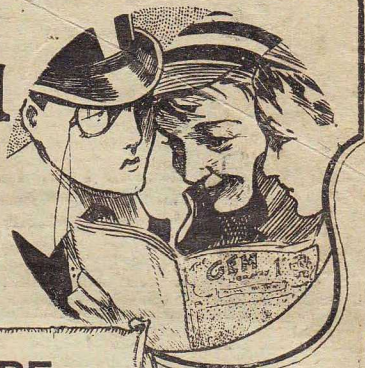


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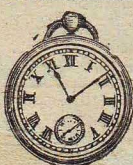
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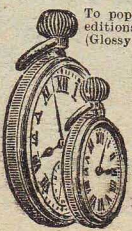
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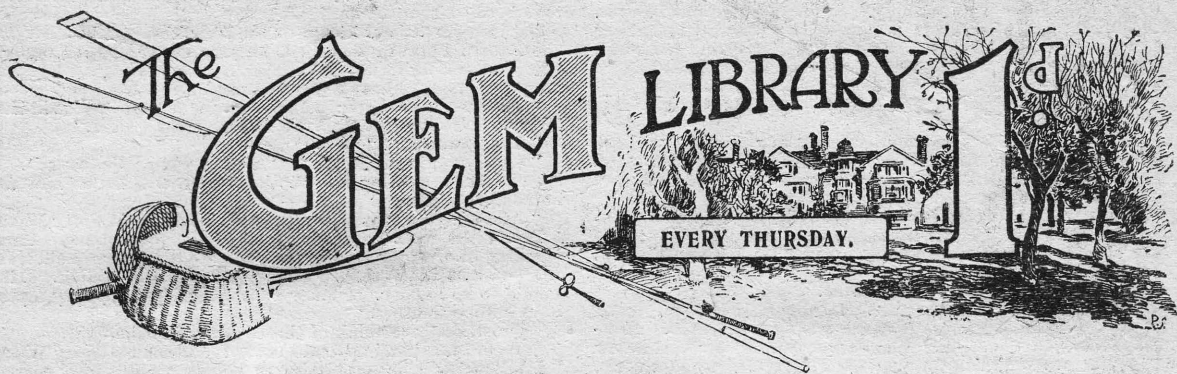
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A SON OF THE EMPIRE



A Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Planning a Welcome.

"NOBLE!"

"Yes, that's the new kid's name."

"Where does he come from?"

"Australia."

"I say, deah boys—"

"And he arrives this afternoon," went on Jack Blake, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, ruthlessly interrupting Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I had it from Kildare, who had it from Mr. Railton, who had it from the Head."

"I say, deah boys—"

"His train gets in at the village station at three o'clock," said Blake. "As it's a half-holiday to-day, kids, I was thinking—"

"Do you only do your thinking on half-holidays?" asked Tom Merry politely.

"Ass! As it's a half-holiday to-day, I was thinking that we might get up a party to meet the chap at the station, and give him a sort of welcome. He's come a long way."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Will you ring off, Gussy?" demanded Blake, turning upon his insistent chum. "I tell you we're busy. This chap Noble—"

"But that's just what I was goin' to speak about, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form, "and undah the cires., Blake, I uttably wefuse to wing off."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Let Gussy go-ahead. I can see that he's got some scheme for giving the new kid an ovation."

"As a mattah of fact, that's just what I was thinkin' of," said D'Arcy. "You see, I have been thinkin' it out while you asses have been talkin'—"

"Well, go on," said Blake resignedly. "Get it over!"

"I wefuse to get it ovah. Pway give me your attention, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, carefully polishing his eyeglass, and then jamming it into his right eye. "I wegard this as an important mattah. I twust that ewery gentleman pwesent agrees with me?"

All the gentlemen present nodded. There were half a dozen of them—Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, and Manners, of the Shell Form, and Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries of the Fourth—D'Arcy's own Form. In spite of the occasional friction between the Shell and the Fourth the youngsters were on excellent terms, and just now they were putting their heads together upon an important subject—that of extending a fitting welcome to the new boy from over the sea.

"Undah the cires.," said Arthur Augustus, "I wegard it as an impewative duty on our part to give this new chap a welcome. We don't know him, and I admit that it is wathah difficult to meet and welcome a chap you haven't been intwooded to. But undah the cires. we have no other wresource."

"Beautifully put," said Digby, "and now Gussy's finished, I—"

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 69 (New Series)

"But I haven't finished, deah boy," said D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass freezingly upon Digby. "I've hardly started yet. I weally think we ought to get up a wepewentative partay to go down to the station and meet the new chap, and make much of him. Of course, he may be a weguhah wastah, but we owe a certain respect to the countwy he awwives fwom. You see, I believe in supportin' the Empire, and that sort of thing, deah boys—"

"I daresay the Empire would worry along all right without your support," suggested Monty Lowther. "Don't you think you're rather reckless in spending your time supporting empires instead of sticking to cricket?"

"I wegard that remark as uttably fwivolous, Lowthah, not to say unpatwiotic," said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "It is the duty of ewevy Englishman to stand up for the Bwitish Empire, upon which the sun nevah wises—"

"Never sets, you ass!" said Blake.

"I wufuse to be called an ass. I suppose if the sun nevah sets on the Bwitish Empire it nevah wises on it eithah. How-evah, that doesn't mattah. What I was goin' to say is, this new kid comes to St. Jim's as a wepewentative of a gweat colony, and an important part of our Empire—"

"Ours?" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! Ours, in common with the west of the inhabitants of the Empire," said D'Arcy. "I didn't mean that it was our personal property, ass. This chap Noble comes as a wepewentative of Bwitain acwoss the seas, and it is our duty as patriots to extend a welcome to him—hands acwoss the sea, you know.—The only point in doubt is in what mannah shall we welcome the kid?"

"My word!" said Digby. "Gussy's got to the point at last."

"Weally, Dig—"

"Well," said Tom Merry, "now Gussy's finished—"

"But I haven't finished, Tom Mewwy."

"Hardly," grinned Blake. "That was only the first lap, and Gussy's as fresh as ever. Go ahead, old son."

"That's a wathah diswepwectful way of puttin' it, Blake. Howevah, I will go ahead. I was thinkin' that pewwaps somethin' in the form of a Wومان twiump would be the pwopah capah."

"A woman triumph?" said Blake, staring. "Do you mean something like a Suffragette raid on the House of Commons?"

"Pway don't be wiciduous, deah boy. I mean a Wومان twiump, the kind of twiump the Womans used to celebawte at Wome."

"Oh, a Roman triumph? I see—chariots and captive lions, and prisoners in chains."

"Of course, the thing would have to be modified, Blake. But that's the idea. We haven't any chawviots or lions, or pwisonahs, but it would be exactly the same in othah wewpects."

"We could borrow the village hack to use as a chariot," suggested Tom Merry gravely.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And we could have it drawn by a captive donkey," said Lowther. "I am sure Gussy would offer his services."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"The triumph's a jolly good idea," said Blake meditatively; "but as it wouldn't work, we needn't bother our heads about it. We can go down to the station in a body to meet this chap Noble—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hullo, here's Figgins! 'Ware New House cads!"

And Tom Merry & Co., all belonging to the School House at St. Jim's, were on their guard at once as Figgins & Co. of the New House came running up, for the warfare between the two houses at St. Jim's seldom slept, and when it did it was liable to waken more lively than ever at any moment.

The School House fellows doubled their fists in a business-like way, and stood prepared to wipe Figgins & Co. off the face of the earth.

But the three juniors of the New House were not on the war-path.

Figgins waved his hand, and grinned as he came up, and Fatty Wynn and Kerr, his chums, turned on friendly smiles.

"It's all right," said Figgins cheerfully. "Don't be afraid."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"We're not going to hurt you," said Kerr.

As there were seven of the School House fellows, and only three of the New House, this assurance was hardly needed, and it put the School House backs up at once.

"Well, of all the cheek!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Here, collar the wasters, and wipe up the ground with them!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hold on!" said Figgins. "Pax, we haven't come over here for a row."

"What do you want, then?" asked Blake suspiciously.

"You're jolly near getting a thick ear, anyway, my son."

"It's about the new chap."

"What new chap?"

"The kid from Australia," said Figgins, becoming serious.

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S SUB-EDITOR."

A Tale of Tom Merry and Harry Noble, the Australian Boy.

"I suppose you know there's a new kid from Australia coming to school this afternoon? It's not settled yet whether he's going into the School House or the New House, I hear, or into the Fourth Form or the Shell, for that matter, so it's really a thing we can unite upon. I think a chap coming such a jolly long way ought to have a sort of a welcome."

"Another case of great minds running in grooves," said Tom Merry. "That's just what we've been talking over."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good egg," said Figgins. "Then we'll go Co. over it. A lot of fellows meeting him at the station will make him feel home-like, you know, and—"

"And a big feed when he gets to St. Jim's," said Fatty Wynn. "That's the most important part of the programme. I was thinking of a whip round to raise the funds, and we could leave the order at the tuckshop before going to the station. He's bound to be hungry. I know I always get jolly hungry myself in this June weather."

"Trust Fatty to think of that," grinned Blake.

"Well, isn't it an important point?" demanded Fatty Wynn.

"I believe in being hospitable to a chap coming from a great distance. And besides, we can have a bit of a feed ourselves at the same time. It will do us good."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Fatty's idea isn't a bad one," he said. "Make it a whip round. Gussy is not allowed to contribute more than a thousand guineas."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"There's my little bit," said Blake, tossing two shillings into the Panama hat Figgins held out for contributions. "Go ahead, kids. No restrictions. Gold preferred, silver accepted, coppers not refused. Anything smaller than a farthing will not be taken."

"I twust," said D'Arcy, looking round, "I twust that if I make a more considewable contwibution you will undahstand that it is merely fwom a desire to have a weally fittin' weception awwanged for our fellow citizen fwom ovah-seas. I twust you will not considah me capable of twyin' to thwow othah contwibutions into the shade."

"Certainly not," grinned Figgins. "The more you throw 'em into the shade the better we shall like it."

"You can throw the other contributions into the shade, and your own into the hat," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Thank you, deah boys! I was weally quite sure that you would not misunderstand me," said D'Arcy graciously, and he tossed a sovereign into the hat. "I have had a fivah fwom my gowernah to-day, and so I am weally quite wiah just at pwesent."

"Any more coming on?"

"I've only got nimpence," said Herries, fishing out his worldly wealth, and looking at it doubtfully. "And I've got to get Towser some dog-biscuits out of that. Young Wally's mongrel has been wolfing my biscuits. You can shove in a half-crown for me, Gussy, if you like."

"Certainly, deah boy."

There was quite a collection in the hat when it had passed round. Fatty Wynn collected it up and counted it.

"One pound nineteen," he said. "Good! There'll be a ripping feed for this. If you chaps will excuse me, I'll cut off and see about the arrangements at once."

And he cut off without waiting for a reply.

CHAPTER 2.

A Collision!

"Gussy!"

"Where's that ass?"

"Anybody seen Gussy?"

"We shall be late for the train."

"Gussy! Gussy! Gusususususy!"

And still there was no reply.

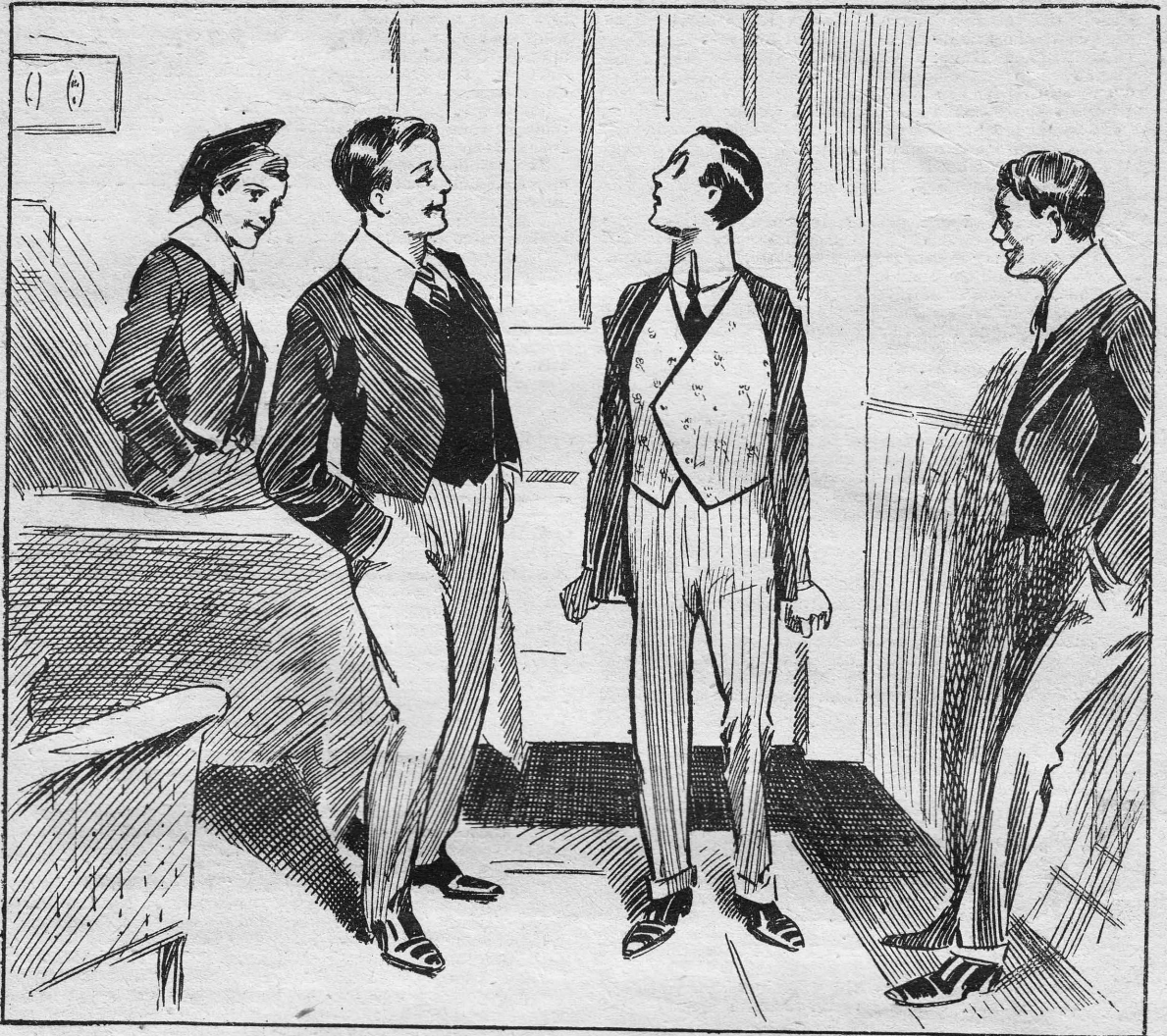
The School House fellows had arranged to meet the New House trio at the school gates to start for the village when they were ready. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came downstairs in good time, and they found Blake and Digby waiting on the steps of the School House. D'Arcy and Herries had not yet turned up. But Herries came racing up in a minute or two. He had only been to feed his bulldog, he explained. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was still absent.

The half-hour had struck from the school clock, and it was time to meet Figgins & Co. at the gates; but still D'Arcy did not come. Jack Blake breathed hard through his nose. They had called him in the quad, and hallooed into the common-room, and yelled up the stairs. And the voice of the swell of St. Jim's was not heard in reply.

"The young villain!" said Blake. "He's trying on a new coat, or a new hat, or something, and he's forgotten all about the train."

"Go and look for him," said Digby, sitting on the balustrade beside the steps, and fanning himself with his straw hat. The afternoon was warm.

"Cut up to the study, and see if he's there, Dig."



D'Arcy looked at Noble, and Noble looked at D'Arcy, and there was a grim silence.

"H'm! Cut up to the study and see if he's there, Herries."
"I've just been to feed Tower."

"Now, don't be a slacker, old chap," said Blake admonishingly. "A little run upstairs isn't much for a chap."

"Then, why don't you go?"

"Oh, you see," said Blake, a little taken aback—"you see—or—you see—well, if you come to that I will go!"

"Then buzz off," said Tom Merry. "Hallo, Taggles, what are you going to do with that whitewash?"

Jack Blake ran into the house just as Taggles, the school porter, came up the steps with a pail of whitewash. The porter was not looking amiable. He never did when there was work in the air.

"Which I've got to wash over the ceiling of Master Knox's study," he growled. "The ink that was spilt in Master Merry's study has soaked through."

"Too bad," said Tom Merry sympathetically. "I'll tell you what it is, Taggy—you ought to have a tip."

Taggles brightened considerably.

"Which you was always a kind-hearted young gent, Master Merry."

"Yes, I cultivate that sort of thing," said Tom Merry blandly. "I think you ought to have a tip. Don't you chaps think that Taggles ought to have a tip?"

"Yes, rather!" said the chaps in chorus.

"You see, Taggles, it's unanimous. You ought to have a tip. If you meet anybody that's likely to give you a tip, we haven't any objection to your taking it. Good-bye."

Taggles looked unutterable things. He moved on with the pail of whitewash on his shoulder, but as he went Tom Merry

slipped a shilling into his disengaged hand. And the face of Taggles was like an April day, sunshine after rain.

"Thank you kindly, Master Merry. You will have your little joke."

"Where's that ass, Blake?" said Lowther. "We shall have Figgins & Co. coming to look for us."

Jack Blake was in Study No. 6, the famous apartment where the four chums of the Fourth lived and moved and had their being. He had just entered it—on the run, rather breathless after dashing upstairs on a warm afternoon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was there, but too deeply preoccupied to notice Blake's entrance. And Jack Blake stared at him speechlessly for a moment.

The swell of St. Jim's was clad with even more than usual elegance. He was always, of course, elegant. The crease of his trousers, the set of his necktie, evoked envy even among the dandies of the Sixth. His fancy waistcoats were a dream, his dainty boots a vision. His gloves fitted as no other gloves in the School House did, and his collars were the highest and whitest in the Form. His silk hats were a poem in themselves.

The School House swell had donned his most ripping garments for the present occasion. Even Blake was dazzled a little, and he was accustomed to the elegance of his chum. D'Arcy was occupied now in trying on neckties; his garb was complete save for that. He had nine or ten neckties lying about near him, and he was trying on a pink one as Blake stared at him.

He watched the effect out of his right eye, that being the optic that was assisted by the monocle, and shook his head slowly.

"Hardly the thing, bai Jove!" Jack Blake burst out as D'Arcy laid the necktie down, and selected another.

"Gussy! Ass! Duffer! Come on!"

"Bai Jove!"

"We're waiting for you, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, and I weally wish, Blake, that you would not burst in on a fellow so beastly suddenly. You have thrown me into quite a fluttah."

"We're waiting!" bawled Blake.

"I am not deaf, deah boy."

"Will you come?"

"Yaas, wathah! I am extremely sowwy to keep you waitin', but it is impewative that I should have a necktie that does not commit any glawin' ewwah of taste. I am wearin' a new waistcoat, and there is blue in it."

"There's a silly duffer in it."

"I wefuse to be addressed as a silly duffah. Pway wetime for a few minutes, and I shall be finished with these neckties."

"You'll be finished in one second, or I'll stamp on your topper," said Blake grimly.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Here goes!"

"Hold on! I mean, let go! Pway don't be a howwid beast. I will make this necktie do, on second thoughts."

"Buck up, then. You can tie it as you come along."

"I should certainly wefuse to do anythin' of the sort," said D'Arcy, turning to the glass again. "It might go cwooked. I considah it necessary to show a great deal of honah to the new kid, as wepwesentin' a great Bwitish colony, and so I have taken a little care with my attire."

"A little care!" gasped Blake. "What would you look like if you took a lot of care, I wonder?"

"I twust I look respectable," said D'Arcy. "Of course, I shouldn't care to look dwessy. I wegah a dwessy man with howwah. I have a great contempt for affectation of any sort. Howevah, I wathah think that you chaps would do bettah to follow my example in this mattah. Fancy goin' to meet a chap comin' all the way from Austwaliah in a cwicket cap!"

"How do you know Noble has come in a cricket cap?"

"I did not mean that, Blake, I was weferrin' to your cwicket cap. I think it would be a good ideah for all of you to come up and change your clothes before goin' to the station."

"Are you coming?" asked Blake, reaching out his hand to the brightly-polished topper on the table.

"Yaas, wathah! Is my necktie stwaight?"

"Yes, ass. Buck up!"

"I am quite weady, deah boy," Arthur Augustus followed Blake from the study. "I shall have the gwatification, at all events, of showin' this chap Noble that there is at least one decently-dwessed chap at St. Jim's. I am wathah anxious to see Noble, Blake, for othah weasons. I want to ask him news of my relations in Bwisbane."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, as they went downstairs. "D'Arcy, I'm afraid I cannot allow this."

"Cannot allow what, deah boy?"

"It's dangerous?"

"What's dangerous?"

"That get-up," said the big Sixth-Former solemnly. "Think of the fluttering hearts you will leave behind you all along the village street."

"Oh, weally, don't wot, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "But for the wespact I owe you as skippah of the school, Kildare, I should wegah you as an ass, you know."

Blake grinned. They hurried downstairs, but on the first landing Arthur Augustus stopped.

"Bai Jove!"

"Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah! But——"

"Come on!" roared Blake, seizing him by the arm. "You're keeping us waiting. Come on, I tell you."

"Yaas; but I've forgotten my tie-pin."

"Leave it behind."

"Imposs, deah boy. I should nevah have forgotten it. It was entirely due to your hurwyvin' me. I suppose you don't want me to meet a new chap without a tie-pin! Pway wesease me, Blake. I sha'n't be more than a few minutes puttin' in a tie-pin."

"Come on!" said Blake, dragging D'Arcy towards the lower stairs.

"I wefuse to come on, I——"

"This way, duffer."

"Wesease me, or I shall lose my tempah and stwike you, Blake. I——"

"Come on!"

Blake exerted his strength, and dragged his chum forcibly downstairs. D'Arcy struggled, but he had to go, and they went down with a run that was nearly a fall. As ill-luck would have it, Taggles had got just half-way up with the pail of whitewash on his shoulder.

There was no possibility of avoiding the collision. Right THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 69.

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S SUB-EDITOR."

into Taggles went the two rushing juniors, and the pail of whitewash toppled off his shoulder, and came in a great wave upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

There was a shriek that might have been heard across the quadrangle.

The empty pail clattered down the stairs. Blake had sprung aside in time to escape the flood; D'Arcy had had the full benefit of it.

The wonderful garments of the swell of St. Jim's had disappeared under the whitewash. He looked like a miller, only more so.

"My heye!" said Taggles, clinging to the banisters. "My heye! More of your tricks. I'll report yer."

"Bai Jove!"

"I'll report yer! 'Elp!"

"Come on," whispered Blake.

He caught D'Arcy by the arm, and rushed him out of the School House, leaving Taggles to deal with the upset whitewash as best he could. And in the sunlight a roar of laughter greeted the swell of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 3. A Little Surprise.

"RIPPING!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Bravo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! My clothes are wuined! I feel vevy un-comfy! Bai Jove, I wegah this as absolutely wotten!"

"Ripping!" repeated Tom Merry enthusiastically. "Was this Gussy's own idea or yours, Blake?"

"Eh? What?"

"This idea of going to meet the new chap in fancy dress, I mean. Gussy's made up as a miller, isn't he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am not made up as a millah, Tom Mewwy. That beast Blake has wun me into that ass Taggles, and I am smothahed with howwid whitewash."

"Well, come on," said Blake. "There's no time to lose."

"I twust you do not expect me to come like this, Blake."

"We shall miss Noble."

"I should be sowwy to miss Noble, but I cannot come like this. I shall have to go and bathe and change my beastly clothes, you know. You chaps can wait."

"Can we?" said Monty Lowther. "Come on!"

"Don't be an ass," said Blake. "We can't miss the new chap, after getting ready to go and meet him. You can follow on your bike."

"Oh, vevy well!"

"I don't see why Gussy can't come as he is," said Manners. "The new chap would take it as a compliment if he came."

"I should be vevy sowwy to disappoint the new chap, Mannahs, but I should uttably wefuse to come as I am," said D'Arcy. "Pway go on, and I will follow as soon as I am weady."

And the swell of St. Jim's, dripping with whitewash, hurried into the house. The juniors, chuckling, ran down to the gates, where Figgins & Co. were waiting, and growing impatient.

"Call this keeping an appointment?" demanded Figgins aggressively.

"Sorry—Gussy's had an accident."

"Isn't he coming?"

"He's following on—perhaps! Let's get off!"

And they got off.

In Rylcombe Lane they broke into a trot. It was a good walk to the village, and they had no time to spare. They took the short cut, and arrived at the station five minutes before the train was due.

"Jolly good!" said Tom Merry, as they went into the shady station, red and warm from the trot in the sun. "We've done it all right. The train's not in yet. Can we go on the platform, cocky? We've got a special friend we've never seen before coming from Australia this afternoon."

They went on the platform. Jack Blake was looking thoughtful.

"Kildare said it was the three train," he remarked. "The kid must have come to Wayland by the express from London, and according to the time-table that could catch an earlier train, when it gets in early. Still, I suppose the kid from Australia wouldn't know that. It's all right."

"No sign of him here, anyway," said Lowther, looking round.

There was only one fellow on the platform beside themselves. He was a lad of about fifteen, of a sturdy frame, which seemed to be cramped into very uncomfortable clothes.

He stood with his back to the juniors, negotiating with an automatic machine, and they only carelessly noted that he was in tight-fitting Etons, and wore a silk hat on the back of his head.

Tom Merry looked up the line.

"Not in sight yet," he said, sitting down on the nearest seat. "That's all right! I suppose he's certain to come by this train?"

"I suppose so," said Blake. "Blessed if I shall know him, though, if there happen to be any other kids on board. Still, I suppose there'll be something distinctive about him."

"Of course, he'll have some sort of free-and-easy costume, I should say, with a sombrero hat or something," said Manners, rather vaguely.

"Do they wear sombreros in Australia?"

"Blessed if I know—I suppose they wear something. I imagine this kid Noble as a free-and-easy sort of chap, with a broad-brimmed hat and big boots——"

"And a belt," said Lowther.

"Yes, a belt certainly," agreed Tom Merry. "Leather trousers, very likely."

"I wonder if he will wear a collar!"

"Well, coming to the school, I suppose he would."

"H'm! Yes."

The boy at the automatic machine looked round curiously as the juniors talked. He showed a handsome, strong-featured face, with keen, alert eyes, that had a gleam of good-humour in their depths.

A slight smile flickered over his sunburnt face as he looked at the juniors from St. Jim's. He leaned an elbow on the automatic machine, and stood regarding them.

"His name's Noble," said Digby reflectively. "I've heard that name before—in connection with Australia, too."

Tom Merry laughed.

"You're thinking of Noble, the cricketer, I suppose."

"Oh, yes; that's it! Do you know what this chap's front name is, Blake?"

"Yes—Harry!"

"I daresay he's a relation of the cricketer," said Herries thoughtfully. "I'll ask him."

"Ha, ha! You may get a dot on the nose if you do."

"Hallo! Here comes the train!" exclaimed Figgins.

The train steamed into the station. There were a good many passengers apparently; but the juniors looked in vain for a sight of the Australian boy. The youth they had pictured to themselves did not get out of the train. There were several boys, but not one that could be imagined to be Tom Noble.

Blake grunted with dissatisfaction.

"The silly ass has missed the train!"

"I suppose a Cornstalk would take some time to get used to our time-tables," grinned Lowther. "We've had our trot for nothing."

"Beastly!" said Kerr. "We can't wait for the next."

"May as well be off," growled Blake. "These two trains come in close together, and then there isn't another for three-quarters of an hour. We could get over to Wayland on our bikes in the time, if we liked."

"Oh, let's get off. The chap's a silly ass——"

"A silly duffer——"

"An utter worm!"

"A really stupid dummy!"

"Thank you!"

It was the boy in Etons, leaning on the automatic machine, who said "Thank you."

The juniors looked round.

"Eh! Did you speak to us?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"Who the dickens are you?" demanded Blake.

"Harry Noble!"

And there was a general exclamation.

"What!"

CHAPTER 4.

The Australian.

NOBLE smiled serenely. He looked very handsome when he smiled; it was a smile of such perfectly good-tempered fun.

The juniors stared at him.

They had made all their comments upon the probable appearance of the Australian boy in the hearing of this lad, never dreaming for an instant that the quiet, neatly-attired fellow was the new fellow from Victoria.

Their comments had not been wholly complimentary, either, as Tom Merry realised with burning cheeks.

"Oh!" said Blake at last.

"Ah!" said Manners.

"Um!" remarked Digby.

"It's all right," said Noble cheerfully. "I couldn't help hearing what you fellows said, as you were talking it all just under my chin. I don't mind."

"Of course, we didn't know you were here," said Tom Merry; "and—and we didn't expect to see a chap exactly like—like you, either."

Noble laughed.

"No—let me see—you expected leather trousers, a broad hat, and—a belt, wasn't it? You were in doubts about the collar!"

"Well, no harm was meant," said Tom Merry laughing. "We've come here to meet you, kid; sort of welcome to the homeland, you know."

"And it's jolly good of you," said the new boy, holding out his hand. "I've found people treat me very decently since I've landed on the old spot."

"The old what?"

"Spot," said Noble—"old country, you know. It's a nice little place, isn't it?" he added, looking round.

"The village, do you mean?"

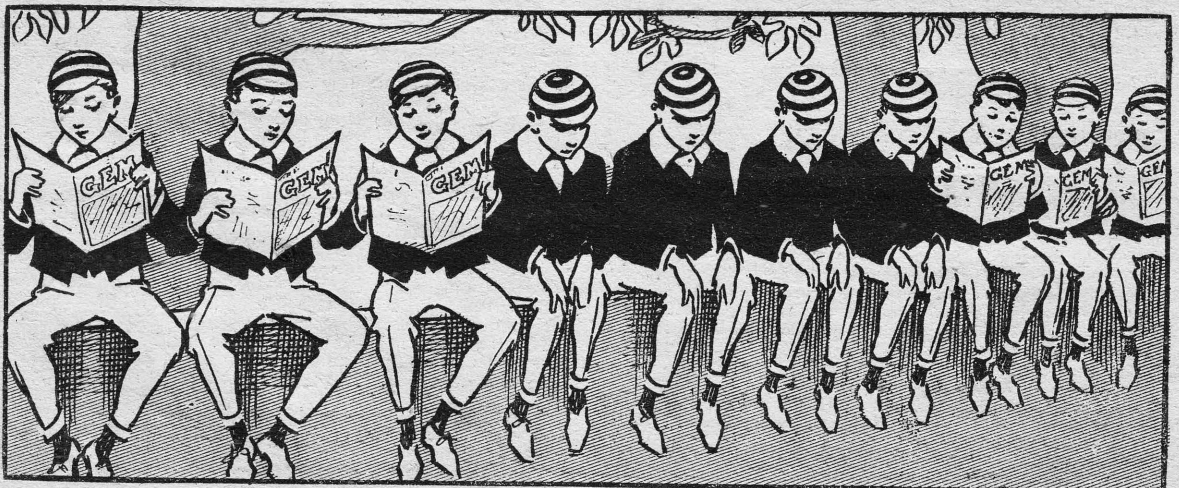
"No—England."

The juniors of St. Jim's looked at one another curiously. It had never struck them before that their native land might be regarded as a spot; and to have the new fellow speaking of England as they might have spoken of a field or a farm, was decidedly curious. Noble spoke quite seriously; but Tom Merry had a slight suspicion that the lad from Victoria was "pulling his leg."

"Yes; it's a decent little show," said Monty Lowther sarcas-

SIX New Readers.

See what happens next week!



NEXT
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tically. "Of course, you've got backyards in Melbourne as big as England, haven't you?"

"Well, yes, roughly speaking," assented the new boy. "Do you find it at all difficult to breathe here?"

"Breathe!" said Tom Merry staring. "Difficult to breathe."

"Yes," said Noble seriously. "After Australia, it seems a bit tight. But I daresay you get used to it."

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Yes; you'll get used to it in time," he said. "There's some more things you'll get used to, in time. Come on, kid, and we'll get to the school. I suppose you came in by the earlier train after all?"

"Yes; and I hung on here, as I understood there was to be somebody to meet me. Where is St. Jim's?" asked Noble, as they left the station.

"It's a walk down the lane. Have you seen to your box?"

"Yes; I've given it to the porter to send up to the school."

"That's all right; come on, then."

There was no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy yet. The juniors strolled into the High Street, and the Australian lad chatted freely as they walked towards St. Jim's. There was a complete self-possession about the new fellow that was very taking and rather surprising to the St. Jim's juniors. He walked with a free and easy stride, and Tom Merry, a young athlete himself, noted the splendid development of his figure and the width of his chest. The junior cricket captain of St. Jim's was already thinking that he had found a new recruit for the eleven.

Fatty Wynn slackened as they passed Mother Murphy's tuckshop.

"Hold on a minute, kids," he exclaimed. Here's—"Rats!" said Figgins. "There's a big feed ready at St. Jim's. Hold out for another ten minutes, Fatty!"

"I wasn't thinking of myself—"

"Of course not," said Lowther. "There's one thing about Fatty Wynn—he never does think much about grub. That's why he's so thin."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wasn't thinking about myself," repeated Fatty Wynn obstinately. "I admit I do get jolly hungry in this June weather somehow. But I was thinking of the new chap. He's had a jolly long journey, and he must be peckish."

"I had a lunch-basket in the train, thanks," said Noble.

"Yes, but since then—"

"I had some chocolates on the station here—"

"Yes, but chocolates aren't much! Of course, it's your own business, but you can't be too careful. I believe in a fellow keeping himself fit, and there's only one way—by keeping in a good supply of grub. I know that from experience."

"Oh, let's go in, for goodness sake," said Manners. "Fatty will keep on being anxious about Noble till he gets a feed."

"I'm thinking about—"

"Grub!" said Blake. "Well, let's go in."

They entered the tuckshop, a place where they were good customers; especially Fatty Wynn. The shop was not empty. A dozen fellows in Grammar School caps were crowded up at the counter, taking up nearly all the room there was. As Mrs. Murphy did a general grocery business, as well as sweets and confectionery, the shop was pretty well crowded with her stock, and the customers hadn't very much room. The Grammar School crowd filled it up. Tom Merry & Co. hadn't a look-in.

"Here, make room, you kids," exclaimed Blake.

The Grammarians looked round and grinned. They were eating ices, and taking their time about it. Monk, Lane, and Carboy, the leaders of the Grammarian juniors in their raids against the boys of St. Jim's, formed up closer against the little counter, and the rest promptly followed their example. It was impossible for the "Saints" to get near it.

"Hullo, St. Jim's cads here!" said Frank Monk. "I say, Mrs. Murphy, this won't do! If you expect us to patronise your establishment, you must keep it respectable."

"Deary me, young gentlemen!" said Mrs. Murphy.

The good dame's shop had often been the scene of encounters between Grammarians and collegians, but as the juniors always paid for any damage they did, Mrs. Murphy did not mind very much.

"Make room, pigs," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Rats!"

"Yah!"

"Look here, we want some refreshments—"

"You can go on wanting," suggested Frank Monk sweetly.

"We sha'n't be finished here for a couple of hours or so."

"Not till you chaps have scooted, anyway," grinned Lane;

"unless you ask us very prettily to please let you be served."

"I'll see you hanged first!"

"Then you can stand where you are."

"Look here!" began Fatty Wynn.

"My hat!" ejaculated Monk. "Here's young Peckham! Have you given up using that Anti-Fat, young shaver?"

"You Grammar rotter—"

"Rats! Get out!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Yah!"

Noble looked on in blank amazement. He was in a new land, among new people, and he had expected St. Jim's to be a change after Australia. But this scene in the village tuckshop was quite new to him, and it surprised him. In spite of the energetic way in which the lads "slanged" one another, there was not the slightest sign of real bad temper. At the same time, it was plain that the St. Jim's boys would not get served until they had fought the Grammarians and turned them out of the shop. And as the Grammarians were a dozen to ten—counting the new boy on the St. Jim's side—the task was certainly not a light one.

"Better hook it!" said Frank Monk. "We came in here to have some ices, not to lick you kids! Get off!"

"No fear!"

"Look here," said Tom Merry, "we'll give you one minute to clear off, then we're going to charge."

"Charge away!"

Tom Merry ostentatiously took out his watch. The Grammarians stood shoulder to shoulder. Noble gave a low whistle.

"Is it a fight?" he asked.

"Yes, rather," said Jack Blake. "We're going to turn them out. You see, St. Jim's is up against Rylecombe Grammar School, all the time. We've given them heaps of lickings—"

"My word, what a-a-a-a-a romancer!" said Monk.

"You know we have, Monkey! We've given 'em heaps of lickings, but they won't give in; they're like the chap, you know, who was dead but wouldn't lie down. They want another now, and they're going to get it. You're a St. Jim's chap now—so wire in. I hope you can use your hands."

"A little bit."

Tom Merry snapped his watch shut.

"Time's up!"

"Go hon!"

"Are you going?"

"Not half!"

"Then give 'em socks!" shouted Tom Merry. And he led the rush, and the juniors followed, and in a moment the tuckshop was the scene of a wild and whirling combat.

CHAPTER 5.

Noble Arrives at St. Jim's.

Noble was for a moment taken by surprise by the sudden turn of events. But it was only for a moment. Then he rushed into the combat with as much ardour as the rest.

He had not yet entered the gates of St. Jim's, but he showed as keen a desire to stand up for the old school as any member of Tom Merry & Co.

And the Grammarians, in spite of their advantage of numbers, found the attack hard to meet.

The rush pinned them up against the counter, and that hampered their movements. Frank Monk closed with Jack Blake, and they rolled on the floor together, and several of the Grammarians were sprawling back over the counter, doing terrific execution among the buns and tarts and bottles of ginger-beer.

"Deary me!" exclaimed Mrs. Murphy. "Oh, dear!" And like a wise woman she retreated into her little parlour, and left the excited youngsters to fight it out.

It was as big a battle as had ever raged in the place between the rival juniors, and it was obstinately contested.

The Grammarians, recovering a little, drove back their assailants, and then numbers told more in the struggle.

Tom Merry and Figgins went down, with three Grammarians sprawling over the two of them, and several more juniors sprawled over them and added themselves to the heap. Noble was attacked by two Grammarians, who tried to hurl him across the sprawling heap. Hanks on one side, and Gilson on the other, threw themselves upon the Australian youth.

Never were Messrs. Hanks and Gilson more surprised. Noble's left came out in an unexpected upper-cut that almost lifted Hanks off his feet, and laid him upon his back. His right flashed out a second later, caught Gilson on the chest, and made him sit down violently upon Tom Merry.

"My hat!" ejaculated Carboy. "Here's a giddy prize-fighter. What are you tumbling about like that for, Hanky?"

"Ow!" mumbled Hanks. "Ow! You tackle him!"

"What-ho!" said Carboy, who had heaps of pluck. He rushed right at Noble, hitting out from the shoulder.

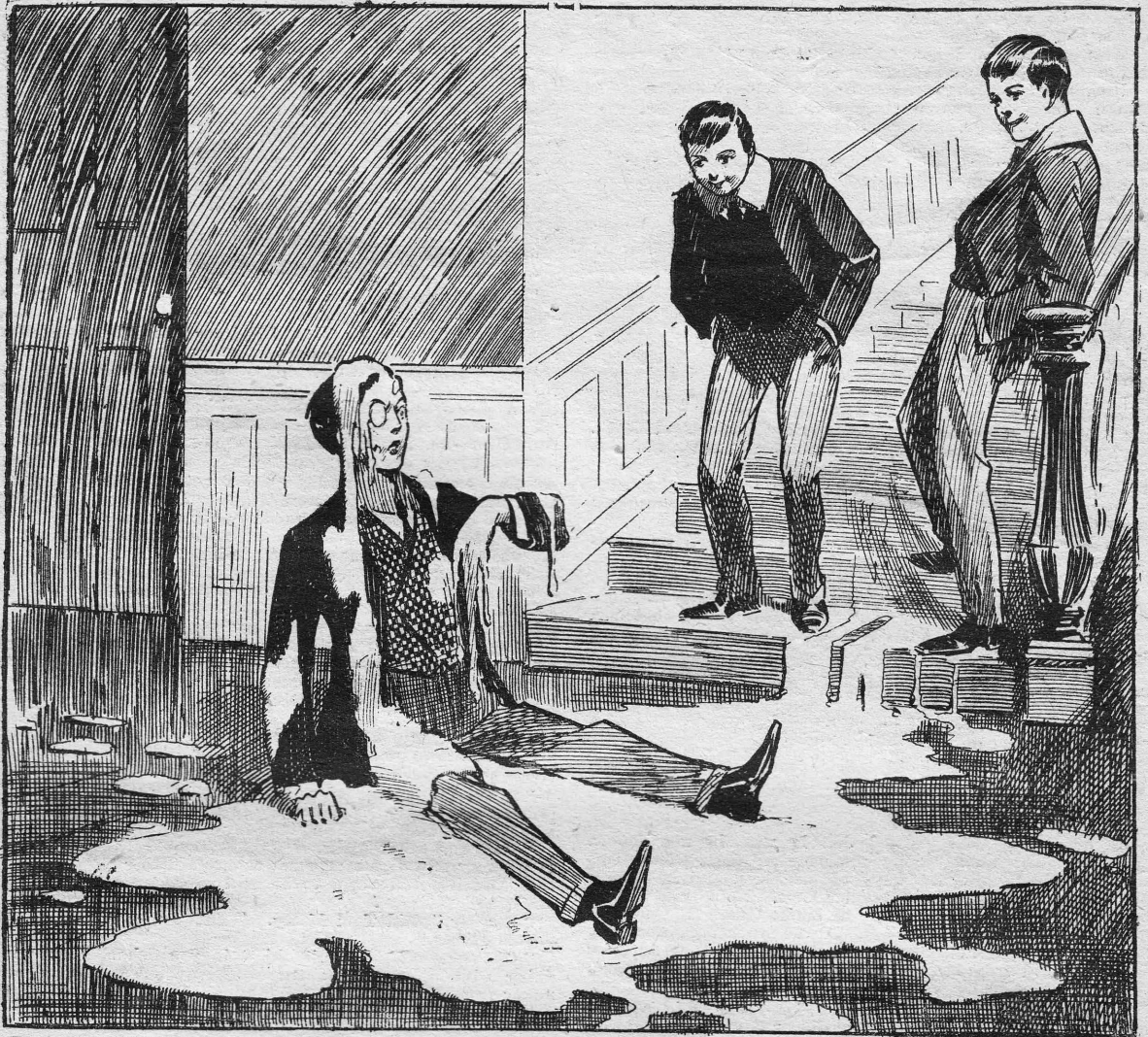
To his amazement his fists were swept away like straws, and that dangerous upper-cut caught him on the point of the chin.

It was not so hard a knock as Noble could easily have made it, or Carboy would have been very much hurt. Noble had not put force into it. But it was just sufficient to send Carboy flying.

He staggered blindly back, and his legs came in contact with the edge of a box of eggs behind him, and he sat down—in the eggs.

There was a terrific squelch.

"Ow!" gasped the Grammarian.



"I'm not made up as a millah, Tom Mewwy! That beast Blake has wun me into that ass Taggles, and I am smothahed with howwid whitewash!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped Tom Merry, struggling to his feet in time to see Carboy's mishap. "Ha, ha, ha! You'll have to pay for those eggs!"

"Ow! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carboy struggled out of the box of eggs. His trousers were in a shocking state. Eggs were squelching all over him. He dripped with yolk as he moved. Noble gripped him by the shoulder and swung him round, and plumped him upon Frank Monk. In a second Monk was nearly as eggy as his chum.

"Oh!" he roared. "Gerroff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"May as well give 'em some more eggs!" grinned Noble.

Some of the Grammarians had started throwing eggs, and one had caught Herries on the nose, giving his face a very peculiar appearance.

Noble dipped his hands into the box.

Carboy's fall had broken two-thirds of the eggs there, but there were sufficient left for Noble.

He caught one in each hand, and began to throw. Smash went an egg on Lane's chest, smash another on Gilson's ear. Then he kept it up. Smash! smash! smash!

"Ow! ow! ow!"

There was a rush of the Grammarians to the door.

They had started the egg-throwing, in the excitement of the moment, but they were getting more than they sent; and they had had enough.

They surged out of the shop, only two or three of the more determined fighting on desperately.

Blake caught up a siphon of soda-water and turned it upon the last of the heroes, and they yelled and struggled away.

The shop was cleared; and the St. Jim's juniors set up a shout of victory.

"Hurrah! Hear us smile!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Outside, the rumped and dishevelled Grammarians sent a yell back, to which the Saints replied by a volley of eggs, and the enemy soon took to flight.

Tom Merry's eyes danced as he hurled the last egg.

"Licked!" he exclaimed. "Licked to the wide!"

"Hurrah!"

Fatty Wynn was surveying the almost-empty eggbox regretfully.

"My hat," he said, "what a lot of omelettes wasted!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You can make omelettes of the smashed ones, if you like!"

"I say, fighting does make you hungry, doesn't it?" said Fatty Wynn. "Here, Mrs. Murphy—Murphy—where are you? I'm hungry!"

The good dame came back into the shop. She gasped as she saw the state of it, and the dishevelled but happy and victorious looks of the juniors.

"Deary me!" she gasped. "Oh, dear, young gentlemen! How could you?"

"It's all right, mother; we'll pay for the damage!" said Tom Merry good-humouredly. "Let us have the account at the school. Now ladle out the ices and the ginger-pop!"

"And the grub," said Fatty Wynn. "We don't want to stint the new chap, Tom Merry. I say, Noble, we can recommend the rabbit-pies. They're always fresh."

"I don't think I'm hungry enough for rabbit-pies, thanks."

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"Then have some of the tarts. You must look after your health, you know!"

Noble laughed, and accepted the tarts. Little the worse for the whirling combat, the juniors enjoyed the ices and ginger-pop, while Fatty Wynn went in for something of a more solid nature. They had beaten the Grammarians, and that was enough to put the St. Jim's juniors into the highest possible spirits.

When they left the tuckshop finally they marched along in a sort of triumphal procession. The sight of Monk and Carboy near the Red Cow—the former scraping the yolk of eggs off the trousers of the latter—made them stop and laugh. The Grammarians looked round, and sent back a cat-call, but that was all. They were licked this time, and not inclined to renew the contest.

"Hear us smile!" shouted Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!"

And the juniors marched on.

Noble grinned. He had been surprised at first, but he was entering into the spirit of the thing now.

"That was jolly lively!" he remarked.

"Yes, and you kept up your end jolly well," said Tom Merry. "I spotted you, you know. You will have to teach me that upper-cut."

They reached the gates of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had not come into sight, and the juniors wondered where he was. Possibly he was still scraping off the white-wash. Gore of the Shell was standing just within the gates talking to Mellish of the Fourth. Blake hailed him.

"Have you seen Gussy?" he asked.

Gore shook his head. Gore wasn't on good terms with the chums of Study No. 6, but that was no reason why he shouldn't give a civil answer to a civil question. But Gore thought otherwise.

"No, I haven't," he said. "I don't know where the dummy is. I heard he was going to the station to meet some new rotter."

"Oh, did you?" said Noble.

Gore glanced at him.

"Yes, I did," he replied. "Some cad from somewhere—Africa, or Borneo, or somewhere at the end of the earth. Some nigger, I dare say."

Noble flushed a little.

He knew that Gore guessed that he was the new fellow, and was deliberately saying unpleasant things. That was Gore's way. He was the bully of the Shell, and he always made himself unpleasant to smaller boys. Noble was a well-built lad, but he was not nearly as big as Gore. If Gore had seen him give those upper-cuts in the tuckshop, however, he would probably not have presumed so much on his superior size. The lad from Australia did not look half so tough a customer as he really was.

"I hear that the new kid is from Australia," said Mellish, following Gore's lead, as he usually did. "His name's Noble—son of a bushranger or something."

"That's it," said Gore. "Fancy having a giddy bushranger at St. Jim's! You fellows had better lock up your trunks."

"And look out for your pockets," said Mellish with a snigger.

Noble's eyes flashed.

"Oh, shut up, you cads," exclaimed Tom Merry in disgust.

"Rats! Have you bought up the quad yet, and issued an edict that people mustn't speak in it?" sneered Gore. "As for the new kid—"

Noble stepped quickly up to him.

"I'm the new kid!" he said quietly.

Gore looked him up and down.

"Oh! Then you know my opinion of you," he said, shrugging his shoulder. "I warn you not to begin any tricks—"

"I'm Harry Noble," said the new boy. "You're a rotten outsider, I think."

Gore stared at him, rather taken aback.

"Eh! What's that?"

"And a cad," said Noble calmly.

"Eh!"

"And a worm!"

"Why, you young rotter, I'll—"

"Rats!"

Gore said no more. He clenched his fists and simply leaped at the new junior.

Noble met him with a smile on his face and a gleam in his eyes. Where Gore's fists went the Shell bully hardly knew—they were knocked away somewhere—and then Noble's right came out and upward. And then it seemed to Gore that a particularly big and powerful battering-ram had caught him on the chin, and he went on his back in the quad, gazing upward dizzily at the sky, and seeing more stars in broad daylight than anybody else ever saw by night.

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CHAPTER 6.

A Son of the Empire—A House Question.

GORE lay for a full minute on his back in the quadrangle, blinking dizzily up at the sunny sky. When his shattered wits collected again, he sat up, still blinking. He had an ache in his lower jaw as if a mule had kicked him there, and strange lights were still dancing before his eyes.

Noble was walking away with Tom Merry & Co., and was already at a distance. Only Mellish was left with the bully of the Shell, and Mellish was standing with his hands in his pockets looking down at him, and grinning.

"My—my hat!" gasped Gore. "What—what was that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I believe my jaw's broken!"

"It looks all right," said Mellish. "I daresay it feels rather busted. Ha, ha!"

Gore staggered to his feet. His brow was dark with anger, and his glance was not pleasant as it turned upon Mellish.

"You seem to see something awfully funny about it," he remarked.

"Well, it was funny," giggled Mellish. "You were going to walk over the new kid—and he only had to give you one lick! And then—ha, ha, ha! His fist might have been a steam-hammer by the way you went down."

"As it's so funny you might like a taste yourself," suggested Gore unpleasantly. And before Mellish could dodge he let out his left, and the Fourth-Former rolled on the ground.

Gore, feeling somewhat relieved in his mind, walked away. He was still nursing his jaw with one hand. There was an ache there that was not likely to depart for some time. And Gore felt vengeful, but he did not follow the Australian lad. He had had enough.

Tom Merry & Co. were regarding their new friend with some surprise. Strong and well-built he certainly was, but he did not look as if he could put so much force into a blow. There was more, in fact, in the lad from Melbourne than met the eye.

"Who was that chap?" asked Noble.

"Name's Gore," said Tom Merry. "He's a rotter. I say, kid, I'm sorry you should have a reception like that—but there are black sheep everywhere, you know. There aren't many chaps at St. Jim's like Gore. Where is that feed, Fatty?"

"It's at Dame Taggles', so far," said Fatty Wynn. "It's all ordered and ready, and I'm going to fetch it from the shop."

"Then buzz off, and bring it to my study."

"Hold on," said Figgins. "I understood that the idea was to give a representative of a great colony a fitting reception. In that case the feed ought to be held in the cook-house at St. Jim's."

"Exactly," said Tom Merry. "That's why I propose the School House."

"Oh, come off! I don't object to you School House kids doing a bit of bragging, among ourselves, but before the new fellow from Kangarooland—"

"Just so," said Kerr. "Under the circumstances, as Gussy says, I think the feed had better be held in the New House."

"We'll put it to the vote," said Monty Lowther.

"Rats!" Figgins was not likely to agree to that, as there were six School House fellows present to three from the New House. "You know what Ibsen says—the majority is always in the wrong. You asses—"

"Whom are you calling asses?"

"You donkeys! You see—"

"Look here, Figgins—"

"Great Scott!" said Noble. "What's all the row about?"

What does it matter which house you have the feed in?"

"You see," explained Tom Merry, "our house—the School House—is the old original house, but a few years back a new house was put up—"

"A hundred and eleven years ago," howled Figgins, jealous for the age of his house.

"Well, that's only the other day," said Blake, "compared with the age of the School House. Our house was standing in the time of the Wars of the Roses, and earlier. You're only a spurious imitation—ow!"

To have his house called a spurious imitation was a little too much for Figgins. He went for Blake, and gave him a tap on the nose that cut his speech suddenly short, and then they seized each other and began a kind of waltz.

"My hat!" said Noble, looking on in amazement. "Go it! Two to one on Long Legs."

"Who are you calling Long Legs?" demanded Figgins, looking round suddenly.

"You, my son. Go it."

"If you want a thick ear—"

"Here, hold on," exclaimed Tom Merry. "You can't fight everybody at once, Figgins. If you kids will stop rowing—"

"Kids!"

"Yes, kids—if you New House kids will behave yourselves—"

"Oh, ring off," said Kerr, and he gave Tom Merry a gentle

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tap on the nose. "There are harder ones where that came from."

The next moment Tom Merry was clasping Kerr in an affectionate embrace. They reeled into Figgins and Blake, and the four juniors sprawled on the ground. They rolled over almost at the foot of the School House steps, and, as luck would have it, Mr. Railton came down the steps at the same moment. The School House master paused and looked at the sprawling juniors in surprise.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "What are you boys doing?"

Tom Merry sat up, and rubbed his nose ruefully.

"I—I—I'm sitting down, sir."

"I can see you are sitting down, Merry. Stand up."

Tom Merry stood up, and the others followed his example. A faint smile lurked round Mr. Railton's mouth.

"I suppose this is another of your absurd House disputes," he said severely.

"Well, not exactly, sir," ventured Tom Merry. "You see, sir, these New House cads—ahem, I mean kids—have joined us to give a welcome to the new chap from Australia, and—"

"And this is the way you are doing it?"

"Well—er—we—"

"I suppose this is a kind of jiu-jitsu entertainment arranged for his amusement?"

"N-n-n-not exactly, sir—"

"Well, it had better cease. The quadrangle is not the place for it," Mr. Railton looked at Noble. "You are the new boy?"

"Yes, sir," said Noble, raising his hat.

"I am glad to see you. Will you go into my study and wait for me there? Merry will show you the way."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Railton walked on, and the juniors entered the School House. Figgins and Blake looked at one another rather ruefully. Blake quietly wiped away a thin stream of crimson from his upper lip.

"Blessed if I know why you kids are always rowing," said Tom Merry severely. "What a bad impression you're making on this kid. If you'd take example by us—"

"More rats," said Blake. "Look here, as Railton is seeing about this kid, and not Ratty, it looks as if he is going to be a School House chap—"

"And in that case the feed ought to be in the School House," said Manners.

"Exactly."

"Well," said Figgins, "if you like to frankly admit that the New House is cock-house, I don't mind about the feed."

"Rats!"

"And many of 'em!"

"Go and eat coke."

"Hallo, kids!" A youth with a smear of ink across one cheek, and another upon his collar, came down the passage, and thus familiarly greeted the heroes of the Fourth and the Shell. It was D'Arcy minor, of the Third Form, Arthur Augustus's younger brother. "Is that the new chap?"

"That's me," said Noble.

Wally D'Arcy looked him up and down.

"Well, you look a decent sort," he remarked, with the charming candour of the Third Form. "We've been thinking of getting up a sort of feed in honour of you, you know—a kind of welcome—and if you like to come along to the Third Form-room—"

Noble laughed.

"You're awfully good," he said. "But I am already booked. These chaps have been kind enough to ask me to a feed."

D'Arcy minor chuckled.

"I shouldn't depend too much on them," he remarked. "They're hardly up to our form, and something generally goes wrong with their schemes. You'd better come along to the Third Form-room. Look here, we've timed it for half-past four, and if you look in about that time it will be all right. You can bring these chaps."

"Well, I'll remember," said Noble, and Wally nodded and walked off whistling. The lad from Melbourne looked after him with a smile.

"Who's that young larrikin?" he asked.

"That's young Wally, of the Third—Gussy's younger brother," said Tom Merry. "You haven't seen Gussy yet—he's the Beau Brummel of the Fourth. Blessed if I know where he's got to. He was coming down to the station with us, but he had an accident with some whitewash. Come along with me to Railton's study, kid—and you get the feed to my study, Wynn."

"To my study, Fatty," said Figgins.

"Look here, Figgins—"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Oh, split the difference," said Jack Blake. "Have it in the wood-shed, and stop arguing. My nose is simply pouring."

"Sorry," said Figgins. "I didn't mean to hit so hard—"

"It wasn't your fist, ass; it was the top of your fat head biffed it," said Blake. "Never mind. Who says wood-shed?"

"Wood-shed!"

"Then that's settled."

And Tom Merry conducted the new boy to the House-master's study, and left him there. Juniors who had occasion to wait for a master in his study usually stood in respectful attitude, shifting from one leg to another if they became tired. That was apparently not the idea of the Cornstalk chum. He sat down in Mr. Railton's armchair, and put his feet on a stool. Tom Merry surveyed him in mingled surprise and alarm.

"Will you have a cushion?" he asked sarcastically.

Noble nodded calmly.

"Yes, now you speak of it, it would be more comfy," he said. "Chuck one over."

Tom Merry, dazed, tossed over a cushion, and the new boy put it behind his head. Then he fished a book out of his pocket and opened it.

"Well, you take the cake," said Tom Merry, wondering what Mr. Railton would think when he came in and found the new boy in that extremely easy attitude. "When you're finished here come to my study, will you?"

"Certainly. Where's your study?"

"In the Shell passage. Anybody will tell you. You'll find one or another of us there."

"Right you are."

And Tom Merry went out and closed the door. He went upstairs, and found the other fellows in the corridor outside Study No. 6. Jack Blake was looking puzzled.

"Haven't you found Gussy?" asked Tom Merry.

Blake shook his head.

"No. The ass seems to have vanished."

"Weally, Blake—"

It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the juniors all turned round at once to look at him.

CHAPTER 7.

A Run for Gussy.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS presented a rather strange sight. The nobby attire spoiled by Taggles's whitewash had disappeared, and the swell of St. Jim's was clad in a dressing-gown, which contained as many colours as the coat of the celebrated Joseph, and a towel. The towel was wrapped round his head, and it looked damp. D'Arcy had just come from the direction of the bath-rooms, and his long absence was explained. He had only just finished getting off the last of the whitewash.

"Well, you look a pretty object," said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah! I feel a pretty object, too," said D'Arcy, in an exhausted voice. "I have been cleanin' off that feahful whitewash."

"Got it all off?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Yaas, I think it's all gone at last. It was mixed up with my hair, you know, and it was weally dweadful. I had to wash and wash and wash! I wegard Taggles as a beast, and Blake as anothah beast."

"It isn't my fault if you will run into fellows carrying pails of whitewash, Gussy."

"You know vewy well you were wushin' me downstairs at the time, Blake. But where is the new kid from Anstwahiah? I want to see him to ask him about my relations in Bwisbane."

"He's gone to see Railton—feed in the wood-shed afterwards," said Tom Merry. "Go and get your things on, my son, and you'll be in time."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus walked on with the dressing-gown trailing behind him on the linoleum. Reilly came out of his study, and stepped unwittingly on the tail of the gown, and Arthur Augustus tripped and went down on his hands and knees. Reilly looked at him with astonishment.

"Faith, and what are ye doin' that for, Gussy?" he asked.

"Oh, you uttah wottah! I have barked my beastly knees!"

"Sure, and if ye— Here, keep off, bedad!"

Reilly retreated as the exasperated swell of the Fourth Form went for him. He disappeared down the passage, with D'Arcy's towel and dressing-gown fluttering in pursuit. A shout of laughter followed them.

"Phew!" ejaculated Blake. "Gussy's going downstairs—in that rig. My only ha! He's forgotten he's in deshabille."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus had indeed forgotten it. He had left his spoiled clothes in the bath-room, and he had only his under-clothing on under the dressing-gown; and certainly he wasn't in form to enter into a foot-race down the big staircase. The juniors ran after him to the top of the stairs.

"Gussy, come back, you ass!"

But D'Arcy was deaf. There was an old feud between him and the Irish junior. Reilly, as a matter of fact, was only running away for the set purpose of drawing Gussy on. And the swell of St. Jim's fell blindly into the trap.

Down the stairs he went with fluttering gown, and Reilly dodged into the lower passage, and cut along by the masters' studies, and fast on his track went Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

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"Stop, you wottah!" gasped D'Arcy. "This is most exhaustin'. Stop!"

But Reilly did not stop.

There was a sudden amazed exclamation in the passage.

"D'Arcy, what does this mean?"

It was Mr. Railton. He had been about to enter his study when Reilly whisked past, with D'Arcy in pursuit. The School House master stared blankly at D'Arcy, who stopped dead, recalled to himself by the House-master's look and tone. And Jack Blake, looking over the banisters, grunted.

"My hat! He's in for it now."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"D'Arcy, what does this mean—this—this attire?" exclaimed Mr. Railton, very much scandalised.

"Pway excuse me, Mr. Waitton, sir. I have been havin' a bath—"

"That is no reason for coming downstairs in such—in such attire! I am amazed, D'Arcy—amazed! Go upstairs at once!"

"Pewwaps you will allow me to explain, sir—"

"Go upstairs!"

"Yaas, but—"

"Do you wish me to cane you, D'Arcy?"

"No, sir, but—"

"I shall do so unless you go at once."

"Yes, sir, but—"

Mr. Railton made a step towards him, and the swell of St. Jim's suddenly stopped his remarks. He hurried away again towards the stairs, and Mr. Railton entered his study. D'Arcy had almost reached the stairs when a stately lady entered the house. It was Mrs. Holmes, the Head's wife. D'Arcy stopped, petrified. Arthur Augustus was peculiarly nice in all his notions, and to appear before a member of the gentle sex in inappropriate attire was unpardonable in his eyes. He drew the dressing-gown more closely about him.

Mrs. Holmes did not see him for a moment. The change from the brilliant sunshine of the quadrangle to the shady interior of the School House prevented it. But as D'Arcy tried to whisk quickly past to reach the stairs her eyes fell upon him. She looked at him, and stared, as well she might. Of course, something was bound to go wrong when the unfortunate junior was in a hurry. In his haste he dropped one of his slippers, and stopped, with a bare foot peeping out from under the dressing-gown.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Holmes.

Arthur Augustus was scarlet. He would have given a term's pocket-money for the floor to open and swallow him up.

"Dear me! Is that you, D'Arcy?"

"Y-a-a-a-a-as, wathah, ma'am."

D'Arcy became conscious of the bare foot showing, and dragged it hastily back out of sight. Mrs. Holmes smiled slightly, and that smile finished D'Arcy. He made a sudden bolt for the staircase. Of course, his foot caught in the dressing-gown as he rushed upstairs, and of course he went down in a heap.

"Bai Jove!"

There was a momentary vision of tangled dressing-gown and legs and bare feet, and then the swell of St. Jim's was up again. Gathering up his flowing robes, so to speak, he dashed upstairs, and he was far too confused to see the group of juniors at the top. He rushed right into them, and sent them spinning right and left, and dashed on for the second staircase to the dormitories. He disappeared with a patter and a rustle, leaving the juniors staggering in helpless mirth.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Blake, clutching the wall for support. "I know he'll be the death of me—I know he will!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gusay will never get over this," murmured Tom Merry, wiping his eyes.

"Oh, if I'd had my camera here!" said Manners, almost weeping. "My hat! What a picture! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors laughed hysterically. The misadventures of Arthur Augustus that afternoon seemed without end, and they grew funnier as they progressed. But the laughter was suddenly interrupted. Figgins & Co. had gone to take the feed to the wood-shed, and all of a sudden the three New House juniors were seen to come tearing up the stairs with wildly excited faces.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "Feed ready?"

"Ready?" howled Figgins. "No! It's gone!"

"Gone!"

"Yes," said Fatty Wynn, almost in tears. "It's been raided!"

"Raided!" gasped Tom Merry.

"That's it. Mrs. Taggles had everything packed in the basket ready to be called for, as I instructed her. I told her somebody would call for it—"

"Well?"

"Well, somebody did, and she handed it to him—"

"Who was it?"

"Young Wally."

"Wally!" Tom Merry almost shouted the name. "Young THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 69.

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Wally! Why, he's standing a feed in the Third Form room!"

"Our feed!" shrieked Blake.

"Here, come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Let's get to the Third Form-room: before those young wasters have scooped it."

And the juniors rushed off in hot haste. Only too well now they understood Wally's remarks when he gave his invitation to the Australian boy. He had calmly called at the tuckshop for the basket and carried it off. Fatty Wynn had been too late. But would Tom Merry & Co. be in time to save the feed?

CHAPTER 8.

Trouble.

"AHEM!"

Mr. Railton coughed slightly.

Noble was reclining in an easy attitude in the arm-chair. He had shifted his feet from the stool for additional comfort and placed them on the table. He had his book before his eyes, and so did not see Mr. Railton enter. The House-master stood regarding him for some moments before he coughed.

"Ahem!"

Noble lowered the book. He rose to his feet at once as he saw the House-master, with just a tinge of red in his sunburnt cheeks.

"Ahem!" said Mr. Railton again. "I trust you have made yourself quite comfortable, Noble."

"Yes, sir, thank you."

"H'm!" Mr. Railton had not meant his remark to be taken exactly like that, but he passed it over. "It is not a custom here to make oneself quite at home in a master's study, Noble. However, let it pass. I am very glad to see you at St. Jim's. You do not look any the worse for your long voyage."

"I feel as fit as a fiddle, sir."

"Very good. Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, is not here at present, and until he returns I shall place you in Tom Merry's study. You are already acquainted with Merry, I believe?"

"Yes, sir. A ripping chap."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"You are quite right, Noble. He is a very fine lad, and if you can gain his friendship it will be worth much to you in the school. Merry's study has already its full complement, but for the present you can be placed there. Dr. Holmes has not mentioned to me which House you will belong to, but you will know shortly. And now, please, if you are not too tired after your journey, we will have a little examination."

"Not at all, sir. I've had a rest."

Mr. Railton suppressed a smile, as he remembered the attitude of the new boy when he had entered the study. For the next half hour House-master and junior were busy. Then Noble was dismissed, and he looked about for Tom Merry's study.

"In the Shell passage," he murmured. "The Shell seems to be a Form here, from what I can make out, so I suppose the Shell passage is where the Shell fellows hang out. Hallo, kid! where's the Shell passage?"

It was Bernard Glyn of the Shell whom Noble called to. Glyn, the lad from Liverpool, looked round.

"New kid?" he asked.

Noble nodded.

"Oh, you're Noble, of course," said Glyn. "I've heard about you."

"My name's Harry Noble."

"Noble's good enough for me," grinned Glyn. "Come with me, and I'll show you the way. I'm in the Shell. Which study do you want?"

"Tom Merry's."

"Here you are, then."

Glyn left the new boy at Tom Merry's door, and Noble tapped and entered. There was no one in the study. Noble looked round, and crossed to the window. It gave a wide view of the old quadrangle, with its ancient elms glimmering in the sun, and the wide playing-fields, where innumerable figures in white flannels were busy at the summer game. Noble's eyes gleamed at the sight. Like most Australians, he was keen on cricket, and a great player of the grand old game.

There was a Sixth Form match in progress, and Kildare was batting. Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was bowling to him. Both bowling and batting were of the best, and the Cornstalk's look grew keenly appreciative. Eagerly watching the cricket, he did not turn from the window again until he heard a footstep in the study. Then he looked round.

A junior had entered Tom Merry's study, and Noble looked at him with some surprise, and great interest.

He had seen some well-dressed fellows already at St. Jim's, but none quite like this junior. He did not know that it was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; but it was. The swell of St. Jim's had re-arrayed himself in his best, in order to do full honour to the occasion. He was looking as spick and span as before the lamentable accident with the pail of whitewash, and he certainly was a picture. From the toes of his dainty, polished boots to the carefully-parted hair on his head, D'Arcy was really perfect.

As he saw the Australian, he jammed his monocle into his eye, and looked at him inquiringly. As he had not yet seen the Australian, he did not associate this fellow in his mind with the expected new boy. Like his chums, he expected to see some sort of a free-and-easy fellow in a broad hat.

"Pway can you tell me where Tom Mewwy is, deah boy?" he asked.

Noble shook his head.

"Nix. I came here to see him myself."

"Bai Jove! where can he be?" said D'Arcy. "This is most annoyin'. Pewwaps you would like to wun away and look for him, and tell him I am waitin' for him."

Noble grinned.

"And perhaps I wouldn't," he remarked. "You can do your own running about, I think."

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Great Scott!" said Noble, "I wonder where it sprang from?"

"To what are you weferrin' as 'it'?" asked Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"Yoursel, my son. Are there any more at home like you?"

"I wegard that question as widiculous. I pwesume," said D'Arcy, his manner growing more stately—"I pwesume that you are some sort of a new boy?"

"Something of the sort," assented Noble.

"We are bein' simply ovalhun with new boys this term," said D'Arcy. "I have been sewiously thinkin' of speaking to the Head about it. I haven't done so yet, because—"

"Because he'd lick you?"

"Certainly not. I am turnin' it ovah in my mind. I twust you are not comin' into the Fourth Form. I don't like your looks vewy much."

"I'm going into the Shell."

"Vewy good. Tom Mewwy is quite welcome to have you in his Form." D'Arcy looked the Cornstalk up and down through his eyeglass. "I wegard you as wathah a wastah, deah boy. You lack the respect that a new kid should naturally show to a seniah. I am vewy much your seniah in the length of time I have been at St. Jim's. You evidently do not know how to treat your bettahs with pwopah respect."

"My—my hat!"

"I am afwaid you are a boundah, and I am vewy pleased you're not comin' into the Fourth. I am usually vewy select in my circle of acquaintances, not to say swaggah," explained D'Arcy.

"Have you ever been to the Zoo?" asked Noble, with an air of great interest.

D'Arcy looked surprised at the unexpected question.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then how did you get away again?"

The swell of St. Jim's turned pink.

"I wegard that as a wotten joke," he said. "I am not in the habit of acceptin' wotten remarks from new kids. I should be sowwy to give you a feahful thwashin'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for wibald laughtah in that remark. I am sowwy to be compelled to give you a feahful thwashin', but I have no alternative. I should be gweatly obliged if you would kindly wemove your jacket."

The Australian grinned.

In spite of D'Arcy's truculent manner, there was something about him that Noble rather liked, and he didn't want trouble. But D'Arcy was in earnest. He took off his jacket, folded it carefully, and laid it on the table. Then he pushed back his cuffs.

"Are you weady, deah boy?"

"Ready for what?"

"To be feahfully thwashed."

"Ha, ha, ha! No, I don't think I'm quite ready."

"Pway get weady, then, you duffah. I should be sowwy to take you unawares, deah boy. That would not be cwicket," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust you will not keep me waitin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, if you will not put up your fists, I shall have no resource but to stwike you on the nose."

And Arthur Augustus reached out to give the new boy a gentle tap there.

To his surprise, his arm was wafted upward somehow, and hard knuckles rapped gently on his own nose.

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy started back. He rubbed his nose with an expression of amazement that was comic in the extreme. The Cornstalk regarded him with a cheerful smile.

"Bai Jove!" repeated the swell of St. Jim's. "This is vewy surprisn'. Howevah, I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'."

Arthur Augustus had heaps of pluck, and as much self-confidence as courage. He came on again, hitting out scientifically, and the new fellow retreated backwards round the study table, warding off his blows.

Twice round the table D'Arcy followed him hotly, and then he began to gasp.

"Pway stop where you are, you wottah! How can I thwash you if you keep on wunnin' away?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy rushed on, determined to get to closer quarters.

But the Cornstalk retreated round the table, dodging him successfully, and at last the swell of St. Jim's stopped, and leaned on the table, panting.

"I wegard you as a feahful poltween!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are afwaid to come to close quartahs. I should be sowwy to chawactwewise anybody as a coward, but undah the cirms, I wegard you as bein' afwaid to come to close quartahs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you are a laughin' jackass," said D'Arcy. "If you are not afwaid, why don't you come within weach of my beasty fists?"

"I'm afraid of hurting you."

"Eh?"

"I don't want to hurt you," explained Noble.

"What?"

"You're an amusing little chap, and I wouldn't hurt you for anything."

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and glared. It was bad enough to have to chase the new boy round and round Tom Merry's table in such an undignified way; but to be described as an amusing little chap was too much.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "You—you wank outsidah! Come on!"

He rushed on again.

Noble grinned, and stepped quickly out of the study, slamming the door after him.

D'Arcy caught hold of the door-handle and dragged at it fiercely, but it held fast. The new boy was holding it on the outside, and his grip was much stronger than that of the swell of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy dragged and dragged, and then let go the handle and tapped at the door.

"Let this door open, you wottah!"

There was no reply.

D'Arcy kicked furiously on the door. He was excited now, and the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere was quite gone.

"Let me out, beast!"

Still silence.

"Will you open this wotten door?"

And still the Cornstalk did not reply. D'Arcy fumed. Taking hold of the handle again, he turned it and gave a terrific wrench. The door flew open, and D'Arcy staggered back into the study. Noble was no longer there. It dawned upon the swell of St. Jim's that the new fellow had gone immediately he ceased to tug.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, "I nevah thought of that! Howevah, I will give him a feahful thwashin' now."

And he ran quickly out of the study. But the new fellow was clean gone, and there was no sign of him to be seen.

CHAPTER 9

A Feed with the Third!

THE new fellow was gone, and vengeance had to be postponed for the time. Arthur Augustus remained a few moments fanning himself with a cambrie handkerchief, cooling down after his exertions.

Having wiped his brow, and adjusted his necktie, he walked away to look for his chums, and met Gore and Mellish in the passage. He stopped to speak to them. He wanted to know where Tom Merry & Co. were, as there was no sign of Tom coming to his study. In the summer afternoon the old college was deserted, and there was no one else to seek information of.

"Have you seen Tom Mewwy, deah boys?" he asked.

"Yes," said Gore. "Do you want him?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then go down to the gates."

"Bai Jove! what on earth is Tom Mewwy doin' at the gates?" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Thank you vewy much, Goah."

And he hurried on. Mellish looked curiously at his chum.

"Tom Merry isn't there," he remarked.

"Did I say he was?" asked Gore.

"Well, no, you didn't! Ha, ha, ha!"

"If Gussy wasn't thinking so much about his neckties, he'd have heard the row from the Third Form-room, I should think," grinned Gore. "A little run down to the gates won't do him any harm."

And Arthur Augustus, all unsuspecting, went out to look for Tom Merry. Tom Merry at that moment, as a matter of fact, was outside the door of the Third Form-room, hammering away on the thick oak panels.

The juniors had found the door of the Form-room locked

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against them, and their demands for admittance were answered only by jeers and catcalls from the fags within.

Wally & Co. were masters of the situation.

Wally, with his superb coolness, had bagged the feed, and it was safe within locked doors in the Form-room, and without a battering-ram it did not seem possible for the rightful owners to get at it.

They breathed all sorts of threats through the keyhole; but Wally replied with unabated cheerfulness, and remarks upon the personal appearance of Tom Merry & Co. that were decidedly personal and unflattering.

Fatty Wynn was almost in tears.

At intervals, within the Third Form-room, could be heard the popping of corks, as the fags disposed of some of the liquid portion of the feast.

The Third Form had already started.

How much of the feed would be left by the time the juniors obtained entrance was a question that could only be answered in decimals, as Figgins remarked.

Tom Merry hammered furiously on the panels.

"Will you let us in, young Wally?"

"We've taken you in already once," replied Wally, through the keyhole. "Some duffers are never satisfied."

"We'll simply skin you!"

"Rats!"

"We'll give you the biggest licking you ever had in your life!"

"More rats!"

"Look here," exclaimed Jack Blake, "this feed was a welcome for the new chap from Australia! Don't be a pig!"

"He's welcome to join us," said Wally. "We've invited him once. Send him along, and we'll let him in, and welcome."

"It's our feed!" roared Fatty Wynn. "Oh, dear, I can hear them opening the pineapples!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled the Third-Formers.

"I'll tell you what!" called out Wally. "If you like to make it pax, we'll invite you to the feed."

The juniors glowered. To be coolly invited to their own feed was like insult added to injury. But Fatty Wynn looked brighter.

"Well, after all, that's better than losing the lot," he remarked.

"Yah!" growled Herries. "Haven't you any regard for the dignity of your Form?"

"Oh, rot! I'm hungry."

"Well, what do you say?" demanded Wally. "Time's going—and so is the grub. You won't have a chance soon."

"Coo-oo-ey!"

Tom Merry turned his head.

The "coo-ey" came echoing down the passages, and it was easy for Tom Merry to guess that it was a signal from the Cornstalk, who wanted to know where they were. Tom suddenly remembered that he had instructed Noble to wait for him in his study, and it occurred to him that the new fellow must have been waiting there some time.

"My word," said Digby, "that's a bush signal! Can any of you fellows coo-ey?"

"Yes, rather!" said Figgins. "Here you are! Coo-ey!"

"Coo-oo-ey!"

The Cornstalk came into sight round the corner of the passage, with a grin on his face. The return signal had reached his ears.

"Hallo!" he remarked. "I thought I'd come and look for you. I've been waiting in the study a jolly long time."

"Awfully sorry!" said Tom Merry. "I—I forgot! You see, the feed's been scooped. These young bounders of the Third have scooped it, and locked themselves in the Form-room."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything funny in it!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm really hungry! I always get extra peckish this June weather."

"Well, what do you say?" demanded Wally from within.

"You can bring the kangaroo here, and come with him, if you like. Yes or no?"

"Hallo, that young larrikin again!" grinned Noble. "Let's accept his offer. I'm hungry myself, you know."

"Oh, all right, then! We'll come in, Wally."

"Is it pax?"

It cost the juniors an effort to say that it was. But there was clearly no alternative.

"Yes," grunted Tom Merry, "it's pax! Open the door."

And the Third Form-room door was promptly opened. Wally required no more assurance than the word of Tom Merry.

The scamp of the Third greeted the juniors with a cheerful grin.

"Come in, my sons! All are welcome! This is Liberty Hall! Jameson, you young pig, leave some of the sardines. Easy with the jam-tarts, Gibson, or I'll jolly well give you a thick ear! Open the pineapple tins, Dudley, my son. You fellows can sit on the forms, or the floor, just as you like, only don't stand on ceremony. Wire in!"

It was impossible not to be in a good-humour with Wally. The fellows "wired in," and as the feast was really a very ample one there was enough for all, and they enjoyed it exceedingly.

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NEXT

THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S SUB-EDITOR."

CHAPTER 10.

One Too Many.

TOM MERRY rose from his seat, and gave a sigh of contentment. It had been a ripping feed, and even Fatty Wynn was satisfied.

"Well, we've had a good time," said Tom Merry. "We won't give Wally that assortment of thick ears after all."

D'Arcy minor grinned.

"No, I think you'd better not. But, I say, where's Gussy? Why hasn't he come to the feed?"

"He's changing his clothes," said Blake. "He's been going about in a dressing-gown lately, shocking the ladies. He'll turn up in a few hours."

"My hat," said Tom Merry, "I should think he had finished by this time!" Tom looked at his watch. "Come on, you chaps; it's time we got on to our prep!"

Manners and Lowther rose. Tom Merry nodded to Noble.

"See you again soon, kid," he remarked.

"Here," exclaimed Wally, "hold on! What's the figure for this feed?"

"Eh? Nought, my son."

"Stuff! We only collared it to take a rise out of you duffers," said the scamp of the Third. "We're going to pay, of course."

"Not a bit of it! It was a whip round, and Gussy contributed most. You're welcome, as it can't be helped. So-long."

And the Terrible Three left the Form-room. Tom Merry looked thoughtful as he walked away towards his study.

"I like that kid Noble," he remarked. "There's something very fresh and taking about him. He looks something of an athlete too. I may find him useful in the cricket. I'll give him a trial to-morrow."

"Good! I rather hope he'll stay in the School House," Lowther observed. "If he goes over the way, he'll be a recruit for Figgins and Co., and I fancy we shall find him a tough customer in House rows."

"He's got a lovely upper-cut, and no mistake," said Manners. "I fancy Gore is still feeling rather sore about the chin."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Shell entered their study, and brought out their books. As they sat down, Noble walked in. He had followed them from the Third Form-room without their noticing it. They were rather surprised to see him.

"Hallo, come in, old chap!" said Tom Merry, looking round.

"Can we do anything for you?"

"No, thanks—nothing in particular," said Noble.

"Like to take a rest in the easy chair while we're working?"

"Well, I'd rather get on with the work myself."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Have you any prep. to do for to-morrow morning, then?"

"Yes," Noble nodded. "Mr. Railton offered to excuse me, as it was the first day; but I said I'd rather begin."

"Good for you. What Form are you in?"

"Same as yours—the Shell, I think you call it. Mr. Railton said I should be in the same Form as Tom Merry."

"And we're jolly glad to have you," said Tom Merry cordially.

"What study are you going into—do you know?"

"Yes; this one."

"Eh?"

The chums of the Shell uttered the exclamation simultaneously, and jumped up.

Noble nodded affably.

"I'm coming into this study," he said.

"But—but there must be some mistake," said Tom Merry. "Mr. Railton cannot have told you to come and dig in this study."

"He did."

"But we're full up, you know!"

"Then you'll be a little fuller."

"You see," said Lowther, "it's impossible."

"How's that?"

"We're three, and we haven't any room for more. We've always had this study. It won't do, you know."

The Cornstalk chuckled.

"Looks to me as if it will have to do. I'm here."

"Oh, go further along the passage, there's a good chap!"

"Can't be did."

"You see," explained Tom Merry, "we're awfully glad to have you in the Form, and to give you a hearty welcome to the Old Country, and all that; but a fellow's study is a different thing. You can't invade a fellow's digs in this way. It was very inconsiderate of Railton."

"Shocking!" said Manners. "But if Noble appealed to him, and put it to him strongly, he'd change his mind, I've no doubt."

ANSWERS

A Tale of Tom Merry and Harry Noble, the Australian Boy.

"Oh, come off!" said Noble cheerfully. "I like this study. It looks to me about the biggest of any I've seen."

"Yes, that's so. But——"

"It will suit me down to the ground."

"It won't suit us to have a fourth in it!" said Tom Merry warmly. "We want to treat you well, but we can't have the family circle broken up in this way."

"It's orders, you see."

"They'll have to be set aside somehow. Suppose you went to Railton and asked him, as a special favour, to put you into Study No. 6, with Blake & Co.? Say you feel lonely, and would rather be in a study with four than three."

"But I don't feel lonely."

"Well, you ought to then!" snapped Lowther. "Blessed if I ever saw such an obstinate bounder in my life!"

"Make the best of it," said Noble. "I'm here, you know. Any room for my books on the table?"

"Doesn't look like it," said Manners.

It certainly did not look like it. The table was crowded. Where the chums of the Shell had no books, they had heaps of other things, including a tray of crockery.

The Cornstalk looked over the table.

"Suppose you make room?" he suggested.

"Can't be did."

"But I've got to do my prep. Mr Railton said that Tom Merry would lend me a hand, too, and show me the ropes."

"So I will," said Tom Merry at once. "I'd lend a hand to any new chap. But, you see, we can't have four in this study. That's a law like the laws of the Medes and Persians—it simply can't be altered."

"Shall I make room?"

"Rats! Go further along the passage."

Noble lifted the tray of crockery off the table. He was perfectly good-tempered, but quite determined.

Monty Lowther jumped up.

"Shove that tray back!" he said.

Noble looked at him.

"I'm making room for my books."

"Shove that tray back!"

"Rats!"

"Hold on, Monty!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as his chum clenched his fists and started towards the new boy. "Draw it mild! I——"

"He's going to put that tray back!" hooted Lowther.

"Yes, but——"

"Shove that tray back, you—you kangaroo!"

"More rats!"

Monty Lowther wasted no more breath in words. He ran right at Noble and caught him by the shoulder. Noble put up his fists, with the natural result that the tray of crockery went on the floor. There was a terrific crash.

"You ass!" roared Tom Merry. "There's all our crocks gone."

"I don't care!" snapped Lowther. "Let 'em go. If he doesn't pick up that tray and put it back I'll smash him!"

"Smash away," said Noble coolly.

"Are you going to pick up that tray?"

"Not much!"

"Then out you go, on your neck!"

And Lowther closed with the boy from Melbourne, and the new boy from Melbourne closed with him, and then the fun began.

CHAPTER 11.

Not Out.

MONTY LOWTHER had set out to "chuck" the new fellow out of the study. Noble was to leave the room "on his neck." But somehow or other the task grew more and more difficult as Monty Lowther proceeded with it.

He got a good grip on the new boy, and waltzed him towards the door. But near the door the new boy reversed, so to speak, and Lowther was waltzed back towards the fireplace.

Tom Merry and Manners were on their feet, looking on, greatly interested in the progress of the chucking-out. Lowther was an athletic lad, and he knew something about boxing and wrestling; but he had his hands full now.

Again he brought the new fellow round towards the door with a terrific swing.

"Open the door, Tom!" he gasped.

"What ho!"

Tom Merry threw the door open wide. Nothing remained but to hurl the new boy through it, to roll indignantly upon the linoleum in the passage. Monty made a terrific effort.

"Out you go!"

And they parted. But somehow it wasn't Noble who went out; it was the lengthy form of Monty Lowther that went flying through the doorway.

Tom Merry gasped.

"Monty! Ha, ha!"

Noble stood in the study breathing rather hard, but otherwise

none the worse for the tussle. Monty Lowther sat on the floor in the passage, staring into the open doorway with an expression of bewilderment amounting almost to idiocy.

Tom Merry roared. He could not help it. It was his best chum—or the best but one—who had gone down before the new fellow, but the expression on Lowther's face was so comical that he couldn't help it. He roared, and Manners roared, and Noble grinned.

"Ow!" gasped Lowther, finding his voice at last. "That was a fluke, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My foot slipped just as I was going to——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop your cackling, do!" Lowther rose slowly and rather gaspingly to his feet. "That chap is going out of the study on his neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lowther came in, looking very grim. He stepped up to Noble, who eyed him calmly and warily, ready for a second bout.

"Are you going?" demanded Lowther.

"Nix!"

"You—you jumping kangaroo!" said Lowther. "I'll sling you out like—a giddy boomerang!"

"Ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "A boomerang always comes back, you know."

"Out you go!"

Lowther gripped hold of the Cornstalk again. The waltzing recommenced, and they went round the table in fine form. They came to the doorway again, and Lowther put all his force into a mighty hurl. This time the new fellow went into the passage, but he did not let go, and Lowther went with him. They rolled on the linoleum, Lowther underneath.

Noble calmly detached himself, and stepped into the study, and again Lowther sat up and blinked at the new boy.

"You know something about wrestling," he said, in a more subdued tone, as he came into the study again. "I'm done."

"No harm done," said Noble cheerfully. "I told you I wasn't going, you know."

"Oh, rats!" said Manners, warmly. "This kangaroo isn't coming here to cheek us in our own study, I suppose. Have another try, Monty."

"Try yourself, my son."

"I jolly well will," said Manners. "If I can't chuck that kid out you can use my head for a football."

"Do you play with wooden footballs in England then?" asked Noble innocently.

Manners did not reply to this frivolous question. He just hurled himself upon the youth from the land of the Southern Cross.

"Go it!" gasped Lowther.

Manners went it. The two juniors mixed themselves up on the floor, and one of them was rolled bodily out of the study. But the rolled-out one was not Noble, it was Manners.

The tussle was furious, and Manners was a little dazed when he found himself sitting on the floor outside the study.

"My hat!" he said.

Tom Merry looked at the new boy in admiration.

"You've got some muscle," he remarked. "And you know how to make the best of it. Are there any more like you in the bush?"

Noble grinned.

"Heaps," he said. "Now am I to remain in the study or not?"

"Not!" said Tom Merry promptly.

"Do these merchants want any more?"

"You see, it's a question of dig, as our friend Gussy would say," explained Tom Merry. "You've got to go or I shan't be head of the Shell any longer. If I allowed you to wade in here and run the show the whole of the juniors of the School House would get their ears up on the spot."

"But you gave me no choice," said Noble. "I had to chuck or be chucked."

"Yes, it's very unfortunate, but such is life. You've got to hook it."

"Isn't that a bit unreasonable?"

"Shouldn't wonder, but I haven't time to think about it now. I'd rather you went quietly," said Tom Merry.

"Well, I'm not going."

"Then I shall have to make you."

"Make away."

"It's a pity. I rather like you, and I was thinking of playing you in the cricket team, too."

"Yes; I dare say I could show you a few points in cricket."

"Oh, you do, do you? Perhaps a chucking-out would do you good upon the whole," said Tom Merry reflectively. "Have you finished, Manners?"

"Quite, thank you."

"Then here goes!"

Tom Merry stepped up to the new boy.

"Won't you go?" he asked persuasively.

"Not much!"

"I warn you that you will very likely get hurt if I start."

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A Tale of Tom Merry and Harry

Noble, the Australian Boy.

"Thanks! And I warn you that you are absolutely certain to get hurt if you start."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Then here goes; we'll see!"

The next moment they were struggling.

Tom Merry was a tougher customer than either Manners or Lowther, there was no doubt upon that point. But there was no doubt, either, that Noble was the toughest opponent Tom Merry had ever laid hands on. He realised at once that he had to do with a fellow who was fully the equal of either Blake or Figgins, which was saying a great deal.

He swung Noble round towards the door, and was swung back himself towards the fireplace. They biffed into the armchair and fell over, together. They scrambled up again, still together. They staggered towards the door once more, and Noble essayed to hurl Tom Merry through as he had hurled Monty Lowther.

But that did not come off. Tom Merry hung on to him like a leech; but when he himself essayed to hurl forth the new fellow he was equally unable to get rid of him.

They reeled away from the door again, and went waltzing clumsily round the study. Manners and Lowther dodged out of the way. Either of them, by lending Tom Merry a hand, could have enabled him to fling the new fellow into the passage. But fair play was a golden rule in Tom Merry's study. Manners and Lowther never even thought of interfering.

"My hat!" murmured Lowther, "Tom's got his work out!"

"Looks like it. Hallo, there goes the table!"

Crash! The excited combatants staggered against the table with all their weight. Study tables at St. Jim's weren't planned to meet attacks like that. The table staggered, too, and went over, and everything that was upon it was swept to the floor.

"Here, draw it mild!" exclaimed Lowther. "I'd rather you let the new fellow stop, thanks. You don't want to wreck the place."

"Can't—be—did," gasped Tom Merry. "He's—got—to—go!"

"Rats!" panted Noble.

They saved the rest of their breath for the struggle. They needed it. Both were equally determined, and they appeared to be pretty well matched. Their next fall was into the firegrate. Fortunately the weather being warm, there was no fire. There was a fearful crash on the fender, and a clatter of a kettle, a saucepan, and a teapot falling into the grate. They dragged themselves dizzily from the ruins, and separated for a moment.

Breathless, gasping, they looked at one another grimly.

"Are you going?"

"No."

They closed again. Manners and Lowther dragged the table into a corner and sat upon it, watching the struggle, as if it were a play. They cheered on the combatants alternately. They wanted Tom Merry to get the best of it, but they were sportsmen.

"Go it, Tommy!"

"Stick to it, Kangaroo!"

The combatants were sticking to it determinedly. Again Tom Merry brought Noble round with a mighty swing to the doorway, and the onlookers thought he was going. But he twisted round in time, and forced Tom backwards with a crash into the bookcase.

"Look out!" roared Lowther.

But it was too late. Tom Merry's shoulder went through the glass of the bookcase, and there was a terrific smashing. The bookcase reeled under the shock and gave a wild lurch. Lowther sprang forward to catch it, and was in time to receive a shower of books. The bookcase went over, and the next moment the combatants stumbled upon it and went over too.

"My hat!" gasped Manners.

The noise was terrific, but the juniors were too excited to notice that. But other ears had heard it. There was a quick footstep in the passage, and Mr. Railton looked in as the juniors extricated themselves from the wreckage.

"Merry!"

Tom Merry jumped up in dismay.

"Yes, sir."

"What is—is all this about?" demanded Mr. Railton sternly, looking round the wrecked and disordered study with knitted brows.

"If you please, sir, we're doing our prep," said Tom Merry.

"Indeed! Is this how you do your preparation?"

"You see, sir—"

"You were fighting with Noble."

"Not exactly fighting, sir," said Tom Merry cautiously, "I shouldn't think of fighting with a new chap, just come from Australia, sir. It's up to us to make him feel at home at St. Jim's, sir, you know. I hope you don't think I would fight with a new chap who only came this afternoon."

"What! Then what were you doing?"

"Well, sir, I—I was just chucking him out, sir, that's all."

"I suppose there is a fine distinction between fighting and

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chucking out, as you call it," said Mr. Railton, "I do not perceive it myself, but I will take your word for it. You have been making a great disturbance, and your study is in a shocking state. You will take two hundred lines each."

"Oh, sir!"

"You, Noble, will follow me. As you do not seem to get on very well in this study, I will find you fresh quarters."

"Righto, sir," said the Cornstalk cheerfully.

He grinned amiably at the Terrible Three, and adjusted his collar and tie as he followed Mr. Railton from the study. He was looking considerably dishevelled, as were all the juniors in the room.

Monty Lowther gave a low whistle.

"Well, he was not out," he remarked, "but it's ended well—and all's well that ends well. We've kept the study."

"And two hundred lines each," grunted Manners.

"Oh, never mind the lines, so long as we keep the study."

Tom Merry pursed his lips a little.

"I hope the new chap won't think us inhospitable," he said, dubiously. "We ought really to have thought of that before."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther. "It's rather late in the day to think of that."

"Ye-es, I suppose it is. I'll see him later and explain that we didn't mean to be anything like inhospitable," said Tom Merry. "I should like to make that point clear, you know. Now let's clear up some of this muck, and get the work started."

And the Terrible Three began what proved to be a long task. It was not easy to get the study to rights after the combat that had raged there.

CHAPTER 12.

A Surprise for Figgins.

MR. RAILTON was looking thoughtful as he walked away from Tom Merry's study. He was a little in doubt as to where to dispose of the Australian. As a matter of fact, there had lately been an influx of new boys into the School House, and space was at a premium, so to speak. A spare room at the end of the Shell passage was being turned into a study, and when finished it would serve for three or four boys; but in the meantime Noble would have to find room somewhere. A new idea occurred to Mr. Railton as he went downstairs, and Noble rather wondered to see the House-master go out into the quadrangle. Mr. Railton crossed the quad to the New House, entered, and tapped at the door of Mr. Ratcliff, the House-master there. He signed to Noble to follow him into the room.

Mr. Ratcliff rose with an agreeable smile. Of late Mr. Ratcliff had shown a much more agreeable side to his nature, a change that was thankfully welcomed by all the fellows in the New House. He still had the same acid temper, but he kept it under better control, and he was more cordial than he had ever been before with the School House master. The fellows, who had divined Mr. Ratcliff's little secret, attributed the change to the beneficent influence of Bernard Glyn's sister, and they confided to one another that they were jolly glad the Liverpool lad had come to St. Jim's.

"I hope I do not interrupt you," said Mr. Railton, politely.

"Not at all," said the New House master. "What can I do for you?" And he pushed forward a chair, a thing he had seldom done before on the rare occasions when Mr. Railton had gone into his study.

"It's about this new boy, Noble. Dr. Holmes did not tell me into which House he was going, and as the Doctor is away now, the matter will remain in doubt till he returns. You are aware that we are very crowded on the other side. Would you have any objection to the boy taking up his quarters here for the present?"

"None at all," said Mr. Ratcliff, "What Form does he belong to?"

"The Shell."

"Ah! The Shell studies are over-full now, but I can find room in the Fourth. That will do, for the present, I suppose?"

"Quite so."

"There is a rather large study in the Fourth Form, which has only three boys in it," said Mr. Ratcliff, "Most of them have had four lately. Yes, Noble can be accommodated there without difficulty. You can leave him with me."

"Thank you; then I will tell Taggles to bring his things over here."

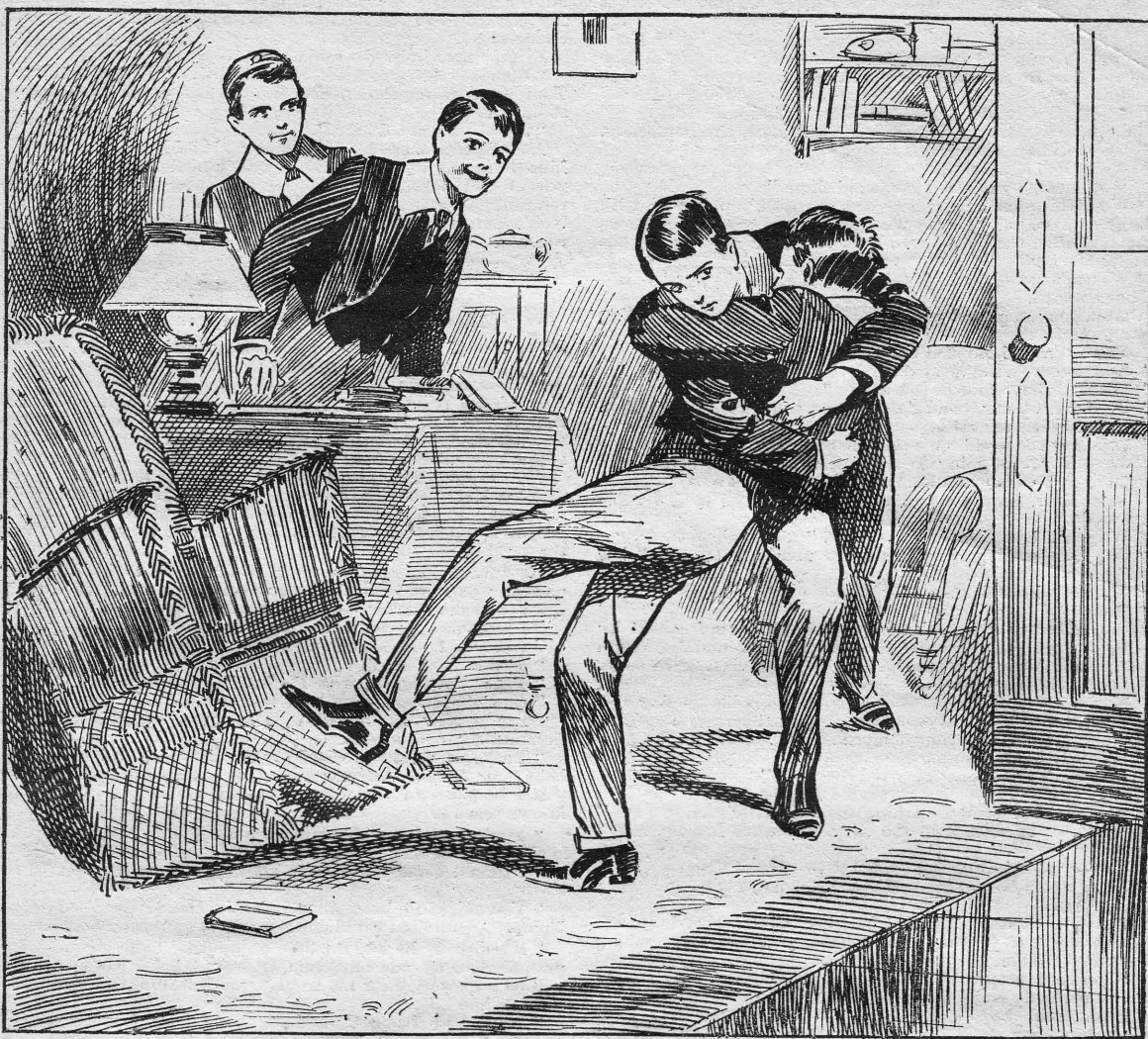
And Mr. Railton, relieved in his mind as to the disposal of the Cornstalk chum, left the room.

Mr. Ratcliff touched a bell, and told the House page to send Figgins to him. Noble waited demurely. He remembered Figgins of the New House among the fellows who had met him at the station, and he wondered how Figgins would take this addition to his study—for he guessed at once that he was to "dig" with Figgins.

The long-legged chief of the New House juniors presented himself in the study in a few minutes. He gave Noble a friendly grin.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Ah yes, Figgins. You see here a new boy a ah—lad



Tom Merry swung Noble round towards the door, and was swung back himself towards the fireplace. There was no doubt Noble was the toughest opponent Tom had ever laid hands on.

from a distant colony, whom I should be glad if you would do your best to make welcome to the school."

"Certainly, sir. I've met Noble already."

"Ah—yes, I am glad of that. He is coming into your study."

Figgins's jaw dropped.

"Into our—our study, sir?"

"Yes; since Marmaduke Smythe left you have, I think, had the study to three of you—yourself, Kerr, and Wynn."

"Yes, sir. But—"

"Noble will be with you, for the present, at least. Take him with you and show him his new quarters, Figgins."

"Yes, sir. But—"

"I am busy, Figgins."

That hint was enough. Figgins left the study, followed by the new boy. In the passage, after closing Mr. Ratcliff's door, he stopped and looked at Noble grimly.

"So you're coming into the New House?" he asked.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?"

"And into our study?"

"That's the order."

"Ain't you in the Shell?"

"Yes. But, bless you, I don't mind," said Noble cheerfully, already detecting incipient hostility in Figgins's manner.

"You don't mind! You don't mind what?"

"I don't mind digging with Fourth-Formers. Of course, it's a bit below the dignity of a Shell fellow, I suppose," said Noble, who had never heard of the Shell before he came to St. Jim's, but already spoke as if he had been a whole term in that Form. He had a wonderful gift for making himself at home.

Figgins simply glared.

"Well! Of all the cheek—"

"I'm going to be very decent to you," said Noble. "Of course, you won't interrupt me when I'm speaking, or anything of that sort. I shall expect a proper respect from fellows in a lower Form."

"I don't know what you expect," said Figgins, "but you'll get something you don't expect if you're not jolly careful. I suppose I've got to take you into the study."

"I suppose you have," agreed Noble, genially. "So suppose you get along instead of talking so much."

Figgins did not reply; words failed him. He led the way in silence to his study, where he had been called away from his prep. by the summons to Mr. Ratcliff's presence. Kerr and Wynn were both at work. They looked surprised when Noble came in with Figgins.

"Visitors?" asked Kerr, "Sorry I can't leave off work."

"No," growled Figgins. "This kid is coming into the New House after all."

"Glad to hear it."

"You won't be glad to hear that he's coming into this study." Kerr laid down his pen.

"Coming into this study!"

"Yes."

"Rats!"

"Fact!"

"That's rotten," said Kerr. "We were quite comfy by ourselves, and there was just room for three. Still, if Ratty says so, we've got to stand it. Don't think we're anything like grumpy towards you, Noble—it isn't that. But chaps like to keep their own study."

Noble nodded.

"I quite catch on," he said. "I'm sorry if I put you out at all."

"Can't be helped. We'll make room somehow," said Kerr, who was a canny Scotsman, and was never known to raise difficulties where no useful purpose could be served. "You're welcome."

"That's all very well——" began Figgins, indignantly.

"Can't be cured, must be endured," said Kerr, philosophically.

"We can't have four in this study."

"We've had four before."

"Yes, but that was Marmy—an old chum."

"Well, this is a new chum—and we didn't pull well with Marmy at first, you know. We had heaps of trouble before we chummed with that chap. Noble's as decent any day in the week as Marmy."

"We can't have four in this study!" shouted Figgins.

Kerr grinned.

"Well, you can go and yell that at Ratty. It's no good yelling it at me."

"You are a cold-blooded beast, Kerr."

"And you are a hot-headed ass."

"We can't have four in this study."

"Oh, I don't know," said Fatty Wynn, who had been thinking.

"If the new chap stands a decent feed, to pay his footing——"

"Oh, blow the feed! We can't have four in this study."

"Well, if you're going to make that into the refrain for a song, Figgy, I wish you'd hum it over to yourself and not shout it," said Kerr, in a tone of remonstrance. "I've got some work to do."

"We can't have four in this study!" roared Figgins.

"Oh, dear—it's getting crescendo now! Take a five-bar rest."

"We can't have four——"

"Rats!"

When Kerr was extra calm and judicious, it was frequent for Figgins to get exasperated. Kerr knew that, and he had a most irritating way of keeping his temper under all circumstances.

"Look here, Kerr, you ass——"

"Now keep cool, Figgy," said Kerr, wagging his forefinger at Figgins in a way that was calculated to make him keep anything but cool. "Don't lose your temper."

"Who's losing his temper?"

"And don't raise your voice, old chap——"

"Who's raising his voice?" roared Figgins.

"Well, unless there's something amiss with my ears, you are," said Kerr. "It sounds to me as if you were roaring like a bargee."

"You—you irritating Scotch beast——"

"Now, don't be personal either. I'm never personal when I get excited."

"I'm not excited!" yelled Figgins, almost dancing with excitement. "If you say I'm excited, you're—you're telling whoppers, so there."

"Keep cool, keep cool."

"I'm perfectly cool—I——"

"Cool, old boy—cool—Ow!"

Kerr broke off as Figgins rushed at him, and gave him a tap on the nose. Figgins's patience was exhausted. Kerr jumped up.

"By George—I——"

"Here, hold on," exclaimed Fatty Wynn, as his two chums began to pummel one another. "Hold on! It's pax in this study. Stop it, you duffers!"

"If he says I'm excited——"

"So you are!"

"Then I'll jolly well——"

Fatty Wynn rushed between. He caught Figgins's fist on his right ear, and Kerr's in his left eye. The unhappy peace-maker reeled and gasped. Noble burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry, Wynn, but——"

"Sorry, Fatty, but——"

"You—you silly asses!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "There's the new chap laughing at you like a hyena. Why don't you have some sense?"

"He tapped me on the nose!"

"He said I was excited!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Noble.

"Oh, shut up!" said Figgins, beginning to realise that perhaps he had been, after all, a little excited. "Stop that cackling, you cackling kangaroo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr rubbed his nose, and reseated himself at the table.

"If you've finished not being excited, Figgy, I'll get on with my work."

"Get on, and be hanged!" growled Figgins.

"Any room for me?" asked Noble.

"Find some."

Noble found some, and placed himself at the table with his books. Figgins grunted, but raised no objection, and Fatty Wynn was too busy between his prep, and some plans that were floating through his brain about a big feast, to care for THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 69.

NEXT
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anything else. Kerr, always polite, helped the new boy with his work, and so the next hour passed peacefully and usefully enough.

Figgins rose from the table at last.

"Come along, you kids," he grunted. "We've got to see Tom Merry about the cricket, and the house will be closing up soon."

"Right you are, Figgy."

And Figgins & Co. left the room, and Noble, left alone, seated himself in the only easy chair, and pulled a book out of his pocket and began to read. He had been reading for about ten minutes, when there was a tap at the door, and it opened. Noble looked up and smiled slightly as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in.

CHAPTER 13.

D'Arcy Gives His Parole.

D'ARCY glanced round the study, evidently in expectation of seeing Figgins & Co., and a peculiar expression came over his face as he saw Noble instead of the New House trio. D'Arcy, of course, hadn't the faintest idea that it was the Australian lad. New boys at St. Jim's were not uncommon, and the normal attire and looks of this new fellow prevented D'Arcy from guessing that he was the Cornstalk. D'Arcy had not seen the new boy since the trouble in Tom Merry's study, but that trouble was very fresh in his memory. He had been, as he considered, treated without proper respect, and such a matter weighed very heavily with the swell of St. Jim's.

He turned his eyeglass upon Noble, with a decidedly disparaging expression, which only caused the smile to broaden upon the sunburnt face of the Cornstalk.

"I wathah expected to see Figgins here," said D'Arcy.

"Did you? He's gone."

"Is this your study?"

"Yes; I'm digging with Figgins."

"Oh! Then you are a New House wottah."

"I'm a New House fellow, I suppose," said Noble good-humouredly.

"Yaas, I am not surprised at your disrespeful and wotten behaviour," said Arthur Augustus, with a withering look. "If I had known you were a New House cad, I should have known what to expect."

"You're calling me some pretty names," said Noble. "Would it surprise you very much if I wiped up the carpet with you?"

"I should uttably wefuse to allow you to do anythin' of the sort."

"You mightn't have any choice in the matter," suggested Noble. "Still, as I said before, you're an amusing little chap."

"I wefuse to be regarded as an amusin' little chap. I was pwepared to let you off," said D'Arcy. "but I can see that it will be impewative for me to give you a feafuhl thwashin'."

"Go hon!"

"Pway wise fwom that chair," said D'Arcy, with growing anger. "Pway wise to your feet, and put up your fists, you wottah!"

Noble did not stir.

"Did you hear me?" demanded D'Arcy wrathfully.

"Yes."

"Then wise fwom that chair."

"I'm very comfy where I am, thank you."

"If you do not immediately wise fwom that chair, I shall dwag you fwom it by force," said the swell of St. Jim's, coming over to the Australian with a very business-like look. "Now, take your choice, deah boy."

"I think I'll remain here, thanks."

"Then I shall dwag you out."

"Drag away," said Noble cheerfully.

Arthur Augustus was as good as his word—or, at least, he

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tried to be. He stooped and grasped Noble by the shoulders, and strove to drag him from the chair.

Noble had his hands on the chair arms, with a firm grip. He did not appear to be exerting himself very much—but it was enough.

He did not stir, in spite of the tremendous efforts of Arthur Augustus. And Gussy's efforts were tremendous! He dragged, and hauled, and pulled, till the big chair ran along on its castors, but still the Australian remained comfortably seated.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "You are a wathah stwong beast! Howevah, I shall dwag you out of that chair, deah boy—I mean, you wottah!"

And he put all his beef, so to speak, into a final wrench. This time he succeeded—because Noble let go the arms of the chair. He did so very suddenly—so suddenly that Arthur Augustus wasn't prepared for it. The swell of St. Jim's reeled backwards, dragging the Australian upon himself, and he went down upon the hearthrug with a bump, with Noble sprawling upon him.

"Ow!" he gasped. Noble rose to a sitting posture on D'Arcy's chest, and did not seem disposed to rise further. He sat there, apparently finding his seat quite comfortable. The swell of the School House gasped under him.

"Ow! Gerroff!"

"Eh?"

"Get off my beastly chest."

"Did you speak?"

"Let me wise, you wottah!"

"What?"

"Pway let me get up. You are wumplin' my clothes feahfully and causin' me to become howwibly dustay," said Arthur Augustus faintly.

Noble laughed.

"But if I let you get up you're going to give me a fearful thrashing?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I'll stay where I am till you change your mind."

"Weally, you wottah—"

"It's all right—I'm not in a hurry."

D'Arcy gasped for breath. Noble was no light weight, and there was simply no getting him off. D'Arcy's wriggles and struggles only seemed to make the Cornstalk weigh heavier.

"On second thoughts, I will let you off that thwashin', you wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for silly cacklin'. Pway get up, and allow me to wise. I feel extwemely dustay."

Noble rose to his feet, and D'Arcy staggered up. He certainly was rumpled and dusty. His trousers were not improved by some ink and cycle-oil that had lately been spilt on the rug. D'Arcy felt a greasy dampness there, and he screwed in his eyeglass, and twisted his head round, trying to see the back of his legs to ascertain exactly how much damage was done. The sight was so utterly absurd that Noble burst into a shout of laughter.

The monocle was turned upon him.

"I wegard you as a beast!" said Arthur Augustus in measured tones. "You have wuined my twousahs. Words fail to expwess my disgust for a chap who wuins a chap's twousahs. I wegard you as a wank outsidersah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Havin' given my pawole, it is imposs. for me to give you a feahful thwashin'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I wish you to undahstand that I wegard you with uttah disgust!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And you can considah yourself thwashed, and beaten almost to a jellay," said D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy turned to the door. The new fellow was laughing almost hysterically, though D'Arcy could not see where the joke came in. The swell of St. Jim's left the study, and came very near slamming the door—a thing that was, of course, impossible for Arthur Augustus to quite do.

And as he went down the passage the ringing laugh of the Australian followed him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 14.

Trouble with the Prefect.

"BEDTIME!" said Figgins.

He rose from the draught table in the junior common-room in the New House, as Sefton the prefect looked in. It was always best to move at once when it was Sefton's duty to see the juniors to bed. Sefton had a bad temper, and he was in the habit of letting it go. He was a favourite with Mr. Ratcliff, but disliked by the other House prefects, and when he was snubbed in the Sixth, it was a little way of his to "take it out" of the juniors.

The scowl on his face at the present moment was an indication that he was in one of his most unpleasant tempers, and that it behoved the juniors to be careful.

Noble had been playing draughts with Figgins. Figgins had soon come round to Kerr's philosophical way of looking at it; and he drew comfort from the fact that it was not finally decided that Noble was to be a New House chap. The study might yet be saved. And Figgins, on second thoughts, wanted to be hospitable to the lad from over the sea.

So he made up his mind to chum with Noble, and Noble proved very "chumable."

The Australian looked round at the prefect.

"Who's that merchant?" he asked.

"That's the prefect on duty. He's got to see us to bed," explained Figgins. "Sort of monitor, you know—big gun in the Sixth."

"Now, then, you rats!"

That was Sefton's polite way of addressing the juniors, when there was not a master present. Noble's eyes glimmered.

"Do you stand that?" he inquired.

Figgins laughed.

"My dear kid, when you've been a little longer at St. Jim's, you'll learn that you have to stand a jolly lot from prefects," he said. "Don't go around hunting for trouble. You'll get enough on your hands anyway, I fancy."

The juniors formed up and went to the dormitory. Sefton saw them all in with the scowl still on his face.

"I shall be back in five minutes," he said, in a tone that implied that if all the Fourth-Formers were not in bed when he came in again there would be trouble. And he left the dormitory.

"Nice manners, eh?" said Figgins. "Kind of gives you pleasant dreams to see old Sefton's face. It is a face, though you mightn't think so."

"If I had that sort of thing frequently I should get wild," said Noble.

"No good getting wild with a prefect," said Pratt.

Noble did not reply, but began to undress. His things had been brought into the New House by Taggles the porter. A bed had been prepared for him next to Figgins's, and his box was beside it. He found his pyjamas all ready placed for him, and well aired, that having been the careful duty of Mrs. Kenwigg and the maids. The other juniors were undressing quickly, but Noble did not hurry. The five minutes had elapsed, and Sefton opened the door again, while Noble was still in his shirt and trousers. There was a general bundling into bed on the part of the Fourth-Formers of the New House. Sefton looked at Noble with a dark expression.

"Get into bed!"

The Cornstalk junior looked round.

"Did you speak to me?"

"Yes. I told you to get into bed."

"I'm not undressed yet. The fellows here don't go to bed with their clothes on, surely," said Noble innocently.

"Get your clothes off, fool!"

"I'm doing it."

"Do it faster, then!" roared Sefton.

"I'm not deaf."

"Here, don't be a young ass," said Kerr, alarmed for the safety of the new junior. "You can't slang a prefect. Get into bed."

"I'm not ready yet."

Sefton crossed over to the Australian. There was an extremely ugly look on the prefect's face.

"I hear you're from the back blocks somewhere," he said.

"Perhaps you don't know that a brat in the Fourth isn't allowed to cheek a prefect. Take that as a lesson on the subject."

And he swung round his open hand to catch the Cornstalk on the ear. Noble's hand went up, and Sefton gave a cry of pain. Hard knuckles had caught him on the wrist, and his blow never reached the mark. His arm dropped to his side.

"You—you young hound!"

"Hands off!" said Noble quietly.

Sefton's eyes blazed, and he fairly leaped at the Australian.

Noble dodged out of the way like lightning, leaving only a foot for Sefton to stumble over. The prefect reeled forward, and fell face downward upon the bed.

As he sprawled there the temptation was too much for the Cornstalk. He brought his open palm down with a sounding thwack upon the prefect, and it rang through the dormitory like a pistol-shot.

For a moment the New House juniors gasped. Then a roar of laughter rang through the dormitory.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sefton sprang up as if the touch upon him had been red-hot. His face was crimson with rage and humiliation, and he went for the Australian lad like a tiger. This time his grasp closed upon the junior—closed upon him with fierce strength. Strong as Noble was, he was naturally not as strong as a big fellow of over seventeen, and he was forced back in the prefect's grasp, and Sefton freed one hand and rained blows upon him.

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Noble was at a disadvantage, but he was not beaten. He hit out fiercely, and Sefton received more than one stinging blow. Figgins sprang out of bed, and flung himself into the fray.

"Stop it, you beast!" he shouted.

And he dragged the enraged prefect backwards.

Sefton went to the floor with a bump that rang through the room, dragging Noble to the floor with him.

"Thanks!" gasped Noble.

"Figgins! I—I—I'll smash you! I——"

"What is all this?"

It was Mr. Ratcliff's voice at the door.

Sefton staggered to his feet. His eyes gleamed. Always, in his little difficulties with the juniors, Mr. Ratcliff had backed him up wholeheartedly. He was a tyrant, and Mr. Ratcliff had always seemed to approve of tyranny directed towards the younger boys. At all events, he never seemed to see anything amiss in bullying and cuffing by a prefect.

The bully had no doubt whatever that he would be backed up as usual, and in his mind's eye he already saw Noble wriggling under the cane in the House-master's study.

"What is the matter, Sefton?"

"It's this new boy, sir. He refused to go to bed when I ordered him."

"I wasn't ready, sir," said Noble. "I can't get all my things off in five minutes."

Under usual circumstances Mr. Ratcliff would have told the junior to hold his tongue, and to report himself for punishment the next morning. But Mr. Ratcliff of late had not been the Ratty of old.

"Ahem! You should allow the juniors ten minutes at least, Sefton," he said mildly.

The prefect could only stare.

"I am sorry, too, that you have thought it necessary to use violence with this new boy, arrived only to-day from a distant colony," went on Mr. Ratcliff. "Perhaps a little tact would have been judicious."

Sefton could not speak. All the wind was taken out of his sails, and he could only stare blankly at the master.

"I will see lights out in this dormitory," added Mr. Ratcliff. "You need not trouble to remain, Sefton."

Sefton stammered something, and left the dormitory. The juniors turned in, and Mr. Ratcliff turned out the lights, and bade them good-night.

"Not a bad sort of a chap," said Noble. "His looks are a bit against him, but his heart seems to be in the right place."

Figgins chuckled in the darkness.

"Ratty's changing," he said; "he's not what he was. We're jolly glad of it, too! It was a come-down for Sefty, and no mistake. You'll have him down on you, too; but you look as if you can take care of yourself."

"Yes, I've usually managed to do that," said Noble cheerfully.

And in two minutes the Cornstalk chum was asleep. Kerr spoke to him once, and only a steady breathing answered him.

"Fast asleep," said Kerr. "That kid's got a nerve. First night in the school, and he's been through some ups and downs to-day, considering. Yet he's sleeping as sound as a top."

"He doesn't know anything about first-night customs," said Pratt, sitting up in bed. "What are we going to give him?"

"Nothing," said Figgins.

"Eh? The frog's march or the christening, or tossing in the blanket?"

"None of them."

"Look here, Figgins——"

"Nuff said," replied Figgins decisively. "The new chap's not going to be ragged. We can make an exception in favour of a chap just arrived from the other end of the world. He wouldn't understand, for one thing."

"I don't care. I——"

"My son, if you start any ragging you'll have a fight on your hands," said Figgins. "And there's Noble too to consider. He's got an upper-cut that's worth a guinea a box. I advise you to let him alone."

"If you're afraid of him, Figgins——"

"Do you want me to yank you out of bed, and jam your head into the water-jug, Pratty?" asked Figgins, in a honeyed tone.

"N-n-no!"

"Then you'd better shut up."

Pratt thought he had better, too; and he did. Quite unconscious of the discussion, Noble slept on, dreaming that he was chasing a dingo up and down the passages in the New House, and that Sefton was pursuing him with jumps like a kangaroo.

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CHAPTER 15.

D'Arcy Does Some Running.

HARRY NOBLE awoke bright and early in the morning. He opened his eyes and blinked at the morning sun streaming in at the high windows of the dormitory. The Fourth Form dormitory in the New House was smaller than the similar apartment in the School House; but to the Australian lad the row of white beds seemed endless.

He sat up, and looked up and down the room. No one seemed to be awake, but from one bed came the sound of a muttering voice. It was the voice of Fatty Wynn, talking in his sleep. Wynn sometimes talked in his sleep after a particularly heavy supper, and sometimes the remarks he made were peculiar to listen to. Noble, who was not yet well acquainted with the manners and customs of Fatty Wynn, looked towards him curiously.

"Lard!" murmured the fat Fourth-Former. "Lard's best! I always fry 'em in lard."

Noble grinned.

"Yes, that's all right about butter," went on Fatty Wynn, holding apparently a conversation with a visionary person in his sleep. "But what about the expense? You can take it from me that lard's all right."

"My hat," murmured Noble, "he ought to be woke up! I'd better wake him, I think."

He groped for his pillow, and poised it to throw. Fatty Wynn, unconscious of danger, mumbled on, continuing the curious argument.

"As for the flavour, that's purely a matter of the cooking. I'd undertake to do better with margarine than most fellows could do with pure butter. Why—ow! Groo!"

The pillow sailed through the air, and landed upon Fatty Wynn. He gasped and awoke.

"Groo—oo—hooh! What's that?"

"Pillow!" explained Noble.

"Ow! You ass! Did you chuck that pillow at me?"

"Yes."

"You! Idiot! You've woke me up."

"I thought I'd better. You were mumbling some rot about lard and butter, and——"

"You—you utter ass! I was dreaming a pleasant dream—about cooking for a big feed in the woodshed," said Wynn, in utter disgust. "I'd punch your silly head, if it wasn't too much trouble to get up. Rising-bell hasn't gone."

"Well, I'm going to get up," said Noble. "You can get up, too, and come for a run in the quad with me if you like."

Fatty Wynn snorted.

"Yes, I'm likely to get up before rising-bell," he said. "Go and eat coke. You can take a run if you like; you may meet some of the School House chaps, and get biffed, and serve you jolly well right. I hear that Gussy has taken to early rising lately as a preventative against stoutness. Don't talk to me, I want to sleep."

"But wouldn't you rather come out and——"

"Shut up!" yelled Fatty. "If you make me wideawake I shall never get to sleep again."

Noble laughed, and slipped out of bed. Fatty Wynn settled himself down to sleep again, with a final sniff of disgust.

It did not take the Cornstalk long to sponge down and dress himself. Then he left the dormitory. By the time he descended the stairs the rising-bell was beginning to clang. It was the task of Taggles to ring that bell, and it was never by any chance a fraction of a second early. Sleepy juniors sometimes accused Taggles of ringing the bell early, with malice aforethought; but in that matter they did the school porter a distinct injustice.

It was very fresh and bright in the quadrangle, but quite deserted at that early hour. Noble broke into a trot to warm himself up. A figure came out of the School House and crossed towards the gates, with a towel over the shoulder. It was Kildare of the Sixth, going down to an early bathe in the Ryll. He gave the Australian a genial nod.

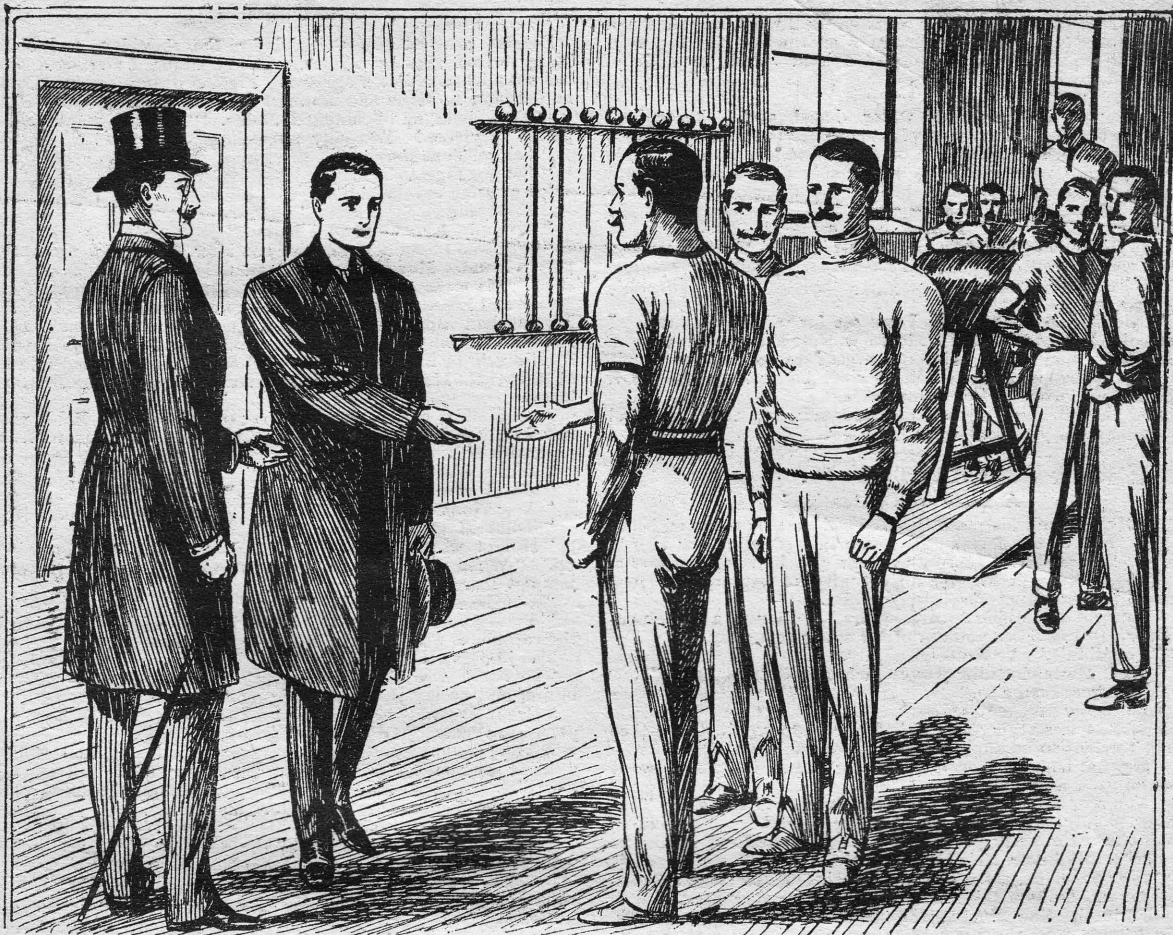
"You're up early," he said.

"Yes, we get up pretty early in the morning on our side," said Noble cheerily. "I find England a rather sleepy little place."

Kildare laughed and walked on. Noble strolled round the quad, with his hands in his pockets. He had not seen much of St. Jim's yet, and there was much to be seen. To the Australian lad, proud of the British blood in his veins, and feeling keenly the charm of all that was old and historic in the Motherland, a place like St. Jim's was of endless interest. There were historic associations crowded about the grey old walls, of which most of the fellows were quite careless. The lad from the land of the Southern Cross was far keener to know the legends of St. Jim's than the boys who were born within a railway journey of the old school. He gazed up at the ancient tower with great delight. Those shattered walls had been broken by the cannon of Cromwell, and the traces of that fierce attack of two or three hundred years ago were very plainly to be seen.

"Bai Jove!"

A Tale of Tom Merry and Harry Noble, the Australian Boy.



This picture illustrates an incident in the long complete tale of Tom Sayers, the gentleman boxer, entitled "Cheer, Boys, Cheer," by Arthur S. Hardy. You will be interested to read about Tom Sayers' encounter with the champion army boxer. This tale is one of the two splendid stories contained in "The Marvel" now on sale. Price One Penny.

Noble turned away from his contemplation of the old tower, as the ejaculation fell upon his ears.

He looked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and smiled.

The swell of St. Jim's was in running garb, and he was coming by at a gentle trot. Of late Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had taken it into his head that he was growing stout, and the thought had chilled him with horror. Fatty Wynn seemed to find it very comfortable, but Fatty Wynn was not a Beau Brummel. D'Arcy prided himself upon his slim and elegant figure, and he would have made great sacrifices to keep it slim and elegant, if need had been. Blake had often urged him to do some sprinting, to keep himself in form for the cricket. The School House swell had found it too "exhaustin'." But when it was a question of keeping down the fat, D'Arcy was ready, as he expressed it, to run like anything.

"Hallo!" said Noble cheerfully. "Top of the morning to you."

D'Arcy paused, and brought his eyeglass to bear upon the Cornstalk.

"Good-mornin', you New House wottah," he said politely. "I trust that you will not give me occasion to administah the thwashin' I was goin' to give you yesterday."

Noble chuckled.

"Certainly not," he said. "Can't you see how frightened I am? Your face alone is enough to terrify anybody."

"Weally, you new wottah—"

"I see you've got a pane in your eye," said Noble, in a tone of sympathy.

D'Arcy looked puzzled.

"I have not got a pain in my eye," he said. "I fail to catch the dwift of your remark, deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you are makin' a wotten pun on the subject of my—aw—monocle, I can only say that I wegard you as an ass," said Arthur Augustus, his wrath beginning to rise. "I am not accustomed to cheek fwom a New House wastah."

"You'll get used to it in time, kid. I shall give you lots."

"I should wufuse to allow you to do anythin' of the sort. I have a great mind to give you that thwashin', aftah all."

"Oh, you couldn't touch me, you know."

"Bai Jove! I will jollay soon show you!"

D'Arcy made for the Cornstalk, and Noble, with a grin, started at an easy run. D'Arcy rather prided himself upon his sprinting powers, but he discovered to his surprise that he couldn't gain upon the running junior.

Noble looked over his shoulder with a grin.

"Put it on," he said. "I'll take the licking if you can catch me."

"I wathah—fancy—myself—as a wunnah," gasped D'Arcy. "I shall certainly catch you if I twy."

"You couldn't do it."

"Bai Jove! I'll show you!"

And Arthur Augustus put on a desperate spurt.

Noble's stride lengthened a little, and to D'Arcy's great surprise he kept ahead with perfect ease.

They crossed the quad, went round the old chapel, and came along by the gym. Then Arthur Augustus began to blow.

"Bai Jove! I wathah think I shall let you off," he gasped. "Aftah all, you are weally beneath a fellow's notice."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a—oh!"

Noble, without the slightest warning, had suddenly stopped.

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He stopped dead, and stood like an oak. The swell of St. Jim's crashed into him, and reeled back from the impact, and sat down with violence. Noble had chosen a spot where the last rain had left puddles—and there was a loud splash as D'Arcy plumped down.

"Bai Jove!"
D'Arcy sat in the muddy water, dazed, and Noble walked away, grinning. It was some moments before Arthur Augustus recovered himself sufficiently to get out of the puddle. Then he mopped himself with his handkerchief, and he was still engaged in doing so when Tom Merry & Co. came out of the School House. Noble had disappeared. The chums of the Shell looked curiously at D'Arcy.

"Is that a new form of gymnastics?" asked Monty Lowther.
"Certainly not, Lowthah. I have been pushed into a puddle by a New House wottah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"There is no reason that I can see for wibald laughah. I am goin' to give that New House wottah a feahful thwashin' when I see him again. If you are goin' to continue to cackle in that disrespectful mannah, I shall be greatly obliged if you will welieve me of your pweseness."

And they relieved him of their presence, but they were still laughing as they walked away.

CHAPTER 16.

A Bone of Contention!

NOBLE took his place in the Shell that morning with the rest of the Form. He came in with the New House fellows. Mr. Linton was not yet in the Form-room, and Tom Merry took the opportunity of tapping the new boy on the shoulder and speaking to him.

"I've got something to say to you," he began, a little awkwardly. "I chucked you out of my study yesterday."

"You didn't," said Noble promptly.

"Well, I was chucking you out when Railton came in."

"You were trying to."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, I was trying to. What I want to say is, that—that wasn't meant to be anything like inhospitable, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha! It looked something like it, but I suppose it was only an accidental resemblance."

"You see, a chap's study is a chap's study," explained Tom Merry lucidly. "Apart from that, we should be jolly glad to have you. I'm sorry you're not in the School House. You're too good to join the New House."

"It's not settled yet. I'm with Figgins till the Head returns, and he will be here this morning. Then we shall see. But if I stick in the New House, you chaps can look out for squalls. I'm getting into the hang of things now. As for that little row yesterday, bless you, I've forgotten that already. No malice on either side, I hope."

"Good for you!" said Tom Merry heartily. "That's the right sort."

Mr. Linton came in, and the talk had to cease. Tom Merry helped the Cornstalk chum considerably that morning, getting him into the way of things in a good-natured way that was really surprising, considering how they had battled in the Shell study the evening before. Noble was a keen lad, and though there was much that was new and strange to him, he succeeded in satisfying the master of the Shell. After lessons he went out with the Terrible Three. The three chums meant to look after him a little, as a sort of make-up for the reception they had given him in the study.

It was a fine, sunny day, and the thoughts of most of the fellows were turning to cricket as they left the class-rooms. Figgins & Co. came out with the Fourth Form, and Figgins looked round for the Australian. He found him in the quad, talking to Tom Merry. He came up and jerked him by the arm.

"This way, kid," he said.

Noble looked at him inquiringly.

"You belong to us," explained Figgins. "No good wasting time with these School House piffers. I'm going to try you for the junior House team. You ought to be able to play cricket, considering where you come from."

The Cornstalk chuckled.

"I can play a little bit," he remarked. "I know a bat from a ball, and short slip from the long field—and some other things."

"Then come and show us what you can do."

"Oh, rats!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I'm going to give Noble a trial to see whether he's any good for the junior eleven for the school."

"Stuff! House teams come before school teams!" said Figgins.

"Now, you know that's rot, Figgy."

"Come on, Noble!"

"Stay here, Noble!"

"I'll jolly well yank him off if he doesn't come!"

"I'll jolly well yank him back, then!"

"Look here——"

"Look here——"

Figgins grasped the Colonial by the shoulder, and Tom Merry seized him by the arm. They dragged together, and the astonished Noble staggered. Figgins dragged away determined, and Lowther and Manners came to Tom Merry's aid.

"Here, hold on!" shouted Noble. "I don't want to be pulled to pieces! You silly asses—leggo! Leggo!"

"Let go, Tom Merry!"

"Let go, Figgins!"

"I'm going to take him!"

"I'm going to keep him!"

"Wynn! Kerr! Lend a hand!"

"What-ho!" said Kerr, and the New House Co. promptly lent a hand. Hands were laid on the amazed Noble on all sides. He struggled in vain in the grasp of so many. Tom Merry and Lowther grasped his ankles to get a good hold, while Figgins had him round the neck, and Kerr round the waist. Pratt and French seized his arms, aided by Fatty Wynn, who fixed a grip in his collar. But Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn of the School House rushed up and lent their aid to the Terrible Three.

In the midst of the struggle, the muffled voice of Noble was heard threatening and expostulating, but the excited juniors took no notice of it.

"Will you let go, Figgins?"

"No, I won't! Leggo yourself!"

"New House waster!"

"School House cad!"

"Hallo! what's the row here?" demanded Kildare, coming up. "What are you kids fighting about again? What have you got there?"

"It's the new kid, Noble!"

"You—you young asses! You'll damage him!" exclaimed the captain of St. Jim's. "All of you let go at once."

The juniors obeyed.

The result was that Noble flopped on the ground with a bump, and he lay there for some moments gasping for breath.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, as he sat up and rubbed his perspiring face. "Of all the silly asses!"

Kildare laughed and walked away. Tom Merry lent Noble a hand to rise. The Cornstalk was dishevelled and dusty, his collar was torn out, and his jacket split up the back, and half the buttons were missing from his clothes.

He glared at the juniors.

"You unspeakable dufers!" he said. "What sort of a way do you call this to treat a chap? You asses!"

"Here, draw it mild!" exclaimed Figgins. "I'm junior captain of your House, and you've got to treat me with respect."

"Rats!"

"And I'm skipper of the cricket team for the Lower School," said Tom Merry. "You have to kow-tow to me, and don't you forget it."

"More rats!"

"Now come and get some practice."

"I'm going to get a wash and a brush-up, thank you," said Noble. "You can go and eat coke!"

And he walked away to the New House. Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"It was rather rough on the kid, when you come to think of it," he remarked. "You really ought to have had more sense, Figgins."

"I! It was you!"

"Oh, don't begin to argue about it," said Tom Merry, waving his hand loftily. "I don't want to argue with you."

"I tell you——" bawled Figgins.

The Terrible Three walked off, leaving Figgins to glare. They had just caught sight of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's had come out of the School House, and was going towards the gym at a gentle trot. Tom Merry overtook him and tapped him on the shoulder, but D'Arcy did not stop.

"Pway don't intewwupt me, deah boy," he said, without looking round.

"What's the hurry?"

"There's no actual huwway," said D'Arcy, slackening a little; "but I am takin' a little wun for my health."

"Oh, I see. I've seen you bolting about like a scared rabbit several times lately, and I wondered whether you were off your rocker," said Tom Merry.

"I am not off my wockah, Tom Mewwy. I have lately developed a slight tendency to ongbongpong."

"To—to—to which?"

"Ongbongpong, and I am takin' gentle exercise to keep it down, you know. I am thinkin' of takin' up Indian clubs, but Blake says it would cause twouble if I do Indian clubs in the studay. He says I shall have to stick to the gym, but I have informed him that I shall uttahly wufuse to stick to the gym. I find it much more convenient to do little bits of exercises in the studay, you know, for two or three minutes at a time. I am thinkin' of keepin' a set of dumb-bells and Indian clubs there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to gwin at in that wemark, deah boys. I am determined not to allow this tendency to ongbongpong to grow upon me."

Tom Merry chuckled. The slim figure of Arthur Augustus showed very little tendency to embonpoint, as far as he could see, but the swell of St. Jim's was evidently alarmed about the fit of his beautiful waistcoats.

"And where are you going now?" demanded Lowther.

"Just a twot wound the gym before dinnah," said D'Arcy.

"As a mattah of fact, I find this midday dinnah system at school wathah twoublesome. I am wathah inclined to atwribute my ongbongpong to this system of feedin' in the middle of the day, instead of the natuwal hour of seven, or half-past. I have been thinkin of a wound wobin to the Head on the subject, pointin' out to him the bad results that accwue fwom bwingin' up fellows to dine in the middle of the day. I atwribute to that this howwid tendency to ongbongpong."

"You mean ang-bang-pang," said Monty Lowther, who was as great on French as D'Arcy was. They gave the language a different pronunciation, perhaps, but no doubt one was as good as another. Both, probably, would have been rather puzzling to a Parisian.

"I mean nothin' of the sort," said Arthur Augustus coldly.

"I mean ongbongpong."

"Ang-bang-pang, my boy."

"Rats!" said Manners. "What you both really mean is ung-bung-pung."

"Weally, Mannahs!"

"I suppose what you mean is oong-boong-poong," remarked Tom Merry. "Blessed if I can see why a chap can't say oong-boong-poong when he means oong-boong-poong."

"I mean ong-bong-pong, Tom Mewwy."

"Angbangpang, fathead!"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead, Lowthah!"

"Hallo, there's the bell!" said Tom Merry. "I'm ready for dinner. Come on, Gussy, and give your oong-boong-poong another chance!"

"You have prevented me gettin' my little wun," said D'Arcy, as he turned back towards the School House. "I twust that it will have no marked effect upon my tendency to ongbongpong. By the way, Tom Mewwy, I have not seen the new chap yet—the Australwian, you know. It is vewy unfortunate, as I wanted to give him a weally hearty welcome to the school. There has been a sewies of unfortunate accidents in this mattah. But I suppose I shall see him at dinnah."

"No, you won't; he's in the New House now."

"Bai Jove!"

"It's curious you haven't run across him too," said Tom Merry. "If you like I'll invite him to a feed in your study, and bring a few friends."

But Arthur Augustus did not jump at that generous offer.

CHAPTER 17.

Arthur Augustus Takes a Stand.

WELL, of all the rotten—rotten—beastly plants!"

"What's that?"

"Of all the ghastly sells!"

"Eh?"

"Of all the beastly bungles!"

"What are you jabbering about, Blake?"

"Oh, don't ask me; it's too rotten!"

Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy stared at Jack Blake. He had come into Study No. 6 after lessons that day, stamping on the floor, exclaiming at the top of his voice, and generally behaving, as Digby observed, more or less like a dangerous lunatic.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon Blake. "I twust the deah boy is not off his wockah."

"It's too bad!" howled Blake.

"What's too bad?"

"What Railton has just told me."

"Oh!" said Digby. He knew that Blake had been called into the House-master's study. "What's the trouble, lines?"

"Lines! No, lines wouldn't matter."

"Not a licking?"

"Licking? Have I done anything to be licked for?" demanded Blake.

"Well, yes, I should say you had done a dozen things," said Digby coolly. "The question is, does Railton know?"

"Well," grunted Blake, "it isn't a licking then."

"Then what are you grousing about?"

"It's about that new chap."

"Noble—Harry Noble?"

"That's the animal! It seems that the Head destines him for the School House, so Railton says. He inquired about it when the Head came back to-day, and Noble is out of the New House again. He's going to belong to this side."

"Well, I'm blessed if I see anything to grumble at in that," said Herries. "He's a decent chap. I showed him Towser this afternoon, and Towser quite took to him. When Towser takes to a chap he's all right."

"I don't say he isn't all right. He's right enough."

"And I'm jolly glad to have him in the School House," said Digby. "He'll help us to keep our end up against those New House rotters."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I don't object to him in the house," grunted Blake. "Can't you understand?"

"I must weally confess that I fail to undahstand, Blake. I shall extend a hearty welcome—a wight hearty welcome—to this new kid. I have not seen him yet, but I am certain that I shall take a great likin' to him."

"Then you'd like him in the study!" snorted Blake.

"What!"

"That's what Railton's just told me. The new kid is coming into this study," said Blake, growing. "There's four of us already, and we haven't room to move when Herries has his feet in here."

"You let my feet alone!" growled Herries.

"Now we've got a fresh kid shoved in! It's rotten! They've tried the same game before," said Blake excitedly. "Twice we've had new chaps shoved in here, but one left, and the other was kicked out of the school. It was a narrow escape."

"But this Colonial will be a stayer," said Dig gloomily.

"I shouldn't wonder."

"But it can't be done!" exclaimed Herries indignantly. "He's in the Shell, that new kid, and this is a Fourth Form study."

"Well, they put a Fourth-Former in a Shell study when they were crowded," said Blake. "That chap Mellish, you know, in Gore's study. I suppose they think they can do as they like with the juniors. I'm jolly well inclined to go on strike. We can't have anybody in this study. Look here, they shoved him in with Tom Merry first, and the Shell-fish ragged him out. That's our cue."

"Good," said Herries. "I like the chap personally, but he can't dig here."

"Exactly!" assented Digby.

"Then we're agreed on that?"

"Wathah not, deah boy."

"Eh! Are you talking, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy decidedly. "I am talkin', and I will be glad if you will listen to me, deah boys. It will be quite impos for us to wag this new kid out of the study."

"Why?" demanded three threatening voices.

"Absolutely impos. I should uttawah wefuse to have a hand in it. As a mattah of fact, I don't like the ideah of new chaps bein' planted on us in this way, any more than you do. We haven't any too much woom as it is. At the same time, I cannot agree to anythin' that might be considered diswepetful to a wewepresentative of Bwitin beyond the beastly seas, you know."

"Look here——"

"It is quite useless to argue the point," said D'Arcy. "I am wewolved upon this. If the new kid is sent into this study he will have a polite weception. I shall give him a wight hearty welcome."

"You utter ass!"

"I have wemarked before, Blake, that I wefuse to be chawactwised as an ass. I have quite made up my mind, and I hope you chaps will see weason. I am goin' to give the Colonial a wight hearty welcome to this study. Any little sawifice of comfort we may make we can wegard as our contwibution towards dwawin' closah the bonds of Empire, deah boy!"

They stared at him.

When Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke in that tone, they knew that he had made up his mind, and that wild horses wouldn't drag him away from the path he had marked out for himself.

"Look here, Gussy," said Blake, "with a new chap and his belongings in here, there won't be any room for your hat-boxes."

"Yaas, it will be wathah watten in that respect, I know; but we are called upon to make sawifices for our ideals ewery day," said D'Arcy. "To dwaw closah the bonds of Empire——"

Tap!

"Here he is!"

The door opened, and the Australian came in.

"Hallo!" he said cheerily. "Please I've come! I——"

He broke off as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rose to his feet, and fixed him with his eyeglass. The swell of St. Jim's seemed to be absolutely flabbergasted, so to speak. He looked at Noble, and Noble looked at him, and there was a grim silence.

CHAPTER 18.

Towser is Fed.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS found his voice at last.

"Bai Jove! You?"

"Hallo, cocky!" said the Cornstalk cheerfully.

"Fancy meeting you!"

"You! You are the new kid Noble?"

"I'm Noble."

"I have met you before, then! Bai Jove, deah boys, I hadn't the faintest ideah that this person was Noble. I was

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A Tale of Tom Merry and Harry

Noble, the Australian Boy.

expectin' to see a vewy diffewent sort of chap. I met this wottah two or three times yesterday."

Noble laughed.

"And had one or two little difficulties, eh?" he remarked. "Never mind—as I told you, you are an amusing little chap, and I never bear malice. If you belong to this study, we'll bury the hatchet and get on swimmingly."

"Bai Jove!"

"I'm being shifted about a lot," said Noble. "I hope you chaps won't mind my digging in this study."

"Well, you see—"

"Because if you do it won't make any difference. Where shall I put my books?"

"Look here—"

"Pway put your books on the table," said Arthur Augustus.

"I will pitch these things off to make room—"

"You let that bag of dog-biscuits alone!" shouted Herries.

"Wats!"

D'Arcy dropped the bag of Towser's biscuits under the table, and the Cornstalk put down a packet of books. The swell of St. Jim's had been hesitating for some moments, but politeness and patriotism had outweighed other considerations.

"You are vewy welcome to this studay, Noble," he said. "As a patwiotic Bwiton, I am vewy glad to welcome any wewpresentative of a gweat and loyal colony. I wewgard it as an honah to have you in this studay. I am vewy sowwy for any little twoubles we have had, while I am ignowant of your twue identity, and I should be vewy pleased to give you the hand of friendship."

And D'Arcy held out the hand of friendship.

Noble grinned as he took it. He gave Arthur Augustus a grip that made him wriggle a little.

"Good!" he said. "Let bygones be bygones. I shall make myself at home all right, never fear. I generally do."

"I think you're about right there," said Blake grimly.

"What they mean by sticking a rotten Shell-fish in a respectable Fourth Form study, I don't pretend to know, but I do think—"

"Never mind what you think, kid," said Noble. "What about tea?"

Jack Blake simply gasped.

He had never had the words taken out of his mouth in that study in that manner before, and he did not like the new experience. He thumped the table, and made the ink spurt out over the cover, but he was too excited to notice that.

"Look here, kid, you're too fresh! Mind, I don't want to cut up rusty, but you're too fresh, and you'll have to sing in a lower key if you remain in this study! I'm head cook and bottle washer here, and—"

"Weally, Blake, you will make a vewy bad impwession upon the new fellow," said Arthur Augustus, in a tone of remonstrance.

"I have already pointed out to you that as a patwiotic Bwiton you are bound to extend the hand of friendship to this wewpresentative from the Colony of New South Victowia—"

"Victoria," corrected Noble, with a grin. "It's next to New South Wales. What sort of geography do you learn in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's?"

"I can show you what sort of boxing we learn, if you like," said Blake darkly.

"Right-oh! Go ahead!"

"Come on, then—"

Arthur Augustus stepped between them.

"Pway hold on! Weally, Blake, I cannot stand by and see a wewpresentative of a gweat Bwewish colony wagged in this mannah. If you do not treat the new kid fwom Austwaliah with pwopah wewspect, I shall have no alternative but to give you a feahful thwashin'."

Blake dropped his hands to his sides at once.

"Behold I tremble!" he said sarcastically.

"Pway don't wot, deah boy. Suppose you get the tea, while I ask Noble about my wewlations in Austwaliah."

"Well, it's a comfort to think they're in Australia," said Blake. "If we had any more of you here, life wouldn't be worth living."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, ring off, and let's get tea."

"I'm going to feed Towser," said Herries, extracting the bag of dog-biscuits from under the table. "Oh, you asses, you've been spilling ink on these."

"Never mind; it will be a bit of a flavour for Towser. I've often thought that dog-biscuits must be wanting in flavour."

"Towser won't eat 'em now."

"Towser can go and eat coke, then. Bring in a pot of jam and some sardines and ham from Dame Taggles's as you come back," said Blake, fishing a half-crown out of his waistcoat pocket. "That will be about all, as funds are low. And be quick!"

Herries grunted, and left the study with the inky dog-biscuits. Blake laid the table, and Digby broke up a box to light a fire under the kettle. Arthur Augustus, in the meantime, was inquiring after his Australian relations. D'Arcy was a little in the dark on the subject of Australian geography, and his ideas about it made the Cornstalk chum chuckle.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S SUB-EDITOR."

A Tale of Tom Merry and Harry Noble, the Australian Boy.

"You see, my uncle went out a long time ago," explained D'Arcy. "He was wathah a wastah. I believe a lot of wastahs go out to Austwaliah."

"Yes, and a good many stay here," said Noble.

"Yaas, vewy pwob.," agreed D'Arcy, without seeing any latent meaning in Noble's remark. "My uncle was weally a sort of a wastah, and if he were in England it would be wathah a pwoblem how to treat him. The last we heard of him he was at Bwisbane, which is either in Austwaliah or New Zealand, or somewhere else, I think."

Noble looked at him admiringly.

"I suppose you're working up geography for an exam, aren't you?" he suggested.

"Not at all, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus unsuspectingly. "As a mattah of fact, I am not vewy stwong on geography. I suppose you know where Bwisbane is?"

"Yes, in Queensland."

"I daresay you have met my uncle, then."

"Yes, I daresay," assented Noble sarcastically. "When I used to get up in the morning at Melbourne, I used to take a sprint up to Brisbane before breakfast, you know. It's what you'd consider a long walk in England, I suppose."

"I don't know—I wathah fancy myself as a long-distance walkah," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "How far is it?"

"Well, I haven't been over it with a cyclometer, but it goes into hundreds of miles."

"Weally, deah boy—"

"So, of course, I've sometimes been a little late for breakfast, getting back."

"Weally, Noble—"

"How long is that ass Herries going to be?" grunted Blake. "I'm hungry. Is that kettle boiling, Dig?"

"Not quite."

"I am sorry you can't give me any news of my uncle," said D'Arcy, with just a touch of dignity in his manner. "I have not heard of him for a long time."

Noble laughed.

"Of course, he may have been one of the sundowners who came along when I was up on the sheep run," he said. "I couldn't say."

"Pewhahs you may have seen him when he was in Perth?" said Arthur Augustus. "There is a town in Austwaliah called Perth, after Perth in Scotland, you know."

"Yes, I think I know," grinned Noble.

"He was there before he went to Bwisbane," said D'Arcy. "You may have seen him—"

"Oh, it's quite an afternoon stroll to Perth from Melbourne. You see, you have to get across a continent. I think I'll get a map of Australia and hang it up in this study," said Noble, "with all the distances marked in plain figures. Then you won't expect a chap who lives in Melbourne to be on nodding terms with a man in Brisbane."

"Howevah, I should have been vewy glad to have news of my uncle," said Arthur Augustus. "By the way, his name isn't the same as mine—his name is—"

"Hallo, here's Herries! Got the stuff? Why, what on earth do you mean?" almost shouted Blake, as Herries came in empty-handed. "Where's the grub?"

Herries looked obstinate.

"There isn't any."

"Isn't any! Why, you—you—"

"It was all the fault of the silly ass who spilt the ink over the dog-biscuits. Towser wouldn't touch 'em."

"Blow Towser! Where's our grub?"

"I suppose I couldn't let Towser miss a meal?" said Herries aggressively. "Is that the way you were brought up to treat dogs? Of course, as Towser couldn't touch the dog-biscuits, I had to get him something else. I happened to notice the butcher's cart in the lane at the back, and I—"

"And you—you—"

"I bought him a joint," said Herries. "It came to exactly half-a-crown. There will be some left over for to-morrow, and I've given some to young Wally's mongrel, too. I don't believe in giving old bits to dogs. Dogs like good meat as well as their masters. I'm jolly well not going to starve Towser to please a lot of greedy wasters in this study!"

"You—you've blued all the tin on Towser?" said Blake, scarcely able to believe his ears. "We're to miss our tea—for Towser!"

"I suppose you don't want my bulldog to starve, do you?"

"Blow your old bulldog!" roared Blake. "Here, lay hold of him, and bump him into the grate! Knock his fat head into the ashes!"

"Here, hold on—"

"Undah the circes, I considah that Hewwies ought to be wagged. I am gettin' wathah hungwy myself."

"I'm jolly well not going to let Towser starve—"

"Chuck it!" said Noble. "Don't row. Look here, I haven't paid my footing in the study yet, and I'm in funds. Let me stand the feed."

Jack Blake calmed down considerably.

"Now you're talking!" he remarked. "No objection on my part. Gentlemen, hands up for the suggestion of our respected friend from Borriboolah-Gha."

The hands all went up.

"Passed unanimously," said Blake. "Come along, Kangaroo, and you shall help us to do the shopping. Gussy, bring your biggest silk hat to carry the things in."

"I refuse to do anything of the sort."

"Then I'll take a cricket-bag. Come on."

And peace having been restored by the Cornstalk coming to the rescue, the chums of Study No. 6 went forth shopping, and a quarter of an hour later they were enjoying a feast in the study, amid the reign of the most perfect good humour and good-fellowship.

CHAPTER 19 A Joker Joked.

"GOOD!"

Tom Merry made that remark, as he looked in at the door of Study No. 6. Monty Lowther and Manners looked over his shoulders and said "Good!" likewise.

It was indeed a good sight to see. Harry Noble had laid out his money royally, and certainly there was nothing mean about the Cornstalk chum. The table groaned, as a novelist would say, under the good things. The chums of the Fourth were busy with them, but without greatly diminishing the piles. No wonder the chums of the Shell said it was good. They were coming in hungry from cricket practice.

Jack Blake looked up with a genial grin.

"Come in," he said. "If you haven't had tea, cut into somebody's study and get some plates and cups and saucers, and come in. There's heaps."

"Anybody left you a fortune?" asked Tom Merry; "or has Gussy had another fiver?"

"No; this is Harry Noble's treat."

"Good old Wallaby! We'll come in."

And they came in. They found room to sit down, and commenced operations. The door was left open for the sake of coolness, for the afternoon was warm, and the fire was kept in to keep the kettle hot.

Skimpole of the Shell came along, and sniffed appreciatively.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "Sardines—and ham—and cold beef! I must really step in, Blake. I have given my last cash to a person at the gate who has been out of work for eleven years, and has not tasted anything to eat—"

"All the time?" asked Blake sympathetically.

"Er—certainly not," said the amateur Socialist of the Shell. Skimpole was a Socialist, a Determinist, and several more sorts of an "ist," and the subjects he could discourse upon were fearful and wonderful; to say nothing of the way he could discourse upon them, which was more fearful and wonderful still. Skimpole had heaps of intellect, but no sense of humour. "Certainly not, Blake. It would be impossible to support life if no sustenance were taken for eleven years."

"Go hon!"

"I assure you that it is a fact. I gave my last cash to the unfortunate victim of the present social system, and I have nothing for tea, and tea in hall is over. I will join you with pleasure."

Skimpole blinked round through his spectacles in search of a chair.

"There's my knee," said Lowther.

Skimpole blinked at him.

"Really, that is very kind of you, Lowther. I fail to perceive a chair. I will sit on your knee with pleasure, and—oooooh!"

"What's the matter?" asked Blake, as Skimpole leaped up from Lowther's knee as if that part of Lowther were red-hot.

"Ow! There was something—something sharp. Lowther must have placed a pin there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Lowther, I cannot but consider that almost rude. I will sit on your knees, D'Arcy."

"That you won't, deah boy."

"Really—"

"There's the fender," said Blake. "Here's some tea, Skimmy. Sit down and be quiet, and don't talk Socialism, or I shall brain you with the sardine-tin."

"Really, Blake—"

"Ring off!"

Noble looked curiously at Skimpole. He realised that at a public school there would be all sorts and conditions of fellows, and he had seen several sorts at St. Jim's; but Skimpole seemed to be a sort on his own. Monty Lowther was passing things to Skimpole as he sat on the fender, Lowther being at the table and within reach of all the good things. There was a grin on Lowther's face that the amateur Socialist was too short-sighted to notice.

"Ham, old chap?" said Lowther. "You must try the ham. I've got some myself, and it's ripping."

"Yes—er—certainly. You are very kind, Lowther. I shall have finished these sardines in a few minutes, and then I will have

some ham with pleasure. I am engaged upon the four hundred and ninety-eighth chapter of my book now," went on Skimpole, pulling a sheaf of notes out of his pocket. "Perhaps you would care to hear some of the subject matter—"

"Oh, get on with the sardines!"

"There is no hurry for that, I assure you. I am writing at present on the subject of the corner in wheat. Under Socialism that could not occur."

Lowther did not reply. He was carefully spreading a thick layer of mustard over some slices of ham, ready to be passed to Skimpole. Skimpole was bolting his eatables in chunks, and speaking between the mouthfuls, and he was certain to take in a large quantity of the ham without noticing how it was prepared—till too late. Then there would be fireworks, as Lowther gleefully murmured to Manners.

Noble was watching Lowther curiously.

"Under Socialism," went on Skimpole, "the wheat supply would be nationalised. Under the present competitive system, it is possible for one rascally financier to corner the supply of the world's wheat, and hold it up. The price of bread is raised everywhere, families are reduced to starvation—all to make the fortune of a single unscrupulous man, who does not even work for his living. Oh, my friends"—Skimpole was fairly going now, and oblivious of everything but his argument—"Oh, my friends, how long must we wait before we get—"

"Ham?" said Lowther.

"Eh?"

"Aren't you ready for your ham?" said Lowther, turning towards Skimpole, having finished the preparations for his little joke.

As he turned his back, Noble reached quietly forward and changed the two plates—one Lowther's own, and the other prepared for Skimpole. Both had slices of ham on them; but on the under side of Skimpole's ham, nicely out of sight, was a thick layer of mustard.

Noble changed the plates quickly, and without a sound, and the other fellows who saw his action were as still as mice. Monty Lowther was a great joker, but it behoved a great joker to look out for himself.

"Ha!" said Skimpole vacantly, "I was speaking about the corner in wheat—"

"And I was speaking about ham. You've finished the sardines."

"Dear me, so I have. As I was saying—"

"Here's the ham."

Lowther reached a plate from the table—the one he believed to be the prepared one. As a matter of fact, owing to Noble's little attention, it was his own plate. Skimpole took it, and placed it on his knees.

"You see," he went on, "when the wheat supply is made national property under Socialism, and farmers are paid out of the national exchequer—"

"You're not eating."

"I am explaining—"

"Oh, wire in, old chap, and explain afterwards."

"Er—yes—certainly, if you wish it, Lowther."

And Skimpole attacked the ham. Lowther watched him with blank amazement. The amateur Socialist showed no sign of burning his mouth. There was a grin round the table. Lowther's expression was bewildered.

"Don't—don't you find a little too much mustard on that ham, Skimmy?" asked the baffled joker, at last.

"No; it seems about right, thank you," said Skimpole, innocently.

"My hat! You must have a mouth of cast-iron, then!" grunted Lowther.

"If you chaps will buck up with your grub, we can get out and have some cricket before dark," said Harry Noble.

"Right you are," said Blake. "I'm done."

Monty Lowther attacked his ham to get finished. A goodly quantity went mouthwards on his fork, and several glances were fixed upon him with almost painful intentness. As Lowther closed his teeth on the ham, a pin might have been heard to drop in the study.

The next moment there was a terrific yell. Monty Lowther sprang to his feet.

"Ow! Oh! Groo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groo! Gerroooooch!"

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "Whatever is the matter?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Groo! I'm burnt! Mustard—oh, mustard! Groo-ger-roooooh! Yah! Gr-r-r-r!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Somebody's changed the plates!" roared Lowther, rubbing his smarting mouth. "Oh, you ass—who did it—duffer—dunmy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, you know, I wegard this as wathah funny! Ha, ha, ha!"

Lowther rubbed out his mouth with his pocket-handkerchief. His face was as red as a beetroot and his eyes streaming with

water. He blinked and almost wept, and he said things. The study rang with laughter.

"What is it Shakespeare says on this subject?" grinned Blake. "Oh, 'tis the sport to see the engine-driver hoist by his own petard."

"The engineer, ass!" said Digby.

"Who changed those plates?" roared Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lowther blinked and glared, and finally went off to rinse his mouth in a bath-room. He left the study in a roar. Skimpole, having finished his ham, looked over his notes, and began to read out extracts from his great book. The laughter died away, and the juniors quietly left the study. Skimpole, with his eyes fixed on the notes, did not notice it, and he went on reading—and it was something like ten minutes before he noticed that he was alone in the room. Meanwhile, Tom Merry & Co. were in the junior cricket ground.

CHAPTER 20.

Something Like Cricket.

IN the bright summer sunshine there were a good many fellows on the cricket-ground when Tom Merry & Co. arrived there. Several games were in progress. Kildare and some more of the Sixth were practising at the nets, and Figgins & Co., on the junior ground, were very busy with a New House side. Noble looked over the scene with a keenly appreciative eye. He had the true Cornstalk love for the great summer game, and the merry click of bat and ball was music to his ears.

"The chap has wathah the out of a cwicketah," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, looking Noble up and down through his eyeglass; "and I must admit that he can wun like anythin'. I should like to twy him on the pitch."

"I'll bowl to you, if you like," said Noble.

"Vewy good. Thwov him the ball, Tom Mewwy."

"Catch!"

Noble caught the ball easily enough as Tom Merry swung it to him, and went down to the bowler's wicket.

Arthur Augustus, who looked very nobby in spotless flannels, went to the stumps with his handsome new bat under his arm. There he took up his position, and turned his eyeglass towards the bowler.

"Pway bowl, deah boy."

"Ready?" called out the Cornstalk.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Noble took a short, quick run, and his hand went up and over. No one saw the ball—it went like lightning—and D'Arcy never knew where it was till he heard the crash of his wicket.

Noble grinned.

"How's that?"

"Out!" chuckled Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus looked down at his wicket. With the balls on the ground, and the middle stump reposing beside them, he certainly was out.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "This is vewy surpwisin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to cackle at. Pway bowl again, Noble, and I will keep a wathah bettah look-out. Of course, that was weally a fluke!"

Blake tossed the ball back to Noble, who bowled again. Tom Merry looked on with keen eyes. He had expected Noble to shape well on the cricket field, but this was better than he had looked for. The ease of the Australian's delivery was only equalled by its wonderful accuracy. The second ball came down with a spin on it that smacked of the billiard table, and D'Arcy's bat swept the air about a foot away from the leather as it curled in and knocked his wicket to pieces.

"Bai Jove!"

"Out!"

"Pway bowl again, deah boy! I wasn't quite pprepared for that!"

"Give your bat to Blake, Gussy."

"Wats! I want to see how I can handle Noble's bowlin'."

"I think you've shown pretty well how you can't handle it," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, a couple of flukes——"

"Oh, go it, Noble—give him another fluke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Noble grinned as he sent down the ball again. D'Arcy was a very fair batsman for a junior, but he was not quite up to Noble's bowling. And Tom Merry could see that Noble was not making hard work of it, either.

The third ball knocked D'Arcy's off-stump down, and then even Gussy was constrained to admit that he was out.

"Was that a fluke?" grinned Manners.

"No, Mannahs, it was not a fluke that time; it was a wathah good ball. You can take the bat, Blake, deah boy!"

Jack Blake took the bat, and faced the bowling. Twice he stopped the ball, and he looked a little worried. The third

ball knocked his middle stump out of the ground. Tom Merry gave a chuckle.

"Jolly good! Why, this chap bowls as well as Fatty Wynn!"

Blake grunted.

"He does—or better! I shouldn't wonder if he could bowl Kildare. Here, you try the kid, Dig!"

Digby stood up to the bowling. He did not get a single chance of hitting out; and the fourth ball knocked down his bails.

Tom Merry clapped his hands.

"Good! good! This chap is going into the junior House team, if I have to get out myself to make room for him!"

"Yaas, wathah! You certainly should give him his junior House cap, Tom Mewwy—and you have my permish to leave out anybody—exceptin', of course, myself!"

"Try him yourself," said Digby, slinging the bat to Tom Merry. And Tom Merry went on to play the Australian's bowling.

Tom Merry was the finest junior batsman the School House boasted, and Noble found him hotter stuff to deal with.

Tom twice swiped away the ball, and it was sent in from a distance. Noble's look became grimmer; his jaw seemed to set hard, and a glint came into his eyes. He took the ball in hand again, and this time he threw all he knew into the bowling. And Tom Merry played a shade out that time—the leather curled in under his bat, and there was a click of falling bails.

Tom Merry gave a whistle.

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy, "that was vewy neat! I weally couldn't have done that bettah myself, you know, though I wathah fancy myself as a bowlah!"

Blake slapped him on the shoulder.

"I quite agree with you, kid," he said, "you couldn't!"

"I am vewy glad you agwee with me, Blake, but pway don't stwike me on the shouldah with such feahful violence. It thwovs me into a fluttah."

Noble was strolling up the pitch. Tom Merry handed him the bat.

"If you bat as well as you bowl, you go into the junior House team—yes, and into the junior School team, too!" he said. "Let's see what you can do!"

"Right-oh!" said Noble cheerily.

He walked to the wicket, and Tom Merry went down the pitch to bowl. The Australian's attitude was very easy, but his eyes were as keen as a hawk's as he looked for the coming ball.

Tom Merry sent it down with all the skill he could throw into it. There was a click, and willow met leather, and the latter went on its journey.

There was a shout from the New House ground.

"Hallo there! Look out!"

Crash!

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the School House juniors.

Figgins was at the wicket, and he had just batted when his wicket went down. For the moment he did not know what it meant, and he stared down at the stumps. The ball from Noble's bat had knocked his wicket to pieces.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Blake. "Figgy's out! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, keep your rotten ball off our ground!" said Figgins, picking up the ball and flinging it back with all the force of his arm, for it was a goodly distance. "I'm here for practice, not for fun!"

"It was an accident, old chap—we've got a new batsman here who swipes!" called out Tom Merry. "If you're not using your porpoise, send him over here to see if he can get Noble out!"

"I'll bet you he can," said Figgins, for Fatty Wynn as a bowler was the terror of the Lower School.

"Well, let him come and try, then!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The School House fellows all admitted that they had no bowler quite up to the form of the Welsh junior, and they looked on eagerly as Fatty Wynn strolled over. Figgins & Co. came with him to see what happened. A crowd was gathering round the junior ground, watching the Australian with great interest. Fatty Wynn looked confident enough, and he handled the ball with the air of a past-master.

Tom Merry slapped him on the back.

"Go on and do your best, kid!"

Wynn sniffed.

"I think I shall jolly soon shift him," he said.

"Well, try!" grinned Tom Merry, who had an idea that the task wasn't so easy as Fatty Wynn anticipated. "Let's see!"

And Fatty Wynn went on to bowl. Noble looked for the bowling, standing in his easy attitude. Fatty Wynn took his curious little run, and folded himself up, and the ball went down like a bullet.

Click!

It dropped dead on the crease. There was a buzz among the juniors. Fatty Wynn breathed hard through his nose, and looked grim. He wasn't accustomed to failing when he had made up his mind and was putting his beef into it. There were batsmen in the Fifth and Sixth who couldn't play his bowling, and he was determined to take Noble's wicket or die in the attempt.

Dr. Holmes was crossing towards the School House, and the excitement on the junior ground caused him to stop and look on at the batting. The Head of St. Jim's took a deep interest in cricket, and he saw that something unusual was going forward. He looked on from a distance, safe—under ordinary circumstances—from the reach of a chance ball. But Noble was a mighty hitter when he let himself go.

Fatty Wynn bowled again, and Noble gave a mighty swipe. The leather flew—and flew—and scores of eyes eagerly followed the direction. Tom Merry gasped.

"My hat—the Head—"

Before he could say more the catastrophe came. The silk hat on the revered head of the doctor was seen to buckle up, and sail away in the air. Dr. Holmes uttered a sharp exclamation—and sat down on the grass.

There was a rush to help him to rise at once, and a crowd of scared juniors gathered round him. Noble captured his hat. It was knocked in at the side, and presented somewhat of the appearance of a half-closed concertina.

The doctor staggered to his feet. He looked dazed.

"Dear me! What has happened?"

"I'm awfully sorry, sir," said Noble. "I was batting—"

"Dear me," said the Head, "I was very startled. You must have another net put up in this direction. You must be a very hard hitter, Noble, for the ball to reach me here with so much force."

"I'm awfully sorry, sir—"

"Never mind, my lad! Of course, it was an accident—but you must see that it does not occur again."

And the Head, with a genial nod to the relieved juniors, walked on. The juniors murmured a cheer. It was like the Head to take the little incident so good-temperedly. Tom Merry clapped the Australian on the shoulder.

"You'll do! If you can knock the doctor's hat off at that distance, you'll do!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wathah fancy myself at hittin' boundawies, but I weally could not have done that myself!"

"Quite right, Gussy—you couldn't—or half done it!" agreed Tom Merry. "And the Cornstalk is going into the Junior Eleven. And—and look here, Noble, you can come into my study if you like—to stay!"

The Cornstalk laughed.

"They're getting a new study ready, and I shall be in that to-morrow," he said. "I shall be jolly glad to get into the Junior Eleven—if you really think I'm fit."

Tom Merry laughed.

"You're as fit as I am," he said. "You're going in!"

And Arthur Augustus chimed in:

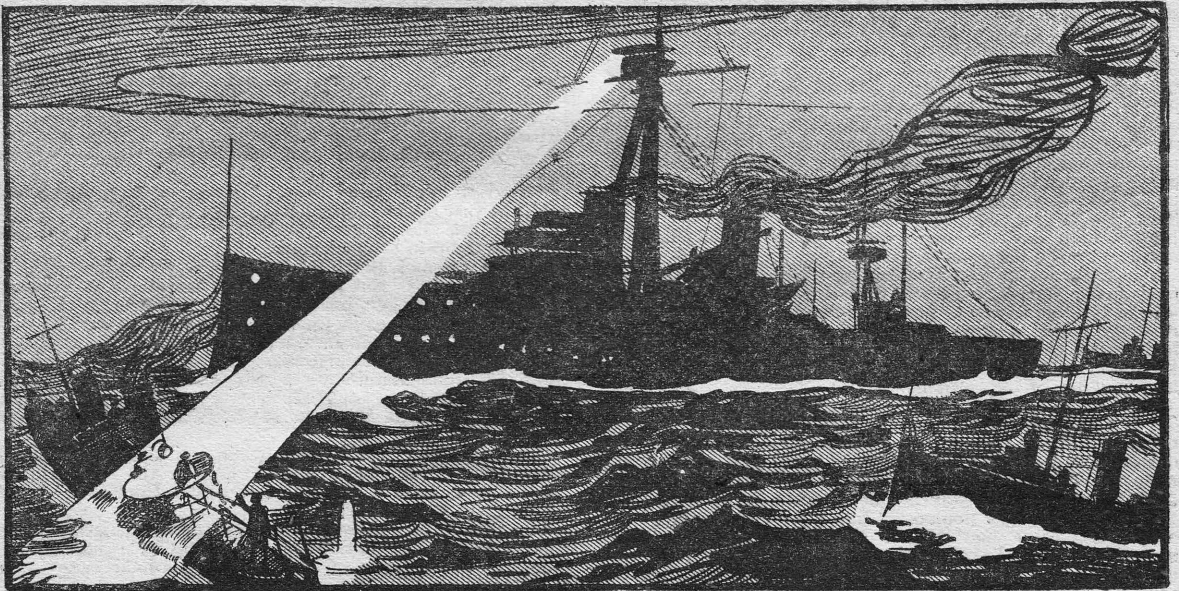
"Yaas, wathah!"

THE END.

(Another long complete story of Tom Merry & Co. next Thursday, entitled: "Tom Merry's Sub-Editor," by Martin Clifford. Please order your copy of THE GEM LIBRARY in advance. Price One Penny.)

Please tell your Friends about this Story.—Ed.

BRITAIN AT BAY.



A Powerful and Stirring 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 instalment opens, Sam is on his way with a message from Colonel Blake, who is besieged in Shorland House, on Sheppey Isle, to Colonel Vincent, who is trying to force his way across the Swale on to the Island. Sam succeeds in dodging the numerous German scouts, and manages to possess himself of the horse of one of them, so that he continues his journey on horseback.

(Now go on with the Story.)

How Sam Led the Charge.

"My aunt," said Sam, "I've come pretty well out of that adventure, on the whole. I'm a horse to the good, anyway, an' where the late owner is I'm blessed if I know or care. Lucky not to get that lance through my ribs, I fancy."

A rapid survey of the country, as far as he could see it, showed him there was nobody in pursuit, and he noticed with satisfaction that the horse was a good one, and fresh. Sam turned southward again, and struck out across the marshes towards the Swale, leaping the dykes as he came to them, and feeling more and more pleased with himself.

"This ain't a manoeuvre that's down in the soldier's pocket-book," he said to himself, "but I'm blessed if I don't patent it. We ought to have some time now, and Blake'll be pleased."

NEXT THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S SUB-EDITOR."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 69.
A Tale of Tom Merry and Harry Noble, the Australian Boy.

He rode across the levels as fast as the horse could go, and was rapidly leaving the miles behind him. He had not been astride a beast—except with Stephen—since they left London, and the swift rush of air exhilarated him. There seemed to be no more scouts to dodge—all was clear between him and the enemy's lines.

"Hold on, though," he said, drawing rein; "this ain't a circus. It won't do for me to go barging on to the Swale beach till Colonel Vincent gets across—if he ever does—else good-bye to my message from Blake."

He turned to the left and rode up a low, grassy knoll, covered at the top with thorn-bushes, rising from the flat marshes. Drawing rein on the crest of it, he looked straight ahead towards the mainland.

The great wide Swale estuary that cut off Sheppey Island from Kent lay before him, not a mile away, and Sam's heart leaped as he saw how well for Britain the fight was going.

It was high-water, and across the broad, salt bosom of the Swale a fleet of six tugs was forging ahead, straight for Sheppey beach near Hartz Ferry. Behind each tug were four large lighters, every one crammed with British troops.

On the shores of Sheppey itself, the hastily-gathered German force was doing its utmost to drive the British back. A galling rifle-fire, spluttering all along the saltings and the seawall, was poured at Colonel Vincent's on-coming force, and two German machine-guns were also at work.

But from the Kentish side, far over the water, two British Batteries of field artillery were covering the landing, and hurling a hail of shell and shrapnel at the German regiments who opposed it.

"By gum, they're gettin' it in the neck!" exclaimed Sam. "The guns are simply mopping 'em up! But our chaps'd never have got across in the teeth of such a fire without gettin' wiped out, but for them!"

He was right. Even from where he was, Sam could see that the German fire was telling on the approaching flotilla, which suffered heavy loss. But steadily, with obstinate, bulldog courage, the British relief force came straight on in the face of the enemy's rifles. The guns behind were telling with deadly effect on the German lines, and the fire of the defenders was slackening rapidly.

From every tug a couple of machine-guns stammered and chattered viciously, pouring a hail of lead upon the beach before them, where the Germans lay in such cover as they could find. Desperately as they might try, the enemy could not stop that determined onward march of the flotilla. The tugs with their loads could not go very fast, but they had no great distance to travel.

"The Germans are whackin' it into the lighters," said Sam, as he watched, quivering with excitement; "but Heaven help 'em once our chaps get ashore! They'll never stand up to the bayonets of the line!"

The batteries on the Kentish side had now perforce to cease firing, for the two forces were drawing close. Suddenly all the lighters began to pour in a heavy rifle-fire upon the Sheppey shore, and as the foremost line of the Germans had to fall back before it, the first of the tugs swung sideways and sent her train of lighters driving on to the beach and the edge of the saltings.

Then came a mighty British cheer that reached even to Sam's ears upon the knoll, chafing because he was out of the fight. Swarming over the sides of the stranded lighters, they dashed over the saltings, bayonet in hand, and charged full upon the enemy's lines. The German riflemen rose up to meet them, and the two forces met in a deadly struggle.

Barge after barge poured its living freight ashore as the other tugs came fast on the heels of the first. Three battalions of the Warwickshires, Bedfords, and two stalwart companies of Volunteers—the London Scottish, who, by this time were considered equal to any corps of the regulars—were ashore in no time. They lost many men by the rifle-fire of the farther Germans, as they dashed across the intervening space and added themselves to the fray, but a minute or less saw them hand to hand with the big Prussian and Hanover Infantry, and steel met steel as they fought it out with the bayonet.

The Germans began to fall back. They had lost heart already at this sudden descent on the island, while there was already a strong force of British on it, and the continued failures of the last few days had spoilt their moral tone. Every man who could be spared from holding the Shorlands force besieged, was there to repel the British. But Von Weisshaus's men had already lost heavily by the guns across the Swale, and the fierce onslaught of the khaki-clad battalions was too much for them.

"They're fallin' back!" cried Sam, who was watching, fascinated, from his point of vantage. "By gum, Sheppey'll be won back before nightfall, or I'm a Dutchman!"

It was true. The Germans contested the ground stubbornly, but yard by yard they gave, and in two places their

line broke, and the men fled. Still more of Colonel Vincent's men poured ashore from the lighters, and the farthest one, partially protected from the enemy's fire by the other barges, had rigged out a broad sloping gangway, and was rapidly disembarking a troop of Light Dragoons on to the beach.

"Cavalry, by Jove!" thought Sam. "Well, they'll be just what's wanted. How smartly it's all managed! Time I got along! Ought to be able to give that message pretty soon. Hallo!"

He was just about to gallop on, when he saw something that made him pull up again and look carefully. The Germans were being driven back fast in the front, it was true. But from his post of vantage he could see a good-sized force of the enemy quickly and quietly congregating behind some low mounds away to the right. Sam's trained eye saw the reason at once.

"That's awkward!" he muttered. "Our chaps can't see that from where they are. Those Hanovers'll be able to fall suddenly on the flank of Vincent's force when it passes, before he knows where he is, an' if the other Germans rally, the day may go against us, after all."

Sam knitted his brows anxiously. It was simple enough to see it from where he was, but the most skilled commander, not knowing those Hanovers were preparing an ambush for him, might well fall into the trap. Sam did not hesitate a moment, but sent his horse flying down the knoll and away at full speed towards the fray.

"Shall I reach 'em in time?" he thought. "Ought to, easily enough, barrin' a stray bullet. By gum," he added, as a thought struck him, "if those Dragoons were to swing round to the right there, an' take 'em on the flank while the Warwick's attack from the front, we should simply wipe 'em up! I'll try it!"

He turned slightly, heading for where the cavalry had disembarked, and urged the Uhlan's horse to the utmost speed he could get out of it. Straight as a die he rode over the marshes, jumping every dyke and ditch that lay in his path, and blessing his stars for the lucky chance that had provided him with a horse that could travel. Rapidly he neared the Swale, and the retreating Germans being now well away to the right, he had no need to trouble his head about them.

The Dragoon troop were now all ashore, and cantering along on the island side of the sea-wall, their captain and subalterns ahead. The officer in command, as soon as he caught sight of Sam, looked amazed to see a disvelled British cadet, on a Uhlan's horse splashed with mud, flying towards him with hand upraised, leaping the last of the dykes.

"Hold on, sir!" cried Sam. "There's a trap ahead, an' you'll be just in time to scotch it if you hurry!"

"Who the doose are you?" said the captain of the Dragoon troop in astonishment.

"From Colonel Blake at Shorlands, sir. Message for Colonel Vincent! But there are two battalions of Prussian Infantry lyin' doggo behind the rise yonder, an' if your C.O. don't find it out in time they'll catch him out!"

"By Jove! Are you sure, my lad?"

"I saw 'em from inland, sir. You can see nothing of it from this side. But there's a way round to the right here by which your troop could reach 'em, an' I can show it you. If you can fall on 'em just as the Warwick's tackle their front—"

"Here, Paulet," said the captain quickly to one of his subalterns, "ride like blazes, sir, and let the colonel know there's an ambush behind the rise yonder, and that we can get in to it at the side!"

The subaltern, who was splendidly mounted, dashed away like an arrow, and they saw him come up with the infantry, who, hastening along on a course that would have taken them close past the rising ground, were rapidly following up the Germans who had fled after the onslaught on the beach.

"Vincent's got the news. He'll make a big thing of it now, instead of getting pipped," muttered the Dragoon captain; the Warwick's and Volunteers were seen to check, and suddenly change formation, "splitting up so as to converge on both sides of the knoll which hid the ambushed enemy."

"The colonel knows his job," thought Sam admiringly, and a few moments later, as the infantry drew near to the ambush, the Dragoon officer turned to him.

"Now is our time," he said briefly. "Where is this road, sir?"

Sam cantered out at once to show him, and the troop followed. There was a broad route leading out through the marshes, with no dykes or gates in the way, and within a couple of minutes the troops had the ambushed Germans in full view, lying in wait behind the knoll—two strong battalions of them.

Almost simultaneously, the British linesmen doubled

round both sides of the rise, and a sharp, deadly fire of musketry at short range was exchanged, the Warwicks and London Scottish rushing in pell-mell with the bayonet, while the Bedfords shot up to the last moment. Sam pointed to wards the knoll:

"Clear road straight through, sir!" he said.

"Well done, lad!" exclaimed the Dragoon captain, and then his voice rang out like a trumpet, "Charge!"

With a thunder of hoofs and a flash of drawn sabres, the troop of cavalry dashed down upon the enemy's position. It looked as if there was no way through, for wide marsh-fleets and sloughs, that seemed made to entrap cavalry, were on every side. But Sam knew the path was clear and broad enough, and he showed it them plainly.

In front, the struggle was at its height. Prepared though they were, the British riflemen had all they could do to hold their own, for the position of the Germans was very strong, both in place and numbers. To dislodge them looked to be a task that would cost Colonel Vincent's force dearly in killed and wounded, if it could be done at all. Nobody, at that moment, could have told which way the fight was going.

It was the cavalry that turned the scale. They came down right upon the German's flank, and the big Prussians and Hanovers, in consternation, tried to form squares.

Had they done so, the little body of horsemen would have had little chance to do any harm to so large a force in solid squares, which is almost invulnerable to cavalry. But so hotly did the Warwicks and Scottish press on their foes, that to form squares effectively was out of the question for the Prussians. It was a neat little lesson in rough-and-tumble warfare.

At the very van of the Dragoons, ahead even of the captain himself, rode the young scout, revolver in hand, and wishing with all his heart that it was a sword. He was a light-weight, and his swift Uhlan troop-horse was as fleet as any. Whether he was in his right place or not he did not much care. Sam, as the scout of the party, thought he ought to be in front, and stayed there. He heard the shouts of the men behind them, as they gripped their sabres to hand.

"Into them, lads!" cried the captain, and the next moment the troop hurled itself upon the Prussians. It was Sam's first cavalry charge. He saw the flash of the bayonets before him, heard the cries of the German officers calling on their men, and then came the shock of the encounter.

A tall Prussian, bayonet lifted above his head in both hands, stood in Sam's path, and lunged at him savagely. The revolver cracked, the man went down, and the horse struck his falling body with its shoulder as it sprang forward. Not a fraction of a second did the whole incident last. The dead man was left a dozen yards behind, and Sam was firing right and left at those who opposed him before he had time to think. He heard the ugly swish and chop of the sabres on all sides, as a Prussian went down here and a Dragoon there. Then came a sharp stinging pain, all along one thigh; his horse gave a wild plunge and a scream as Sam fired his last shot, and found himself rolling over and over on the sodden turf.

The Sortie from Shorlands.

When he picked himself up, it was to see the Germans scattered and flying like leaves before a gale. The Dragoons had gone through them as a bullet goes through brushwood. In every direction tall men in blue and grey were running for their lives, while the long sabres followed and did deadly work. Had there been another troop of Dragoons the rout would have been complete, and few of the Germans who had made the ambush would have got away. As it was, the victory proved thorough enough, and not till a covering fire from the hills beyond opened upon the Dragoons did they come riding back.

"It's the worst smack in the eye Von Weissshaus has had yet!" said Sam exultingly.

He took an inventory of his damages, and found he had taken no serious harm. A bayonet-point had ripped open his riding-breeches and scored the muscles of his thigh slightly, drawing a good deal of blood, but not laming him. The Uhlan troop-horse lay dead on the turf, a bayonet deep in its chest, and broken off at the catch where it had joined the rifle.

Sam heaved a sigh of regret. His acquaintance with the troop-horse had been short, but he had liked the beast, and was very sorry it had not survived the conflict, but had been killed by a foul blow from one of its own side.

"Well, youngster, the Pink Dragoons owe you more than they'll ever be able to pay!" said the captain of the troop, drawing rein as he neared Sam. "You put us on to that very smartly. Are you hurt?"

"Nothing much. Where shall I find Colonel Vincent, sir? I've got to see him at once."

"Jump up on the sergeant's horse there. Sergeant, give up your mount and follow on. Come along, my lad."

Sam galloped along beside the cavalry officer till they came up to Colonel Vincent, a sharp, wiry little man, on a tall chestnut horse. He had halted his force and was making a rapid survey from the top of the knoll.

"Call up your men, Carter!" he called to Sam's companion, "and throw out ten of them as scouts. We must push on and get round by the rear of Shorlands at once."

"I've a messenger here from Colonel Blake, sir," said the Dragoon officer.

"Eh? What?" said Colonel Vincent fiercely, as Sam saluted. "You're from Shorlands? Have they held out against the German guns—eh?"

"They've knocked the German guns into flinders, sir," said Sam, "and Colonel Blake bids me say that there's no need to rescue him. If you'll work round to the fore side of Shorlands, westwards, an' tackle the German trenches that way, he'll break cover an' come down on them from the other side. His idea is to drive them back on Sheerness an' recapture the place."

"Gad," said Colonel Vincent abruptly, staring at Sam, "is it, by Jove! Now, my lad, give me the state of affairs and the position of the enemy as clearly as you can, and as quickly."

Sam put it into remarkably few words, yet he gave the colonel the exact position, the approximate number of the Germans, and how they were entrenched, also an estimate of Blake's losses. At Colonel Vincent's demand, he mentioned how the 4.7's had been brought ashore, and his journey from Shorlands, in two or three sentences.

"I ought to add, sir," put in the Dragoon captain, "that it was this youngster, too, who brought us the news of the ambush, and showed my troop the way through the marshes."

"Gad, you ought to have the D.S.O.!" exclaimed Vincent in astonishment, to Sam.

"Oh, I've got that, sir—had it some time!" said Sam, laughing.

"What? By Jove, you must be young Villiers, of the Greyfriars affair—eh?"

"That's my name, sir. My brother Stephen's at Shorlands."

"Gad, no wonder Blake's had such luck—you bring it wherever you go, they say. But we'll talk of that later—our job now is to drive these Germans into Sheerness. Forward there—column of companies, form! Lieutenant Villiers, I take you with me as aide-de-camp."

Smartly the whole force moved ahead, in capital formation, as Sam noticed. He felt the confidence men feel in a good leader, and was proud of the distinction the colonel gave him. He had been many things during the campaign, but never yet aide-de-camp, even temporarily. It meant more than it generally means, under Colonel Vincent.

The Germans were hurrying westward as fast as they could, evidently bent on taking up the strongest position they could, and joining with their other forces to make a stand for it.

"There are a dickens of a lot of 'em," said a subaltern on Vincent's staff, as Sam rode beside him, a little way behind the colonel, at a smart trot.

"Wait till you see Blake's men break out of Shorlands," said Sam.

"I can tell you, if anybody can win back Sheppey, it's Vincent and Blake," said the subaltern, "it all depends on how things go when we join."

Sam knew that well enough, and he knew, too, by the way Vincent was handling his men, and the route he was taking, that Blake's message had had its effect, and the Rutlands would get their chance. He wondered how Stephen was getting on, and what the bluejackets were doing.

The thunder of the 4.7's had ceased some time since. Sam guessed that their supply of ammunition had given out, but they had done their work. The remaining German battery, which had cleared out, had not returned. There was a brisk musketry fire still being exchanged, but Sam knew the advantage in that lay with Shorlands.

"It's queer they didn't bring all their men down to stop us landing," said the subaltern.

"An' let Blake an' the Rutlands out to take 'em in the rear—eh?" said Sam. "Worse mess than ever, Weissshaus would have been in then."

"No, that wouldn't have done. You know the game, I see," said the subaltern pensively, and Sam smiled. He was called alongside the colonel shortly afterwards, to give him more details as they rode. They were not able to go at a very great pace, being mounted, while the force itself was afoot, but the line regiments pushed on at a wonderful pace for infantry, and soon the besiegers of Shorlands were in sight.

There was some skirmishing on the outskirts of the column all the way, but now the fighting became sharp and deadly, as the Germans strove to bar Colonel Vincent's way. He kept on steadily, in spite of them, forcing his way ahead, till he suddenly threw out his lines, and made the men take cover in the position he had been making a forced march to reach.

To the right was Shorlands, far up the slope, the unseen Rutlands plugging away at the enemy, but not too rapidly, for it was pretty certain they must have used nearly all their ammunition, and would, of course, get no more. Westward, and below them, lay their besiegers, half of these now turning to face Colonel Vincent's force, and reinforced by all those who had been driven back by him at Hartz Ferry. In short, all Von Weisshaus' men were there, and the battle opened with a rattle and roar of musketry and machine-guns that split the ear-drums.

Desperately the fight was fought, and every ruse that both British and German commanders could use was tried and countered. Watchful and keen, Colonel Vincent met every move of his rival with one as good or better.

Shorlands was pouring in a hotter fire than ever, using the last of its ammunition, which had been reserved for this. The two German guns, which were all that remained of the fourth battery, came into play again, but they were not enough to do great harm to Vincent's long, well-placed lines.

"They're giving way! They can't stand up to it!" cried Sam, as he lay by the subaltern's side. "Now for a strong blow, and they'll break!"

The German fire was growing wild, and had slackened perceptibly. Several battalions were forced to shift ground. Suddenly, far up the slope, a distant bugle sounded its clear notes, and out of Shorlands poured a dark, moving mass of men, glinting and gleaming here and there with steel. A cheer rose upon the air, and they came dashing headlong down the slope.

"The Rutlands are charging!" cried Sam.

Colonel Vincent sprang to his feet.

"Fix bayonets! Sound the charge!" he exclaimed.

There was another cheer, and the regiments under his command rose and raced across the open, straight at the German trenches. The two forces came down like an avalanche on Von Weisshaus' lines, one on the front and one on the flank. Then came one stamping, roaring medley as foe met foe and the bayonets did their work.

When it was over, the German lines were broken and fleeing for Sheerness as fast as they could go, leaving more than fifty per cent. of their men behind them about the trenches. No troops, even in the Kaiser's army, could have stood against that swift, deftly-dealt attack on flank and front, with the bayonets of the finest infantry in the world to back it up. After ten minutes of grim, gory work, the invaders were fairly broken and driven out.

Sam had little part in the actual fighting. He had to stand by his colonel, who was directing operations from the highest point he could reach, and every now and then the young scout had to gallop as fast as his horse would carry him to one battalion-commander or the other with Vincent's orders. But when the full tide of victory was over, he saw Stephen, Cavendish, and eight of the Orion's bluejackets coming towards him.

"Wasn't it great!" cried Stephen. "You got through all right then. I knew you would. What are you doin' on that camel, Sam?"

"I'm newly appointed aide-de-camp," said Sam, "and—confound!"

Even as he was answering his brother, a stray bullet of the few that distant snipers were lobbing into the British ranks struck the Dragon horse through both hocks, and dropped him, dead lame. Sam got off ruefully.

"Not done for, but he can't be ridden any more to-day, anyhow," said Sam; "he couldn't go a mile. I don't seem lucky with horses. This is the second to-day. But aide-de-camping ain't

much in my line. I like to see more of the foe; so as it can't be done without a horse, we'll consider me struck off the rolls, an' I'll chip in with you chaps."

"Good old Sam! But won't the colonel make a row?" said Cavendish.

"He won't miss me, and I can't gallop on foot, can I? I don't want to be thanked by those two blessed colonels, either. Let 'em weep on each other's necks. I consider Steve an' I belong to the Navy, Bob, my boy, after bringin' up those 4.7's. They're pushin' on for Sheerness yonder like anything. What have you done with the guns?"

"Left 'em up at Shorlands," said Cavendish. "We hadn't any more ammunition for 'em; so it was no good lugging 'em about. We buried the sight and breech-pins, so they should be no use, in case they fell into German hands. There go the Bedfords—look!—scootin' out southward to get round the Germans. What's goin' to happen now? I'm new to these shore games."

"Why, we've got the Germans on toast!" said Sam. "They can't get off the island—"

"Not by King's Ferry Bridge?"

"That's blown up. They did it themselves long ago, after we ran No. 669 torpedo-boat through, an' plugged the German battleships in the Medway. There's no way off Sheppey now, except by boat, an' you bet they've got none that can transport a whole division in a hurry."

"They'll have to skeddaddle into Sheerness, an' try an' hold it against us," said Stephen, "that's all. Then there'll be the sea an' the Medway behind 'em, an' us in front. They'll make a stand, an' hope for help from seaward."

"They won't get it," said a grim voice behind them. "Don't they wish they may!"

The companions turned, and saw a sturdily-built, dishevelled-looking man in serge clothes, with brass buttons, very dilapidated and muddy, though they had evidently been smart once, and a peaked cap. His face bore the marks of recent suffering and privation, and he plainly belonged to the sea.

"Hallo! What might you be?" said Cavendish, in surprise.

"I was a prisoner in Sheerness till this morning," said the stranger, with a cavernous chuckle, "but they'd got so much else to think about the last few hours that I managed to give 'em the slip, an' here I am. I gathered they were goin' to give me a hemp necktie."

"What, you've had a taste of Von Weisshaus, too, have you?" cried Sam. "We know the beast! What did he get you for?"

"Called you a—"

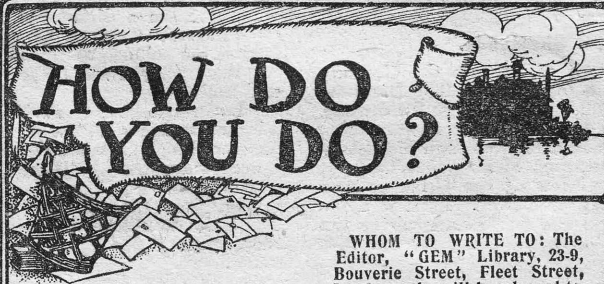
"Spy—yes!" growled the stranger. "That's him! It's a fact I'm a civilian. John McBaine is my name, and first engineer on one o' the Red Ox freighters is what I was before the war. Well, I was running a little steam-pinnace down from Gravesend with some Naval Volunteers that wanted to try an' do some scoutin' round the Medway's mouth, an' get the news to our fleet. We was sunk by a shot from one o' their torpedo-boats, an' I was washed up on Garrison Point an' nabbed by the Germans. It suited Von Weisshaus to call me a spy, an' they were to have hanged me to-day, but I've got through their fingers, as you see."

"Good for you!" said Stephen. "We had the same luck; and now you'll see Von Weisshaus get it where the chicken got the axe!"

"I'd like to have a hand in that!" said the engineer grimly. "Though the sea's my line, I'd like fine to do a hand's turn to help, an' any hit at the German beggars would do me good, after the way they used me. I'll show 'em the difference between a spy and a man! But d'ye hear that?"

He jerked his thumb northwards towards the sea, where the dull mutter of distant heavy gun-fire was heard, and grew louder and louder.

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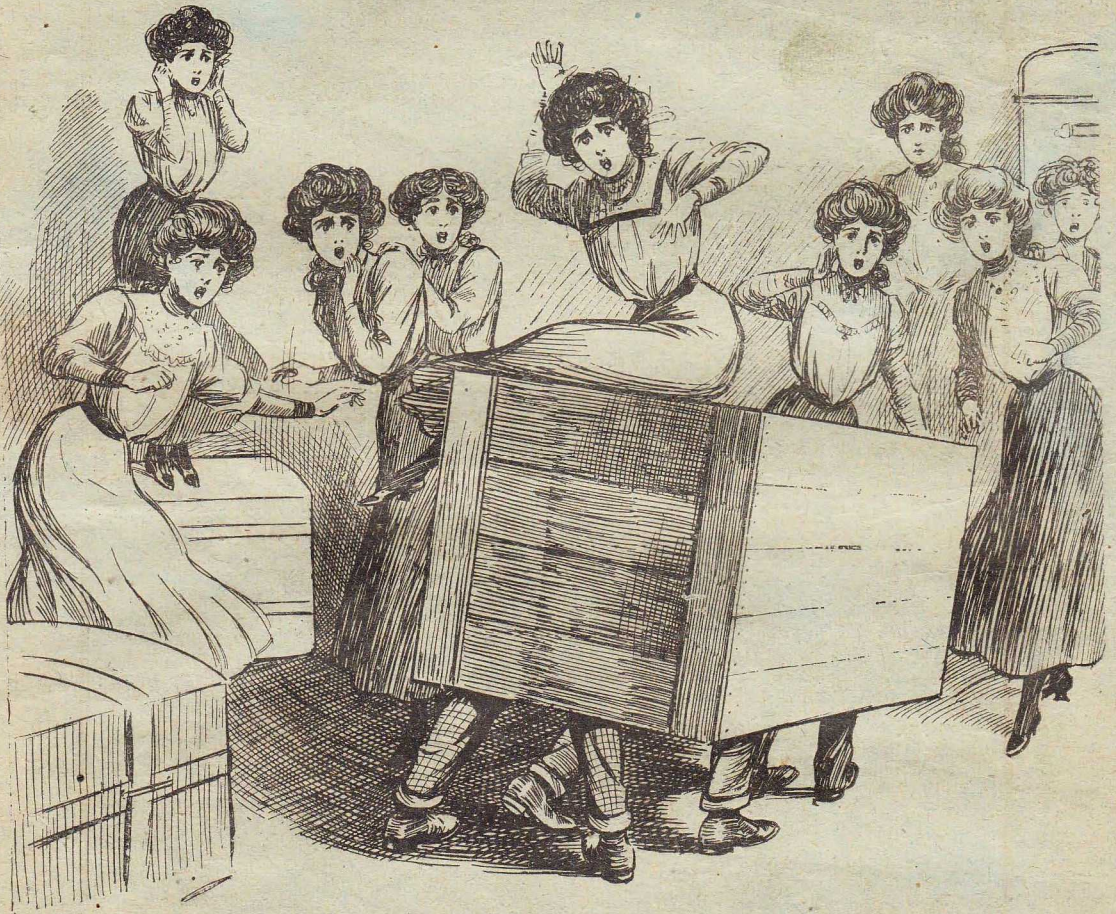
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