In this issue: **A SCHOOL TALE** and a Powerful **WAR STORY**

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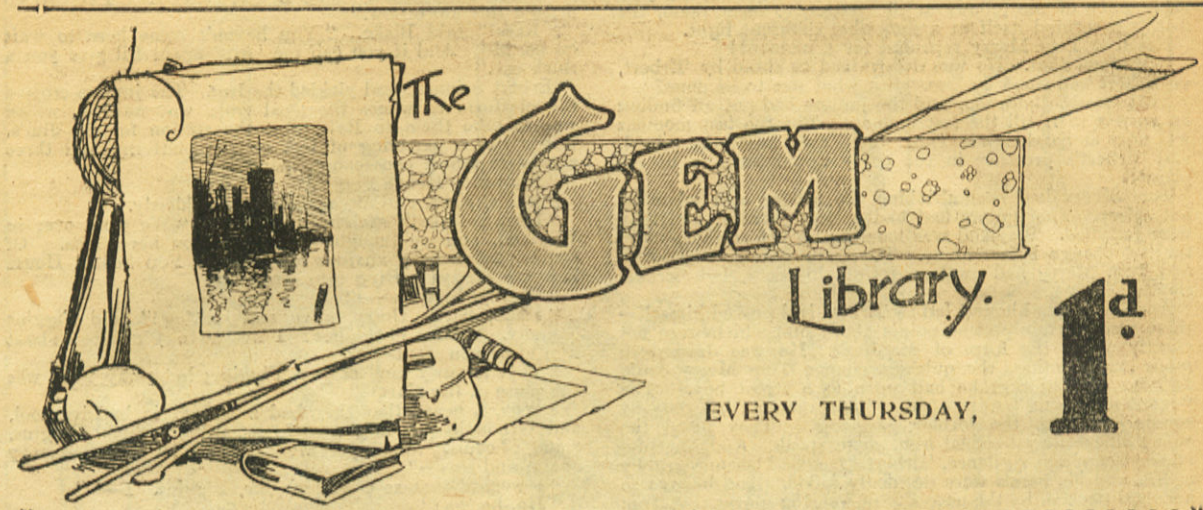
"SMUGGLED TO SCHOOL."

A grand long, complete School Tale of TOM MERRY & CO.

D'ARCY MINOR TAKES THE NEW BOY IN HAND.



Complete Stories for Everyone, and Every Story a Gem!

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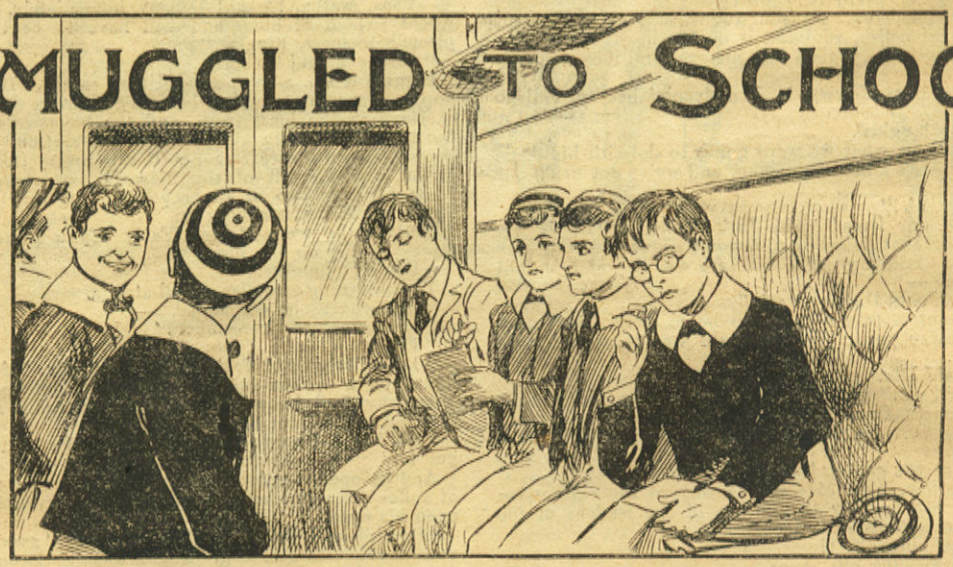


A Grand Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
The Return of the Travellers.

TOM MERRY started out of a doze. Lights were gleaming ahead through the spring dusk, and the train was slowing down. Tom rubbed his eyes.

"By Jove! I've been asleep!"

No one controverted that statement. The half-dozen juniors, belonging to the famous school of St. Jim's, who occupied the carriage, were all busy just then.

Manners and Lowther, Tom Merry's chums in the Shell, were deeply engaged upon a never-ending game of chess. Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries were engaged in a warm argument on the subject of cricket, a subject that was taking up much of the attention of St. Jim's juniors at this time, in view of the coming season. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was polishing his silk hat with loving care and inexhaustible patience. Skimpole was busy with a pencil in his hand and a notebook on his knees.

From a youth leaning back in a corner of the carriage came an unmusical snore.

Tom Merry glanced at the sleeper, and smiled.

The slumbering lad was evidently of the party, yet not of them. He was of a diminutive but wiry frame, and his face—though that of a lad of thirteen—was curiously lined, as though he had known most of the troubles of life even at that early age. As indeed he had, for the lad was a street arab of Liverpool, whom Tom Merry and his friends had taken from his old haunts, intending to look after him and provide for him in some manner not yet determined on.

It was a generous determination of the St. Jim's juniors; but the more Tom Merry thought about it, the more difficult the task seemed.

In an hour of excitement, in a Liverpool slum at the dead of night, when the little ragamuffin had saved the juniors from a terrible danger, it had seemed the most natural thing to do, to take him in hand and look after him. But now, on

their return home, with St. Jim's close at hand, and probably some of the fellows at the station to meet them, the matter presented itself in a somewhat different light.

Not that Tom Merry repented for a moment!

It was not that. He was determined to stand by 'Erbert, as 'Erbert had stood by him. But what was to be done?

That was the question, and the juniors had put off finding an answer to it till the last moment. But the last moment was near at hand now! They would soon be at the school, and 'Erbert's presence in the party would have to be explained.

Tom Merry had been thinking the matter over when he fell asleep. The juniors had had a long journey, and they were fatigued. Wayland was looming up before them now; the last change before home. The train was slowing down, and Tom Merry had awakened from his doze, but 'Erbert slept on.

And—brave and honest lad as 'Erbert had proved himself—there were certainly some points about him which were not exactly up to the form of St. Jim's. He was dressed in ready-made clothes, the quickest change Tom Merry could find for the old rags he had worn as a street boy. The "reach-me-downs" were a great improvement; but only by comparison with the former garments. They fitted the youth where they touched him, so to speak. And, in spite of great care and vigilance, 'Erbert's face had become grubby again, and his hands were decidedly soiled. And he was so keenly distressed by the necessity of wearing gloves that Tom had not had the heart to insist upon it, so far. And 'Erbert had not learned to keep his mouth closed while he was asleep. He was leaning back now with that aperture wide open, and a loud snore proceeded from him that was distinctly audible through the carriage, and probably in the next one.

"Wake up, kid!" said Tom Merry.

But 'Erbert slept on. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave his silk hat a final polish, replaced it on his head, and looked up. He jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and took a survey of 'Erbert.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, he is a sleepin' beauty, and no mistake!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I wish I knew what we were going to do with him," he remarked. "He's a fine little chap, and we've got to do our best for him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He saved our lives," said Jack Blake. "There's not much doubt on that point. No, I won't argue the point any further, Dig. You may call it a late cut if you like, but what I say is——"

"Rubbish!" said Digby cheerfully.

"If you want to take a thick ear home to St. Jim's with you, Dig, you're going just the right way to work," said Blake darkly.

"Rats!" said Dig.

"Here, hold on!" said Tom Merry. "For goodness' sake don't you Fourth Form kids begin to row now——"

The Fourth-Formers fixed an aggressive glare upon Tom Merry.

"Whom are you calling kids?"

"Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy! I wegard the expwession as distinctly dewogatowy to the dig. of the leadahs of the School House juniahs——"

"Now, you ring off, Gussy——"

"I wefuse to wing off. I——"

"Wayland!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The train stopped. The jerk of it was followed by a grunt from Monty Lowther as the chessmen danced on the board. 'Erbert started, and awoke, and rubbed his eyes with his grimy knuckles, leaving dusky circles round them.

"Crikey!" he remarked. "I've bin asleep."

"Change here!" said Tom Merry. "Put those toys away, Lowther——"

Monty Lowther glared.

"If you can't say anything more sensible than that, Tom Merry——"

"You don't want to go on to Southampton, I suppose? Put 'em away."

Lowther grunted, and clicked the fastener on the pocket chessboard, to keep the pieces on the squares they belonged to, and then closed up the board and slipped it into his overcoat pocket. He rose and stretched his long legs.

"I'm about tired of the railway," he remarked. "It will be all right to get a feed in the study at St. Jim's, after this beastly travelling. Jolly lucky we're getting back after last lesson, too."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry opened the carriage door, and the juniors tumbled out. 'Erbert took a bag in each hand off the rack and followed them. Jack Blake jerked one of them away from him on the platform.

"I can carry it, sir," said 'Erbert eagerly. "I've carried more'n this afore now."

"Rats!" said Blake. "You haven't come here to wait on us, kid. And if you call me 'Sir' again I'll give you a thick ear."

'Erbert grinned, and yielded the bag. The juniors crossed the platform to where the local train was waiting, which was to take them to Rylcombe, the station for St. Jim's. There was a pattering of feet on the platform, and three youths in school caps came racing up.

"My hat! Here's Figgy!"

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn halted breathlessly.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Figgins. "We were over in Wayland, and we thought we'd meet you here, kids. Of course, we've been anxious about you. You School House kids are always getting into scrapes."

"Weally, Figgins——"

"Hallo, here's Gussy, alive and kicking!" said Figgins genially. "Same old duffer! I was awfully alarmed about him after you went——"

"That is vewy kind of you, Figgins; but pway what was the cause of the alarm?"

"Why, I heard that they had a menagerie in Liverpool, and I thought you might go to see it," explained Figgins, "and, of course, the keepers wouldn't have let you come away again, and so——"

"I wegard that as a wotten joke, Figgins. I——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see nothin' to laugh at in Figgins's wotten, diswespectful wemarks, Tom Mewwy. Undah the circs——"

"Better get into the train," said Figgins; "it's going in a minute. I say, is this a friend of yours?"

And he stared blankly at 'Erbert.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy immediately. "He is a gweat fwiend of ours, and will have to be tweated with pwopah wespect, Figgins."

"Crikey!" said 'Erbert.

Figgins & Co. stared, as well they might. But there was no time for more talk just then. The juniors swarmed into a carriage in the local train, and the bags were stacked on the rack. The train glided out of the station. There were twelve lads in the carriage, so it was pretty full; and Fatty Wynn, the Falstaff of the New House, occupied enough room for any two of the others. But they squeezed in somehow, 'Erbert standing up.

And as the train started Fatty Wynn leaned over and tapped Digby on the knee.

"Got it?" he asked.

The returning traveller stared at him.

"Got what?" he demanded.

"Oh, come, you remember!"

"Eh?"

"Look here," said Fatty Wynn anxiously, "don't rot, you know, on a serious subject. Have you got it—the toffee? You jolly well know you promised to bring me a lot of Everton toffee from Liverpool."

"Oh," said Digby, with a grin, "that's all right! I've got it!"

And he opened one of the bags, and brought out a packet of toffee the dimensions of which made even Fatty Wynn open his eyes.

"Good," said the New House junior—"good! I knew you wouldn't forget, Dig. That's awfully decent of you. I say, you chaps, have some toffee."

And they all accepted chunks of the famous Everton toffee, and discussed it with great relish as the train glided through the spring dusk towards St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 2.

The Only Way.

THE thoughtful shade deepened upon Tom Merry's face as the train dashed on towards St. Jim's. The crisis was coming; before long, now, the question of 'Erbert had to be definitely settled, and the solution seemed no nearer now than it had seemed twenty-four hours ago.

Figgins & Co. looked at 'Erbert with natural curiosity. Where and how he had joined the party was a mystery to them; and what Tom Merry intended to do with him a greater puzzle still. 'Erbert was grinning a little uneasily. He had jumped at the offer to escape from slum life. But the meeting with new fellows from St. Jim's made him realise that he was adventuring into strange waters. The nerve and coolness which had been his in the Liverpool streets seemed likely to desert him in such a new and curious situation.

"Make room for the kid!" said Tom Merry.

"It's all right, sir," said 'Erbert. "I kin stand."

"Bosh! You can't!"

"Certainly not, deah boy. Pway squeeze up a little,

"My word!" said Wally. "Who's that?" "It's the new kid," said Tom Merry.

Wynn. You weally do take up too much woom, you know. Pway sit down beside me, Wags!"

"Wags!" said Figgins, looking amazed. "You don't mean to say that chap's name is Wags?"

"Yaas, wathah! Herbert Wags."

"My hat!"

"That's me name, sir," grinned 'Erbert. "'Erbert, sir—'Erbert Rags."

"Oh, Rags!" said Figgins, comprehending. "Jolly good name, too. Jolly glad to see you, Rags. Did you win him in a raffle, Tom Merry?"

"Ha, ha! No. He saved our lives."

"Phew!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I will welate the circs."

"Cut it short, then!"

"Weally, I must wefuse to cut it short. This deservin' kid wisked his life, in the first place, to save my toppah fwom bein' wun ovah."

"Young ass!"

"I wegard that wemark as wotten, Figgins. Then he stopped a wascally person, who was wobbin' me of my watch, and in weturn I went to his wesidence to wescue him fwom the same wuffian. Unfortunately, we got into dangah, and should pwobably have been vewy much hurt if Wags hadn't come in in the nick of time and helped us out of a weally wotten scwape."

"My hat! You talk like a book, Gussy!"

"Yaas, I think I have wathah a good powah of descwiption," said D'Arcy modestly, "and I uttahly fail to see anythin' to gwin at, Tom Mewwy. Have you enough woom to be comfy, Wags?"

Snore!

"Bai Jove, the young boundah's asleep again!"

'Erbert's head was leaning back on the cushion, and he was snoring. He was tired, and not in the habit of standing on ceremony when he was tired.

"Let him have his nap!" said Tom Merry. "I'm blessed if I know how to arrange matters. You see, Figgy, we had to take him from the place he lived in, and I'd do a great deal to give him a chance in life. But the question is how are we going to do it?"

"Well, it's jolly good of you," said Figgins, "but you've taken on a big job."

"Yaas, wathah; but we have all adopted Wags, you see," explained D'Arcy. "And we are going to put our heads together over it, and decide on somethin'. I was thinkin' at first of sendin' him to Eastwood House, but, upon weflection, it seems to me that he would be wathah out of his element at my governah's home."

Figgins chuckled.

"Well, yes, I can't imagine him pullin' exactly with Lord Eastwood," he agreed; "and that butler of yours, too, would make him hop. He's much more aristocratic than the noble earl himself, and he would be rough on Rags."

"And I was thinking of sending him to Huckleberry Heath, to my old governess," said Tom Merry. "Miss Fawcett would take him in like a shot. She'd take in anybody I sent her, if it was a cannibal or a Red Indian. But——"

"But the estimable Rags would be about as much out of place at Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath, as at Eastwood House," grinned Figgins.

"That's it!"

"Besides," said D'Arcy, "it isn't only to find him a home, his future's got to be looked aftah, his education, and so on. We are wesponsible for him now."

"You could shove him into a cheap school, and pay his fees," said Kerr.

"H'm, yes, but——"

"I shouldn't recommend that, though," said Fatty Wynn. "Cheap schools are always rather close with grub, and it's not fair on a chap to send him anywhere where he can't get enough to eat."

"Trust Fatty to think of that."

"It's a jolly important point," said Fatty Wynn warmly. "I've been hungry, and I know what it's like. I was jolly hungry before I started on this toffee. We haven't had tea yet, and we only had a little bit in Wayland—a few sausages and chips, and some steak, and rabbit-pie."

Skimpole looked up from his notebook, and blinked through his spectacles at the chums of St. Jim's. He had not been writing for some time, apparently having been engaged in thinking something out.

Skimpole was the genius of the Shell, very strong on Socialism and any other "ism." But Skimmy sometimes had good ideas.

"May I make a suggestion?" he asked mildly.

"Yes, certainly. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings——"

"I was thinking. Is Rags asleep, D'Arcy? It is better for him not to hear his future being discussed."

"Yaas, he's sleepin' like a top."

"Very well. Why not take him to St. Jim's?"

"Eh?"

"He could enter the school as a new boy."

"A-a-a-a-a new boy?"

"Certainly," said Skimpole, beaming round through his spectacles upon the amazed juniors. "Enter him as a new boy! We could have a whip round to make up his fees. Unfortunately, I have no money, but D'Arcy could get some from his governor, and you from Miss Fawcett, Merry. All of you could contribute, and, after all, the fees are not so very high."

"But——"

"Besides, as the term is so advanced, there would be only half-term fees to pay," said Skimpole. "I think the idea is a good one. If we keep Rags under our own eyes, we could look after him. In the intervals of the lessons, I could give him instruction in the great truths of Socialism."

"Wats! You won't be allowed to bore him to death, Skimmay."

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"There's something in Skimmy's suggestion," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "We ought to keep him under our eyes if possible."

"Yaas, wathah. I intend to be a fathah to him."

"He's of a good age to enter the Third Form," said Monty Lowther, looking at the young sleeping ragamuffin critically. "And he's not much dirtier than D'Arcy's young brother Wally."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"And he's more tidy in his ways than Wally; and a jolly sight more amenable to the authority of his elders."

"Yaas, I admit that much. Wally certainly nevah shows me the wespect due to an eldah bwothah."

"But you could never work it," said Manners. "Dr. Holmes is a good old sort, but you couldn't expect him to take a ragamuffin in. Rags is a decent little chap, but——"

"It's impossible," said Herries. "We might get him a job about the school, perhaps? He could look after my bulldog Towser."

"Blow your bulldog Towsah! I should wefuse to allow Wags to entah the coll on an infewiah footin', and I am surpwised at your suggestin' it, Hewwies."

"Oh, keep your wool on, Gussy. I was only suggesting it for the kid's good. I expect he'd feel pretty uncomfy in the Third Form of St. Jim's, and if he didn't, the other fags would jolly soon make him."

"There's that to be considered," said Tom Merry gravely. "There would be—well, some prejudice against the kid, and—and there are snobs at St. Jim's, as there are everywhere else; and we know the kid is decent, but the other fellows don't."

"Yaas, wathah; but I should ordah my young bwothah Wally to look aftah him."

"Wally obeys your orders, doesn't he?" grinned Digby.

"If he wefused to do so, I should give him a feahful thwashin'."

"That wouldn't help the kid much. Besides, Dr. Holmes would never admit him as a pupil. You couldn't expect it."

Jack Blake had been silent for some minutes. He now spoke.

"I think it's a good idea. But, of course, it's no good taking the kid openly to school and presenting him as a new boy. He would get the order of the push at once. Dr. Holmes wouldn't understand. Masters never do understand things as well as we do; and it's no good arguing with a master. The bounder always has a cane handy for juniors who want to argue, and that settles any dispute. If Rags is going to St. Jim's, we shall have to smuggle him in."

"Smuggle him!"

"Yes. Why not? We can march him in with us, without his being noticed, as it's after dark. We'll tell the fellows he's a new boy from Liverpool. So he is! We'll report him to the House-master as a new kid, and Mr. Railton will think Dr. Holmes knows all about it. We'll take the fees to Dr. Holmes, and Dr. Holmes will think Mr. Railton knows all about it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see such a wheeze has never been worked before, and so there can't possibly be any suspicion."

"There'll be a row when it comes out."

"I don't see why it ever should come out."

"Well, Rags doesn't speak exactly—ahem—he doesn't speak in the choicest English. And I don't know if he's ever been to school before."

"Still, he's a north-country chap," said Blake, who hailed from Yorkshire himself. "He will pick up things jolly sharp. You've only to give a north-countryman half a chance, and he's on it like a bird. I know 'em."

"Yes, there's something in that, perhaps; but——"

"Well, it isn't a choice between this idea and a better one, but between this and nothing at all."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, we'll work it!" exclaimed Tom Merry, making up his mind. "If we could plant the kid at St. Jim's, it would be the making of him, and it's worth some risk and trouble. If there's a row, we can stand it. It won't be the first."

"Wight-o, deah boy!"

"Good!" said Figgins. "We'll back you up, too. It's possible we shall be able to pull the thing off."

"Then I'll wake the kid up and tell him." Tom Merry shook 'Erbert by the shoulder, and the street arab woke up instantly. "Hallo, Rags! We're near our station."

"Crikey! I've been asleep."

"Listen to me, kid! Would you like to come to the school with us, to stay there?"

'Erbert's eyes glistened.

"Wouldn't I just!" he said emphatically.

"I think we may be able to work it," said Tom Merry. "We don't want to part with you. Have you been to school before?"

Rags shook his head.

"Can you read and write?"

"I kin read a bit," said Rags brightly. "The print on the boards outside the newt shops, you know—'Orrible Murder! Shockin' Tragedy in 'Igh Life!"

"H'm! I'm afraid we don't get much of that kind of reading at St. Jim's," said Tom Merry, a little hopelessly. "Can you write?"

"I kin print a little," said 'Erbert.

"Do you know anything about geography, history, or anything?"

"That's 'cordin' to what they is," said 'Erbert cautiously. "I dessay I does. Are they anything to eat?"

"My word!" said Digby.

"Hardly up to the Third Form," grinned Figgins. "Even Wally would be able to teach the kid things."

'Erbert's face fell. He thought he had somehow offended his friends, and a curious expression came over his face, an expression that went straight to Tom Merry's heart. It was so curiously like that of a dog that knows he has unwittingly offended.

"You'd better let me go, sir," said 'Erbert, in a low voice. "I ain't fit to mix with you young gents. I don't know nothin'. I sha'n't never be able to understand 'arf the words this young gent uses."

And he nodded at Skimpole. Tom Merry laughed, and the others joined in.

"That's all right!" he said. "We don't understand what Skimmy says ourselves, and, as a matter of absolute fact, Skimmy doesn't understand either."

"Really, Tom Merry——"

"As for other things," said Tom Merry, "we'll try to help you. We'll all lend a hand in our spare time; and if you're quick, and pick up things, you may get on. Anyway, we're going to try it, if you're agreeable."

"I'll do anything you tell me, sir."

"Good! Then you're going in to St. Jim's as a new boy,

and, first of all, you must stop calling me 'sir.' Call me 'Merry.'"

"Yes, sir—I mean Merry."

The train was slackening speed.

"Here we are at Rylcombe," said Tom Merry. "We walk to St. Jim's from here. Don't talk more than you can help at the school, kid, but keep your eyes open—eyes open and mouth shut, you know."

'Erbert grinned intelligently. Although in matters of education he was hopelessly behind the St. Jim's boys, in other matters he was as far ahead of them. His life of the streets had taught him caution and cunning without spoiling his frank and honest nature. The faults of his training, perhaps, were to come out more markedly later, when the juniors knew him better.

The train stopped, and the party alighted. They walked to the school in the thick dusk, and en route 'Erbert was instructed as to how he should comport himself on his arrival. But as most of the juniors talked at once, and as they nearly all held divergent views, it is to be feared that 'Erbert did not benefit much by their instruction

CHAPTER 3.
The New Boy!

TAGGLES, the porter, had not yet locked up, but he had just come out of his lodge, keys in hand, as the juniors came in. He looked at them surlily. Taggles had had too many rubs with Tom Merry & Co. to be glad to see them back at St. Jim's. But the juniors all looked pleased to see him—with a pleasure that was too overdone to take the porter in.

"Bai Jove! Here's old Taggles again!" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the porter. "How do you do, Taggles?"

"Cheerful as ever!" grinned Blake. "The same old red nose! Taggles, Taggles, why don't you sign the pledge?"

"Better sign two, in case you break one," said Monty Lowther. "Nothing like being on the safe side, Taggles!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I should like to photograph him with that sweet expression on his face," said Manners. "Will you stand like that till to-morrow morning, Taggles, so that I can photograph you?"

Taggles grunted.

"I'm 'ere to lock these 'ere gates," he said. "Hare you comin' hin, or hare you stayin' hout?"

"We're comin' hin," said Blake. "Come hin, you chaps, and don't stay hout!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Young himps," grunted Taggles, as he locked the gates—"young himps! Boiling in hoil is too good for 'em!"

"We haven't seen you for such a long time, Taggy," said Digby affectionately. "I suppose you won't refuse half a crown if I offer one?"

Taggles thawed visibly.

"Which it's very kind of you, Master Digby!"

"Yes, isn't it?" said Digby, walking on.

"But—but where's the 'arf-crown, sir?"

"Oh, I haven't one. I was only asking for information."

The school-porter's face was a study. But Arthur Augustus pressed a shilling into his hand, and it cleared a little.

"You're a gentleman, you are, Master D'Arcy!" said Taggles, with an accent on the "you" which was intended as a reflection upon the rest.

"Thank you, Taggles," said D'Arcy languidly. "I am vewy pleased indeed to be the wecipient of your kind commendation."

Taggles looked a little puzzled, but he pocketed the shilling.

The juniors, keeping 'Erbert in their midst, walked on without the stranger being even perceived by the school-porter. In the quadrangle Figgins & Co. stopped.

"You've got him past the dragon all right," he remarked. "I hope you'll have luck in the School House. Are you too tired after your journey to come to a feed?"

"Not much!"

"Then come along to the New House in about half an hour, and you'll find us ready," said Figgins. "We've been killing the fatted calf."

"He looks lively enough," said Lowther, with a glance at Fatty Wynn.

"Eh? I was speaking figuratively."

"Oh, I thought you were speaking of Wynn."

"Look here, Lowther——" began Fatty Wynn wrathfully.

But Figgins chuckled, and pulled him away; and the New House trio went off towards their own House.

Tom Merry & Co. entered the School House. They had got 'Erbert past the school-porter without remark, but getting him into the lighted House was another matter. And as the time of Tom Merry's train was known, there were a good many fellows expecting him.

As soon as the juniors came in there was a gathering of fellows at once to see and speak to them.

"Faith, and ye're back!" said Reilly. "Sure, and I'm glad to see ye! Who's that ye've brought wid ye?"

"Where did you dig that up?" asked Gore, of the Shell, staring at 'Erbert. "I say, what's your name, my buck?"

"'Erbert."

"Herbert! What else?"

"Rags."

"Ha, ha, ha! Herbert Rags! Where did you learn to speak? What kind of a critter have you been digging up, Tom Merry?"

"Mind your own business!" said Tom Merry gruffly. "He's a new boy."

"Come to take Binks's place? I didn't know Binks had the sack."

"Don't be a pig, Gore!"

"Look here, Merry, you don't mean to say that that kid is coming to St. Jim's—to mix with us?" exclaimed the cad of the Shell.

"Not to mix with you," said Lowther. "He's rather particular whom he mixes with."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Lowther——"

"Bai Jove, Lowthah, I wegard that as wathah funnay!"

"Look here," shouted Gore, "what are you getting at? The kid hasn't an 'h' in him! He can't be coming into a Form here!"

"He is coming into a junior Form," said Blake. "You shut up! He's not coming into the Shell, so you needn't worry."

"But, I say——"

"You've said enough! Shut up!"

And Tom Merry & Co. pushed their way on, leaving Gore and the rest in amazement.

'Erbert was looking red and disquieted. It was dawning upon him that he would have a thorny path to follow at St. Jim's. But he was too grateful to Tom Merry & Co. to think of questioning their judgment.

"Come up to the study," said Lowther.

Tom Merry's study was soon reached. The new boy was watched by some dozen pairs of eyes till he was out of sight.

Tom Merry looked a little worried.

"Of course we might have expected that Gore and Mellish

and their set would make trouble if they could," said Digby.

"I suppose so. We—— Where are you going, Herries?"

"I'm going to feed my bulldog."

And Herries disappeared. He was uneasy about what might have happened to Towser in his absence; and no other matter was of quite as much importance to Herries.

"It's jolly good of Figgins to ask us to a feed on the evenin' of our weturn!" said D'Arcy. "I'll go and change my clothes."

And he followed Herries from the study.

"We've got the kid in here," said Tom Merry. "Those togs were all right for him to travel in, but they won't do for St. Jim's. He'll have to have a fresh rig-out. He is just about young Wally's size, and we shall have to have some of young Wally's clothes for him, that's all."

"Good wheeze!"

"Somebody go and find Wally, then. He's a good kid if he wasn't so cheeky, and I think he'll do all he can."

And Digby went to look for the hero of the Third. Meanwhile, Tom Merry & Co. consulted. As the highest Form 'Erbert could possibly think of going into was the Third, it was necessary to make a friend of Wally, so that he would have help there. There was another point which the juniors had overlooked till it was too late.

"He can't go by the name of 'Rags' here," said Blake.

'Erbert, unfortunately, had no surname—at least he was not aware of having one. He was called "'Erbert,' and he was nicknamed 'Rags,' and as yet in his career he had not experienced any need of a more definite appellation. It was different at St. Jim's. A boy without a surname to answer to would be a very noticeable anomaly there. The unfortunate part of it was that 'Erbert had already given his name as Rags to the fellows downstairs.

"He must have a name," said Tom Merry. "He can't be called Herbert Rags."

"Well, it would excite remark," grinned Lowther.

"Suppose we name him after his native city?" suggested Manners.

"Hum! Herbert Liverpool would sound—well, curious!"

"I have a suggestion to make," said Skimpole, blinking. "As I intend to inculcate in this worthy youth the precepts of Socialism, suppose we give him a name suitable for a Socialist—such as Liberty, or Equality——"

"Ha, ha, ha! Herbert Equality would make a stunning name!"

"Crikey!" said 'Erbert.

"Don't be an ass, Skimmy," said Tom Merry—"or, at all events, be a silent ass."

"Really, Merry——"

"We could name him Everton, after the football club," said Blake. "He comes from Liverpool, and Everton's in Liverpool."

"That's better! But—— What part of Liverpool were you born in, kid?"

'Erbert shook his head. He did not know.

"I've lived in Kirkdale," he said.

"Kirkdale!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "That's a jolly good name! We'll name him Kirkdale!"

"Good!"

"Do you like that all right, kid?"

"Yes, sir—I mean Merry."

"Good! Then you're Herbert Kirkdale from this moment. That's settled. Hallo! Here comes young Wally!"

Digby re-entered the study, accompanied by a youth about 'Erbert's size with a soiled collar and decidedly inky fingers. It was D'Arcy minor, the younger brother of the one and only Arthur Augustus—Wally, the scamp of the Third Form at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 4.

Wally Takes the New Boy Under His Wing!

WALLY looked suspiciously into the study. Digby's assurance that Tom Merry wanted to speak to him upon an important subject had not quite satisfied him. There was something of the Ishmael about the scamp of the Third, and he was generally in a state of expecting trouble.

"Hallo, I see you're back!" Wally remarked cheerfully. "My word! Who's that? Where did he dig up those clothes?"

"It's the new kid," said Tom Merry.

"New kid!" said Wally, staring at 'Erbert. "I heard there was a new kid coming, but I understood he was going into the Shell—chap named Glyn, the son of a millionaire engineer or something in Liverpool. Is this the chap?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"No. This is—is another chap. The fact is, he's a chap under our protection, and we're smuggling him into the school."

Wally whistled expressively

"My hat! What larks!"

Tom Merry was a little relieved. There was no telling how the scamp of the Third would take things; but Wally seemed to be taking this in the right spirit.

"We are trusting you with the secret, you see," he went on. "Of course, you'll keep it dark."

"Trust me!"

"Now, we want some of your togs; they'll about fit this kid. Of course, we'll stand the expense afterwards. Will you rig him out for us?"

Wally chuckled.

"You bet! My Aunt Jane! What a lark on the Head! There'll be a jolly row when it comes out!"

"Never mind that! Get the togs."

"The kid can come along with me to the Third Form," said Wally. "I'll rig him out. Come on, kid! Follow your uncle."

'Erbert looked at Tom Merry. Tom gave him a nod, and he followed Wally. The juniors looked at one another with satisfaction.

"This is going all right," said Blake. "Wally's a cheeky little beast, but he's a decent kid at times. I'm going to have a wash before going to the feed over in the New House."

"Pray take my regrets to Figgins," said Skimpole. "I shall not be able to come, as I am making up my notes on the journey. I have collected a great deal of valuable information for the three hundredth chapter of my great book on Socialism, and——"

But the juniors were gone, and Skimpole was talking to the desert air. The travellers had plenty of stains to remove after their long journey, and they were, as a matter of fact, fatigued, but a feed with Figgins was too good to be missed.

Considering that the juniors of the two Houses at St. Jim's were in a state of perpetual warfare, it was very good of Figgins to have provided a feed against the return of the School House youths.

Meanwhile, D'Arcy minor led his new charge upstairs. Wally was not much given to reflection, and at present he only saw in the whole matter a "lark" of the most gorgeous description. To introduce a fellow into the school, and palm him off on the authorities as a new boy, seemed to Wally the very creamiest of all possible jokes, and a horn of plenty, so to speak, from which endless fun would flow. And so Wally was inclined to be very good, at present, to his protege. But there were other fellows who had very different inclinations, and they watched the two boys going up to the dormitory with looks that meant mischief. Gore, making a sign to Mellish and some more of his set, followed.

'Erbert looked round him in wonder as he accompanied Wally. He had never been in a building so large and imposing as the School House at St. Jim's, with the exception of a church. The great staircase, the long, wide passages and endless studies, amazed and confused him. The crowds of boys, of all ages and sizes, most of them so well dressed, many elegant and dandified, interested and a little frightened him. When he entered the long, lofty dormitory, with its rows of white beds, he looked round him with wide-open eyes.

His evident wonder rather gratified Wally. It made him feel the importance of his position as cicerone.

"This is the Third Form dorm.," he explained.

"Crikey!" said 'Erbert.

He did not know what the Third Form was, nor what a dorm. was. Had he known that dorm. was short for dormitory, he would still have been just as much in the dark as to what the word meant.

"You look as if you want a wash," said Wally, pouring out some water into his washstand basin. "Here you are."

"So do you," said 'Erbert.

Wally looked at him, reddening.

"What did you say, kid?"

"I said so do you," replied 'Erbert sturdily.

"Look here, kid, if you want a thick ear, you'll get one jolly soon if you cheek me," said Wally impressively. "You mustn't make remarks about your elders. Just you buckle to and wash."

"Right y'ar!"

"My only Aunt Jane! Where did you learn to talk English?"

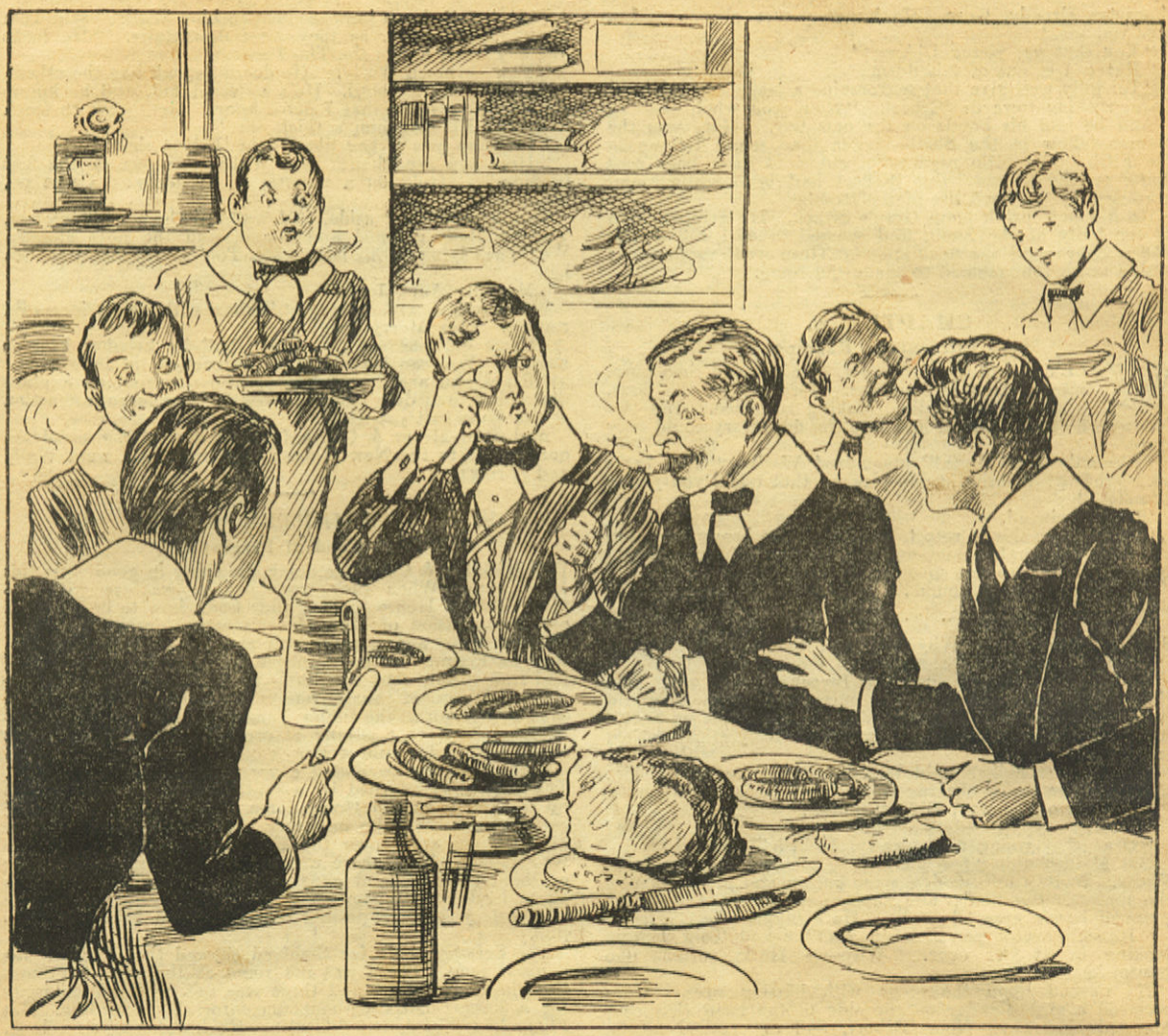
"In Green Alley."

"Where on earth's that?"

"Liverpool," said 'Erbert, somewhat nettled. "If my talk ain't good enough for you——"

"Oh, never mind! Get those togs off, and I'll get you some of mine."

'Erbert obeyed, and Wally selected his oldest clothes. Wally's clothes never were in a good condition of repair, even his best ones; but they were princely in out compared



"Golly, this 'ere is prime!" remarked 'Erbert appreciatively, jabbing his fork into the sausage, and lifting it bodily from the plate.

with the ready-made garments at present worn by 'Erbert. The latter were stripped off, and 'Erbert donned an Eton suit, rather baggy at the knees, and shiny at the elbows. But that suit, with a clean shirt and a clean collar, with an extra wash for his face, worked wonders in his appearance. Save for its thinness, due to want of food, 'Erbert's face was quite as good to look at as the average face at St. Jim's. His hair, which had never apparently known comb or brush, was more difficult to deal with, but Wally offered to comb it out. 'Erbert shrieked as he did it, but Wally kept on without mercy, and the new boy set his teeth and bore the pain grimly.

Wally was still combing out the unruly locks, when the dormitory door opened, and Gore & Co. looked in. They stared in silently for some seconds, in amazement, and then a loud laugh warned Wally that he was observed.

He turned his head.

"What do you rotters want in a Third Form-room?" he demanded. "Clear, can't you!"

"We've come to see your young friend," said Gore, grinning. "My hat! Are you dressing him in your old clothes?"

"Mind your own business."

"Look at his things!" said Mellish, pointing to the garments lying on the floor. "Did you ever see anything like that?"

Wally picked up the discarded clothes, put them into his box, and locked it. Then he glared defiance at the juniors.

"Get out, you rotters! Your chivvies get on my nerves."

"No fear!" said Gore. "Come in, you chaps! This is a good opportunity for talking to the new chap. I don't know what little game Tom Merry is playing, but I know jolly well that this fellow isn't a new boy for St. Jim's."

"I rather think not," said Crofton. "Rather too much of the gutter about him."

"He talks as if he had just been dug out of a kennel," said Mellish. "Blessed if I know where Tom Merry got him from."

"We'll soon see!" exclaimed Sharp. "What's your name, kid?"

"'Erbert!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I suppose you mean Herbert?"

"No, I don't," said 'Erbert sturdily; "I means 'Erbert."

"Ha, ha, ha! What's the rest of your name?"

'Erbert was about to say "Rags," but he remembered the new name that had been bestowed upon him by his adopted parents in Tom Merry's study.

"Kirkdale!" he said.

"He told me his name was Rags!" exclaimed Gore.

"He's a young liar," said Mellish.

'Erbert's eyes flashed.

"'Oo yer callin'?" he exclaimed. "If you call me, you'll get a lifter under the ear, jolly quick, and don't you forget it."

"Nice language!" said Gore sarcastically.

"And you too!" exclaimed 'Erbert. "You can't come it over me. You can't take me in. You ain't a gentleman like Tom Merry."

Gore turned crimson, and he was not pleased, either, by the chuckle that escaped from his own followers. Wally grinned.

"My only Aunt Jane!" he exclaimed. "He's got your

character already, Gore. He knows you're a snob and a pig, you see."

"You shut up, young D'Arcy!"

"Rats! Get out of this dorm!"

"I'll jolly well give that guttersnipe a lesson!" exclaimed Gore, rushing towards 'Erbert. "Now, you whelp——"

And he laid his hands on the new boy. Gore was the biggest fellow in the Shell—bigger than many fellows in the Fifth. The little ragamuffin ought to have been sent flying on the instant. But 'Erbert had been trained and hardened by the hard life of the streets.

He did not shrink from Gore's attack. He gripped hold of the bully of the Shell, and seemed to curl round him like a tiger; and the next moment Gore went to the floor with a crash that seemed to shake the room.

CHAPTER 5.

An Interrupted Ragging.

WALLY stared for a moment, amazed, and then burst into a shout of laughter. Gore lay on the floor, where he had fallen, looking stupefied. And the fellows who had followed him into the dormitory could only stare.

"My only Aunt Jane!" murmured Wally. "This beats cock-fighting! Where did you pick up that trick, you young bounder?"

'Erbert grinned.

George Gore slowly rose to his feet. The heavy bump on the floor had shaken him up, and he was aching in every bone. But he was not so much hurt as he was angry.

"You—you young hound!" he gasped. "I'll—I'll teach you!"

"You lemme alone," said 'Erbert defiantly; "I ain't done nothing to you. Why can't you leave a cove alone?"

"Yes, I'll leave you alone, when I've pulverised you."

And Gore advanced upon the Liverpool lad, more cautiously this time. He hit out in earnest, and now it would have fared hard with 'Erbert, who of course was no match for a fellow nearly twice his size. But D'Arcy minor rushed to his aid.

"You rotten bully!" said Wally, squaring up. "Let him alone, or else tackle the two of us."

"Get out of the way, D'Arcy minor!"

"Rats!"

"Drag that young whelp away, Mellish!" howled Gore.

But Mellish didn't feel inclined to tackle the redoubtable Wally. Wally's left-handers were known and feared among the juniors. But Sharp and Crofton ran forward, and two pairs of hands grasped Wally. He struggled fiercely.

"Hallo, haven't you finished yet?" asked Tom Merry, looking in at the door. "Why—— Hallo, what's the matter here?"

He dashed upon the scene with blazing eyes. Gore received a right-hander on the side of the head that sent him spinning away from 'Erbert, and he crashed into a washstand and fell. There was another crash as the washstand reeled, and the basin went to the floor. It was the basin 'Erbert had washed in, and it was still full of water. Gore gave a fiendish yell as the flood of soapy water descended upon him, soaking his face and chest and blinding him for a moment.

"Crikey!" gasped 'Erbert. "He, he, he! Look at him!"

Tom Merry laughed, too. Gore, as he struggled up, streaming with soapy water, was a curious sight. He was spluttering furiously as he pressed his hand to his head, singing from Tom Merry's blow.

The other raggers promptly drew back. Ragging a couple of fags was a very different matter from tackling Tom Merry when his blood was up.

"You cads!" cried Tom hotly. "I might have guessed you would be up to something of this sort. You cads!"

"Why did you bring a workhouse brat here, then?" sneered Mellish. "I suppose you didn't expect us to chum up with him?"

"I didn't expect you to; you're not likely to chum up with anybody decent," said Tom Merry scornfully. "Look here, this kid is under my protection, and anybody who touches him will have to settle it with me. You understand that?"

"Oh, take him under your wing if you like! He'll have a pretty warm time, all the same, if he really stays at St. Jim's."

Tom Merry did not answer. He felt that Mellish's words were true, and for the moment he felt a great misgiving. He had meant to do his best for 'Erbert—but had he been right in setting the lad such a thorny path to follow?

But it was no use thinking of that now. Tom Merry put his hand through the boy's arm, and led him from the dormitory. Wally followed with his hands in his pockets, whistling, stopping at the door a moment to make an irritating grimace at Gore.

"You've made an improvement in him, Wally," said Tom Merry approvingly, as they went downstairs. "He looks like any other kid in the Third now."

"Yes," grinned Wally. "He doesn't speak like the others, but that's only a detail. He's a decent kid, and he knows a trick in wrestling that I don't know. He'll have to teach it me, or I'll give him a thick ear."

"I'll show you if you like," said 'Erbert simply.

"Here you are, then!" said Wally, stopping on the first landing. "Hold on a minute, Tom Merry! Come on, Kirkdale!"

Tom Merry stood aside, and watched them with interest. The two lads gripped and closed, and the next moment Wally was lying on his back, even Tom Merry could not see how.

"My only Aunt Jane!"

Wally rose slowly, looking at 'Erbert with visibly increased respect. Tom Merry laughed.

"Come on," he said, "or we shall be keeping Figgins waiting. You can leave further instruction till later."

"Right you are!" said Wally, who was rubbing a place that ached, and didn't feel inclined for any more instruction of the same sort just then.

And Tom Merry & Co., a few minutes later, crossed the quadrangle to the New House; and with them went Wally and 'Erbert.

CHAPTER 6.

A Feed at Figgins's.

FIGGINS & CO. were doing the thing in good style this time. When they were not at warfare with the School House juniors, they knew how to be friendly, and the occasion of Tom Merry's return from an absence of some days was a very good one for an amicable feed. And as Figgins & Co. happened to be in funds, they had laid in a supply that was likely to do their study credit.

Fatty Wynn, of course, was in his element. Fatty was a cook of renown in the junior Forms, and his greatest happiness was to have a supply of comestibles that gave him a really free and ample scope.

Figgins's study presented a very cheery aspect just now. The table was adorned by a spotless white cloth, obtained by coaxing from the House-dame. There was an array of cutlery that was quite imposing. It had been borrowed on all sides up and down the Fourth Form passage in the New House. Then there was a stack of plates, only a few of them cracked, and cups and saucers galore. Fourth Form feeds usually showed a "plentiful lack" of crockery and cutlery, but the present occasion was a brilliant exception.

The arrangements for the feed showed that Figgins was a great man. There was not room at the table for more than half his guests, and there was not room in the study for a dozen chairs without uncomfortable crowding. But Figgy had solved that difficulty. He had borrowed a long, narrow form, and set it along the wall in the study, the bookcase being placed temporarily outside in the corridor.

The form offered seating accommodation for seven or eight, and a small table was there to support the teacups and saucers, and the feasters could take their plates upon their knees. In case trousers should be soiled or spoiled by this device, Figgins had provided serviettes—an utterly unknown and unprecedented detail in junior feeds. But there they were—eight of them—snowy white table-napkins of excellent quality. They had been borrowed from the House-dame, without the formality of asking permission. As Figgins said, they could be returned after the feed, and no one would be the wiser. Kerr had his doubts as to whether a Fourth Form feed mightn't leave some very plain traces on the serviettes, but he would not say a word to make Figgins dissatisfied with his scheme. Besides, all three of the New House juniors were sensible of the effect that the serviettes would be bound to produce on their guests.

Although it was a truce now between the School House and the New House, Figgins & Co. were not debarred from getting one ahead, so to speak, in a quiet way. And the serviettes would make the School House fellows open their eyes.

There was a pleasant smell of cooking in the study—pleasant, at all events, to juniors who were hungry. Fatty Wynn was turning out the sausages from the frying-pan into a large flat dish, resting on the fender to keep warm before the glowing fire. The sausages were the best that could be obtained for love or money, and they were cooked in the way that only Fatty Wynn could cook sausages.

Figgins and Kerr felt their mouths water as they looked at them. They were so beautifully browned and crisped, that they would have made a vegetarian forswear his diet.

"My word, Fatty," said Figgins, in a tone of awed admiration, "you can cook! Blessed if I ever knew anybody give sausages the artistic finish you give 'em!"

"Right!" said Kerr emphatically. "When it comes to cooking, especially sausages, I put my money on Fatty Wynn. Fatty Wynn against the field!"

And Fatty smiled a gratified smile.

"Well, I must say I think my cooking is up to the mark," he said modestly, "and I admit I take a pride in the way I fry sausages. It's an art. But it's a real pleasure to cook for chaps who can appreciate a good thing. There's some chaps who don't care how a thing's cooked, so long as they can eat it. I believe that if a thing's worth doing at all it's worth doing well."

"Yes, rather!" said Figgins, looking at his watch. "It's time for those chaps to be here. I think we've arranged the study nicely. There's room for everybody, and nobody will have to stand."

"And enough crockery for everybody to have his tea at once," said Kerr, with much satisfaction. "I call that ripping!"

"And more'n enough grub to go round," said Fatty Wynn, with a beatific smile. "Don't you worry about serving me. You two look after the guests. I've had a few of the sausages to stay my appetite, so that I can wait, and I can make up afterwards. There will be lots left. I think this feed will be a success."

There was a tap at the door.

"Shove the kettle on to boil, Fatty; they're here! Come in!"

The door opened, and Tom Merry looked in. He wore a clean collar and a cheerful smile. Figgins grinned at him amiably.

"Come in, you fellows, we're all ready!"

"Right-ho! I say, this is stunning!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"This way, Kirkdale; you sit here with me," said Tom Merry, as Figgins grandly showed him to a seat of honour at the table.

"Yes, sir," said 'Erbert—"I mean yes, Merry."

'Erbert was looking a little scared. If Figgins & Co. had taken special notice of him, he would have been discomfited utterly. But Figgins & Co. had too much tact to do that. They simply included him in the general greeting to the whole party, and addressed no especial remark to him. 'Erbert, finding that he was not taken notice of, began to recover his courage.

Tom Merry himself was a little uneasy about his protege. "Table manners" had been as much neglected in 'Erbert's education as geography and history. In the streets the little ragamuffin had been accustomed to eat and drink in an exceedingly free-and-easy way, and it was a delicate subject to approach in giving hints. Tom intended to keep his protege under his own fatherly eye, and he sat down with the new boy at his side. Arthur Augustus sat down on 'Erbert's other side, and the three filled up one side of the table. D'Arcy's idea was that 'Erbert could keep an eye on him, and by having such a perfect model before him, could see exactly what to do, and avoid bringing remark upon himself. It was possible, however, that 'Erbert did not understand what was expected of him.

Manners, Lowther, Digby, Herries, and Kerr occupied the form at the side of the room. Blake and Wally and Figgins sat down at the table opposite Tom Merry, 'Erbert, and D'Arcy. Fatty Wynn did not sit down at all. He was too busy looking after the provisions to have time to eat any, and he had already disposed of enough for three ordinary persons by way of a snack.

"There's the tea, Figgy!"

And Wynn handed up a huge pot, borrowed from below stairs. It held over a gallon, and Figgins had to be very careful with it. All the guests, of course, laboured to help, passing cups and saucers and comestibles round. Figgins poured out cup after cup, till the huge teapot was nearly empty, and it was handed to Fatty Wynn to be refilled from the steaming kettle.

Fatty Wynn passed round the plates of hot sausages and poached eggs, and Kerr backed him up with the bread-and-butter. The serviettes were spread over the knees of trousers, the guests making no remark on the subject, but evidently much impressed. One of the serviettes was handed to 'Erbert by Kerr, who wanted the new boy to feel that he was treated with as much care as the others; and as there were not enough to go all round, this was really a mark of distinction. It was a mark of distinction, however, that poor 'Erbert would have been happier without. For the street arab did not know the use of the square of shining cloth, and he took it and turned it over in his hands in dismay. It was here that Tom Merry's fatherly care came quietly to the rescue. He unobtrusively took the serviette and spread it over 'Erbert's knees, everybody making it a point not to observe him doing so; and poor 'Erbert, unaccustomed to anything like breeding in his surroundings, imagined that they really did not observe anything. Fatty Wynn placed a generously-loaded plate before him, and as the feast was commencing on all sides, 'Erbert started. His method of starting was peculiar. He took his fork in his right hand, jabbed it into the sausage, and lifted the latter bodily from the plate, and began to eat it at one end.

"My word!" murmured Digby.

Tom Merry turned pink.

This would never do at the common table in the dining-hall of the School House; but 'Erbert, who was hungry, did not think of looking to see what Tom Merry was doing, and he munched away at his sausage with great contentment.

Then the silence, which was rather painful at that moment in the study, was broken by 'Erbert's appreciative voice.

"Golly! This 'ere is prime!"

The juniors would have given anything to laugh—at the same time, nothing would have induced them to do so. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was extremely nice, not to say fastidious, in his eating, replied to the remark without the quiver of a muscle.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I ain't never tasted anything so prime," said 'Erbert, confidentially. "This 'ere is better'n——"

He was going to say that it was better than the crusts and bones that had formed his habitual diet in the streets of Liverpool, but he remembered Tom Merry's caution to keep his eyes open and his mouth shut—in time.

He left off in the middle of the remark, therefore, and used his eyes instead of his tongue.

Then the red burned in his cheeks for a moment, and the half-gnawed sausage was replaced upon the plate. The little ragamuffin began to use his knife and fork. Arthur Augustus smiled with satisfaction.

'Erbert travelled through the sausages and poached eggs without more mishaps. But when he had finished he pushed his plate away, and poured his tea into the saucer to cool it. He took the saucer in both hands, and swamped the tea into his mouth. It was hot—and 'Erbert gave a yell.

"Oh, crikey!"

The saucer of hot tea was jerked away from his scalded mouth, and Arthur Augustus echoed the yell as it swamped over his beautiful trousers.

He leaped to his feet, and his elbow caught 'Erbert on the side of the head, and 'Erbert bumped against Tom Merry, on his other side, and Tom Merry, who was just raising his cup to his lips, bestowed the contents upon his shirt-front instead of his mouth.

"Oh! Ow!"

"Crikey!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus mopped his knees with his handkerchief. His trousers were slopped, and for a moment he regretted that he had not left 'Erbert in Green Alley.

"Oh, crumbs!" said 'Erbert. "I'm sorry—I'm norful sorry!"

"Bai Jove! My twousahs are wuined!"

"I'm norful sorry!" The tears stood in 'Erbert's eyes. "The tea was so 'ot, you know——"

"Never mind," said Tom Merry, mopping his chest with his serviette—a proceeding which was viewed with silent agony by Figgins, who wondered what Mrs. Kenwigg would think of that serviette when she saw it again. "Never mind, kid; sit down."

"Yaas, wathah! It's of—of no consequence whatevah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I ain't fit to be with you," said 'Erbert. "Look 'ere——"

"Shut up!" said Blake.

And 'Erbert shut up. The feed continued, and 'Erbert ate hardly anything more, though he could easily have done so—and drank no more tea. He was painfully on the alert not to transgress now—and so evidently so that his adopted fathers were discomfited more by that than by the spilt tea.

All the same, the guests made a very pleasant tea in Figgins's study, and the feed was voted a stunning success. Every face was contented, even D'Arcy's, when he had once made up his mind to the spoiling of his trousers. And when no one could be prevailed upon to have another bun, or another tart, or another cup of tea, the table was cleared by the simple process of stacking the remains of the eatables and all the cutlery and crockery into the cupboard, to be sorted and returned to the various owners later. But the evening's entertainment was not over. Figgins & Co., as we have said, were doing the thing in style. Fatty Wynn produced chestnuts, and proceeded to roast them, and Figgins with a slight blush proposed a "little music," and the School House chums gasped and assented.

CHAPTER 7.
A Little Music

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY beamed. If anything could have made him forget that a pair of his best trousers were "wuined" it was the proposal to have a little music. For Arthur Augustus had lately made the important discovery that he had a remarkably fine tenor voice, and his singing practice of late had been energetic and incessant. Disrespectful fags had named him "Caruso II.," and fellows had sent him an old dog's muzzle by post, and others had offered to get up a subscription to buy him a gag.

But Arthur Augustus was not deterred by trifles like that. As there was no piano at the disposal of the juniors, he had armed himself with a tuning-fork, and with that, and a knowledge of tonic sol-fa, he was always able to get into his key. He was not always able to keep in it, when he had once got there, but that was a detail. As D'Arcy said, even a remarkable tenor like himself could not expect to equal Caruso or Tamagno at first; and D'Arcy certainly didn't equal them.

Most of the juniors could sing—or, at all events were satisfied that they could, regardless of grave doubts expressed upon the subject by their friends—and some of them could play various instruments. Kerr, who was one of those youths who can do nearly everything, and do it well, was a great hand with the violin, and more like Kubelik than D'Arcy was like Caruso. Figgins had recently invested in a 'cello, and he played the "Broken Melody" upon it—more broken than the composer had ever intended. Some said that he did not equal Van Biene, but Monty Lowther declared that it was quite a bieno to hear him—a pun that was unanimously declared to be worse than Figgins's 'cello-playing, which was saying a great deal.

Herries had his cornet, but his hosts had unaccountably forgotten to ask him to bring it over with him. But that was only a trifle. Herries was quite willing to run over to the School House for his cornet.

"I've been thinking," said Figgins modestly, "of starting a musical society in the Fourth, and getting up an orchestra. It would be ripping for us all to play something, and learn to play in tune——"

"You'll have a hard row to hoe, old chap!" said Manners.

"I wasn't speaking of myself," said Figgins, glaring at Manners. "I was speaking of all of us. You chaps know how I play the 'cello."

"We do," said Blake, in a tone that might have meant anything. Figgins went on hastily.

"Well, I think it's a good idea to begin with a musical evening. Suppose every chap does what he can, and——"

"Good!" said Herries. "I'll run over for my cornet."

"Your—your cornet," said Figgins, with a sickly smile.

Herries' cornet was the worst-hated instrument in the school. Even the New House could hear its wild and whirling strains when Herries was practising in Study No. 6, with the window open.

"Certainly!" said Herries cheerily. "You've never heard me play the Toreador song from 'Carmen' as a cornet solo, have you?"

"N-n-n-no."

"Then I'll give you that this evening. I sha'n't be a few minutes."

"Bring my mouth-organ with you, Herries!" called out Blake.

Herries paused.

"I don't know where it is," he said.

"It's in the cupboard, beside the ink-bottle."

"Oh—er—all right! But perhaps Figgins——"

"Would you like Herries to bring my mouth-organ, Figgy?" asked Blake, looking directly at the chief of the New House juniors.

"Oh, yes, rather," said Figgins, with a heartiness that was perhaps a little overdone.

"That's right," said Blake, as Herries disappeared. "We shall all be able to do something to contribute to the harmony of the evening. That's what I like about Figgy—nothing mean about him. No getting fellows into his study for a musical evening, and then taking up the whole show himself."

Figgins & Co. exchanged uncomfortable glances.

"Certainly not," said D'Arcy, unsuspiciously. "You could not suspect Figgins of actin' in such a wotten way. Of course, evewy gentleman pwesent will contwibute an item to the pwogwamme."

"Of—of course," said Figgins.

"That's the—the idea," said Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah! I shall be happy to contwibute a tenah solo. What are you goin' to give, Tom Mewwy?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"If you like, I will give a second tenah-solo, and save you the twouble of singin'," suggested the swell of the School House.

"No you won't," said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"'Nuff's as good as a feast. Tom Merry can give us a football song. It's a pity that Lowther can't sing, but——"

"Is it?" said Lowther, glaring. "I can sing better than some silly asses I know."

"I don't think you ought to speak of Figgins & Co. like that when they're——"

"You—you—— I wasn't speaking of Figgins——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't mind giving you a solo," said Lowther. "Manners has about as much ear for music as a guinea-pig. Are you going to give us anything, Figgins?"

Figgins turned pink.

"I was thinking of giving you the 'Broken Melody' on the 'cello."

"Oh—er—good! We shall—shall enjoy that."

"I think I play it pretty well," said Figgins modestly. "I suppose we may as well start with the 'cello."

Figgins turned towards the huge case standing in the corner, and so did not see the looks that followed his remark. Blake rose hastily.

"That duffer Herries is a long time finding the mouth-organ," he said. "I'll run across and help him look for it. Don't wait for me."

And he left the study. Figgins opened the case and produced the violoncello. The juniors placed themselves in attitudes of attention as he prepared to start. He was some time beginning, and exactly where the Broken Melody started the audience did not know. As for the end, for a long time it seemed as though it would have no end. But Figgins left off at last, and there was a round of applause. Whether the applause was for playing the piece, or for leaving off, we cannot say.

The applause had died away when Blake and Herries came in with the mouth-organ and the cornet. Kerr was ready with his violin, and Fatty Wynn with his Welsh song; but they felt it would not be the correct thing to go straight ahead. One of the guests was politely requested to do a turn, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy accepted the invitation.

"I shall be vewy pleased, Figgins, deah boy——"

"More than we shall!" murmured Lowther.

"Did you speak, Lowthah?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Vewy good! As you are aware, Figgins, I am a tenah, and I can sing wippin' tenah solos fwom memowy. As there is no piano, you will excuse me if I use a tunin'-fork to get my note."

"Oh, certainly!" said Figgins.

"I'll give you your note on the mouth-organ, if you like," Blake offered.

But Arthur Augustus did not even deign to reply to this kind offer.

He extracted the tuning-fork—his inseparable companion—from his pocket, and struck it on the mantelpiece. It gave forth a sonorous A. D'Arcy listened to it with his head cocked a little on one side in a very businesslike way.

"That's wight! I am goin' to sing the 'Steersman's Song' fwom the 'Flying Dutchman,'" he said, beaming round upon the company, who tried to look delighted, and failed dismally. "I have studied that song vewy much, and can sing without any accompaniment——"

"I don't mind accompanying you on the cornet," said Herries.

"That's a good idea!" said Figgins heartily, with the idea of getting the tenor solo and the cornet solo over at the same time.

"Not at all, deah boy! I cannot sing to Hewwies's accompaniment. You need not bothah, Hewwies. You will excuse me while I get my note, won't you?"

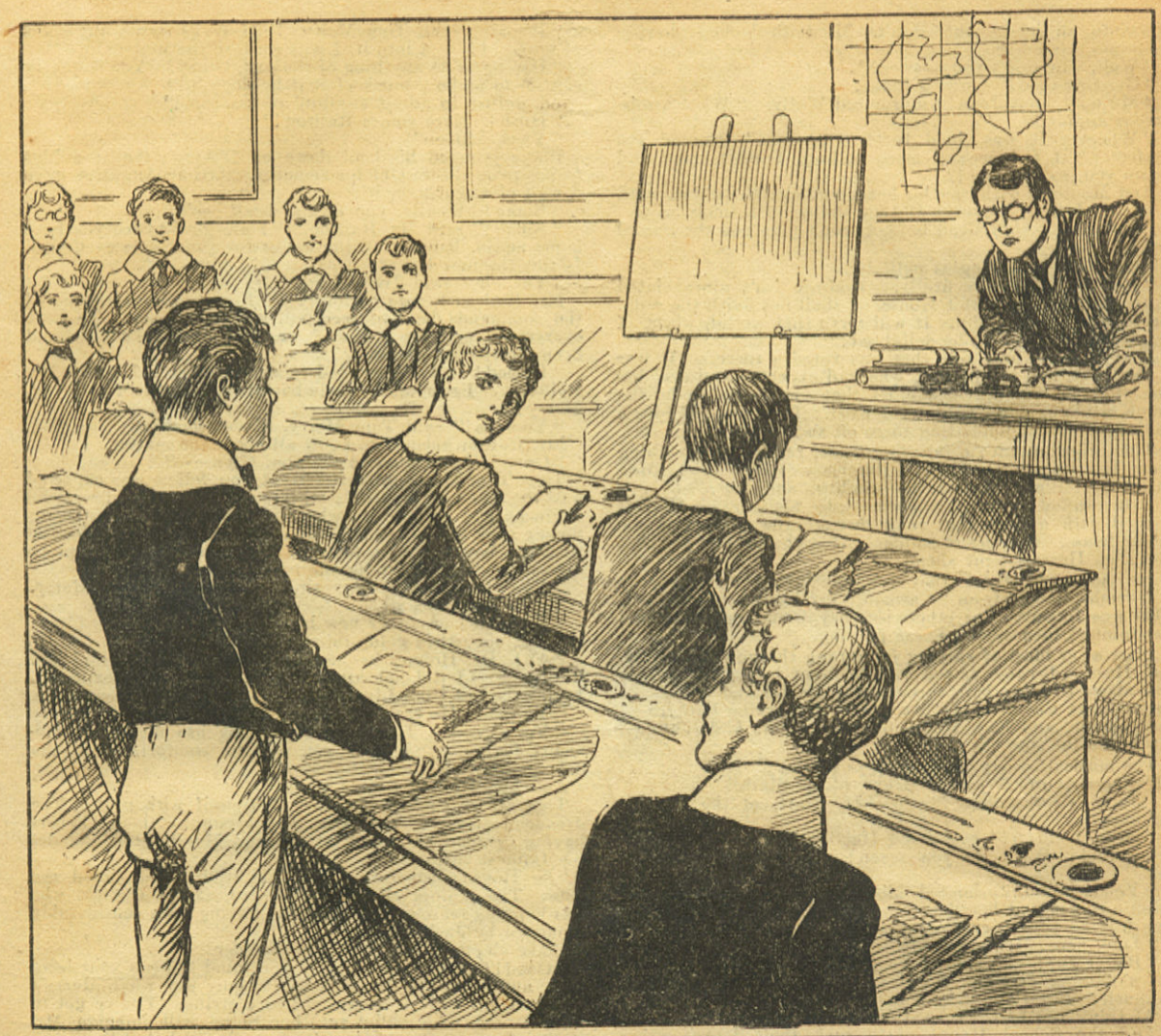
They would willingly have excused him altogether, but they did not say so. They listened with polite grins—'Erbert with blank amazement—while Arthur Augustus got his note. 'Erbert had never seen a tuning-fork before, and D'Arcy's proceedings were a great mystery to him.

The amateur Caruso assumed a thoughtful expression as he struck the fork again, jammed the stump on the mantelpiece, and listened to the sonorous buzz.

"Let me see. The thing begins on the dominant," he murmured. "As you don't undahstand these mattahs, Herbert Wags, I may explain that the dominant is the fifth note of the scale. The song is in B flat, and so the dominant would be F, wouldn't it?"

"Crikey!" said 'Erbert. "Blessed if I know!"

"Well, you may take my word for it. Now, aftah stwikin' A, I can get F by tweatin' the A as the 'Me' of the tonic sol-fa scale, and going down fwom 'Me' to 'Doh.' The Doh in that case will be F, and that's the note I want. You undahstand?"



"Boy, how dare you deliberately drop an aspirate in speaking to me!" exclaimed the Form-master harshly. 'Erbert looked first at the desk and then at the floor. "I ain't dropped nothin'," he said, looking puzzled.

"Crikey!"

And Arthur Augustus sang F. Having now settled on his note—though Kerr said he was flat, and Digby that he was sharp—Arthur Augustus started on the solo.

The "Steersman's Song" was certainly a ripping song, and worthy of a tenor's best efforts, but it is doubtful if D'Arcy did it justice.

D'Arcy, of course, sang it in the original. He was strong on German. Various expressions were visible on the faces of the juniors as he began:

"'Mit Gewitter und Sturm aus fernem Meer,
Mein Madel, bin dir nah.
Uber thurmhohe Fluth vom Suden her,
Mein Madel, ich bin da!'"

At this point Arthur Augustus forgot his German, and went on unconsciously in English:

"'My maiden were there no south wind,
I never could come to thee.
O fair south wind, to me be kind,
My maiden she longs for me.'"

So far, so good. The variation in the languages made the juniors grin, but no bones were broken yet, so to speak. 'Erbert looked on in open-mouthed admiration. A chap who could get up and sing in a foreign language was an amazing revelation to 'Erbert. D'Arcy's wonderful clothes and manners had greatly impressed 'Erbert from the beginning. Now his feeling amounted to hero-worship.

But the chorus was to come yet. Blake, who happened to know that there was a top B flat in it, waited with a lurking grin. Nothing would convince D'Arcy that he couldn't get a top B flat when he was in form. Nothing would convince him that his voice wasn't a tenor, and a first-class one.

He began the next "lap" with a smile of calm confidence.

"'Ho-yo-ho, hallo-ho-ho, hallo-ho-ho-ho!
Ho-yo-ho, hallo-ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho-o-o-o, ho—o!'"

The last "O" was the top B flat.

Arthur Augustus threw all his efforts into that top B flat, and it came out a yell that ended in a cracking gasp.

Blake crammed his handkerchief into his mouth, Figgins turned away his head, Lowther drowned a giggle by turning it into a cough. Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye and looked round complacently.

"That's the first verse," he said. "The next——"

He was interrupted. The door was opened, and Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, put his head in. Monteith was looking angry.

"What the dickens is this row about?"

"Weally, Monteith——"

"I've no objection to you youngsters having some fun," said Monteith, "and I don't mind any singing practice; but you can't expect fellows in the same passage to stand that row. What was that yelling just now?"

The juniors sat and gasped. D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the prefect with a glance that ought to have frozen

him into an icicle, but didn't. Monteith looked sharply from one to another.

"Well, why don't you answer?"

"Ger-r-r-r-rooo!" gurgled Blake.

"My only Aunt Jane!" murmured Wally. "What a misunderstanding!"

"Whoever it was, he'd better ring off!" grunted the prefect. "If I hear any more yelling, I shall come and warm you, so look out!"

And Monteith withdrew his head, and closed the door with a bang. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy smiled in a sickly way.

"Upon weflection, deah boys, I won't give you the second verse."

"Oh, do!" said Figgins politely.

"No!" said D'Arcy firmly. "Music isn't appweciated in the seniah part of this House. I shall not finish the song. Let's have Kerr's violin. It will serve that wottah wight—I—I mean, we shall all be delighted!"

Kerr gave a violin solo that was voted a success. It was a short one, and the juniors, who had expected and dreaded one of those long-drawn agonies that sometimes go by the name of violin solos, applauded Kerr. They thought him a jolly good fellow for letting them off so lightly.

Then Figgins, with a faltering voice, requested something from Herries on the cornet. Herries was only too willing to oblige. Blake opened the window, and Kerr surreptitiously stuffed some cotton-wool into his ears. Herries started with a blast that rang through the study and the whole house. It came so suddenly that the juniors jumped, and then Herries went ahead.

He had told them that he was going to play the "Toreador Song" from "Carmen," arranged for the cornet. This was fortunate, as otherwise they would not have had the faintest idea what he was playing.

Blast after blast of varying force rang through the House, and Herries became as red as a beetroot in the face. He was about a dozen bars through the fearful and wonderful performance when there was a sound of hurrying footsteps in the passage, and New House fellows—seniors and juniors—burst into the study.

The musical society jumped up in alarm.

"Stop that row!" roared Baker, of the Sixth.

"Jump on the thing!" shrieked Pratt, of the Fourth. "Smash it!"

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Herries. "Don't you touch my cornet! What do you mean? I'm playing a cornet solo."

"You're what?" shouted Monteith. "I give you one minute to get that horrible thing out of the House, before I smash it on your head!"

"Look here, Monteith——"

"Better cut!" whispered Tom Merry. "Thanks awfully for a ripping evening, Figgins! We've enjoyed ourselves so much! But I think we'd better cut now."

"I think you had!" roared Monteith.

And the School House party took their leave—rather hurriedly. Herries, speechless with indignation, marched off with his cornet under his arm. Figgins & Co. grinned at one another. The party had been rather abruptly broken up, but they had been saved from hearing the rest of Herries's cornet solo, and that was a blessing they felt very thankful for.

CHAPTER 8.

Passing the Rubicon.

MR. RAILTON, the House-master of the School House, paused, and nursed his chin in his hand. A crowd of juniors were entering the House—they were Tom Merry & Co. coming back from their visit to Figgins. Among them was 'Erbert, and Mr. Railton, who never forgot a face, knew that he had never seen 'Erbert before.

Tom Merry saw the House-master stop, and his gaze fall upon 'Erbert. He paused before the House notice-board, and affecting to read it, he spoke in a low tone to 'Erbert.

"Kirkdale, listen to me, and don't jaw!"

"Yes, sir—I mean, Merry!"

"That chap yonder is our House-master, Mr. Railton. Don't look at him, or he'll guess something. He's going to speak to you."

"Wot-ho!" murmured 'Erbert.

"Don't say more than you can help when he questions you. Your name is Kirkdale, and you're a new boy, going into the Third. Say that, and nothing else, and he'll think it's been fixed by the other masters. See?"

"I twig!"

"Mind you don't say anything more than that, kid!" said Tom Merry, in an agony of apprehension as to what 'Erbert might say now that the critical moment had come.

"You kin trust me, sir—I mean, Merry!"

"It's all wight, Tom Mewwy! If Wags shows any signs of puttin' his foot into it, I will wush to the wescue!"

"Don't you do anything of the sort, Gussy! You're pretty certain to make a muck of it if he doesn't!"

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort!"

"Hush! Here comes Railton!"

"Yaas, but——"

Blake jammed his boot down on D'Arcy's toe as a hint to postpone the rest of his remarks. Arthur Augustus gave a wail of anguish.

"Blake! Weally, you bwutal beast——"

"Ahem!" said Mr. Railton. "I am glad to see you boys home again, looking all the better for your little excursion. Is this the new boy?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

Mr. Railton looked curiously at 'Erbert, who remembered the commands he had received, and was silent. To hear everything and say "nowt" was not hard to a cute and keen North-country lad.

"Indeed! I had expected to see an older lad," said Mr. Railton. "I suppose he came back from Liverpool with you, Merry?"

"Yee-e-es!" said Tom Merry, almost gasping.

Mr. Railton seemed to know all about the matter.

"Good! I am glad to see you, Glyn——"

Then Tom Merry understood. A new fellow was expected into the Shell at St. Jim's—the son of a wealthy Liverpool engineer and shipowner, who was retiring to an estate in Sussex near the old school. Mr. Railton had been informed that the boy was to come into the School House, and he evidently took 'Erbert for the new junior.

"This—this isn't Glyn, sir," stammered Tom Merry. "This is Kirkdale, sir."

"Kirkdale! Another new boy?"

"Yes, sir. He's going into the Third."

"Ah! Dr. Holmes has not informed me of it," said Mr. Railton. "I did not know two new boys were expected. Is this the lad from Liverpool?"

"Yes, sir. He travelled down with us."

"Very good! I suppose Mr. Selby has made arrangements for him. I hope you will be comfortable in the School House, Kirkdale."

And Mr. Railton turned away.

Tom Merry could have hugged himself with glee. The dreaded interview had been got through without 'Erbert having to open his mouth at all, and Mr. Railton had not the faintest suspicion.

The House-master went into his study, and closed the door. The juniors all looked satisfied, except D'Arcy, who was hopping on one foot, the other having been considerably damaged by Jack Blake.

Blake slapped 'Erbert on the shoulder.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "If you mind to keep your head shut, and when you have to speak, only say what Merry's told you, all will go as straight as a string. You've got to have it out with Selby yet, but Selby will imagine Mr. Railton has put you in the Third, so it will be all O. K."

"Who's Mr. Selby?" asked 'Erbert.

"The master of the Third. Look here, kids, we may as well take the bull by the horns in this matter. Kirkdale ought to go in and see Selby at once, and then he can take his place in the ordinary way in the Third to-morrow morning."

"Yaas, wathah! I will take him in to Mr. Selby's study. A fellow with tact and judgment is wequired in a mattah like this."

"I think I'd better do it," said Blake. "You see, you're bound to put your foot in it, and Selby's a suspicious beast."

"Wats! I shall manage it all wight——"

"I'll take him in," said Tom Merry. "I'm the oldest, and I ought to do it. Besides, I've got more sense than you Fourth Form kids——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"And you can come in and interrupt us, Blake, before Selby can ask questions," said Tom, struck by a brilliant idea. "I'll leave the door ajar so that you can hear us jaw, and seize the right moment."

"Bai Jove, that's a wippin' wheeze!"

"Good!" said Blake. "I'll do it!"

Tom Merry led 'Erbert away towards Mr. Selby's study. The master of the Third Form was not a pleasant gentleman, and nobody liked interviewing him in his study. He suffered from indigestion, and the redness of his nose was a danger-signal well known in the Third Form-room. He did not look amiable when he snappishly bade the juniors come in when Tom Merry tapped at his door.

"Who is this?" he said sharply.

"The new boy, sir."

"New boy! I don't know anything about a new boy. Is he in my Form?"

"Yes, sir; he's for the Third," said Tom Merry glibly.

"He's come with us from Liverpool to-day, sir. He's just seen Mr. Railton."

"Very good! If Mr. Railton says he is to go into the Third there is no need for me to examine him. What is your name, boy?"

"Kirkdale, sir."

"What was your Form at your last school?"

This question would have been a difficult one for 'Erbert to reply to, but he was not put to the test. Jack Blake bumped against the door from without, and fell into the study with a crash.

Mr. Selby jumped up.

"Blake! How dare you?"

"Sorry, sir!" said Blake, sitting up on the floor. "I—I must have fallen over, sir."

"Take fifty lines!"

"Yes, sir. Where shall I take them, sir?"

Mr. Selby turned so crimson that his cheeks matched the tip of his nose. He made a stride to his desk, and caught up a cane.

"Blake! This is deliberate impertinence—deliberate, sir! Come here, boy! I will show you that I am not to be treated with deliberate impertinence!"

"If you please, sir," said Tom Merry, "Blake——"

"Silence, Merry! Leave the study! Blake, come here!"

Blake advanced—with reluctance that was not feigned. He had heroically thrown himself into the breach, as it were, but he remembered with inward misgivings how hard Mr. Selby could swipe. But it was too late to think of that now. Tom Merry, chuckling inwardly over the success of Blake's stratagem, drew 'Erbert to the door, and hurried him away down the passage. As they went they could hear the angry voice of Mr. Selby from the study:

"Hold out your hand, Blake!"

Jack Blake held out his hand. Three on each palm did the angry Third Form-master give him with stinging force. Blake was almost doubled up with the pain, but he bore it pluckily. The twist in the boy's features afforded a grim satisfaction to the exasperated master.

"There!" he exclaimed, throwing down the cane. "I hope that will be a lesson to you, Blake! I hope you will not be impertinent to a master again!"

"No, sir," murmured Blake.

"You may go, Blake."

"Thank you, sir."

Jack Blake went out and closed the door quietly. He went down the passage with his hands under his armpits, and twisting himself into all sorts of impossible attitudes. He grinned feebly as he met Tom Merry and 'Erbert.

"Did he lay it on?" asked Tom sympathetically.

"Ye-e-es, rather! But it's all right! We did him beautifully! He hasn't the faintest idea I tumbled into his study and cheeked him on purpose. Kirkdale goes into the Third Form to-morrow morning without question."

"It was plucky of you, kid! I know how Selby cuts. But it was a ripping wheeze! All's plain sailing now. Gussy and I are getting tin from home to pay the fees, and we can take it in to the Head to-morrow with what Dig can put towards it. It will only be fees for the half-term. If we can get through the interview with the Head all's serene!"

So far as the juniors could see, that was the chief difficulty that remained. There might be points they had not thought of, but that could not be helped. They had committed themselves to the task of smuggling 'Erbert to school, and they were going to carry it through at any risk. And they were sanguine; they would not allow themselves to think of failure now.

CHAPTER 9.

Kirkdale of the Third.

'ERBERT spent what remained of the evening in Tom Merry's study. His protectors did not consider it prudent yet for him to enter the Third Form-room. Of course, it would do a Third-Former no good in his Form to be known as a protege of higher Form fellows. But that could not be helped. 'Erbert had to be kept isolated as long as possible. The longer he was at St. Jim's before taking his place publicly among the rest, the more chances he had of picking up the ways of the fellows there.

After bedtime all, of course, depended on Wally. Kirkdale, as the chums now made it a point always to call 'Erbert, would have to go to the Third Form dormitory, and Wally had promised to look after him there. 'Erbert was to remain as silent as possible, and Wally was to keep the others off as much as he could. As Wally was the champion fighting-man of the Third, and the acknowledged leader of the Form, his patronage was priceless to the new boy.

The juniors had provided 'Erbert with what he required, for some time at least, in the way of clothing. Wally's wardrobe had been drawn on liberally, and Arthur Augustus had provided the boy with beautiful pyjamas—a little too long for him, perhaps, but they could be turned up at the ankles. Tom Merry had subscribed comb and hair-brushes from the half-dozen sets his loving governess had provided him with. For boots, D'Arcy's ample store was raided, and as Arthur Augustus had very small feet for a lad of his age, his boots almost exactly fitted the smaller youth, and the swell of St. Jim's had provided him with three pairs in excellent condition. Monty Lowther had found an old trunk in a box-room which was quite suited to 'Erbert's wants, and Manners, in a quite artistic way, had put the initials "H. K." on the lid in white paint.

'Erbert's brain was almost in a whirl when he saw the provision that had been made for him—the articles we have enumerated being only part of the collection. By the time his benefactors had finished, he was probably better supplied than any other fellow in the Third Form, and almost as well as the great Arthur Augustus himself.

Advice and instruction, too, were bestowed on the new boy in endless quantities. He promised to faithfully carry out all that was told him, but he did not remember one tenth of it, so with the best intentions in the world, he was still likely to make some slips.

"Well, we've done all we can," said Tom Merry, when nine o'clock struck. "We must leave the rest to luck. It's bedtime now, kid. I've told the House-dame there's a new kid in the Third, and you'll find a bed made up in the dorm."

'Erbert stared a little.

"It's only nine," he reflected.

"That's the bedtime of the Third Form," said Tom Merry. "What on earth time are you accustomed to going to bed?"

'Erbert grinned.

"Not till after the theayters were closed," he said. "I orfen used to pick up coppers gittin' kebs."

"My hat! Why, it's enough to muck up your constitution for life, staying up late every night. You'll get used to early hours, though."

"I'll do anything you young gents tell me," said 'Erbert submissively. "This 'ere seems all like a dream to me. I can't 'elp thinkin' I shall wake up in Green Alley, with Frau Hemling a-naggin' at me."

"Bai Jove!"

"I ain't never had nobody took no trouble about me," said 'Erbert. "I ain't belonged to nobody, you see. You young gents——"

"That's all right," said Tom Merry. "But you mustn't say 'young gents.' Say 'you chaps.'"

"It—it seems like puttin' myself on a footin' with you, sir."

"Well, you are on a footing with us, kid," said Tom kindly. "Besides, you must keep up the appearance of being one of us."

"I twig, sir—I mean Merry!" said 'Erbert. "I suppose you don't mind if I smoke a fag afore I goes to snooze?"

"If you what?" shouted Tom Merry.

"Smoke a fag, sir."

"You don't mean to say you smoke?"

It was 'Erbert's turn to look surprised.

"Course I do!" he exclaimed. "I've smoked ever since I was a kid so 'igh! I used to git cigarette-ends out of the gutters, you know, and the bits of cigars that the swells chucked away outside the theayters."

"My poor kid!" said Tom Merry gently. "You mustn't do that here. Boys are not allowed to smoke at St. Jim's; besides, it's a dirty habit for kids, and unhealthy! You're going to learn to play cricket, and you'll want your wind for that. Have you got any cigarettes about you?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"Shove 'em in the fire!"

'Erbert hesitated for a moment, and then meekly obeyed. He evidently did not understand, but he was learning to do exactly as he was told without troubling to understand. There were too many mysterious things at St. Jim's for him to hope to understand them all at once.

"That's wight!" said D'Arcy. "He's a good kid, you see, and it would be wotten to blame him for gettin' into beastly habits, considewin'. While we're on the subject, Wags, you mustn't say 'theayter.' The accent in the word 'theatre' is on the first syllable."

"Yes, sir," said Rags humbly.

"Bedtime now," said Tom Merry, as Wally opened the door and beckoned to 'Erbert. "Cut along. Good-night!"

"Good-night, young gents—I mean chaps!"

And 'Erbert left the study with Wally, and joined the Third Form as they went up to bed. Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Well, the worst of it's over," he said. "The kid has sense, and he's trying to learn, and I hope all will go well yet."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"One thing's jolly certain, he's a decent little chap, and whether he stays at St. Jim's or not, I'm going to stick to him, for one."

And the rest murmured assent.

CHAPTER 10.

'Erbert Looks After Himself.

WALLY had said that he would look after 'Erbert, and he meant it. Wally was a young rascal in many respects, but he was a sportsman, and he felt a strong sympathy for a fellow facing such difficulties as confronted 'Erbert. And the "lark" appealed to him very much. To smuggle a new boy into the school and palm him off on the masters seemed to Wally a screaming joke, and one that called for his best efforts to make it a success.

The Third Form had not seen much of 'Erbert so far. When they were in the dormitory, they naturally took some interest in him. In his new clothes, 'Erbert was a nice-looking lad, though there were one or two points about him that required a change.

He had an irresistible tendency to get his hands dirty, to wipe his face on his sleeve, to breathe through his mouth instead of his nose, and so on; but he was really learning quite as fast as could be expected to do better. He was in a cheerful if a somewhat uneasy mood, and he was inclined to cling to Wally as his only friend in the big room with the crowd of strange and curious boys.

"Hallo!" said Curly Gibson. "That a new kid?"

"Yes," said Wally.

"Friend of yours?"

"Yes."

"What's his name?"

"Kirkdale."

"Oh!" said Gibson. He looked Kirkdale over as if he had been a pig for sale in a country market, and then asked him where he came from.

"Kim from Liverpool," said 'Erbert.

Curly Gibson stared at him.

"Oh! You kim from Liverpool, did you? When did you kim?"

"I kim with Master Merry to-day."

"Leave him alone," said Wally. "Look here, that's your bed, kid. Get into it."

"Hold on!" said Gibson, who was very curious. "Let him run on. I like his accent."

"Shut up, Curly!"

"Sha'n't! I say, chaps, here's a freak! Come and listen to him," said Gibson. "He says he kim from Liverpool. You shut up, D'Arcy minor."

"I'll jolly well give you a thick ear if you don't let him alone!" said Wally belligerently. "Haven't I told you he's a friend of mine?"

"Well, why shouldn't I chum up with a friend of yours?" demanded Gibson. "Ain't I your friend myself? Now, kid, you have to give a good account of yourself when you come into a Form like the Third Form at St. Jim's. Who's your father?"

"I don't know," said 'Erbert simply.

Curly Gibson jumped.

"Eh? What did you say?"

"I don't know."

"You—you—you don't know who your father is?" exclaimed Curly, quite taken aback.

"No. I never saw him."

"Who—who's your mother?"

"I don't know."

"My only hat! Did you ever have one?"

"I—I suppose so," said 'Erbert cautiously. "I must have, you know."

"My word! Here's a chap who never had any parents!" said Gibson. "He growed, like Topsy in the story, I suppose. My word! This is something new!"

A good many of the fellows had gathered round curiously. Wally was chafing, as he removed his jacket. Yet he did not quite see how he was to save 'Erbert from the necessity of answering questions.

"What school have you been to before?" asked Norris.

"I ain't been to school before."

"My hat!"

"Well, he speaks as if he hasn't," said Kite. "Where on earth did the fellow come from?"

"He says he came with Tom Merry——"

"This is one of Merry's little jokes, then."

"Look here," said Wally, "let the kid alone. I'm looking after him. Get into bed, Kirkdale. Don't jaw."

"Right y'ar," said Kirkdale.

Kildare, of the Sixth, looked into the dormitory.

"Time you were in, you kids."

"It's all right, Kildare," said Curly Gibson. "We're examining a new zoological specimen—a—— Ow! You beast, Wally, you've hacked my shin!"

"Serve you right!"

"I'll jolly well punch your head for that——"

"Come on, then!"

"Order there!" exclaimed the captain of St. Jim's. "Stop that! If you're not in bed in one minute you'll hear from me, all of you!"

And the senior went out and slammed the door. The Third-Formers tumbled into bed, 'Erebrt among the rest, and when Kildare looked in again, they were all disposed for slumber. The captain of the school said good-night, and left the dormitory in darkness. But some of the fags had no intention of sleeping.

Curly Gibson eat up in bed as soon as the captain's footsteps had died away down the passage.

"Now, then, we'll talk to that new chap," he said. "Kirkdale——"

"'Ullo!" said 'Erbert.

"Get out of bed——"

"Sha'n't!"

"What's that!" exclaimed Gibson. "You won't—when I tell you! I'll jolly soon have you out!"

And Curly scrambled out of bed, and yanked the bedclothes off the new boy. A bare foot lashed out in the dark, caught Gibson on the chest, and caused him to sit down with violent suddenness.

"Ow! Ow!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" said Wally, peering through the darkness. "If you touch that new kid, Curly, I'll lather you!"

"I'll touch him!" howled Gibson. "I'll paste him! I'll make him ache in every separate bone in his body!"

Wally skipped out of bed.

"Will you? This way, then!"

"Look here, you keep out of it."

"Rats!"

"It's all right, sir," said 'Erbert. "I can look arter myself. I don't mind puttin' up my dukes if he wants to."

Wally hesitated.

But 'Erbert was stepping out of bed. There was plenty of fight in the little street lad from the northern city, and though he was grateful for protection, he was not at a loss to look after himself when it came to personal defence.

Two or three fags were out of bed now, and they lighted candle-ends to shed a light upon the scene. 'Erbert was squaring up to Curly Gibson in a more or less scientific attitude, his eyes gleaming. Wally looked at him, and grinned, and stepped aside.

"Go it, then!" he said.

"Of course, I'm not going to fight that kid," said Curly loftily. "I'm just going to give him a licking for his cheek!"

"Kim on, then!" said 'Erbert.

"Go it, Curly!" said a dozen voices encouragingly.

And Gibson rushed to the attack. He knocked aside 'Erbert's defence, and landed him with a right-hander that sent him sprawling across his bed. There was a yell of laughter from the fags.

'Erbert sat on the bed, looking dazed.

"Crikey!" he murmured.

"Had enough?" asked Curly Gibson, grinning. 'Erbert jumped up with a shake of the head, and put up his fists again.

"No, I ain't," he said sturdily—"I ain't, not by no means! Kim on!"

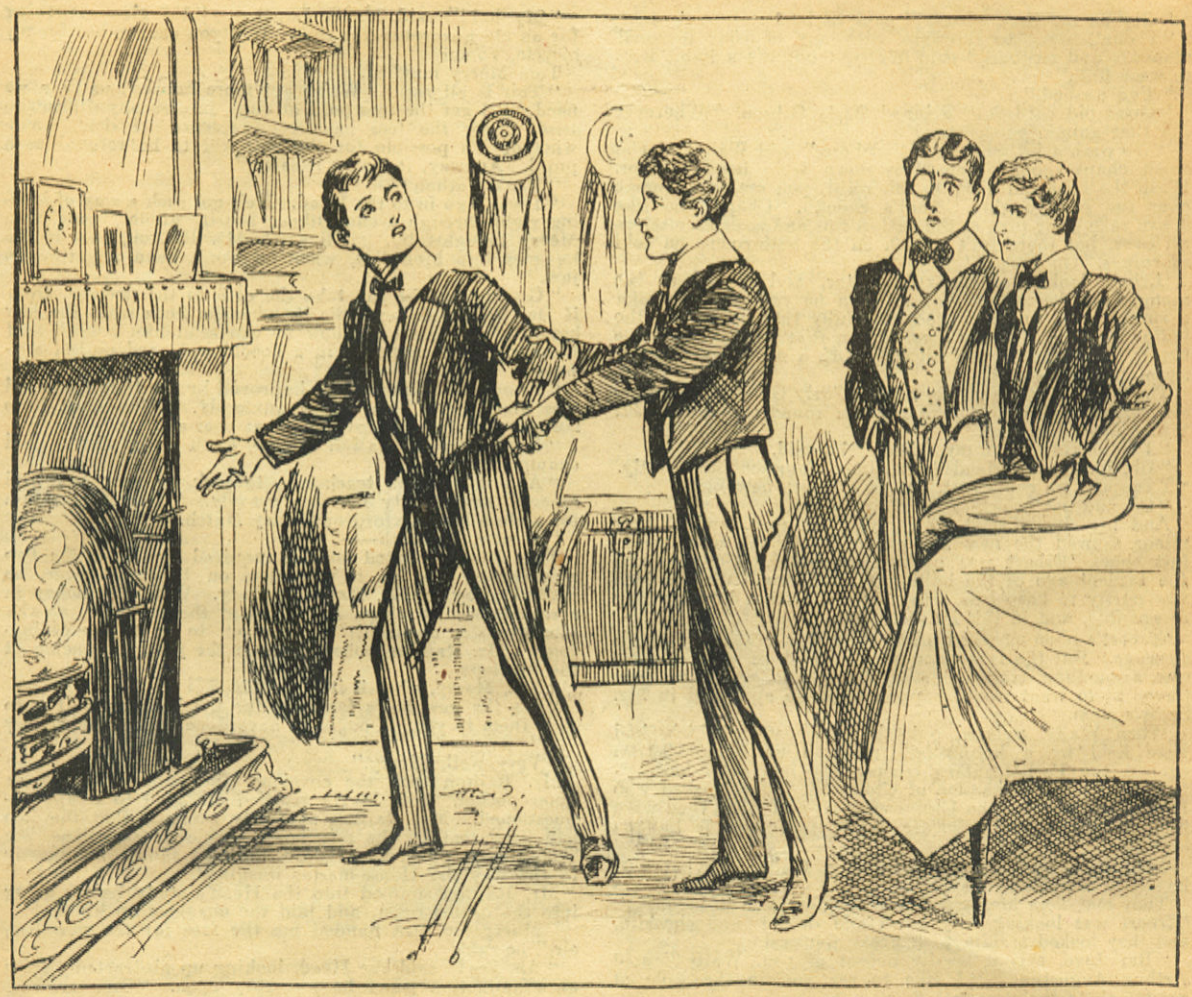
Curly rushed at him again, but not with the same success. 'Erbert dodged his rush, and whipped round him, and let out a left-hander that caught him under the ear, and sent him staggering.

Curly Gibson brought up against a bed, and stood there unsteadily, amazed.

"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Wally, in great admiration. "That's right! Give him a couple more like that, kid, and he's done in!"

This was rather rough on Gibson, as he was Wally's special chum. But in a matter like this, Wally could not allow friendship to stand in the way of appreciation of really good hitting.

Curly, looking very angry, attacked again, more cautiously than before. But he found the Liverpool lad quite his match. 'Erbert hadn't much knowledge of boxing as a science, but he was quick, adroit, and had boundless pluck. He did not seem to care how much punishment he received. And he certainly gave more than he got in that respect.



"You don't mean to say you smoke!" said Tom Merry. "Have you any cigarettes about you?" "Ye-e-es, sir!" said 'Erbert." "Shove 'em in the fire!" 'Erbert hesitated for a moment, then meekly obeyed.

After a few minutes, he put in an upper-cut that almost lifted Curly Gibson off his feet, and sent him with a bump to the floor.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Dudley.

Wally, with a grin, helped Curly to rise. The aggressive fag did not continue the fight. He plunged into bed instead.

"Go for him again!" urged Norris. "You're not half licked, Curly!"

Curly grunted.

"I'll jolly well go for you if you don't shut up, Norris!" he said.

And Norris shut up. Wally gave the new boy a slap on the back that made him ache, in his enthusiasm forgetting that 'Erbert had only his night-garments on.

"You'll do!" he exclaimed. "That's all right!"

"Thanky!" said 'Erbert.

And he went to bed, and in a few minutes a musical snore proceeding from his pillow told that he was fast asleep.

CHAPTER 11.

'Erbert Makes Himself at Home.

"CRIKEY! Where—where am I?"

That was 'Erbert's first exclamation as he awoke on the following morning.

He sat up in bed and looked around him, doubting if he was not still dreaming. The clean, white bed, the orderly room, the soft pillows—what did it mean? To the boy, accustomed to waking in a filthy garret, or under the shelter of a waggon or an archway, the change was great enough.

But in a few seconds recollection returned.

He was at St. Jim's, and as he realised it, an irresistible chuckle broke from the little ragamuffin. It was in some aspects a serious matter to him, yet he could not help seeing a humorous side to it. The lad who had slept in the shadowy corners of a great city, who had lived on crusts, who had never known in the morning if he would have anything to eat before sunset—found himself in a great school, with everything around him in order, and in a state of cleanliness he had not known even in his dreams, with good meals awaiting him, as much as he could eat of good food, and friends to stand by him and help him in his difficulties!

The change was great enough to make him dizzy. But the street lad, his wits sharpened and his philosophy developed by the hard life he had led, took it with considerable coolness and humour.

Wally looked out of bed, and yawned.

"Hallo, that's rising bell! What are you cackling about, young Kirkdale?"

"It seems funny," said 'Erbert.

"What seems funny"

"Me bein' 'ere."

"Never mind that. Get up, and get into your togs, and don't jaw! Remember that's your motto—don't jaw!"

"Right y'ar!" said 'Erbert cheerfully. "I'll say nowt."

And he jumped out of bed. He proceeded to make a primitive toilet—a smack of the sponge on the centre of his face. Then he turned to the towel. Wally jerked it away.

"Gimme me that, please!" said 'Erbert.

"I don't want to interfere with any of your personal manners and customs," said Wally, "but it's a habit here to wash first."

"I've washed."

"Good old cat-lick!" grinned Curly Gibson. "Wherever did that animal come from?"

"We wash a bit more than that here," said Wally. "The clean chaps sponge themselves down from head to foot. Wash the face and down to the waist, you see, and sponge over the rest roughly. That's enough. Chaps who like it can take their turn at the bath-rooms and soak themselves all over, but there isn't a rush on the bath-rooms on cold mornings. Go ahead!"

'Erbert looked at the cold water, and looked at the sponge, and looked at Wally. Then he proceeded to take a sponge-bath, and admitted cheerfully that he felt all the better for it, and Wally assured him that he looked all the better. Then he dressed himself, with a novel sensation of cleanliness and comfort.

The Third Form went down, and Curly Gibson and Jameson called on Wally to take a sprint round the quad. But Wally shook his head.

"I'm looking after my friend," he said.

"Oh, blow your friend!" exclaimed Jameson indignantly. "I suppose we come first, before a rotten new kid?"

"Go and eat coke!" said Wally politely.

And his chums went off in high dudgeon, and D'Arcy minor showed the new boy round the school until breakfast time. 'Erbert was greatly impressed. The size and the evident age of the buildings awed him. Wally's idea was partly to keep him away from the other boys as long as possible, and in this he succeeded.

'Erbert's open-mouthed admiration was gratifying to his cicerone. But the ignorance he displayed on some subjects was astounding, and it made Wally feel something like terror as to what would happen when he appeared in Mr. Selby's class.

When Wally pointed out the old tower, which had been held by a hot-headed partisan of King Charles against the Parliamentary troops, and had been half-battered down by the cannon of Cromwell, 'Erbert asked who King Charles was, who Cromwell was, and what they were fighting about, and whether Wally had seen it happen himself.

"My only Aunt Jane!" murmured Wally. "What will he say in the history class!"

They met Tom Merry & Co. as they came in to breakfast. 'Erbert was looking very clean and decent and cheerful, and they looked at him with great approval.

"Bai Jove, this is weally decent of you, Wally!" said Arthur Augustus. "I like to see you in the wole of pwotectah to the stwangah."

"Yes, jolly decent, isn't it?" said Wally cheerfully. "Can you lend me five bob, Gus?"

"Weally, Wally——" Arthur Augustus sorted out five shillings, and handed them over. "There you are, deah boy!"

"Thanks, that will do for the present," said Wally. "Upon the whole, I'm glad you've come back to school, Gus."

Tom Merry laughed as Wally walked away with his protege.

"I'm jolly glad Wally's taken him up," he said. "It would be against him in the Lower Forms if he were too openly backed up by Shell fellows. What he wanted was a staunch friend in his own Form. If Wally sticks to him, he'll pull through all right."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What about the tin?" asked Monty Lowther. "You haven't paid the fees yet, Tommy."

"I'm waiting for the remittance. It's bound to come this morning, because I made a great point of it."

"And I am certain that my governah will pay up on this occasion," said Arthur Augustus. "I told him I wanted the tin to help a chap who couldn't pay his fees, without goin' into furthah particulahs, and he's bound to send it."

"Good! The post ought to be in now. Let's go and look."

The juniors entered the School House. Sure enough, there was a letter for Tom Merry, with the postmark Huckleberry Heath, and another with a crest on the outside for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The juniors drew aside into a secluded spot to open them. There was a rustle of crisp banknotes.

"By Jove, the governah is playin' up, and no mistake! I shall have to w'ite to him and tell him I weally considah he is playin' the game."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Miss Priscilla has sent me twice what I asked for, as she feels that I want the money for a good purpose."

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther. "I'd give something for an old governess like that. Will you change her for my bicycle, Tommy?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"This is all right. We've got more between us than we need. I'll get the fees paid at once, in case any difficulties arise. After the fees have been accepted, I don't know whether it's possible for the new kid to be refused as a pupil. Anyway, it makes it safer."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I won't go in to the Head. He's got such a way of looking right through a chap like a beastly gimlet," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I'll catch Mr. Railton, just before he goes into breakfast, when he won't have any time to jaw."

"Good! And he can take the cash to the doctah. Even if Dr. Holmes doesn't like it, when he finds what the new kid is like, I don't see how he can send him away," said D'Arcy. "He would be in a doocid awkward posish, anyway."

"I hope Kirkdale will be improved by the time the Head sees him," said Tom Merry anxiously. "You must have noticed that he's improved a great deal already."

"Yaas, indeed. As fah as poss, I am settin' him a good example, and——"

"And if you can teach him to pick up your beautiful accent," said Monty Lowther gravely. "They'll take him for a chap from Oxford or Colney Hatch."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

Tom Merry counted out the required sum from the two remittances, and as it was close on breakfast time, he walked away to Mr. Railton's study. With the money in a sealed, new envelope, he tapped at the door, just as the House-master opened it to come out to go to the dining-room. Mr. Railton looked down at the junior, glancing at the envelope.

"Yes, Merry, what is it?"

"It's the new boy's fees, sir, for the half term. I'm to give them to you. I ought to have done so last night, only——"

"Very well, Merry."

Mr. Railton took the envelope, and slipped it into an inner pocket. Tom Merry scuttled off, glad to escape unquestioned. Mr. Railton naturally assumed that the fees had been sent by the new boy's people or guardians, per Tom Merry, which was, indeed, the case, though not exactly in the way the House-master imagined.

Mr. Railton stepped into the Head's study before going into the dining-room, and laid the envelope on his desk.

"Merry has just handed me the fees for the new boy, sir," he said.

"Ah, yes!" said the Head, looking up abstractedly from an examination paper he was busy upon. "The—er—new boy! I did not know he had arrived."

"Yes, sir; he came with Merry from Liverpool."

"Ah, yes, a very good arrangement. Thank you, Mr. Railton."

And the Head slipped the envelope into a drawer of his desk, and turned to his work again. The House-master left the study. Fate seemed to be playing into Tom Merry's hands. That a new boy was coming from Liverpool Dr. Holmes knew, and he had assumed, without thinking much about the matter, that it was this boy Mr. Railton was referring to. As the new boy was to go into the School House, the matter was wholly in the hands of the School House-master, and the Head had nothing to do with it except to send the receipt for the fees.

Mr. Railton walked into the dining-room. He took the head of the Sixth Form table there, and he noticed, as he sat down, that there was a suppressed chuckle proceeding from the fags' table. Mr. Selby was in charge of that, and he was looking red and annoyed.

The Third Form-master was not a good-tempered man, and anything like a disturbance irritated his weak nerves.

"Silence at the table!" he said sharply. "What do you mean by laughing, Gibson?"

"If you please, sir, I couldn't help it."

"Take fifty lines!"

"Ye-e-e-e-s, sir."

And Curly Gibson left off laughing. But chuckles broke out the next moment from other fags, and Mr. Selby glared along the table in search of the cause of merriment. His eyes fell upon 'Erbert.

The fags had fried sausages for breakfast, as a change from the usual bacon. 'Erbert had absent-mindedly taken up his sausage in his fingers, and was eating it from the end. A mischievous fag had abstracted his knife and fork, and poor 'Erbert, seeing none there, had fallen at once into his old habits. The sight of the new boy munching the sausage, with the grease staining his fingers, and a perfectly contented look upon his face, was too much for the gravity of the Third Form. Wally, unfortunately,

happened to be two or three seats away from 'Erbert, and could not whisper to him.

Mr. Selby could hardly believe his eyes for the moment. He rose to his feet, and stared at 'Erbert. The chuckles of the Third-Formers died away as they saw the angry glow at the tip of Mr. Selby's nose. Only 'Erbert seemed to be unconscious of anything amiss. He munched away in huge enjoyment.

"Boy!"

Mr. Selby seemed hardly able to articulate the word. Even then 'Erbert did not look towards the Form-master. It was not till Curly Gibson gave him a friendly nudge that he started, and looked up. Then, catching Mr. Selby's angry stare, he remained struck with dismay, the half-eaten sausage in his fingers, half-way to his mouth, and his mouth wide open.

"Boy! You—you are the new boy, I think?"

"Yes, sir," said 'Erbert.

"You—you—— I do not know where you were trained," said Mr. Selby, "but you must know better than to eat in that disgusting way. Put down that sausage at once!"

'Erbert laid it on his plate.

"Now go and wash your hands and face, and then wait in the Hall till the first lesson," said Mr. Selby. "Not a word, sir! Go!"

And poor 'Erbert, greatly dismayed at losing the rest of that enjoyable breakfast, went slowly from the dining-room. At the Shell table, Tom Merry looked glumly at Manners and Lowther.

"He's in Selby's black books already," he murmured. "That's rotten!"

They agreed that it was rotten. But there was worse to come for 'Erbert when he took his place in the Third Form class-room.

CHAPTER 12.

'Erbert in Trouble.

TOM MERRY looked for 'Erbert before going in to lessons. He found the lad waiting in the passage outside the Third Form-room, looking troubled and dismayed. Tom gave him a tap on the shoulder.

"Cheer up, kid!"

'Erbert's eyes were moist as he looked at the hero of the Shell.

"Thanky, sir—I mean, Merry. I'm goin' to do my best, and I 'ope I sha'n't get you into a row, that's all."

"That's all right. Do your best, and don't talk too much, and do keep on your guard. You mustn't lose a point, you know."

"I'll be careful, sir. I did act the giddy ox, this mornin'," said 'Erbert ruefully. "A bloke can't learn everything at once, I s'p'ose."

Tom Merry was thoughtful as he joined the Shell going in. He felt uneasy about 'Erbert, but he had done all he could.

Wally had promised to sit next to the new boy, and help him in any way he could, and Tom Merry could only trust to fortune and hope for the best.

'Erbert went in with the Third Form, and Wally drew him to a seat. In the few minutes that elapsed before the Form-master came in, Wally did his best to initiate 'Erbert into the routine of the place. The lad's adopted parents had made a collection of books for him, as of clothes, and 'Erbert was well-provided for in that respect. But he was hardly able to read the simplest of the books; words of two and three syllables were frequently a hopeless puzzle to him. Of grammar he had hardly heard. He did not know how many parts of speech there were, or, in fact, whether there were any parts of speech at all, and he could not have told the difference between a noun and a verb to save his life. It unfortunately happened that English grammar had been fixed for first lesson that morning, and Wally, in trying to give 'Erbert a few hints, had found his mind so absolute a blank that he had had to abandon the task in despair. He hoped that Mr. Selby would pass 'Erbert over; and it was very unfortunate that the Form-master's attention had been specially directed to the new boy during breakfast.

Mr. Selby was not looking amiable as he came in. He had a hopelessly weak digestion, which could not stand the British bacon-and-eggs for breakfast—and yet he persisted in the bacon-and-eggs. The result was that almost every morning he was in a state of peevish irritation that kept his class on tenterhooks. It was never known upon whom Mr. Selby would come down, but it was pretty certain that a morning would never pass without his "coming down" upon somebody.

The Form-master's nose was very red—a warning of danger the Third Form knew well. Even Wally was quite meek, and the rest of the class might have been taken for tame mice, as far as their looks went.

Mr. Selby sniffed as he went up to his desk. He would have preferred to see some reckless fag throwing ink-balls, or slipping a comic paper under his desk. This good behaviour was a trial to his nerves.

However, with a Form like the Third at St. Jim's, he was not likely to be long in want of a victim. His eye roamed over the class, and lighted upon 'Erbert—and glittered. He had not forgotten the incident of the gnawed sausage.

There was keen attention on the part of the class, and a snappishness on the part of the master for some time. Then Jameson was caught napping. Jameson was the biggest fellow in the Third, but he was far from being the cleverest. Wally could make rings round him on any subject. For that reason Mr. Selby let Wally alone, and picked on Jameson. He was out for scalps that morning.

He dissected Jameson, so to speak—for the delectation of the class. He ruthlessly probed into all Jameson's confused views on the subject of English grammar; he exposed all his little weaknesses, frightened him so much that he continually contradicted himself, and made him feel ten times the dunce he really was, and finally denounced him as being the most backward boy in a backward class, and gave him an imposition which was likely to account for most of Jameson's evening.

Then, his appetite whetted, he looked round for fresh victims. The Third Form, with heavy hearts, realised that their Form-master was in rare form that morning. Jameson sat in a cold perspiration, wondering whether he really was the unexampled booby Mr. Selby had made him out to be, and feeling utterly miserable and dejected. And yet Mr. Selby was far from being a bad-hearted man. But when he was suffering from indigestion he had a rigid sense of duty that admitted of no appeal, and offenders who might have escaped at other times had no chance then.

"My only Aunt Jane!" murmured Wally, in dismay. "He's looking for trouble—and if he starts on Rags now ——"

He dared not finish the thought. But his worst forebodings were realised. Mr. Selby turned from Jameson to 'Erbert. Mr. Selby had a bitter tongue; and he did not realise himself how bitter it was, or he would have kept it under better control.

"Kirkdale!"

He rapped the name out, and 'Erbert, who was hardly used to it yet, and who was surreptitiously trying to make some glimmer of meaning out of the Third Form grammar, did not look up.

Mr. Selby's nose grew more crimson.

"Kirkdale!"

Wally nudged the new boy, and 'Erbert started.

"Yes, sir."

"Stand up!"

'Erbert rose to his feet. Some of the class turned their heads to look at him, and he went very red.

"Why did you not answer to your name?" said Mr. Selby harshly. "I presume I have your name correctly. What is your name, boy?"

"'Erbert, sir," said the new boy, much flustered.

Mr. Selby jumped.

"What!"

"'Erbert, sir."

"I presume," said Mr. Selby, in a tone of the heaviest, most crushing sarcasm—"I presume you mean Herbert."

"No, sir, I mean 'Erbert," said the lad, his obstinacy roused by the Form-master's manner, and speaking, too, in all good faith. For the aspirate had not entered very much into the experience of the little ragamuffin. "My name's 'Erbert, sir."

"Boy! How dare you be impertinent? How dare you deliberately drop an aspirate in speaking to me?" exclaimed the Form-master.

'Erbert looked puzzled. He glanced at the desk, and he glanced at the floor, and then he gazed at Mr. Selby again.

"Do you hear me, boy?"

"Yes, sir. I ain't dropped nothin'."

"Eh?"

"I ain't dropped nothin'," said 'Erbert, in a tone of growing resentment.

The class could not repress a giggle. It was clear that 'Erbert did not know that the harmless and necessary "h" was termed an aspirate. The class wondered; and Mr. Selby was astounded.

"Kirkdale, I hardly understand you. You dropped an aspirate——"

"I didn't, sir," said 'Erbert, much distressed. "I ain't dropped nothin'."

"Is it possible that you do not understand me? Come out here!"

'Erbert went out slowly before the class. Every eye was upon him; and his face was as red as Mr. Selby's nose. The class-room door had been left open to admit the fresh

spring air, and 'Erbert was tempted to make a bolt for it, and shake the dust of St. Jim's from his feet. But the thought of Tom Merry and his other kind friends restrained him. The untaught, untrained lad was capable of a gratitude and devotion to his benefactors that would have put many an educated fellow to the blush.

The lad stood out before the class, and Mr. Selby advanced within a few paces of him, and looked him over as he might have looked over a strange animal.

"Now, Kirkdale, kindly repeat your Christian name."

"'Erbert, sir."

Mr. Selby clicked his teeth hard. Yet it seemed hardly possible that the small, scared-looking boy could be deliberately intending to cheek him.

"Do you mean to say, Kirkdale, that you were christened 'Erbert, and not Herbert?" he asked.

'Erbert looked hopelessly bewildered.

"Answer me!" thundered Mr. Selby.

"I—I don't know, sir."

"You—you don't know! What don't you know?"

"I don't know what you mean, sir."

The Form-master looked at him searchingly.

"I suppose you have been christened, Kirkdale?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Enough," said Mr. Selby. "I don't know where you have been trained, Kirkdale, but you will find that this deliberate insolence will not answer at this school. Go to my desk and fetch my cane."

'Erbert obeyed. Mr. Selby took the cane.

"Hold out your hand."

"What for?" said 'Erbert sullenly. "I ain't done nothin'."

"You—you what?" gasped Mr. Selby. "What do you mean by using such expressions? Is it possible that you were taught to speak so?" He lowered the cane. "Listen to me, Kirkdale. I hardly know what to make of you. What school did you attend before you came here?"

'Erbert was silent.

It was a difficult situation. Tom Merry had cautioned him, under any circumstances whatever, not to speak an untruth; and at the same time not to "give himself away" to any questioner. Silence was safest for him, if he could not elude a question. He could not dodge this one; so he remained silent. Mr. Selby, of course, could not know what was passing in the boy's mind, and he was amazed.

"Kirkdale!"

"Yes, sir."

"Why do you not answer me?"

'Erbert was silent. The class were silent, too; there was a feeling of painful tension. The Third Form were as puzzled as their master, with the exception of Wally. And Wally could not help his protege then.

"Kirkdale, answer me! What was the name of your previous school?"

Still 'Erbert did not speak.

"Very well," said Mr. Selby, in a grinding voice. "As you persist in deliberate insolence, I shall punish you. Hold your hand out!"

'Erbert hesitated. But he remembered that Tom Merry had cautioned him to take any punishment without complaint. He held out his hand. He winced at the vicious cut he received, but it did not end there. Mr. Selby gave him six, and 'Erbert was tingling with pain as he went back to his place.

Mr. Selby, considerably ruffled, went on snappishly with the lesson, and more than one luckless Third-Former paid dear for carelessness. It was some time before he came to 'Erbert again; but come to him he did at last.

"In the sentence we have been taking, Kirkdale——" He broke off snappishly. "Will you kindly pay me some little attention, Kirkdale?"

'Erbert jumped.

"Yes, sir. I 'ear you."

"In the sentence we have just been taking—kindly repeat the sentence, Kirkdale."

'Erbert looked nonplussed for a moment, but Wally, without moving his head, and looking straight before him, whispered:

"Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety."

'Erbert was careful not to grin as he repeated the sentence. Mr. Selby hadn't the faintest idea of the astute Wally's device.

"Age cannot wither 'er, nor custom stale 'er infinite variety, sir."

"I will not now refer to your dropping of aspirates, Kirkdale. That appears to be incurable, though I shall hope to cure it by sufficiently severe measures. We will now take this sentence, which you have astonished me by repeating correctly. I shall be glad to know whether the simplest grammar is as strange to you as the most ordinary pronunciation. In the first part of the sentence, you will point out the nominative and the accusative respectively, and indicate why they are placed in their respective cases. We will test your knowledge of your own tongue."

'Erbert stared blankly at the Form-master.

Cases, so far as his knowldege extended, were receptacles for containing articles, and nominative and accusative cases were great mysteries to him.

"Well, Kirkdale, I am waiting."

'Erbert did not speak.

"Is it possible," said Mr. Selby, in measured tones, "that you do not know which is the nominative case in that sentence?"

"I—I—I——"

"Do you know what the nominative case is, at all?" thundered Mr. Selby.

"N-no, sir," said 'Erbert, driven to reply.

"You—you—you do not know! They have put you into the Third Form, when you are not fit to be in the Second or the First!" exclaimed Mr. Selby, too astonished to be angry this time. "Do you mean to say that you don't know that the subject of the sentence is in the nominative case?"

"N-n-no, sir."

"Do you know anything at all?"

"I—I don't know, sir."

Mr. Selby looked at him very curiously. 'Erbert expected the cane again, but it did not come.

"Very well, Kirkdale; I will attend to you later," said Mr. Selby, very quietly; and for the rest of that morning he did not address another remark to 'Erbert.

CHAPTER 13.

Tom Merry's Pupil.

'ERBERT breathed more freely when the time to dismiss came, and the Third Form left the room. A weight was lifted from his heart and his mind, as he went out into the fresh spring air in the quadrangle. There was perspiration on his brow, and almost a hunted look in his eyes. Wally slipped his arm through 'Erbert's, and Jameson and Gibson sniffed and walked another way. When the Shell came out, Tom Merry looked for 'Erbert, and hurried towards him. He was anxious to know how his protege had fared under the ordeal of the first morning's lessons.

"How did it go?" he asked.

Wally made a grimace.

"Rotten!" he said. "Selby's surprised, and he's going to speak to Kirkdale later. I don't know what will come of it."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"How do you like it, Kirkdale?"

"I—I like it all right," said 'Erbert, with an effort. "I'll do my best, Master Merry, because you want me to."

"It's for your own good, you know," said Wally.

"Yes, I know it is," said 'Erbert. "I dessay I'll git used to it in time, if I stay 'ere. And I'll stay if I can fix it, Master Merry."

Tom Merry did not feel wholly satisfied. He had a dim conception of the ordeal the lad must have been through that morning, with a sharp-tempered master, amid strange and incomprehensible surroundings. Had he, after all, done the best possible thing for 'Erbert in bringing him to St. Jim's?

The lad would be happier in the Liverpool streets than he was at present, there was no doubt on that point. Yet what must starvation and dirt and homeless wandering inevitably lead to? Loafing, or crime, when 'Erbert grew up! That was certain. No, there was no doubt that if 'Erbert could remain at St. Jim's, at St. Jim's he ought to remain.

"Look here, we'll all lend a hand, and help!" said Tom. "Would you like to have some lessons now—something that would help you out this afternoon?"

'Erbert brightened up at once.

"Yes, sir, I would; that would be spiffing. But——"

"But what?"

"Ain't you goin' to play cricket?"

"I was going to, kid, but that doesn't matter. Never mind the cricket; this is more important. Come up to my study."

'Erbert went upstairs with Tom Merry. They passed Gore in the passage, talking to several fellows in his own set. They all stared at Tom Merry and his protege, and laughed scoffingly.

"Here comes Merry and his workhouse friend," said Gore.

"Queer taste, picking up chums in the gutter," remarked Mellish.

Tom Merry's eyes burned, and he came very near "pitching into" the cads of the lower school on the spot. But he restrained himself, and went on. Monty Lowther and

Manners were just leaving the study, with their bats under their arms, and they stared at Tom.

"Aren't you coming out, Tom?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"But we want you," said Manners. "It's a ripping day, and we can get in half an hour before dinner. Why aren't you coming?"

"Busy!"

"'Ere," said 'Erbert, "I don't wanter——"

"You shut up, kid, and do as you're told," said Tom Merry. "Buzz off, you chaps, and don't bother! Take a seat, kid."

Lowther and Manners went out. Tom Merry drew books and paper and pens and ink up, and sat down beside 'Erbert. Exactly where the instruction was to begin he could hardly tell; every question he put to 'Erbert seemed to reveal a deeper maze of ignorance than the last.

It was not only that 'Erbert had not the faintest knowledge of grammar, history, or geography, but he could barely write his name, and that in characters that would have earned him a sound caning from any master; and he could not read anything but the simplest stuff. That was not surprising, for he had never been taught to read; he had picked up what little he did know by spelling out words on newsagents' notice-boards, and the titles of books in shop-windows. He confided to Tom Merry that when he was "flush" he used to buy a copy of a boy's paper, and get an acquaintance to read it to him, and sometimes a friend would show him what the words meant, so that he could spell through simple stories himself.

Tom Merry's heart was very heavy. The lad was so bright, so intelligent and honest, and yet he had been neglected in this way. Exactly who or what was to blame for that Tom Merry did not know, and he did not try to think it out; but one determination was fixed in his mind, that he would help the lad by every means in his power, at any cost to himself.

And so he commenced the task of enlightening 'Erbert. It was Tom Merry's first essay as a teacher, and the role came awkwardly enough. He hardly knew where to begin and where to leave off. And, like many boys of his age, he had half forgotten his earlier knowledge, and it came to him as a surprise that, although he was the top of the Shell, he was not fitted, without preparation, for becoming top of the Third. And poor 'Erbert's ignorance was so abyssmal! There were things a Third-Former was supposed to know, of which 'Erbert had never even heard of the existence. But Tom Merry laboured manfully through this slough of despond, manfully doing his best, like a brave and true-hearted British lad.

'Erbert was quick and willing, but he could not learn as much in an hour as other boys take a year or two years to learn. It was a beginning, a breaking-up of the ground, that was all.

Tom Merry realised that much—very much—more was required before 'Erbert could take his place in the Third Form without suspicion. And meanwhile—— But it was useless to think of that.

The door opened after a while, and Gore looked in. His friends were with him, and they laughed at the sight of Tom Merry and his pupil sitting at the table, busy. Tom looked round angrily.

"What do you want, Gore?"

"Nothing," grinned Gore, "only to see the little game. I suppose there is no charge?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled his companions.

"This is worth seeing," went on Gore. "It's as good as a penny gaff, any day in the week. Young gutter-snipes taken as private pupils by Thomas Merry, Esquire! Are you giving him the A B C, or twice one are two? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway excuse me, deah boy," said a voice in the passage, "I want to come in."

D'Arcy pushed Gore out of the way none too gently, and Gore staggered into the study. He glared at D'Arcy, who appeared to be quite unruffled by his glare.

"I have been speakin' to young Wally, Tom Mewwy, and I thought I'd look in and lend you a hand," said D'Arcy. "Of course, you belong to a highah Form than I do, but what is weally wequired in a case like this is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Ha, ha, ha! Lend a hand, Gussy——"

"Are you going, Gore?" asked Tom Merry quietly.

"Oh, yes, certainly!" said Gore, backing away so quickly that he trod on D'Arcy's toe. "I'll go and tell the fellows——"

"Ow! You howwid wottah, you've twodden on my toe!"

"Blow your toe!"

That was too much for D'Arcy. He could stand an injury, but insult added to injury was too much for the patience of the swell of the School House.

He reached out, and caught Gore's nose between finger and thumb, and, compressing his grip on it, tweaked it sharply.

"There, you wottah," he said, "I wegard that as a pwopah weply to your beastly impertinence!"

"Ow! Groo!" gasped Gore. "Leggo!"

"Now pway go," said Arthur Augustus, releasing Gore's nose, which had become crimson from the pressure, "othahwise, I shall have no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin'—— Oh!"

Gore had no intention of going quietly. His nose pained too much. He rushed at the swell of the School House, and got his head into chancery.

"Ow! Gerroff! You're wumplin' my collah!" came a stifled voice from under Gore's arm. "You're wuinin' my necktie!"

But D'Arcy would have received a pretty severe punishment had not Tom Merry chipped in. Tom jumped up from the table, and caught Gore by the back of the collar.

"Leggo!" roared Gore.

"Get out of my study."

"So I will when I've finished."

"You will now, you cad!" said Tom Merry, between his teeth.

He dragged Gore to the door. D'Arcy tore himself loose. In Tom Merry's grasp, Gore had little chance, though he struggled furiously. His friends were staring in at the door, not caring to interfere, though Gore yelled to them.

"Bai Jove," gasped Arthur Augustus, "the wascal has uttahly wuined my collah! I shall have to go and change it, bai Jove!"

Round swung Gore in the angry grasp of Tom Merry, and then he went whirling through the doorway. Right into his friends he crashed, and there was a chorus of yells. Mellish received Gore on his chest, and went staggering, throwing out his arms wildly and knocking his companions flying.

In a moment there was a heap of shrieking and struggling juniors in the passage.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; while Tom Merry grinned, and 'Erbert burst into a loud laugh.

Gore staggered to his feet.

"You beast!" he roared, shaking his fist into the study. "I'll——"

Tom Merry made a motion as if to rush out of the study, and Gore left the rest of his threat unuttered. There was a hasty movement of the raggers down the passage. D'Arcy looked at himself in the glass.

"Bai Jove, I shall have to change my collar and tie," he murmured. "I shall not be able to lend you a hand aftah all, Tom Mewwy."

Tom laughed.

"Never mind, Gussy; it's all right."

And the first lesson to 'Erbert was finished without any assistance from the swell of the School House, and without further interruptions from Gore & Co.

CHAPTER 14.
Brought to Light.

"DEAR me!" said Dr. Holmes.

The Head of St. Jim's stood in his study, and stared at a letter in his hand. He had just opened it, and a cheque had fallen from it upon his desk. Dr. Holmes stared at the letter, and then at the cheque, and then at the letter again in blank amazement.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "This is most extraordinary!"

He touched the bell, and Binks appeared. The doctor looked up from the letter, which he was reading for the third time.

"Go to the Sixth Form-room and request Mr. Railton to step here," he said.

And he read the letter through again. Then he picked up the cheque and read it. He laid it down as Mr. Railton entered the study.

"You sent for me, sir?" said the House-master, who had been taking the Sixth Form, and was considerably surprised at the summons.

"Yes, Railton. I have had a most curious letter. It is from Mr. Glyn, the father of the new boy who is coming to the school. He has sent me a cheque for the half-term's fees, and states that his son will arrive here to-day."

"Well, sir?"

"But he has already come," said the Head, in amazement, "and the fees are paid. Do you not remember handing me the money yourself?"

It was Mr. Railton's turn to look surprised.

"The fees I handed you were not Glyn's, sir."

"Indeed! Did you not tell me they were for the new boy who had arrived at St. Jim's?"

"Yes, certainly! But——"

"All other fees have been paid, I think, with the exception of Skimpole's, which are delayed, as usual."

"Yes, but this money was handed me by Tom Merry, for the new boy, Kirkdale——"

"Kirkdale?"

"Yes, sir; the new boy in the Third Form."

Dr. Holmes laid down the letter, and stared blankly at Mr. Railton.

"This is—is most extraordinary!" he gasped. "Is it possible that a new boy has come to this school without my knowledge?"

"My dear sir——"

"Kirkdale! I have never heard the name before."

"But—but he came from Liverpool with Tom Merry," said Mr. Railton, in surprise. "I—I certainly understood that you knew all about it."

"The only new boy I was expecting was young Glyn, and he will go, I think, into the Shell," said Dr. Holmes. "No new boy was expected for the Third Form. What made you decide upon the Third Form for this boy?"

"I—I did not decide. I understood from—from Merry, I think—that it had been decided, and I naturally thought——"

"Perhaps Mr. Selby can throw some light on the subject?" said Dr. Holmes thoughtfully. "He could hardly admit a new boy to his Form without knowing something about him. I think we had better go and see Mr. Selby."

"A good idea, sir! I have no doubt he can clear it up. It is most surprising!"

And the Head and the House-master proceeded to the Third Form-room. The door was half open, and as they came down the passage they could see the Third Form in their seats following Mr. Selby in a far from delightful investigation into the early history of their native country.

Mr. Selby's voice was rasping in the room, and the Head, with a natural disinclination to interrupt the Form-master in his work, decided to wait a few minutes till there was a pause.

"Kirkdale!"

The Head started, and looked at Mr. Railton.

"The boy is certainly there," he remarked.

"Yes. He is standing up now," said Mr. Railton.

They could see Kirkdale, standing up in his place with a very red face. Poor 'Erbert was evidently in for it once more.

"Yes, sir."

"Where did King John meet his death?"

"I—I don't know, sir."

"What was the chief event in the reign of King John?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Was it the signing of Magna Charta?"

"It might ha' been, sir."

"It might have been!" said Mr. Selby, in a withering tone. "Indeed! Have you the faintest idea what Magna Charta was?"

"N-nó, sir."

Mr. Selby stared at the boy, and his tone grew more sarcastic still as he went on:

"Perhaps you do not know whom King John was?"

"N-no, sir."

"Boy! Do you mean to tell me that you have never heard of King John?"

"No, sir."

"Come out here, Kirkdale!"

'Erbert came out before the class. Mr. Selby picked up his cane, and fixed his eyes upon the new junior.

"Now, Kirkdale, I have been very easy with you. I have made allowances, but I can only come to the conclusion that this is a very feeble attempt at a joke—a joke at the expense of your Form-master. Do you understand?"

"I—I can't 'elp it, sir!" stammered the unfortunate 'Erbert. "I ain't never 'eard of the bloke!"

"Goodness gracious!" murmured Dr. Holmes.

"Werry likely there never was sich a bloke, nuther," said 'Erbert. "'Ow do I know?"

"Boy! Hold out your hand! You may be able to make the class laugh by this astounding impertinence, but it will cost you dear, sir! Hold out your hand!"

"I ain't goin' to!" said 'Erbert. "My 'ands is still 'urtin'! I've 'ad enough fur one day! I ain't goin' to!"

Mr. Selby could hardly believe his ears. At the door Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton were simply petrified.

"Boy!" gasped Mr. Selby at last. "Do you refuse to obey me?"

"I ain't goin' to be caned again!"

"Hold out your hand!"

"Look 'ere, old cock, don't you come it!" said 'Erbert, growing reckless, and forgetting all his good resolutions for the moment. "I've 'ad enough! My 'ands is still 'urtin' from the last dose! You let me alone, I tell yer!"

"Boy! I shall—shall thrash you——"

"I'll hack your shins if you do," said 'Erbert. "Why can't you let a cove alone?"

"Upon my soul!" gasped Mr. Selby. "I—I never met such an extraordinary boy! Come with me, Kirkdale—come with me to the doctor at once!"

'Erbert started. He remembered Tom Merry's many warnings and cautions too late.

"I—I—I'm sorry, sir!" he stammered. "You can lick me if you like! I can stand it! I don't mind! 'Ere's my 'and!"

And he held out a grubby paw.

Dr. Holmes entered the room. He gave 'Erbert a peculiar glance.

"I was coming to see you about this lad, Mr. Selby," he said. "Please come to my study, and bring him with you. I will send a prefect to take the class."

"Certainly, sir!" gasped Mr. Selby.

Wally whistled under his breath.

"The game's up!" he murmured. "Well, it was a lark; and I'm jolly sorry for Rags!"

Rags was feeling sorry for himself as he followed the Third Form-master to the Head's study. These grave and dignified gentlemen were very terrible to 'Erbert, and he had no knowledge of what punishment might or might not await him in the Head's presence.

A flogging was the least he expected, but whatever me to him, he was determined upon one thing—so fa as possible, he would save Tom Merry from blame.

In the Head's study the little ragamuffin stood w downcast eyes, with three separate pairs of eyes fixed up him.

"Kirkdale!" said the Head gravely. "Kirkdale, think, is your name?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you come to this school?"

"I kim in a train from Liverpool, sir."

The Head coughed slightly.

"I did not mean that, Kirkdale. How was it you came to be a new boy here—did your parents send you?"

"I ain't got any, sir."

"Then who sent you?"

'Erbert was silent.

"Answer me, my lad," said the Head kindly enough. "I do not intend to punish you. I only want this matter cleared up and set right."

"I ain't nothing to say, sir."

"Very well. You say that you can throw no light upon the matter, Mr. Selby?"

"None, sir. The boy was presented to me as coming into the Third Form, and I understood that Mr. Railton had so decided."

"You were misled, as I was," said Mr. Railton. "I understood that it had been decided by Dr. Holmes or yourself."

"There has been some deception," said the Head, frowning. "We need not detain you from your class any longer, Mr. Selby. Will you send Tom Merry here as you return?"

There was a cry from 'Erbert:

"Oh, sir—if you please, sir——"

"Have you anything to say, Kirkdale?"

"It—it wasn't Tom Merry's fault, sir, nor Master D'Arcy's, neither. They was both very kind. They was good to me, and they——"

"Send both Merry and D'Arcy here, Mr. Selby!"

"Certainly, sir."

The Third Form-master left the study, and 'Erbert looked the picture of misery.

"You seem to be troubled for these boys," said the Head. "Unless they have acted wrongly they will not be punished. Surely you must understand that this matter must be cleared up."

"They ain't done nothin' wrong, sir. It was only their kindness; and how was they to know I couldn't stick it? You can lick me if you like, sir. It was all my fault! I know I oughtn't to 'ave kim 'ere."

The Head glanced helplessly at Mr. Railton. There was a silence in the study after 'Erbert's words, till a tap came at the door. In response to the Head's "Come in!" two juniors entered—Tom Merry, of the Shell, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth. Both the juniors looked very grave, and at the sight of 'Erbert in the Head's study their worst forebodings were realised. They had felt that something was wrong when they were called away in the middle of afternoon lessons to the Head's presence, and now, of course, they knew that the trouble had come! 'Erbert's presence explained everything.

Tom Merry's cheek became a shade paler. He knew very well that the matter was serious, that it might be very serious for him. D'Arcy did not turn a hair, however. Perhaps he did not realise the gravity of the case so keenly as Tom Merry; or perhaps his inward misgivings were unable to disturb the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

The Head adjusted his gold-rimmed pince-nez, and looked at the juniors with a stern brow.

"Merry, I have sent for you to give me an explanation. This lad, Kirkdale, has been introduced into the school—I may say smuggled into the school—in what appears to be a surreptitious manner. You know about it?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry firmly.

"Then kindly explain. The boy came with you from Liverpool?"

"Yes, sir."

"You paid his fees to Mr. Railton? Where did you obtain the money?"

"D'Arcy and I raised it between us, sir."

"Yaas, wathah, sir. My governah played up on this occasion in a weally decent mannah, and——"

"That will do, D'Arcy! How did this boy come to be with you at all, Merry?"

"We met him in Liverpool, sir."

"Ah! Did his parents place him in your charge, or his people, or whoever was caring for him?"

"No one was caring for him, sir. He was alone in the world, and living in the street. He saved my life, and Blake's and D'Arcy's life, too, when we were beset in a slum by a gang of ruffians."

"I had not heard of this."

"We—we thought we could do some good for him, sir. His life was in danger if he remained in the place he belonged to, so we brought him away from Liverpool, so that Choker Bill couldn't find him again."

"Dear me! You amaze me!"

"And then, sir," went on Tom Merry encouraged, "we—we had the idea of bringing him to St. Jim's. He had nothing to do with it himself, he only did what we told him."

"Upon my soul!"

"We thought that if we paid the fees, sir, and gave him some extra tuition in our spare time, he'd be all right."

"They was kind to me, sir," faltered 'Erbert, mistaking the frown on the Doctor's brow. "They didn't mean any 'arm, sir. But I knows I ain't suitable to be 'ere, sir. I'm ready to go. I don't want to give no trouble. I can go back, and I'll never forget wot these young gents 'ave done for me."

"I should wegard it as wotten, sir, if Wags was sent away fwom St. Jim's. If you could give him a chance, sir——"

The doctor's brow was wrinkled in deep thought. Mr. Railton's face was curious in its expression, but he was certainly not angry.

"Merry," said the Head at last, "you must be sensible that you have acted very wrongly. You have attempted to impose a strange lad upon us, and you do not appear to have realised that the affair was bound to come to light sooner or later."

"I—I hoped that Rags—I mean, Kirkdale—would have got upon a better footing here by the time it came out, sir, and—and that you'd be easy with him," faltered Tom Merry. "If—if you knew what an awfully decent little chap he is, sir——"

"Yaas, wathah, sir! He wan a gweat wisk to wescue my toppah fwom bein' wun ovah in Livahpool, to say nothin' of savin' our lives."

"But, surely, my boys, you must see that Kirkdale, however worthy he is, is not in a—in a fit state to take his place in the Third Form."

"I—I'd rather have him in the Shell with me, sir, but that would have been still more difficult to manage. I——"

The Head could not help smiling.

"Come, Merry! You have acted in a thoughtless manner. But as your motives were undoubtedly of the best, I shall forgive you. But, of course, it will be impossible for Kirkdale to remain in the Third Form. The fees you have paid for him will be returned to you."

Tom Merry's face fell.

"I—I suppose you know best, sir," he faltered. "But—but if you'd give him a chance——"

"I am going to give him a chance," said the Head gently, "but in a more suitable manner. I shall not send the poor lad away, that would be harsh. I shall, at all events, give him a trial here, but at present he will not be attached to any Form. He will be given separate instruction until he is sufficiently far advanced to study with the Second Form. As for the future, I can say no more at present. But of this you can be assured, the lad will have his chance to make the best he can of it."

The tears started to Tom Merry's eyes.

"Oh, sir! Thank you! I—I——" He broke off.

"By Jove, sir! That's weally wippin'. I wegard you as a sport, sir, if I may say so."

"D'Arcy!"

"Sowwy, sir; but, weally——"

"You may go!" said the Head, smiling.

The juniors left the study. Tom Merry and D'Arcy took each an arm of 'Erbert, and marched him down the passage in a sort of triumphal progress. 'Erbert hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

"It's all right," grinned Tom Merry. "What a ripping old sport the Head is! It's all right, 'Erbert, my boy."

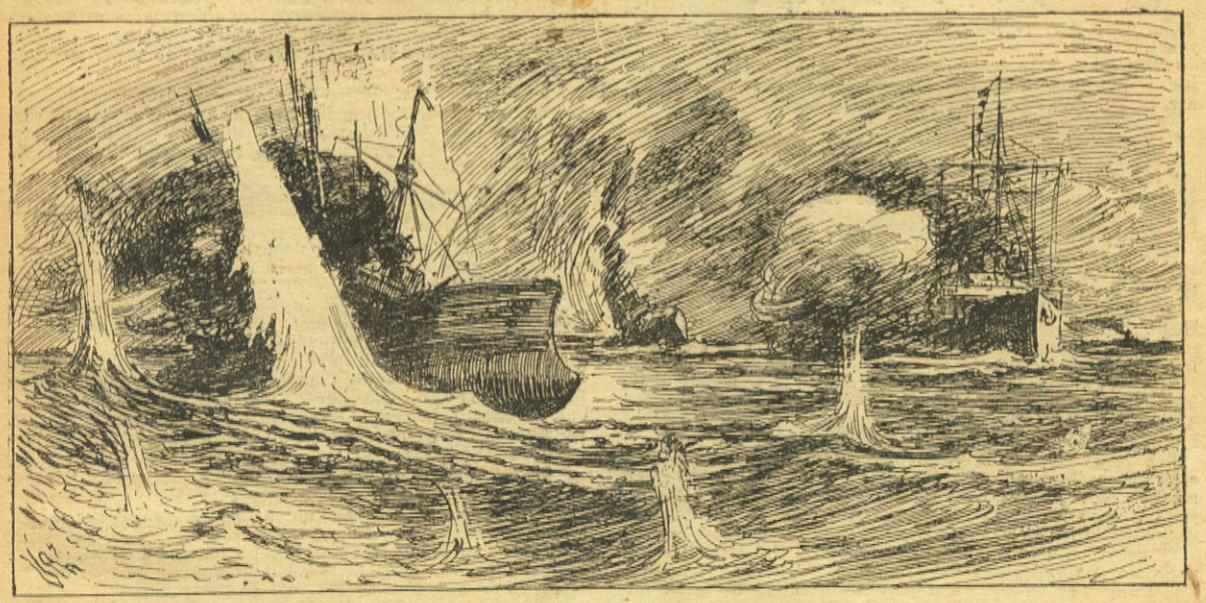
"Yaas, wathah! It's all wight, Wags."

And it was indeed all right for the little ragamuffin who had been smuggled to school!

THE END.

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. The boys and Ned board a derelict steamer, 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 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 the crew are obliged to beach her.

Lieutenant Cavendish, Sam, and Steve are rescued by Ned. While sailing away in the Maid of Essex they come across an anchored German battleship. Cavendish proposes that he and Sam shall swim down with the tide and blow away the anchor cables with gun-cotton. "As soon as the chains are blown apart she'll drift on to the Swin Middle sandbank!" "Great Scott!" exclaimed Sam, as the possibilities of the venture came home to him.

(Now go on with the Story.)

The Drifting Battleship.

They went below without another word, and looked on eagerly, as Cavendish opened the parcel of the things he had saved, and set to work. Besides other items, there were several sticks of white guncotton-cake, some watertight tins holding photographic films—which latter Cavendish now threw away—and several more necessaries.

For the next half-hour the young officer worked with deft fingers, whistling softly between his teeth the while, and much of what he did was beyond the knowledge of the two cadets.

"There!" he said at last. "There's a couple of 'em, an' they can't fail if they're properly placed. These two tins, you chaps, would smash that battleship's cables twice over. The fuses'll stand some water, but they must be kept as dry as we decently can. Come out on deck. Are you a strong swimmer?" he said to Sam.

"I'm generally reckoned one, I think."

"It'll be a swimmin' job," said Cavendish. "The punt'd show up too much, an' they'd hear her oars. They'll have a strict watch kept, you can bet. You're willing to try, then?"

"Like a shot!"

"What, swim' in a tide like this?" said Ned, aghast.

"Why not? No need to swim against it. You can pull us up above her, an' we'll drop down to her with the current. Then you make a circuit, and go an' wait a few hundred yards below her, to pick us up again. You can easily keep out of sight of her in this mist, an' yet be handy to take us in if we get back."

"If you get back!" groaned Ned. "Master Aubrey, don't 'ee tackle this job. What wi' guncotton, the tide, the fog, an' the battleship, there ain't a cat's chance o' either o' you comin' through it."

"Even that can't count," said Sam. "If our two lives can go as the price of scotching that great fightin' machine, they won't be badly spent. We can't hang back. It ain't a certainty for dead loss, either," he added, quickly slipping out of his clothes. "We needn't cry before we're hurt."

"Can't I go, Sam?" cried Stephen.

"No kid, you don't want for pluck, but you aren't strong enough in the water. It's a tough job."

"But look here," said Stephen anxiously, "they'll have

NEXT THURSDAY: **"TOM MERRY, SCOUT-MASTER."** A School Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's, by Martin Clifford.

steam up all the time. Won't they be able to stop her goin' on the Swin Middle?"

"Not they. She'll be on it before they can get command of her, in this tide, no matter how smart they are. She'll drive broadside along directly the cables part."

"That's true," put in Ned, who had seen a powerful steamer in the grip of a cross-tide, and knew how slow the engines were to bring her under command again.

"Ready, Villiers?" said Cavendish. "Strap this round your forehead, an' keep your head out of the water if you can. Shove this belt round your middle for the other things."

They were strange sights when prepared. Skin-bare, save for a belt apiece, to which two or three necessaries hung, both were rubbed over with oil by the crew.

Cavendish had contrived also an oilskin cap for each, holding the things that had to be kept dry.

"You can get rid of that as soon as you reach the place," he said. "Remember how I told you to fix the thing on the cable. The fuse-matches are in the glass bottle, as I showed you, to which there's a bit of sandpaper stuck. You can't make any mistake with common gumption."

"I'll use all the sense I've got," said Sam, with a grin.

And next moment they were in the dinghy, with Ned and Birch to row. Stephen was almost mutinous at being left behind, but he gripped Sam's hand as the dinghy pushed off.

It was not often the brothers gave vent to any sentiment, but this seemed an occasion for it.

The oars were muffled, and it took an incredible time to row far enough up against the strong tide to be well above the battleship.

Ned caught sight of her once, and, judging his distance well, at last reached a point some way above her, and out of sight in the fog.

"I call this a fool's errand, sir!" he muttered. "I don't understand this machinery business; an', anyhow, it's odds agin your gettin' picked up, even if you ain't blown up or shot. However, we be in line with her now, an' I'll do my utmost, as you knows."

"Meet us two streets below, Ned," murmured Sam, throwing off the rug he had worn to keep out the cold, "an' don't miss the corner."

They were both in the water a few seconds later, and the dinghy disappeared. Deadly cold it seemed, and would have been colder yet but for the oil on their skins.

"You take the port-cable; I'll tackle the starboard!" whispered Cavendish in Sam's ear, as they struck out. "Get away as quickly as you can when the thing's fixed. The fuses are short, an'll only take a few seconds to burn. Wouldn't have done to make 'em longer."

Used as he was to risks, Sam thought he had never taken quite so many all at once. There seemed little enough chance of living to see the result of his work, but the work itself was the first thing in hand, and with strong, silent strokes he made his way along.

It seemed but a few moments before the great iron hull of the battleship loomed up ahead of him, with the tide rushing past her huge bows and gurgling on her taut anchor-chains.

Sam steadied himself. Now or never was the time. If he were seen by those on the fore-deck flats, high overhead, it was all up. He could make out one or two shadowy forms through the fog up in the bows, and he thought he saw the rifle of a Marine; but there was no time to do more than glance.

He caught the port anchor-chain just as the tide was sweeping him by it, and hung on. Cavendish was away on the other bow.

Without hesitating—for at any moment he might be seen by those on deck—he took the necessary implements from the oilskin cap on his head, which he then allowed to drift away.

He fixed the encased charge of gun-cotton to the great cable, a foot above the water, and followed Cavendish's instructions carefully.

His deft fingers worked rapidly, and it did not take him many moments. He had hardly finished, when a soft whistle came from the other side.

Sam whistled back as softly in reply, started the fuse, and at once struck backwards strongly, swimming along by the ship's side as fast as the tide could take him.

Not ten strokes had he made, when there was a sharp, rending explosion on the starboard-bow, and an instant later his own charge followed suit.

A flash of brilliant flame lit the darkness, a crash that made Sam's head ring, and as the great iron cable parted like a straw, the battleship gave a lurch and began to swerve away sideways with surprising speed on the rushing current.

A loud cry from the fore-deck and another from the chart-house followed the explosions, and in a moment the great ship was humming like a beehive, while the engine-bells clanged furiously.

"The ship's adrift!" shouted a fierce voice, in German. "Give her steam—quick, or we shall be on the shoal!"

"Someone has blown the cables apart!" cried another hoarsely.

And at the same moment there was a fierce outcry from the fore-deck.

"Here he is—in the water!"

"Fire there, men—fire, and you've got him!"

Swimming with all his might to get clear, Sam found himself drawn along by the "pull" of the great ship as she drove with the tide.

As he struggled desperately he glanced up, and saw the fierce faces of the German bluejackets and the levelled rifle of a Marine pointing down at him.

Crack! went the rifle, and the bullet, fired hastily, dashed the water up just beside Sam.

"Steady, Hans!" said a deep voice. "Rest your rifle on the rail, and you can't miss! Now then, plug him!"

The Wrecking of the Kronprinz Karl.

Without expecting anything better than a bullet in his back, Sam turned over and dived like an otter, striking out towards the bottom with all his force. A muffled crack, no louder than a clap of the hands, seemed to reach him through the water, but where the shot went he did not know.

It is no easy matter to hit a diving man on a black, foggy night, and the sand-coloured water hid him for the moment. On the surface they could hardly miss him.

Knowing this, Sam turned under water and swam straight outwards to the utmost length of time that he could hold his breath.

At last with bursting lungs he shot to the surface, and as he did so the roar and thrash of the battleship's propellers told him that her engines were going hard and striving to get command.

He had covered some thirty yards, and in the thick fog the ironclad now looked no more than an outline, driving round with the current. But Sam's white body and face against the black water was just visible to those on the ship, and the hoarse voice announced it.

"There he is! Let him have it!"

Sam, unable to dive again, struck out with all his strength, and a couple of strokes put him practically out of sight in the fog, as half a dozen bullets came plugging round him, one actually touching his hair. Fervently he blessed the fog that prevented them from sighting the rifles accurately, and he swam as he had never swum before. But the chill of the water was on him.

The funnels and fighting-tops of the battleship were all that he could see now, and the random bullets flew wide. The noise on the ship and the hurry and flying orders as she tried to avert the coming disaster, were prodigious, and Sam heard a stern voice hail:

"What are you firing at there, aft?"

"Englander in the water, sir!" came the reply from the officer of the Marines. "It was he who parted the cables!"

"Blitzen! Lower away a boat and after him! He must be captured! Quick, there, with the third anchor, fools! Are you going to be all night?"

The squeal of the davit-blocks as a boat was lowered reached Sam's ears a few moments later, and he altered his course again abruptly, and swam across the current.

"Tryin' to shackle another anchor on her cable an' bring up," he thought. "They won't do it in time. If they do, likely it won't hold her. She must be nearly on the shoal now."

The sound of oars rowing navy-stroke and plying rapidly came over the water, and the sharp orders of the boat's officer were heard.

"I ought to be able to dodge 'em in this fog," muttered Sam. "Now, if only Ned an' the dinghy would turn up! But I've lost my bearin's, an' may be a long way wide of him. One thing, if he don't find me I can't keep up long."

The chill was entering his marrow, and there were no signs of Ned. The Germans' boat seemed to be rowing in all directions in the search for him, but sound is deceiving in a fog, and now she seemed to be ahead of him, now behind.

He thought he had shaken her well off, however, when he heard a cry from one of the men in her. The oars beat faster, and then stopped. There was a pause, during which German oaths sounded pretty thickly, and then the oars started again.

Sam wondered what had happened; but, anyway, the boat seemed some distance off, and he congratulated himself on being rid of her. All his anxiety now was to find Ned and the dinghy. Nor did the chances seem at all bright.

He gave three or four times the low, curlew's whistle that Ned knew, but no answer came through the darkness, and Sam felt his strength fast failing him. Hope suddenly

sprang up again as he heard the beat of oars behind, which now scarcely reached his dulled hearing, and a boat loomed up through the mist.

Too late! He saw that it was not Ned's dinghy, but the battleship's quarter-boat, and at the same moment a hoarse cry in German from the man in the bows announced that Sam was discovered.

"Right ahead! There he is, the devil! Give way!"

Sam tried to dive with a last effort, but his stiffening muscles and failing wind refused their office, and he came up almost immediately, choking and barely able to keep afloat. The boat dashed up to him instantly, and a big hairy paw reached over and grabbed him by the arm.

Sam struck out at his captor with a sort of despair, and his fist came home on the man's eye, bringing out a good round oath, but the young scout was past any real resistance, even if it could have helped him.

The lad expected to be shot, but their orders were evidently to take him alive, for he was hauled roughly aboard and cast down on the floor-boards on his face, while a piece of rope was at once knotted round his wrists.

"Got him, the cursed spy!" said his captor. "Here's work for the marines' rifles; the fools won't miss him when he's on deck!"

"Plenty of pluck, whoever he is," the petty officer said gruffly. "Pity that he should be shot; but there it is! Give way, there!"

"So they've got you," said a cool English voice at Sam's ear. "I was hopin' Longshoreman Billy would have picked you up in the dinghy; but it seems we're both in the soup."

Sam started in astonishment at hearing Cavendish's voice, and contriving to struggle on to his side, found he was lying right against the late commander of No. 667, who was bound like himself. Blue with cold and with his teeth chattering in his head, the young Naval officer winked grimly as he caught his fellow-prisoner's eye.

"Great Scott! Is it you, Cavendish?" muttered Sam, as the boat was pulled rapidly ahead. "I was hopin' the same thing about you. Well, it's all up now. The——"

A loud noise of rattling chain somewhere in front drowned his voice, and the petty officer in the boat altered his course and steered straight for the sound.

"It's the Karl letting go her spare anchor," he said. "Pull away, you dogs!"

"There she is, sir, right ahead!" said the man in the bows. "Why, she's heeling right over!"

"Curse it, they're too late; she's struck the shoal!" exclaimed the other.

"I knew she would when she broke adrift."

"Blitzen! And on an ebb tide, too!" muttered the man in the bows. "If I were the skipper, I'd give those two pigs six dozen apiece before they're shot!"

The great floating fortress, bristling with guns, came suddenly into view again, and at the very same time she took the hidden shoal fairly with her keel, broadside on, and gave an ugly lurch. The rushing tide drove her hard on the sunken sand eighteen feet under water, and nothing that her huge crew and staff of officers could do would alter her fate, which was sealed from the moment when the gun-cotton parted the cables. From that moment till the captured pair were brought back to her was barely two minutes, long as it seemed to Sam when he was in the water. Even from where they lay, both he and Cavendish could see, by the rake of her masts, that the ironclad was on the shoal, and at that moment cold and danger were forgotten.

"Gloriana," said Cavendish, with deep satisfaction, "we've piled her up! They've got us, but their giddy ship is done for!"

"Thank goodness!" said Sam fervently. "Well, we didn't funk it, so let's keep a stiff lip. They'll take their change out of us, an' a mighty dear bargain for 'em!"

"Silence, there!" came the gruff order; and a boot struck Sam in the ribs. "In oars, men!"

The boat ran alongside the great steel wall of the ship's side, and a few moments later the two prisoners were being passed up on deck. The vessel was humming like a stirred-up wasps' nest, winches were clattering, boats were dashing off to lay out anchors and cables to try and steady her, and a feverishly-excited German captain, beside himself with rage, was directing matters from the upper deck, his subordinates flying in all directions.

A fierce-looking Marine officer was at the gangway, and his deep red moustache bristled as he saw the captives handed aboard. His eye passed quickly over them, and he noted the belts—the only things they had on—to which still hung some of the implements Cavendish had brought with him, and these told their own tale. There was neither need nor time to ask questions. The Marine officer eyed them savagely.

"A fine night's work!" he said grimly. "You have put a 12,000-ton ship ashore, and we shall presently deal with you! Sergeant, put the prisoners in the guard-room!"

Over the iron decks, among the busy crew, the two naked prisoners were hustled. They were hurried below by the Marine sergeant and his men, and pushed hastily into an iron room, the door of which was slammed and locked.

"My aunt!" said Cavendish, shivering violently, his skin still dripping salt water as he looked round the bare cabin, which was nearly pitch dark. "Cold quarters these, Villiers! Nothin' but tin plates to sit on! Br-r-r-r!"

Sam gasped with the chill, which struck right into him.

"We shall be warm enough when they've time to attend to us," he said, between his clicking teeth. 'I s'pose they don't flog prisoners, though. If we're left here long, we shall be pretty nigh dead before they're ready for us."

The torment of the cold, in their exhausted state, was terrible, and they could hardly move when the door was unlocked and opened suddenly, and a couple of rough, horsehair blankets thrown in.

"You can have those till you're shot!" growled a voice; and the door was locked again

"That's the sergeant. Decent chap for a Dutchman," said Cavendish, taking one of the blankets in his numbed hands and rolling himself in it. "These are his own, as like as not."

"He'll soon get 'em back," said Sam; and after rubbing themselves briskly with the rough surfaces, they wrapped themselves up and tramped about at a fast pace till they grew warmer. "Pretty pair of fools we look, I reckon," Sam added, as they stopped. "My blood's beginnin' to move again, though. I suppose it's all up with us?"

"Sure. We're booked through this time," replied Cavendish, trying to look through the keyhole of the iron door. "Firin' party as soon as it's daylight. 'Point-blank, sight—with ball-cartridge, load!' an' that'll be the end of us."

"You may get off. You're a Service man."

"Not a chance. They'll make jolly sure of us both. We sha'n't need any trial. They'll ask us if we did the trick, an', of course, we sha'n't lie. The rifles 'll do the rest. Think how mad the skipper is, watchin' his dandy 12,000-tonner careenin' on the sandbank an' wrenchin' her entrails out. Oblige me by thinkin' of it!"

"I suppose she is done for?" said Sam.

"With any luck. Of course, there's just the chance she might come off without much hurt, if she lies evenly. But I don't think it. The sand's all up an' down here, an'—— Hark at that!"

A long, jarring groan, low at first, and increasing gradually, seemed to come from the very bowels of the ship herself. Then, after about a minute, there was a report like a cannon far below them, and the whole vessel seemed to ring with it.

"I told you so!" said Cavendish jubilantly.

"What is it?" said Sam, listening intently.

"The garboard strake's gone. Badly sprung, an' p'r'aps snapped. She's settlin' sideways on the shoal, an' her weight's breakin' her! There, you can hear the stringers giving, too!"

"That's Greek to me," said Sam. "What's it mean?"

"It means she'll leak like a basket, even if they're able to float her off!" said Cavendish, dancing with delight; and another long-drawn groan, as if the great ship were complaining in her pain, echoed through her. "It'll be as much as the steam-pumps can keep under. We've done it now, Villiers! We've wiped her off the list! Back to Germany she'll have to go, even if she floats at all!"

"If I'd any voice left I'd cheer," said Sam. "It'd be worth a month's pay to be on deck now."

They listened in silence for some time, and it seemed to make their own peril the lighter as they heard the sounds of the damage one by one. They had nothing to expect but a death in cold blood, but their four hands had put out of action a great ship of their country's foes, and the knowledge warmed them more than the horsehair blankets.

How the time passed they could not tell. All was darkness in the iron cabin. It seemed to them they lay there for hours, occasionally taking exercise to keep themselves warm, and talking to avoid thinking of the fate that was in store for them. It was plain enough they were beyond reach of all aid or rescue. They had been caught red-handed, and must pay the penalty.

The noise and bustle had long since died down. At last they heard the sound of many feet in the alley-way, the key grated in the lock, and as the door was thrown open a switch turned on a barred electric light on the ceiling of the guard-room.

The captain of the battleship stood before them, grim and forbidding, two ward-room officers beside him, and a bluejacket. He was a big, square-jawed man, with a tawny torpedo beard, and short moustache, with flinty-blue eyes that gazed sternly at the captives with a pitiless stare.

"You are English, of course?" he said, in their own tongue.

"Yes," said Cavendish, with a polite smile.

He looked a queer figure, wrapped in the horsehair blanket, his wrists still tied, though he had managed partly to loosen them.

"Civilians?"

"I am a sub-lieutenant in the British Navy, named Robert Cavendish."

One of the ward-room officers sneered, and the other shook his head grimly.

"And you?" said the captain sternly to Sam.

"Lieutenant Aubrey Villiers, late of the Greyfriars Cadet Corps."

The captain did not seem to have heard of the corps, nor, fortunately, of Sam. Not that it mattered much.

"You will both be dealt with before long," said the captain, in a rasping voice; and after another glare at the prisoners he withdrew, and darkness fell on them again.

"Don't like the look of that joker," said Cavendish, "though probably no skipper in their service would show us any mercy. Not that we particularly want any from a Dutchman. Knuckling under's a thing I never fancy."

"No," said Sam. "Seems to me," he added, with a sigh, "it'd have saved us a lot of trouble if the gun-cotton had finished us off."

"It pretty nearly did," chuckled Cavendish. "Those fuses went even shorter than I reckoned on. I say, the tide's risin' again. This room's gettin' level."

The iron plates of the guard-room floor had been more or less on a slant as the battleship heeled, but now they were slowly coming to the level again.

"She's rightin' herself," said Stephen. "That means she's goin' to float, I suppose. Hark! There's some vessel comin' alongside."

"Must be something small, then," said Cavendish, as the toot of a siren was heard; "a despatch-boat, most likely. I expect the skipper's sent the news of this blessed disaster to his admiral—p'r'aps by steam-pinnace."

They listened eagerly for some time, and it was plain that visitors had boarded the battleship. Presently a distant hail was heard, and the other vessel was apparently departing. A long pause followed, and by-and-by some sailors or Marines came along the alley, talking as they went.

"Depends on whether she floats—ordered to the Elbe if she does—take weeks to repair her—cursed British! Admiral's in the deuce of a rage, I'll bet! Pretty fix for the Kronprinz Karl, just when she's wanted."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Cavendish, as the scraps of conversation reached them through the door. "Do they say this is the Kronprinz Karl?"

"Yes."

"Glory! We've bagged one of their finest ships, then! What else did the beggars say? My German's only Navy-brand; I couldn't twig it all."

"That if she floats she's to go to the Elbe for repairs. That's what I made of it."

"Ah, I thought so!"

"Do you think she can cross the North Sea in this condition?"

"Probably, with care. They'll shut all her watertight doors, an' keep the steam-pumps goin'. She's got to try it. They can't do without her, nor can she be repaired here. I say, it's gettin' lighter, ain't it?"

"Dawn's breaking," said Sam; and for the first time they saw there was a porthole to the guard-room, which was on the upper deck. "I didn't know they put windows on these ships."

"Bless you, yes—where they won't do any harm. We're high up here, an' we're not in the citadel."

"I escaped by a porthole once—on the Kaiser's yacht—by unscrewin' the frame," said Sam, looking at the narrow bullseye light; "but there's no doin' anything with that one. Not big enough, either. They've got us as safe as a bee in a bottle. Well, there's the dawn risin', an' I'd like to have a look at it," he added, standing by the port, "for it's likely to be the last either of us'll see."

"Chap must take the luck as it comes," said Cavendish philosophically, folding himself tighter in his blanket. "I've seen the sun rise before. I say, she feels as if she were nearly afloat. Blow it!"

"The tides are gettin' bigger with the full moon," answered Sam, "an' we've been in here several hours. Shouldn't wonder if she is."

They soon had proof of it, for a dull throbbing in the ship presently announced that her engines had started. The ebb tide had ceased long since, the flood had come up, and it was nearly high water. The prisoners heard the great vessel vibrating as the steam-power heaved on the winches and strained the cables.

"They're trying to haul her off. She's comin', too!" said Cavendish. "If she goes down—well, I'd as soon be drowned in here as shot on deck."

There was a long pause as the Kronprinz Karl strained in the throes of the struggle. Sam and his companion began to feel a new hope—perhaps she would not come off the bank at all. They were doomed to disappointment, however, for presently it was evident she moved, and at last a quicker run forward and a gentle roll showed that she was off the shoal and in deep water again.

"Now's the anxious time for her precious staff," said Sam, smiling grimly; "they'll keep a close watch to see what she'll do."

"They're whackin' her up to full speed at once," said Cavendish, as the engines began to beat and throb powerfully. "They mean runnin' her across by the shortest way without any delay. It'll take 'em a day an' night."

"Can they go at full speed, though?"

"Pretty near it; the engines probably are all right. She couldn't be depended on to keep the sea long, though, an' they wouldn't dare hamper a battle fleet with her as she is now. Lame ducks are no use."

"She'll float long enough for us," said Sam grimly; "they'll get rid of our carcases hours before reaching the Elbe. It's gettin' broad daylight now; they'll send for us soon, I s'pose."

"Noon is the usual time for executions," said Cavendish cheerfully; "but they may polish us off earlier. No good harpin' on that subject, anyhow."

"I wasn't," said Sam shortly.

He stood by the port-light for a long time, feeling as if every minute that he could look upon the sea and sky was worth seizing. The summons might come at any time.

For over an hour Sam stood there gazing at the sea, or as much of it as he could view from his standpoint. The only thing he saw in that time was a red-sailed fishing smack, which the ship passed quite close, and she took Sam's thoughts back to the Maid of Essex, and set him wondering what would become of her, and whether Stephen and Ned guessed they were prisoners, or thought them drowned.

The fog had partly cleared off with the morning breeze, but the day was still rather hazy. The Kronprinz Karl churned along as fast as her engines could take her, and a landsman would not have suspected that she was badly crippled and unfit to stay at sea. Cavendish, taking no further interest in matters, had dropped off to sleep in his blanket, but presently he awoke.

"Been keepin' watch, have you?" he said. "Any idea how far she's got? Rum to find ourselves still alive."

"She's been goin' hard an hour an' a half," said Sam, "an' ought to be a good twenty-five miles to sea by now to the eastward. Maybe thirty. We're probably well out in the North Sea, with the Channel open to leeward of us, an hour or two's journey away."

"If only Frankie were down this way," mused Cavendish. "But there ain't the smallest chance of that. He'll be on guard somewhere off Dover. We're more likely to meet Germans than British."

"Yes," said Sam, "an' there's one of 'em now!" he added, staring through the port as a distant ironclad came into view through the haze a mile or more away, as the wind thinned the mist still more. "A smaller ship than this—battleship, though, too."

A sudden stir outside on the iron decks reached Sam's ear, and several orders were shouted sharply.

"Clear for action! Man the starboard guns! Lieutenant Kruger, warn them in the fighting-tops!"

"What!" exclaimed Cavendish, starting up as he heard the cry, and joining Sam at the port-light. "Where's that vessel? Great James, that's no German! She's one of ours!"

"So she is!" cried Sam, as the white ensign, looking no bigger than a handkerchief, was seen flying from the stranger's poop-staff as she turned slowly. "Is it one of Sir Francis's lot?"

"Rats, no! It's one of the old second-class battleships, used now for coast defence ships. What a risk to send her out here? By gum, I ought to know her! It's the poor old Resolute! My cousin, Charlie Onslow, commands her. Good for him. There goes the first shot! She's opened the ball, anyway, an' shows she don't fear the Dutchman!"

For the first time Cavendish showed a trace of excitement as a thin puff of smoke jerked from the British ship's after-deck, instantly followed by a stunning crash overheard on the Kronprinz Karl as the six-inch shell burst upon the citadel.

"Got him where he lives! There go the Dutchman's guns!" exclaimed Cavendish, and six heavy shocks were felt in quick succession as the German ship opened fire with her

starboard batteries. Two columns of water leaped up near the Resolute, and the blaze of bursting shells could be seen among her upper works. Her guns replied smartly, but with much less power, though the shots came home every one upon the German's sides and top hamper, and the noise was deafening. A thrill of joy ran through Sam as he saw the proud ensign flying, and felt the shock of the British shells overhead.

"Hurrah!" he shouted. "She'll sink us or save us, then! The old flag to the rescue!"

"Sink us?" said Cavendish. "Man, that ship'll be at the bottom in twenty minutes! Can't you see?"

Sam felt a shock as if a cold douche were thrown over him.

"Eh!" he cried. "Do you mean to say——"

"I mean the Resolute is doomed," returned Cavendish. "She's a poor old crock of a Reserve ship, an' this is one of the strongest vessels in the German Navy. She could sink six Resolutes, and they couldn't touch her."

"And that battleship there can do nothing?" queried Sam, his heart sinking.

"Not to a ship like this. Poor old Resolute! Her guns can't pierce the Kronprinz's armour. Her engines can't take her out of range. This vessel we're in is ten knots faster. Look how we're followin' her! An' the range isn't a mile! No, Charlie's been sent out here on some orders or other, an' this fog's betrayed him. One thing, he'll die game!"

The roar of the batteries drowned all speech for some time, and the fight raged hotly. The Kronprinz was able, with her superior speed, to steam to any side of the Resolute and attack her as she pleased. The booming of the guns seemed to shake the very sea.

"I thought this ship was too crippled to fight," said Sam.

"This ain't a fight—it's target practice for the Kronprinz Karl," said Cavendish bitterly. "Look at the Resolute reelin' under it! We aren't even usin' our big bow guns here; there's no need for the German to strain himself. He can wipe his enemy out on the way."

Sam said no more. He watched the fight with a dismal fascination. The whole ship shook to the recoil of the guns and the crash of the British shells.

But it was as Cavendish said. The six-inch projectiles could make no more impression on the mighty armour of the Karl than on a granite mountain. The Resolute was no longer a ship of the Fleet. She had had her day, and was only of use for coast defence. The German shells rained down upon her and riddled her thin armour-belt through and through.

From where they were Sam and Cavendish could not see her grim-faced crews slaving at the guns as the old ship slowly settled under them. But they could see her reeling and blazing under the pitiless hail of shells, her engines stopped, her funnels shot away, and her hull riddled, while still the remaining guns pounded away stubbornly at her huge foe, and scarcely a shot but came home upon the German's hulk.

"He can shoot," said Cavendish soberly. "Uncommon well those guns are handled. But she's goin' now."

A lump came into Sam's throat as the end took place before his eyes. Three tremendous explosions rent the Resolute amidships. Slowly at first, but faster and faster, she settled down in the water, and her bows began to dive sullenly. Still firing with every gun that remained, hurling her defence at the enemy with her last gasp, her stern reared its spinning screws high into the air. The sea closed over her, and she vanished into the depths, a huge wave curling over her as she sank.

"Good-bye, Charlie, old man!" muttered Cavendish. "You fought it out like a good 'un."

Sam's eyes were strangely misty as he turned away from the port-light. When he looked again, nothing was to be seen but the grey, foggy winter sea, and the Kronprinz Karl was steaming full speed upon her course again.

"Isn't she even stoppin' to see if there are any of the crew to pick up?" exclaimed Sam huskily.

"Seems not," returned Cavendish grimly. "She's in a hurry to reach the Elbe, you see."

"If I could give my life ten times over to sink this ship I'd do it joyfully!" cried the cadet, clenching his hands with a perfect outburst. "If we could only ——"

"Steady, old boy. Don't get hot under the collar," said Cavendish quietly. "You've seen a sight that's pretty tryin' to watch, an' I've lost my cousin. But he died fightin'; and as for pickin' 'em up, it's long odds there'd be none afloat. Things happen quicker here at sea than they do ashore, an' the Resolute was done the first moment she happened on the Kronprinz so close. But we've sent two like her to the bottom, at Sheerness, an' our fleet will avenge us two."

No more was said for some time, for neither of them felt inclined for much talk. Sam sat moodily against the iron wall, and tried to think of other things. It was not long before he was recalled to himself by footsteps in the alley-way outside, and the door was thrown open. The sergeant of Marines appeared, with a private, who threw down a couple of rough serge "jumpers" or blouses, and two pairs of old duck trousers.

"Put those on," said the sergeant gruffly, and bending down he cut loose the captives' wrists.

"Don't think they're quite my size," said Cavendish, looking at them.

"They are good enough to get shot in," growled the sergeant. "On with them quickly. You are wanted on deck at once.

There was nothing to be gained by protesting, and they both donned the slop clothes. Bare-headed and bare-footed, they walked out into the corridor, where a guard of Marines closed round them and they were marched off to the after-deck.

The Kronprinz Karl showed plainly enough the marks of her recent fight. She was scarred and stained all over, and outside the armoured citadel much minor damage was done. Her smokestacks were riddled with shot-holes, and her fighting-tops dented and chipped.

There was little leisure to notice these things, however, for the captives found themselves brought before the captain and first lieutenant, standing apart from the other group of officers, while all around the decks the sailors and Marines were drawn up in orderly lines, facing the centre. The stern alone was left unmanned.

The guard of Marines placed Sam and Cavendish before the captain, saluted, and drew back. The Kronprinz's commander looked the prisoners over grimly, and silence fell on all, while the ship forged steadily ahead. He spoke with a clear, harsh voice, in good English.

"It is reported to me that you were the cause of the severing of this ship's cables last night, and of her subsequent grounding," he said sternly. "I ask you formally if this is true?"

"Quite correct," said Cavendish coolly.

"It's true," answered Sam steadily.

"Have you anything to say before sentence of death is pronounced on you and carried out?" said the captain grimly.

"If you've made up your mind to take your revenge by shooting us, I suppose you'll do it," returned Cavendish. "Both of us are in the service of our country, all the same. We are not civilians."

"Neither of us," said Sam grimly; "but if you're bent on butchery, go ahead and don't make a sham court-martial of it!"

A flush came to the captain's face and his lips tightened wrathfully.

"You have earned the penalty!" he said grimly, and turned to the officer of Marines.

"Place the prisoners aft and select your firing-party at once!"

Three crisp orders were given. Cavendish and Sam were placed side by side some little distance aft, with a clear field behind them away over the stern. Six Marines with loaded rifles were drawn up in line opposite to them.

"Shall I bind the prisoners' eyes, sir?" said the captain of Marines.

"Do nothing that you are not told to do, Herr Captain," said the battleship's commander grimly. "Bid your men present, and I will give the final word. Silence on the quarter-deck!"

Sam and Cavendish, erect as on parade, faced the six riflemen fearlessly and without a tremor.

"Good-bye, old chap!" said Cavendish quietly. "If she reaches the Elbe she'll be lucky. A decent time we've had together—eh?"

"Ready! Present!" cried the officer of Marines.

The six men raised their rifles sharply, and the six black muzzles pointed level at the prisoners' breasts.

Four hundred eyes were fixed on the captive Britons, but neither Sam nor Cavendish in that moment of cruel strain moved a muscle. The fatal word was awaited in dead silence. It was broken by a sharp shout from the fighting-top—a shout that rang over the ship, jarred on every ear.

"Destroyers in sight, sir! British destroyers east and west, approaching at full speed!"

Like an electric shock the news reached the crew, and at that same instant through the murky haze two swift black forms came leaping down upon the battleship, not four hundred yards distant, and two more on the other side. And each one bore, fluttering amid the black smoke that streamed aft along her decks as she hurled herself onwards, the white ensign of the British Navy.

The captain seemed to stiffen with a jerk as he heard the

cry from the fighting-top. One swift glance to either side he gave, and the orders flew like hail as he sprang to the turret ladder.

"Quarters! Let go with the quick-firers! All batteries on those destroyers! Clear the decks!"

The firing party was nowhere in the swift rush to quarters that followed the order. In that moment of deadly peril for the German ironclad, there was not a thought given to the prisoners. The muster for execution was a thing of the past in less than three seconds—it was a question of saving the ship or losing her.

"Here, quick!" said Cavendish at Sam's ear. "Dodge after me!"

He slipped actively across the deck before the rush to quarters was over, and in another moment the pair of them were hidden from view by the casemate of the great stern guns, where they were least likely to be noticed, though there was little chance of any attention being paid to them just then.

The British destroyers were now in full view, and, despite the danger, Sam gave a sharp cheer as he saw the stripped hulls leaping down upon their prey. With a rattling crash the quick-firers of the Kronprinz opened fire, below and aloft.

"Will they get her?" cried Sam.

"They're goin' to buy her!" said Cavendish grimly. "Glory! What a chance for the fellows on 'em!"

"Buy her? What d'you mean?"

"Four destroyers rushin' all at once at a range like this, have a good chance of gettin' a battleship before they're all wiped out. She'll sink three, but the fourth may get her. They'll sell themselves for the chance of sinkin' her. I wonder by whose orders?"

It was all done in less time than it takes to tell it. The prisoners' hearts beat fast as they saw the destroyers make their long, lunging rush through the seas, straight for the battleship's steel sides. They had seen her huge bulk through the fog before she had seen them, and the Kronprinz, like some huge whale attacked by swordfish, rushed ahead as fast as her engines would take her, firing as she went. In but a few seconds the range would allow of the torpedoes being fired.

"If they get her fairly, she'll go down, an' take us with her," said Cavendish, watching the attack with professional interest, "it's a better death than by a Marine's bullet. Ah, there goes one!"

Each of the attackers was rushing ahead through a halo of shell-torn water. The foremost destroyer away to starboard was seen to stagger, reel, and go down. Amid the deafening crash of the guns the others held on, and a second destroyer slid to a standstill, and began to sink, turning slowly round in circles like a wild-duck shot through the lungs.

The third, hard-hit, did not stop, and the fourth came on almost untouched. Something seemed to leap out ahead of her, and again as she swerved swiftly and dashed astern. The other did the same.

"They've let go!" said Cavendish. "Sit tight! Now for the devil an' the deep sea—they'll never have missed!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a tremendous shock was felt. It was as if some giant hand had risen from the ocean-bed, and smitten right into the Kronprinz vitals. She heaved her side up violently, a huge spout of water shot up alongside, drenching the boys, who were shaken off their feet and flung down by the shock.

An instant later, a second torpedo struck the ship on the same side, and Sam and Cavendish, every nerve in their bodies shaken, were sent rolling across the iron deck as the blow came home, and the great ship lurched. A third hit her under the stern, and carried away her steering-gear.

Stricken and rent asunder, the Kronprinz Karl swerved round, and began to settle with amazing suddenness, her decks all on the slant, and her guns still going wildly, while the destroyers turned and raced away like black greyhounds. All was confusion, and half the crew were smitten with panic as the broken ship heeled as though she would turn turtle altogether. Cavendish, trained in matters of the sea, knew what had happened.

"By gum, they've rent the very soul out of her!" he exclaimed, clinging to a casemate-rail, for the breath had been knocked out of him when he was flung against it. "No watertight doors'll help her now—she's got no bottom left!"

It was true enough. The strakes and girders that had been sprung by strain when she grounded had been blown clean in, and ripped away by the torpedoes. In the usual course of things it ought to have been nearly an hour before she sank, but now her under-parts were open to the sea. She was like a floating biscuit-tin with the bottom suddenly knocked out, her crew panic-stricken and helpless, for no power could save her, and as the water swiftly reached her port engines the boilers on the lower side blew up with a crash that lifted the iron decks.

"She's on the way down!" cried Cavendish in Sam's ear, shouting to make himself heard above the roar of the steam. "Jump for your life!"

Both of them sprang overboard at the same moment, and plunged into the sea thirty feet below. Nobody dreamed of stopping them—in that deadly five minutes since the first alarm, not a soul had paid any attention to the prisoners. Indeed, some of the crew, struck with the panic that will attack even the best men at such times, were leaping overboard, too, in defiance of all orders. To stay on the ship was certain death.

"Swim like blazes!" said Cavendish, striking out powerfully the moment they both rose to the surface. "If we don't get clear she'll pull us down with her, or cut us up with her screw!"

Sam put all his strength into his strokes, for he knew the danger as well as Cavendish. In his heart he could not see that it mattered much. If they escaped the sinking battleship there was nothing likely to be left that would float. In the old days when wooden ships went down, spars and debris sometimes saved many of their crews, but a modern ironclad is stripped of all wood, fittings, and boats before she goes into action. The Kronprinz Karl held out no hope to her men. The exploding boilers alone had killed over a hundred.

When each wave raised him on its crest, Sam caught a glimpse of one of the destroyers, scudding far away over the sea. She had dealt the mortal wound, and sped away from the revenge of the guns, that were now helpless to do further harm. The two swimmers knew they were far from any land, and there seemed little to hope for. Yet while a man has breath he will swim.

They had covered nearly a hundred yards from the Kronprinz Karl when Cavendish, glancing back, saw she was in her death-throes. Her bows were diving till the water came up to the citadel, her stern reared itself in the air. One of the engines was still going, and the starboard propeller was spinning in the air like a fly-wheel. The crew, on all sides, were jumping overboard in scores.

"Stick it on," panted Cavendish; "we're barely out of the pull of her yet!"

Sam glanced back as he quickened his stroke, and it seemed to him that he made little headway. The sight he saw was one that haunted his brain for ever after. It was enough to shake the coolest nerve and the calmest head.

As the Kronprinz sank, her upended stern going lower and lower, the black masses of men were drawn helplessly into

the whirlpool that she made, and the huge, spinning propeller cut them to pieces as it thrashed the water into a lather of crimson foam. Sam turned away his head, sickened, to shut out the sight, and hardly heard Cavendish's warning cry.

"Harder, man! Swim for all you're worth! We're drawin' back into it fast!"

One furious spurt Sam made as the deadly peril became plain to him. It was true enough. They were being drawn rapidly backwards into the vortex made by the huge ship as she foundered, and no human power could make headway against the drag of the whirlpool. Strong as he was, Sam felt his wind and strength failing him under the strain.

"I'm done!" he gasped.

Back to the Colours.

What happened next Sam hardly knew. He was conscious of Cavendish's voice urging him to make a final effort; but Cavendish was doing no better than himself. They were both drawing slowly back in a circle towards that horrible spider's-web where the whirling screw was chopping up the drowning men in heaps.

It was not in Sam's nature to give up the struggle for life as long as he could lift a finger, but he was past caring very much what happened to him then. The sea and the whirlpool had him in its grip, and though he struck out mechanically it made no difference.

A heavy, muffled explosion seemed to run through all his muscles as the water leaped up in a great fountain near the vortex. The two remaining boilers, now deep under the surface, had blown up. They had held out a long time, and the water in the sunken ship reached them last, but they followed the fate of the others now, and the very sea seemed to shake for a moment.

Sam scarcely noticed the explosion, his brain and senses were fast becoming dulled. The Kronprinz Karl, with one last wallow, had gone to the bottom, propeller and all.

Like two corks in a pond, the comrades somehow kept together—by no effort of their own. They were kicked about in a lather of broken, leaping water, swirling to and fro helplessly, not knowing whether they sank or swam. It seemed to last for ever, and when finally the jabble of sea calmed down and Sam heard the sub-lieutenant's tone calling huskily somewhere near by, he wondered hazily if he were dead and listening to some spirit-voice of the under seas.

"Only just missed it!" spluttered Cavendish. "I thought we were done!"

Sam wrung the water out of his eyes, and looked round. There was nothing to see, except the oily swells, streaked with floating ash, and some unpleasant-looking objects rising and falling over the waves some distance away.

"How was it we weren't sucked down?" he said huskily.

"We were just far enough away, by good luck. We got pulled in some distance, but she went down quick, an' the backwash swept us out again when the whirlpool stopped." He broke into a fit of coughing. "Can't talk about it now," he added faintly.

"What's the good? We're done for, anyway. I can't keep up another five minutes," muttered Sam, paddling wearily to keep himself afloat. The jumper and trousers were light and thin, but the weight of them was enough to hamper him badly in his exhausted condition.

"Not good for much more myself," said Cavendish faintly. "Don't see anything to lay hold of—do you?"

Sam made no reply. There was nothing. Even if there had been, he would not have had strength to reach it. The stress and excitement of the sinking ship had kept them going, and enabled them to do their utmost for a time. Now she was gone, a sort of lethargy crept over them. They were too far gone to see or hear distinctly, and each was wondering dully when he would sink. There is no saying how long they remained in that condition, mechanically keeping themselves up with feebler and feebler strokes, when Sam heard a mysterious voice, apparently somewhere up in the sky:

"There's life in 'em yet! Stick the boathook into his pants, Jackson!"

Sam felt himself being hauled up along some iron plates that bruised and bumped him. He protested and struggled feebly, having some idea in his bewildered brain that he was out for a swim, and an officious person with a pole was interfering with him. Cavendish was hauled up, too. The serge cloth of his breeches, though thin, was tough, and it held his weight wonderfully at the end of a boathook. Both of them lay for some time upon cold iron deck-plates in a state of collapse, the water streaming from them. Neither had seen the approach and slowing-down of the destroyer that had rescued them in their last extremity; but Cavendish was the first to sit up.

"Hallo, Freddy!" he remarked.

A spruce-looking young lieutenant—despite the smuts and grime from the flying smoke—gave a jump, and stared at the dripping figure his torpedo-coxswain had rescued.

"Holy smoke!" he said. "Are you English? Why, it's Bob Cavendish—or his ghost!"

"I'm not quite sure which myself," said Cavendish. "It's a pleasure to see you on a whole dee-stroyer of your own, Freddy! I've a deuce of a vacuum in my inside, let me tell you. Got any grub?"

Sam raised himself on one elbow, and stared round, gradually realising that he was no longer in the tossing sea, but on a British ship, if the smoke-stained white ensign at the stern was anything to go by.

"Where on earth did you spring from?" exclaimed the lieutenant, helping Cavendish to his feet and pulling out a silver flask. "Take a pull at that—you look half dead! Were you on the Kronprinz Karl?"

"Thereabouts. Prisoners of war, as you might say," replied Cavendish, with renewed cheerfulness, "owing to our own idiocy. Let me introduce my fellow-maniac. Lieutenant Villiers of the Greyfriars Cadets—Lieutenant Frederick Forbes, commandin' the destroyer Puff-Adder. Villiers, my dear Freddy, is a trump from Trumpville."

"Pleased to meet you," gasped Sam, thinking that nobody on earth but Cavendish would start formally introducing people at such a time. "We were pretty near going out when you picked us up. Was it you who torpedoed the Kronprinz?"

"Half of her. The Rattler attended to the other half," said the lieutenant, pointing to a second destroyer with two of her smoke-stacks shot away approaching the scene at full speed. "Go there, Mr. Hawley, and see if you can pick any of the poor beggars up, though it isn't likely. I say, come below and get into dry clothes, you two!"

A short spell below during which the two companions stripped and towelled each other with rough tape-cloths, followed by a hasty meal of corned beef and biscuit, made new men of them; and having each borrowed a heavy suit of "lammies" made of service blanket, they felt fit to go on deck. They found their commander circling round over the scene of the sunken Kronprinz.

(To be continued.)

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