But as you won't give your parole like a gentleman, you'll have to be dealt with accordingly. Ned, we needn't carry this cargo any farther."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Ned, heaving the smack to. The prisoners, thinking they were going to be shot or hove overboard, waited in sullen silence.

"I think we can spare your dinghy—eh, Cavendish?" said Sam.

"Oh, by all means!" said the lieutenant. "I don't know what we've brought it so far for. Birch, open an' launch the Berthon."

The folding Berthon boat, which had been brought from No. 667, lay on deck, and two of the torpedo men swiftly opened out its canvas skin and battens, and launched it. Meanwhile Sam, with a piece of rope, deftly bound the arms of the German officer to his sides, and tied his ankles together, despite his astounded curses. The other two men remaining had already been trussed in the same way, and a piece of sail-cloth was bound over the mouth of each.

"We can't have you hailin' any of those German warships, you know," said Sam grimly; "but you're quite comfortable now, so we'll give you a little time to find 'em—say, half an hour. If you don't do it by then, you'd better draw lots an' shoot each other, for failin' to preserve discipline. Lift 'em in, men!"

The officer and the two privates were hoisted into the folding dinghy rocking alongside, and at a word from Sam they were cast off, amid the grins of the smack's crew.

"By-by, my pets!" said Stephen, waving an adieu to them as they sat on the dinghy's thwarts, and glared at him while the Maid of Essex drew ahead. "Don't look at the foam, or you'll be seasick. The tide'll drop you somewhere on the sands towards mornin,' an' some of your keen-eyed pals'll come an' pick you up, if you're in luck? Fine things tides, aren't they? So-long, and keep each other warm, an' don't rock the boat!"

If strong language could be delivered by mere looks, those on the smack would have been swamped in a flood of it, as the speechless and frantic Germans in the dinghy drifted away into the mist, amid the chuckles of the crew. Ned, grinning hugely under his sou'-wester, steered straight away once more for the nor'-east, and the torpedo-men, on a hint from the skipper, went below to cook some hot food for all hands on the fo'c'sle stove.

Sam and Cavendish retired to the cabin with the lantern, and spent some time together over the captured despatch. It conveyed instructions to the commander of the torpedo-boat flotilla to detach six of his first-class boats to escort into the Thames a convoy of three German ships which were expected off the Naze, bringing ammunition and war-

stores. But the fact which had most struck Sam was that the note bore the Kaiser's seal.

"It's from dear Billy all right enough," he said to Cavendish, "an' that shows that the Kaiser's in quarters no great way from the Havens, probably at Rochford, lookin' after things at the mouth of the Thames."

"Shouldn't wonder if the smash-up of that Army Corps brought him down here to buck up things," said Cavendish. "He must have got his shirt out fearfully over that. But I don't see why Wilhelm should send written notes out by Service Corps officers who chance findin' a vessel to take 'em. If it's important——"

"In this fog it'd be the deuce of a job to find just what you want," said Sam; "an' if anything's gone wrong with the wireless telegraph show, he'd have to send direct, especially as the message is urgent. If that chap we tied up was sent down by the Kaiser, he'd know that the nearest way into the Swin in a fog when the tide's up is by way of the Havens. The Kaiser holds the reins here, an' you bet there's mighty little he doesn't know."

"Well, Frankie'll be jolly glad to get this despatch, anyhow," said Cavendish, "an' if we can only reach him soon enough he might be able to capture that convoy. Shouldn't wonder but he'd give me the job if I put him on to it. We'd have rare sport."

"Will you gents come on deck?" said Ned, putting his head inside the cabin. They went at once.

"I don't like the look o' the weather," said the marshman anxiously. "Here's the breeze droppin' dead away, an' it's thicker than ever. We ain't barely got steerageway."

"That's bad. Are we clear of the Maplins?" said Sam, knitting his brows.

"We're just off 'em an' into the Swin, only right down by the Middle Light. This 'ere tide's runnin' like a millrace, an' as you know, it sets right over the Barrows."

"What can we do, then?" said Stephen.

"The only way to avoid it is to anchor."

"What, out here in the open," said Cavendish, "with half the German fleet lookin' for us? Won't it be better to risk an' let her drive along? She's goin' the right way."

"Ned's hit it," said Sam. "If we miss the Barrows we shall strike something else, in a fog like this, an' with no wind. Gettin' aground means certain capture. Better drop the kedge anchor till the tide eases a bit, or the breeze springs up."

"Bear a hand with the kedge, an' do it quiet," growled Ned. "I can hear a screw somewhere."

"Twin-screws," added Stephen, staring into the fog.

They dropped the little spare anchor overboard at the end of a coir-rope, to avoid the noise of the regular anchor-chain, and the smack swung and rode steadily in the dripping fog, the rope stretched tight, and the tide rushing past her. For some time her crew sat on deck, eating the meal Birch had prepared, and longing impatiently for a breeze that would give them command.

"If it don't come soon," grumbled Stephen, "I'll—— Great Scott!"

His voice died down to a whisper as something vast and grey came looming out of the night. The fog had thinned a little, and a hundred yards away the huge iron hulk of a battleship showed for an instant in the dark mist, and vanished again as the fog thickened.

So brief was the glimpse that the smack's crew, holding their breath, might almost have thought their eyesight had played them a trick.

But through the haze came the muffled cry of the leadsman, calling the depths as he hove the hand-lead as he stood in the chains.

"Great guns!" murmured Cavendish. "German battleship, steamin' dead slow!"

The voices from the unseen ship were heard again, and sharp, authoritative orders came across the water. A little later there was a great splash, and a deafening noise of iron cable running out. Two or three minutes more and a second splash and roar followed, then silence.

"Brought up!" said Sam. "She daren't go gropin' up the Swin on such a night. The skipper don't mean chuckin' away a million pounds' worth of warship on the Barrows."

"Two anchors out, too."

"She wouldn't trust to one in this tide, not a vessel of her bulk an' draught," said Cavendish.

"She's only stopped just in time. The Swin Middle ain't far behind her," said Ned; "but there ain't no fear of her draggin' two anchors."

"Where would she go if she did drag them?" said Cavendish.

"Why, slap on to the Swin Middle bank, which is very narrer an' long, as I said," replied Ned.

"Would she, by gum!" said Cavendish.

And he fell into thoughtful silence, nor could anything more be got out of him.

NOW YOU'VE FINISHED
Introduce Me to Your Father.

"My eye, to think of her lyin' there within a few hundred yards of us!" murmured Stephen. "I say, if only this smack was No. 667! Just a couple of Whiteheads neatly rammed against her, just under the engine-rooms, would ——"

"We can't do that," said Cavendish, rising suddenly from the hatch; "but if one of you chaps is game to bear a hand, we'll try something that might turn out nearly as good."

"Game for anything!" said Sam. "But what on earth can we do?"

"Our excellent Ned says that if she broke adrift she'd ——"

"Drive on to the Swin Middle," put in Ned.

"Just so. It's up to us to break her adrift!"

"How?" said Sam, staring. "My dear chap, do you ——"

"A battleship that size, groundin' suddenly on an ebb-tide," interrupted Cavendish, "and in a current like this, would be pretty near done for. She's safe to break her back as the water falls, or strain herself so badly she'd be no use for months."

"Yes, of course," said Stephen. "But how do you suggest breakin' two iron anchor-chains each as thick as a man's thigh? Row up to 'em an' snip 'em through with nail-scissors?"

"No; blow them apart with a cake of gun-cotton. They'd go as easy as rotten string, then."

"Ye-es, I s'pose they would; but you can't make gun-cotton out of nothing."

"Don't need to. I've got six sticks of it below, which I brought off from No. 667 when we abandoned her. It's stuff I never leave behind. More than that, I've got fuses an' fulminate, an' I'll undertake to manufacture in half an hour a couple of detonators that'll stand the water an' do the trick. You can watch, if you like."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Sam, as the possibilities of it came home to him.

(Another long instalment of this Grand War Story next Thursday. Please order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance. Price 1d.)

Printed and published weekly by the Proprietors 23, Bouverie Street, London, England. Subscription, 4s. 4d. per annum.
Saturday, April 3rd, 1909.

DON'T

RUB THIS SPACE

A Clue for new Readers.

The Treasure is hidden in the

WITH A PENNY

—but spend the penny in getting this week's number of "The Marvel," which contains a grand, long, complete tale of Bob and Harry, the two boy detectives, by Detective-Inspector Coles. Join in the great treasure hunt. £2 10s. a week in prizes!