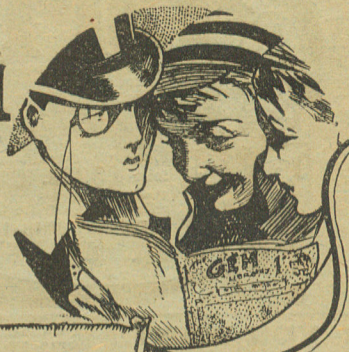


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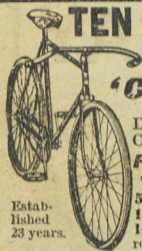
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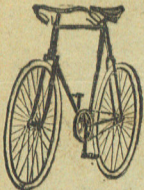


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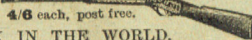
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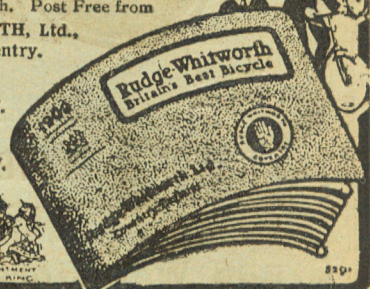
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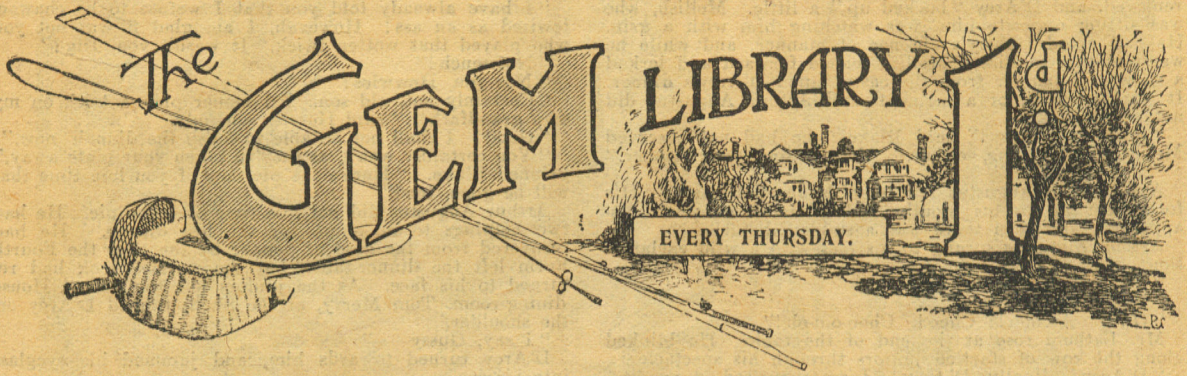
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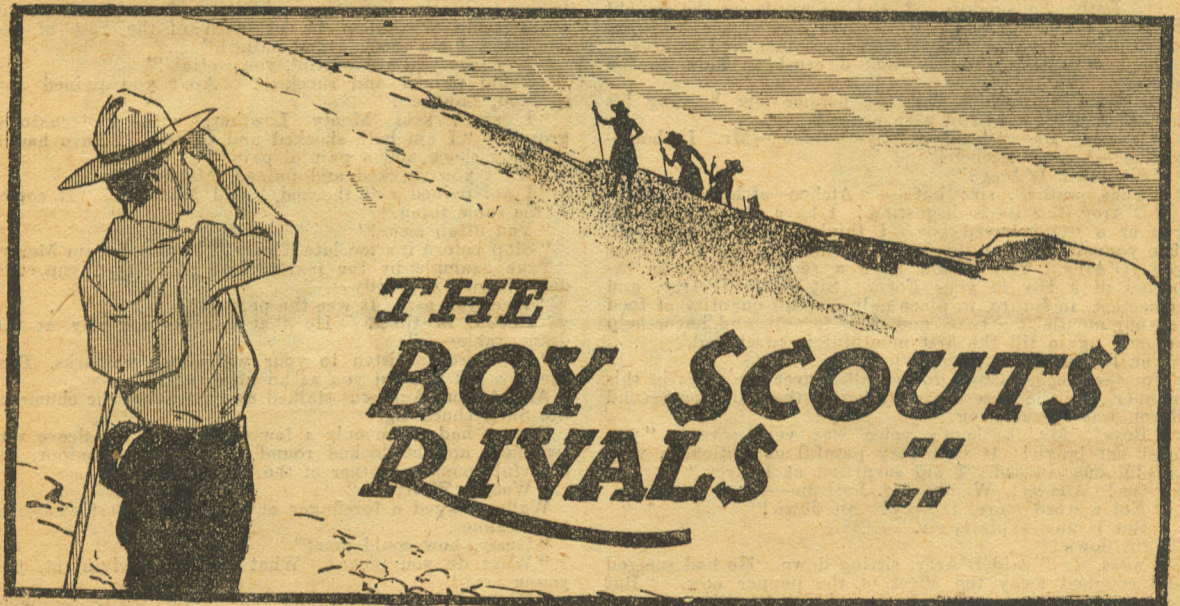
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CHAPTER 1.

Arthur Augustus is Worried.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY wore a worried look.

He wore it during morning lessons, in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. He was not worrying about his lessons, for several random answers he made to Mr. Lathom showed that he was thinking of something else. He wore it when he strolled out into the quadrangle after morning school, and he was still wearing it when he came into the School House to dinner.

"What's the matter with Gussy?" murmured Jack Blake. "Hungry, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus shook his head absently.

"No, deah boy, not vewy hungwy."

"What are you looking worried about, then?"

"Was I lookin' wovvied?"

"Well, you were looking as if you had the tooth-ache,"

said Blake. "You've been looking like it all the morning. What's the trouble?"

"Nothin', deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus sat down between Blake and Digby. In spite of his assurance that nothing was the matter, he was very absent-minded. There was steak pudding for dinner, and D'Arcy began to eat very absent-mindedly, as if it were a duty he had to go through. Blake polished off his steak pudding with the healthy appetite of youth, and when his plate was quite clear, he glanced at D'Arcy again. The swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's seemed to have hardly started.

"Look here, Gussy——"

"Yaas, deah boy?"

"You're off your feed!"

"Bai Jove! I will buck up."

"What have you got on your mind?"

"Nothin'."

Blake was baffled. It was time for the plates to be

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removed, and D'Arcy "bucked up" a little. Mellish, who was sitting opposite him, was watching him with a grin. He had noted D'Arcy's absence of manner, and while he was speaking to Blake, Mellish leaned forward and jerked a shower of pepper from the castor upon D'Arcy's dinner. It was the work of a moment, and Arthur Augustus did not perceive it.

"Buck up, Gussy!" said Blake, who had not observed Mellish's little joke, either. "You'll lose your dinner."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus fell to with unusual haste. His fork went up to his mouth, and a chunk of steak disappeared, and then there was a sudden disturbance.

Arthur Augustus sprang to his feet with a wild exclamation.

"Ow! Wow! Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"What's the matter?"

"Ow! Atchoo! Choo! Choo-o-o-oh!"

Mr. Latham rose at the end of the table. He blinked along the row of startled juniors through his spectacles.

"D'Arcy! Really, D'Arcy! I am surprised at you!"

"Atchoo! Atchoo! Gr-r-r-r-r-r!"

"D'Arcy! Really! This—this gluttony in public. I am astounded. Surely you know that you should eat in a more seemly manner, D'Arcy. I am surprised, shocked!"

D'Arcy, with the tears in his eyes, brought there by the heat of the pepper, blinked at the annoyed Form-master.

Mr. Latham misunderstood, and his words cut the elegant Fourth-Former to the quick. Arthur Augustus was always elegant and extremely cleanly in his habits, and to be suspected of eating greedily was a crushing blow to his dignity.

He tried to explain, but the pepper was burning his mouth, and his eyes and nose were streaming.

"Weally, sir—atchoo!—weally—grooch!—Mr. Latham—atchoo!—I—ow!—atchoo!"

"Sit down, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir; but— Atchoo—atchoo! Groo!"

"D'Arcy, this is—is disgusting! I have always regarded you as a well-behaved boy. I think I must punish you. The younger boys at the Third Form table are looking at you, D'Arcy. You should have a sense of what is expected of a boy in your Form. Sit down, D'Arcy, and remember, in future, to place only a small quantity of food in your mouth at a time, and chew it well, and never help yourself again till the first mouthful is swallowed."

The Fourth Form giggled joyously.

For the elegant Gussy to be called over the coals in this manner, as if he were a greedy fag in the Third or Second Form, was excruciating.

"Boys," Mr. Latham's voice was very severe, "you must not laugh! It is a very painful exhibition, a very painful one, indeed. I am surprised at D'Arcy."

"Ow! Atchoo! Weally, Mr. Latham—"

"Not a word more, D'Arcy! Sit down!"

"But I must explain, sir."

"Sit down!"

"Yaas, sir!" said D'Arcy, sitting down. He had sneezed and coughed away the effect of the pepper now. "But pway allow me to explain sir. I cannot allow you to remain undah such a missappwehension."

"That will do, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir! You see, I was not eatin' gweedly, as you suppose—"

"Silence at the table!"

"Yaas, sir. I was not eating gweedly, but some boundah had shoved a heap of peppah on my dinnah, sir, and I didn't see it, and—"

"Oh! That alters the case."

"Yaas, wathah, sir! I weceived a mouthful of peppah, sir, and—"

"Ahem! You are excused, D'Arcy."

"Thank you, sir! You see—"

"Who placed the pepper on D'Arcy's plate?" asked Mr. Latham sternly.

There was no reply.

Mellish was not inclined to own up, and the juniors who had seen his action weren't inclined to give him away.

"Very well," said Mr. Latham. "It was a foolish action. I cannot see how it was done without your being aware of it, D'Arcy. However, you are excused."

Arthur Augustus blew his nose.

The nose was very red, and his eyes were streaming still, and the swell of St. Jim's blinked through the water at the grinning juniors.

"I wegard that as a wotten twick!" he murmured. "I hope that was not you, Blake."

"Of course it wasn't, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Blake. I have already told you—"

"Here comes the pie!"

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NEXT WEEK:

"JACK BLAKE'S PLOT."

"I have already told you that I wefuse to be chawac-tewised as an ass! Howevah, I am glad it was not you who played that wotten twick. It wasn't you, Dig?"

"Not much!"

"Nor you, Hewwies?"

"Certainly not, old son. I'd sooner play a trick on my own grandfather," said Herries solemnly.

"Good! I shall not be able to finish the dinnah now."

"You certainly won't, as they've taken your plate away," grinned Blake. "Here's the pie, and if you lose time that will be gone, too!"

Arthur Augustus did not lose time over the pie. He had two helpings to make up for the lost dinner. He had recovered from the dose of pepper by the time the Fourth Form left the dinner-table, but the worried look had returned to his face. As the juniors left the School House dining-room, Tom Merry, of the Shell, tapped D'Arcy on the shoulder.

"I say, Gussy—"

D'Arcy turned towards him, and jammed his eyeglass into his eye.

"Yaas, deah boy?"

"I'm surprised at you."

"Eh?"

"Fancy you setting your elders and your youngsters such a bad example, Gussy," said Tom Merry, shaking his head seriously. "We always look up to you as a guide in these things. You are our model, a working model. If Gussy begins to give a disgusting exhibition of greediness at the dinner-table, what's to be expected of the rest of us. Augustus, I am shocked and pained."

"I believe you are wottin' you wottah!"

"I am pained and shocked! Ain't you pained and shocked, Lowther?"

"I am," said Monty Lowther, with preternatural gravity. "I am both shocked and pained. I have had a shocking shock and a painful pain."

"Ain't you shocked and pained, Manners?"

"I am pained and shocked," said Manners. "It comes to the same thing."

"You uttah asses!"

"Stop before it's too late, Gussy!" implored Tom Merry. "Take example by the fearful fate of Fatty Wynn, and don't become a greedy—"

"You—you ass! It was the peppah!"

"Reflect in time! He that gorges recklessly at the dinner-table—"

"I wefuse to listen to your wicidulous wemarks, Tom Merry. I wegard you as an uttah ass!"

And Arthur Augustus stalked away, leaving the chums of the Shell chuckling.

D'Arcy had taken only a few paces when his sleeve was twitched, and he looked round to see D'Arcy minor, his cheerful younger brother of the Third Form.

"Weally, Wally—"

Wally wagged a forefinger at him in the most exasperating manner.

"Gussy, how could you?"

"What do you mean? What are you dwivin' at, you young ass?"

"Right before the people, too!" said Wally reproachfully. "Under the very eyes of your minor! Oh, Gussy!"

"Look here!"

"You know that the governor sent me here to follow in your footsteps, and profit by your example," said Wally sternly. "You know that my Aunt Adelina commanded me to take example by you in everything. Now, suppose I go and visit Aunt Adelina at Leamington, and begin to guzzle at the dinner-table like you?"

"You young wascal! It was the peppah."

"I don't want to hear any excuses," said Wally, with a wave of the hand. "I consider it my duty, as your younger brother, to speak a word in season, that's all!"

"You—you howwid little wuffian! It was the pep—"

"Take warning!" said Wally. "Take warning in time! Look at me! You never see me guzzling like that. And with Cousin Ethel coming, too! Suppose she had been here? Gussy, I don't want to be hard on you, but really—really, you know, old chap—"

Wally had no time to say more, as he had to dodge the outstretched hand of his exasperated major.

He whisked round Tom Merry, and escaped, and Arthur Augustus, dashing in pursuit, dashed into the hero of the Shell.

"Oh!" he gasped.

Tom Merry threw his arms round D'Arcy and clasped

ANSWERS

A Splendid Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.
By Martin Clifford.



Peering through the foliage, Tom Merry could catch a glimpse of a form near at hand, and Cousin Ethel's voice came to his ears. "Did you see him, Flora?" "No, I heard him! Listen!" Tom Merry held his breath.

him like a vice. The sudden squeeze drove all the breath out of Arthur Augustus.

"Ow!" he gasped again. "Leggo!"

"Saved!" panted Tom Merry.

"What do you mean, you ass?"

"I've saved you from falling."

"You have done nothin' of the kind. Welease me at once."

"Sure you're all right?"

"Welease me!"

Arthur Augustus struggled violently. Tom Merry's grip round him was like a band of iron, and he could not get loose. The smiling face of the Shell fellow looked into the excited countenance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Sure you can stand alone, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah, you wottah! I insist upon bein' immediately weleased."

"Go hon!"

Arthur Augustus made a tremendous effort to tear himself away.

At the same moment Tom Merry relaxed his hold, and D'Arcy, thus unexpectedly released, staggered away and sat down with a bump.

"Ow!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I asked you if you were all right, Gussy. Don't blame me."

"You—you uttah wottah——"

"That's gratitude," said Tom Merry, looking round. "Manners, old man, what is it Shakespeare says about that?"

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is, to have a thankless kid!" said Manners solemnly.

"How sharper than a serpent's kid it is to have a thankless Gussy," said Tom Merry. "I forgive you, Gussy."

And he walked away with Manners and Lowther, chuckling. D'Arcy staggered up.

"I wegard Tom Mewwy as a beast," he said. "I wegard Lowthah and Mannahs also as beasts. What are you cacklin' at, Blake?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause whatevah for wibald mewwiment. I wegard you as a beast, too, Blake. Digby, old man—bai Jove! Have you got it, too? What are you cacklin' at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as anothah beast."

And Arthur Augustus, with his nose very high in the air, walked out of the School House.

No. 78.

A Splendid Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.
By Martin Clifford.

NEXT
WEEK:

"JACK BLAKE'S PLOT."

CHAPTER 2.

A Committee is Appointed.

WELL hit!" It was Tom Merry who uttered the shout, as Figgins of the New House swiped away a ball for four. Figgins's long legs seemed to fly up and down the pitch, and the lithe form of Kerr crossed the level green with just as much speed, while the fieldsmen were hunting for the leather. And Tom Merry, though he was chief of the School House juniors, and "up against" the New House all the time, cheered as though Lowther or Manners had made that hit.

It was only a practice match of the New House juniors; but Fatty Wynn was putting in some good bowling, and Figgins some extra good batting, and Tom Merry had paused to watch.

Figgins reached the wicket just before the ball came whizzing in, and grinned at Tom Merry with a red and perspiring face.

"Bravo!" shouted Tom Merry. "That was good, Figgy."

"Thanks!" said Figgins. "Awfully pleased, you know. If you chaps look on, you'll pick up something about this game."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wogard that as cheek, Figgins."

Figgins grinned, but did not reply, as he had to give all his attention to Wynn just then. The Welsh junior was simply a terror with the round red ball, and fast, slow or medium were all the same to him, and equally dangerous from his hand.

"Good man," said Tom Merry, as Figgins stopped the ball. "Figgy is learning to bat."

"Yaas, wathah! I couldn't have stopped that ball so well myself."

"Quite right there, Gussy," said Harry Noble, the Australian, chiming in, and giving D'Arcy a slap on the shoulder that nearly sent him staggering over the ropes. "You couldn't."

"Pway don't be a wuff beast, Kangawoo."

Noble laughed. "Sorry. You chaps in this country always seem to fall over if you're touched. Now in Australia—"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry, laughing. When Harry Noble began—"Now, in Australia"—the St. Jim's fellows always knew what to expect. "Cheese it! We know that Australia can knock spots off us in cricket, in walking, and running, in cycling and swimming and telling tall stories. Don't tell us again."

"Oh, all right!" said Kangaroo, grinning. "Still, there's one thing where you can equal us—"

"What is it? We ought to have it written up in letters of gold."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Footer," said Kangaroo. "Of course, at Rugger we can knock you all over the earth. But at soccer—"

"I wufuse to admit that you can knock us all ova the earth, Kangawoo. It is twue that the New Zealandahs wiped up the Wugby Union. But when your chaps began to play the Northern Union, there was wathah a diffewence. What?"

"Admitted! All the same—"

"All the same, we're only a spot," said Tom Merry, cheerfully. "Now, in Australia they have backyards as big as England, and they have votes for women, too, and all sorts of things we don't get here."

"Yes, rather; you're awfully behind the times in this country," said Noble, with a grin. "Your suffragettes are still raiding the House of Commons, and trying to show 'em that it isn't still the sixteenth century. Now in Australia—"

"Hurrah! Well bowled!"

Tom Merry's shout interrupted Noble's remark; but Noble did not mind. He shouted, too, and clapped his hand. A ball from Fatty Wynn had broken in in a most curious sort of way, and knocked Figgy's wicket into a piteous wreck.

"Out!" said Kerr, with a grin.

"Yes, rather," said Figgins. "I don't mind. What a cough-drop Fatty will be for the School House in the next match, eh?"

And that thought fully consoled Figgins for his wrecked wicket.

"These New House kids are looking up," said Noble; "but I say, Gussy, wherefore that worried look?"

"What wovvied look, deah boy?"

"The one that's ornamenting your beautiful chivvy," said Kangaroo. "You've been going about all day looking as if you were trying to work out something in Euclid, in your head. What's the matter?"

"Nothin'."

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NEXT WEEK: "JACK BLAKE'S PLOT."

"Oh, come; get it off your chest!" said Tom Merry. "Are you thinking of getting a new silk hat?"

"Certainly not."

"Still worrying about the clothes that were messed up the time we were carried away in a balloon?"

"I had quite forgotten them."

"Not in love again?"

"I wogard that wemark as uttably fwivolous and in the worst of taste."

"Then what is it?"

"Nothin'."

And Arthur Augustus walked away. Tom Merry and the Cornstalk stared at one another in perplexity.

Although they frequently "ragged" the swell of the School House, they liked him well, as everybody at St. Jim's did; and if anything was really the matter with him, they were seriously concerned about it.

"Blessed if I know what to make of him," said Tom Merry. "Blake says he got fifty lines in class this morning for answering something about geometry in the grammar lesson. He told Lathom that all sides of an equilateral noun of the first declension were at right angles."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then you saw the trick Mellish played him at the dinner-table. There's something up with Gussy."

"Looks like it."

"We ought to look into it. Look here, we'll jolly well form a committee to sit upon Gussy."

"Good! We'll inquire into it."

And Tom Merry and his Australian chum, full of the new idea, started at once. They ran down Blake, Herries, and Digby, going to the cricket, and stopped them.

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "Will you join the committee?"

"What committee?"

"The committee of inquiry."

"Inquiry! Into what?"

"Gussy."

"Eh?"

"A committee has been appointed to inquire into what's the matter with Gussy," explained Tom Merry. "I'm chairman. Noble is vice-chairman, as he's more vicious than I am. Will you join the board?"

Jack Blake chuckled.

"Certainly. I'm rather bothered about Gussy."

"Then the committee will proceed. Come on!"

They proceeded. The proceedings began by a hunt for D'Arcy, who had disappeared. The committee ran into Lowther and Manners near the gym, and stopped them.

"Have you seen Gussy?"

"Not since dinner," said Lowther.

"Will you join the committee? We're a committee appointed by ourselves to run down Gussy and sit on him till he explains what's the matter with—"

"England?" asked Lowther, humming the refrain of the well-known Territorial song.

"No. What's the matter with Gussy? Come on!"

"We're on!"

The committee, swollen now to seven members, entered the School House, and inquired right and left for Arthur Augustus. Reilly, of the Fourth, volunteered the information that he had seen him go down the passage towards the class-rooms. Thither went the committee of inquiry, and they ran into Kerruish in the passage—literally, for the Manx lad was coming along in a hurry, and there was a collision at the corner.

"Ow!" roared Kerruish.

He sat down in the passage, and Lowther and Blake sat upon him. They sorted themselves out and picked themselves up, gasping.

"You utter asses—" began Kerruish warmly.

"Hold on! Have you seen Gussy?"

"Blow Gussy!"

"He came down this way—"

"Rats!"

Kerruish dusted himself down. Noble and Tom Merry seized him and ran him against the wall. The Manx lad struggled; but sturdy as he was, he was helpless in the grasp of two pairs of hands.

"Now, then," said Tom Merry. "Where is Gussy?"

"Rats!"

"When I say two, bang his napper against the wall, Wallaby."

"Right-ho!" grinned the Cornstalk.

"One!"

"Leggo!"

"Tw—"

"Hold on! I saw him go into No. 2 class-room."

"Good!"

And leaving Kerruish gasping in the passage, the committee dashed on, into No. 2 class-room, and there, sure enough, they found Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

A Splendid Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.
By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 3. The Committee Sits.

"QUIET!"
Tom Merry whispered the word as the juniors crowded into the doorway of the class-room, and he held up his hand.

"My hat!" murmured Blake.
Arthur Augustus was walking slowly up and down at the further end of the class-room. He had not seen the juniors at the door, being evidently too deeply wrapped in thought to see anything.

He had his hands in his pockets, and his head bent forward a little, and his brow was corrugated in deep wrinkles of thought.

"He's composing poetry," said Manners, in an undertone. Lowther shook his head.

"Two to one on his being in love!"
"I'll have a bob each way!" murmured Noble.
And the juniors chuckled.

"Hush! He's going to speak!"
In the silence of the wide room the voice of Arthur Augustus was heard, speaking aloud.

"The twouble is, you nevah can tell what these things will lead to," said D'Arcy, addressing himself and space. "That's the twouble."

"So there's some trouble," murmured Kangaroo.

"Looks like it. Listen!"
"The question is, ought I to intahfere with the authowity of a cousin?"

"Plew!"
"It's something about Cousin Ethel, I expect."

"Hallo, he's looking this way!"
Some sound at the door had probably caught D'Arcy's ear. He looked round, and saw the juniors in the doorway.

A frown crossed his face, and he put up his eyeglass and surveyed the grinning seven. Then he slowly turned, and resumed his pacing.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry. And he led the way.
The committee crossed the class-room, spreading out a little to intercept Arthur Augustus if he should attempt to dodge them and escape.

But the swell of St. Jim's did not attempt anything of the sort. He stopped and looked at them, watching them as they approached with a frigid stare.

"Hallo, Gus!"
"Weally, deah boys, I wish you would not intwude upon me like this," said D'Arcy. "I am thinkin' somethin' out."

"What's the matter?"
"Nothin'."

"What are you bothering about, then?"
"Nothin' that need wowwy you, deah boys."

"But it does worry us if we see you going about looking like a gargoylo."
"I wefuse to admit for a moment that I have gone about lookin' anythin' at all like a gargoylo."

"What have you got on your mind?"
"Nothin'."

"There's something in your head."
"Nothin' at all, deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kangaroo.
Arthur Augustus frowned.

"Weally, deah boys—"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I see no weason for this wibald laughtah. Of course, I did not mean to imply that I had no bwains in my head."

"Ha, ha, ha! Many a true word spoken by accident," said Lowther.
"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Now, look here, Gussy, you can't deny that you're bothering over something or other," said Tom Merry.
"No, certainly not. It's nothin' to wowwy you, howevah."

"But we want to help you."
"Thank you very much, deah boys. But I don't want to be helped. Good-afthnoon!"

The members of the committee looked at one another. D'Arcy seemed to think that his words ended the matter. The committee did not agree with him.

Tom Merry tapped the elegant junior on the shoulder as he turned to walk away. Arthur Augustus looked back a little impatiently.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"
"Halt! We've come here to talk to you—"
"Excuse me, the mattah is ended."

"Excuse me," said Tom Merry cheerfully, "it's only just beginning. A committee has been appointed to inquire into the worried looks of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Esq."

"Exactly!"
"It is better to do these things formally, and to show a proper respect for all parties concerned," said Tom Merry seriously. "Gentlemen, this is Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of Study No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's, of East-

wood House, in the county of Hampshire, of Park Lane, in London, and of several other places too numerous to mention. He is the second son of Lord Eastwood, a gentleman we all know and respect very highly, especially when he sends fivers to Gussy, and Gussy stands treat with them."

"Hear, hear!"
"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"D'Arcy, these gentlemen are members of the committee," said Tom Merry, with a wave of the hand. "This is Harry Noble, otherwise known as Kangaroo, Wallaby, Dingo, Baron Munchausen, and—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"
"This is Montague Lowther, a retailer of ancient wheezes and chestnuts."

"Look here," said Lowther, "I—"
"This is Henry Manners, amateur photographer, and a staunch supporter of the Junior Hobby Club."

"Weally—"
"This gentleman is Jack Blake. He comes from Yorkshire, and is one of the best—"

"I wegard you as an ass!"
"This is Arthur Digby, son of Sir Robert Digby, baronet."
"You uttah duffah!"

"This is Herries, the owner of the famous bulldog Towser."

"I wefuse to listen to this piffle."
"Last, but not least, I am myself, Tom Merry. Gentlemen, you are now all known to one another, and the committee will proceed."

"Hear, hear!"
"The committee has been appointed to sit upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in inquiry into his state of mind. As chairman, I open the proceedings. Master D'Arcy, you are invited to explain to the committee what is the reason of these worried looks."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."
"We pause for a reply."

"Wats!"
"Then the committee will sit upon the matter."
Tom Merry made a sign to his followers.

In a moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was seized by seven pairs of hands, and whisked over on the floor in a twinkling.

"Bai Jove!"
The elegant figure of Arthur Augustus being stretched at full length on the floor, the committee proceeded to sit.

Tom Merry sat on his chest on one side of him, Blake on the other, as he lay on his back. Digby, Blake, and Herries sat on his legs. Noble and Manners sat one on each arm.

Lowther found room on his boots. Under the committee the swell of St. Jim's wriggled and gasped.

"You uttah wottahs! Gerroff!"
"Gentlemen—"

"Gerroff! I insist upon bein' weleased."
"Gentlemen, the committee is now sitting."

"Hear, hear!"
"Gerroff!"

"It will continue to sit in the same place till Master D'Arcy satisfies it. D'Arcy, we don't want to hurry you. You can take your time."

D'Arcy wriggled spasmodically.
"Ow! You wottahs!"

"We can wait! Take your time."
"Bai Jove! You are uttably wuinin' my clothes!"

"Never mind; we don't."
"Gerroff!"

"It's all right; don't worry about us."
"You—you wottahs! I am hein' cwushed howwibly, and my clothes will be weekin' with dust! I wegard you as beasts."

"Hear, hear!"
"I shall dwop your acquaintance."
"Hear, hear!"

"I won't say a word."
"Hear, hear!"
"Pway welease me, deah boys!"

"Hear, hear!"
"You foahful wascals!"
"Hear, hear!"
"Get up, you wascally wottahs, and I will explain!"

"Good!"
And the committee rose, and Arthur Augustus picked himself up, very red and dusty and wrathful.

CHAPTER 4. D'Arcy's Doubts.

"YOU—you uttah wottahs!"
"Hear, hear!"
"I wegard you as a set of the most unuttewable beasts!"

"Hear, hear!"
"I wefuse to wecognise you as fwiends."

"Hear, hear!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy broke off. It was useless to pour out the vials of his wrath upon fellows who only shouted "Hear, hear!" in reply to every remark he made. He jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed the members of the committee, who beamed upon him with cheerful grins.

"Now, then, go ahead!" said the chairman, in a business-like tone. "Gentlemen, listen to the Hon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy while he gets his trouble off his chest."

"Hear, hear!"

"I wegard you as uttah wottahs, but I suppose I must keep my word. I wish you to undahstand, howevah, that I wegard you with contempt, and wefuse to wecognise you. I have been thinkin'—"

"Oh, that accounts! When did you begin?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to take any notice of that wibald remark. The question concerns my cousin Ethel, so pway be sewious." Tom Merry looked graver.

"Look here, Gussy, if it's really anything private, keep it in, you know. We wouldn't dream of asking questions in that case."

D'Arcy looked more amiable, the smiles returning to his dusky face.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wegard that assuwanse as quite satisfawwy. Upon the whole, I will tell you, and pewwaps you can advise me. If any chap is inclined to tweek the mattah in a wibald spiwit, pway let him wetire, to begin with."

"If any chap is ribald, I'll knock his head off," said Tom Merry. "Go ahead."

"It's about my cousin."

"Good! Go on."

"She' comin' to stay at Wylcombe, you know—or to speak more cowwectly, she has come."

Tom Merry started.

"Cousin Ethel staying in the village?"

"Yaas, wathah! A gal fwiend of hers fwom Scotland is staying in the village, you know—a youngh sistah of Mac-gregor of the Sixth—and Ethel's stayin' with her while she's in Wylcombe."

"Nothing to worry about in that, surely."

"No, wathah not: it is weally vewy nice, you know."

"And is that all?"

"No, deah boys, that is not all. You see, cousin Ethel is takin' up the new Gal Scout wheeze—"

"Girl Scouts!"

"Yaas, wathah."

"Good! Just like Ethel!" said Tom Merry. "But what are you worrying about? All this is very interesting, but this committee was appointed to discover what you were worrying about?"

"That's it."

"What's it?" demanded several voices.

"I am in doubt whether that is quite the pwopah thing for a gal to do," explained D'Arcy. "You see—"

"My hat! I should think you might leave it to Cousin Ethel to decide about that," exclaimed Kangaroo.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"That is where you are mistaken, deah boy. A man bein' so much supwiah to a woman in intellect, is bound to look aftah her and give her fwiendly advice. Ethel takes a thing up out of enthusiasm, and it's the duty of a chap who has a largah outlook and a largah expwience of the world to see that it's all wight."

Tom Merry chuckled. From D'Arcy's manner, he might have been a grizzled veteran of sixty at least, and thoroughly accustomed to all the wiles of this wicked world.

"I see," said Tom Merry, gravely. "You feel that you must think the matter out, and give Cousin Ethel some fawtherly advice?"

"Not exactly fathahly, deah boy. But as Ethel's cousin, I wegard myself as bein' in some degwee wewponsible in the mattah."

"Of course," said Blake, seriously. "Every chap is wewponsible for some actions or other. Now, Gussy is not wewponsible for his own actions, so—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Order!" said Tom Merry, severely. "I am surprised at your introducing an element of humour into a serious and solemn matter like this, John Blake."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard that as vewy well put indeed, Tom Mewwy."

"The matter is one of the first importance," went on Tom Merry, looking round at the committee, who all wagged their heads solemnly. "Here on the one hand we have Cousin Ethel, a young lady we all admire and respect, and on the other hand Arthur Adolphus, Esquire—"

"Arthur Augustus, deah boy—"

"Certainly: my mistake. Arthur Augustus, Esquire, is THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 78.

NEXT WEEK: "JACK BLAKE'S PLOT."

worried in his mind. He feels bound, owing to his superiority over ordinary mortals, to worry over things that don't concern him, and set them right."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, that is hardly cowwect. You see—"

"The question is, whether it is exactly the thing for Cousin Ethel to join the Girl Scouts—"

"That's all wight in itself, deah boy. But the twouble is, that these things pwogwess, you know. Now, I shouldn't like Cousin Ethel to become a suffwagette."

"Oh, rats!" said Kangaroo.

"There is an old maxim about wesistin' the beginnin's," said D'Arcy sagely. "I wegard it as necessawwy for a woman to wemain in her place. There is no need for them to come out into the sewamble, you know. They ought to be pwotected fwom all that sort of thing. It would be absolutely howwid for women to get into Parliament, you know, when you considah what kind of boundahs they would have to mix with there. Wesist the beginnin's, you know. The question is, whethah I ought to put my foot down on this."

"On what?" asked Digby, peering down at the floor, as if he expected to see a beetle, or something of the sort, there.

"On this new wheeze, I mean," explained D'Arcy. "Girl Scouts are all wight, but the question is, whethah it is a little too much in the public eye, you know, to be weally suitable for gals."

"It's a difficult question," said Tom Merry, seriously. "Yaas, wathah! You see, I shouldn't like to disappoint Ethel, you know, and so I don't want to act hastily."

"Certainly not!"

"On the othah hand, I cannot allow her to wush into anythin' injudiciously, for want of a little advice fwom an expwienced fellow."

"Ha, ha, ha!—I—I mean, exactly."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy! You see, it is a difficult mattah."

"Awfully so."

"It has been on my mind for some time. I have been twyin' to think it out, and if you fellows could help me, I should be vewy much obliged."

Tom Merry grinned.

"There's one point that ought to be considered first," he remarked. "Suppose you decided that it won't do for Cousin Ethel—"

"Yaas?"

"—And give her parental advice on the subject—"

"Yaas?"

"Will she do as you tell her?"

Arthur Augustus started a little.

Apparently he had not thought about that at all so far.

"Well," he began, slowly. "You—you see—"

"You see," went on Tom Merry, blandly. "That's rather an important point. My view is that Cousin Ethel will have thought the matter out for herself, and probably taken the advice of some elder lady, and decided that it's the thing to do. If you chip in with advice, she may regard it as cheek."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"She might think it awful cheek, and put you in your place, you know."

"As Ethel's cousin—"

"Yes, but Ethel's a jolly sensible girl, you know. You must admit that she has more brains than you have, Gussy," said Tom Merry, argumentatively.

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort. I—"

"Well, if you're going to dispute well-known facts—"

"Weally, you know—"

"Now, the advice of the committee is this—"

"Why, you haven't asked us yet," exclaimed Blake.

"I speak as chairman of the committee. I suppose a chairman has a right to speak for a committee," said Tom Merry, warmly.

"Oh, rats!"

"The advice of the committee is this, that you don't bother your head about things you don't understand."

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Cousin Ethel knows better than you do, and it isn't your business anyway."

"I decline to—"

"Moreover, Ethel wouldn't take you seriously. Besides, over and above, her idea is a ripping good idea, and ought to be encouraged. Why shouldn't there be Girl Scouts as well as Boy Scouts?"

"Yaas, but you might as well say, why shouldn't there be female membahs of Parliament as well as male membahs."

"Well, why not, if you come to that?"

"I twust you do not want to destwoy the home, Tom Mewwy?"

"My dear chap," said Tom Merry, with serene wisdom.

"So long as a chap behaves himself at home, the lady members of his family will always be glad to stay at home with

him. It all depends on the men. But you're off side—that isn't the present subject at all. Cousin Ethel's idea is a jolly good one, and look here, we're going to back them up."

"Yaas, but—"

"Still feeling worried?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"The finding of this jury—I mean the opinion of this committee, is that you leave off feeling worried at once."

"Hear, hear!"

"I wergard this committee as a set of asses, and the chairman as the biggest ass of the lot."

And Arthur Augustus walked out of the class-room, leaving the committee to digest that Parthian shot.

CHAPTER 5.

Arthur Augustus Goes Alone.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS might feel worried about the matter as much as he liked; but to the other fellows the news came as a pleasant surprise. They all liked Cousin Ethel; and the news that she was staying in Rylcombe was pleasant to hear. The Girl Scout idea appealed to them at once.

"Why, it's simply ripping," said Blake. "Cousin Ethel will be simply jolly as a patrol leader. What?"

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry. "Gussy's an ass. Look here, we've been rather neglecting the Boy Scout business lately. It's about time we went for it in earnest."

"I was just thinking the same."

"If we happen to meet the Girl Scouts—"

"That will be all right."

"I suppose Figgins will be thinking of the same wheeze," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully. "That chap Figgins is always following up our schemes."

"Just like those New House bounders. They can't think of anything for themselves," said Blake, with a sniff.

"I say, deah boys—"

"Hallo, Gus!"

"I have been thinkin' that I had bettah go down to Wylcombe and speak to Ethel on the mattah—"

"Good idea," said Tom Merry, heartily. "I'll come with you."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon him frigidly. It was the day after that sitting of the committee of investigation, but Arthur Augustus had not yet quite got over it.

"I was thinkin' of goin' alone," he remarked.

"Rotten idea! It's a long walk—"

"I am goin' on my jiggah."

"Suppose you met any of the Grammar cads," said Tom Merry, persuasively. "You'd better have me with you."

"I shouldn't have time to look aftah you, deah boy."

"Look aftah me!" hooted Tom Merry. "I meant that I would look after you, you young ass."

"I wufuse to be called an ass. I—"

"Gussy's right," said Jack Blake. "No Shell-fish wanted this journey. I'm going with Gussy, and one friend's quite enough for a chap to take to a strange house."

"One fwient would be one too many, Blake, I am goin' alone."

"That doesn't apply to chaps in your own study, of course," said Digby, persuasively. "Of course, you don't want Blake. I'll come."

"No, you won't, deah boy."

"I'll run along, if you like," said Herries, "My bulldog could do with a run."

"I uttahly wufuse to take you and your bulldog, Hewies."

"Well, I jolly well hope you'll fall in with the Grammar cads," said Blake. "It will be a lesson to you."

"Same here," said Tom Merry, cordially.

Arthur Augustus did not reply to these friendly wishes. He removed his collar, and donned a clean one before the glass, and tied his necktie with unusual care. He looked down doubtfully at his trousers. It would take some time to change into cycling clothes, and he had no time to spare, if he was to get in again before locking-up.

"Will you lend me your twousah clips, Blake?"

"Yes, ass."

"I am sowwy I can't take you with me," said D'Arcy, as he gathered in his trousers at the ankles, and fastened them with the clips. "But you see, Ethel is my cousin, not yours. You seem to forget that sometimes, deah boys."

"Rats!"

Arthur Augustus picked up a cap and left the study. Wrathful looks followed him, but they had no effect upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. When his cousin Ethel came to St. Jim's, D'Arcy very often found that he had no chance of even a word with her. Figgins of the New House was always to the fore, and there were always so many fellows devoted to Cousin Ethel. Naturally enough, Arthur Augustus

wasn't going to take them all along to Rylcombe to appropriate his cousin under his eyes.

The swell of St. Jim's strolled down to the cycle shed.

"Hallo, Gussy!"

It was the voice of Figgins of the New House. The long-legged junior overtook D'Arcy, and joined him, with a cheery smile on his face.

"Hallo, deah boy."

"Going out for a spin?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"So am I! I'll come with you if you like."

"Thank you very much, Figgins, but I'm only going as far as the village."

"Just where I want to go," said Figgins, with great heartiness.

"Ahem! I am goin' on a visit!"

"I was just thinking I'd like to visit somebody."

"Look here, Figgins—"

"I'll get your bike out," said Figgins, cheerfully. "Don't you worry."

"Figgins—"

"That's all right—you stand there."

"I wufuse to—"

"I'll have it out in a juffy," said Figgins, apparently deaf to all D'Arcy's remarks.

And he hurried into the cycle shed. He brought out Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's handsome machine, and then went in for his own. A slight grin came over D'Arcy's face. He mounted his machine, and pedalled away. Figgins came out of the shed a minute later, wheeling his machine, and looked round for D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's had vanished.

Figgins murmured something under his breath. In about two minutes he was outside the school gates, looking down the road.

The form of D'Arcy could be seen, pedalling away at a great rate in the direction of the village of Rylcombe.

"The young bounder!" muttered Figgins.

He jumped on his machine and rode off.

Figgins was a terror on the cycle track, and the way he made that machine go would have won the prize in any of the cycle competitions at St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus looked over his shoulder, and frowned as he saw the New House junior coming up at a spanking pace.

"Bai Jove!"

And the swell of St. Jim's worked away, putting his beef into it. But he could not get away from Figgins.

Nearer and nearer the New House junior came.

"Hold on," shouted Figgins.

"Wats, deah boy."

"I'm coming with you."

"No, you're not."

"Yes, I am, you ass. Look here, the Grammarians are out to-day," shouted Figgins, as he pedalled on. "Kerr had a brush with them only a quarter of an hour ago."

"Blow the Gwammawians!"

"Look here—"

"Wats! I know your little game, and you're not coming."

"Now, look here," said Figgins. "Don't be a cad, you know. I jolly well know you're going to see Cousin Ethel."

"Yaas, wathah."

"I've got something very important to say to her—"

"Wats! Write it."

"Well, I can't very well write it—"

"Then call and tell her."

"You see, she's staying with people I don't know, and they might think it a cheek—and she might think it a cheek. You see, as her cousin you could take a chap."

"I am hardly likely to take a New House wastah, aftah wufusin' my own chums."

"Yes, but—"

"Pway buzz off, deah boy."

"Look here—"

"Wats!"

Figgins turned red. He was greatly inclined to catch hold of Arthur Augustus and yank him off his bicycle, and give him a whirl into the ditch.

But he did not. He restrained the impulse.

He slackened down, and Arthur Augustus shot ahead.

A grin was on the face of the swell of St. Jim's. His cycle went sweeping on, and Figgins, who was free-wheeling now, dropped behind.

The New House junior grunted discontentedly. Then he uttered a sudden exclamation.

"My hat! The Grammarians!"

From a track that ran into the lane just ahead of him three cyclists had suddenly appeared. He knew Monk, Lane, and Carboy, of the Rylcombe Grammar School, at a

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glance. They did not look towards Figgins. They were going in the direction of the village, and the moment they were in the lane they caught sight of D'Arcy ahead.

"My hat!" ejaculated Frank Monk. "You know that chap."

"Gussy!" said Carboy.

"Put a spurt on."

And the three Grammarians dashed on at top speed.

Figgins burst into a chuckle.

Arthur Augustus had declined his company, without thanks. He was likely to fall into company now that would be a great deal more uncomfortable for him.

CHAPTER 6.

The Girl Scouts to the Rescue.

"**B**AI JOVE! That boundah Figgins is still on my twack!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he heard the whiz of a bicycle behind him. "I wegard him as an obstinate wottah!"

He glanced over his shoulder.

What he saw almost made him fall off his bicycle.

Figgins was no longer in sight: and instead of one cyclist, there were three on his track. D'Arcy knew at once the faces of the Grammarian trio.

"Bai Jove!"

He dug away at the pedals. He could tell by the looks of the Grammarians that they meant mischief.

D'Arcy was a good cyclist when he chose, and he fairly made his machine fly now. But the pursuers rode hard. Frank Monk shot ahead, and easily kept pace with Arthur Augustus; Lane and Carboy tearing on behind. D'Arcy looked back again. He was dropping two of the Grammarians: but Monk was gaining at every turn of the wheels.

"The wottah!" murmured D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! This is a wotten fix."

At the pace he was going at the run to the village would be short: but Frank Monk was gaining fast. To fall into the hands of the Grammarians was the last thing D'Arcy wished at that moment. He was going to see Cousin Ethel—and he did not want to be delayed. And after passing through the hands of the rival juniors, he had a feeling that he would not be sufficiently presentable to call upon a lady.

He slaved away at the pedals: but closer and closer came the hero of the Grammar School. He waved his hand as D'Arcy looked back again, and shouted:

"Hold on!"

"Wats!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Well, I'll jolly soon stop you."

There wasn't much doubt on that point.

Arthur Augustus looked round him desperately. He was near the stile that gave admittance to the short cut through the wood to the village.

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy acted on the impulse of the moment.

He jumped off his machine at the stile, left the cycle there, clambered over the stile and disappeared into the wood.

In a place like the quiet lane, it was generally safe to leave a bicycle for any length of time: but as a matter of fact D'Arcy hardly gave a thought to his machine just then. He was thinking of himself.

He bolted into the wood, intending to give the Grammarians the slip there. The pursuers, unprepared for his manoeuvre, went shooting past the stile, down the winding lane towards Rylcombe.

Frank Monk jammed on the brake and jumped off.

He had a narrow escape of being ridden down by Lane as he did so: he jumped away in time, and crashed into Carboy, who had just come abreast.

Carboy and his machine went reeling, and there was a terrific splash as Carboy disappeared into the ditch, his machine clanking down alongside.

"M—m—my hat!" gasped Monk, in consternation.

Carboy's head appeared from the ditch. His face was streaming with water and mud, and was profusely ornamented with weeds and slime.

"Ow!" he gasped.

"Awfully sorry, old chap—"

"Ow! You ass—"

"It was Lane's fault."

"Oh, rats!" said Lane.

"You duffer! You dummy! You unspeakable chump!"

"Oh, draw it mild," said Monk. "It couldn't be helped.

Let me help you out: you must be wet."

As Carboy was nearly up to his neck in water, he certainly was wet. Monk dragged him out of the ditch, and Carboy shook himself like a mastiff.

"Here, mind what you're at," growled Lane. "Don't splash me all over."

"Serve you right, you ass! You shrieking dummies!"

said Carboy indignantly. "Nice state I'm in, ain't I?"

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NEXT WEEK: "JACK BLAKE'S PLOT."

"Yes, rather—ha, ha! Come on, we shall lose Gussy."

"Blow Gussy—I'm off."

"Well, perhaps you'd be the better for a change," grinned Frank Monk. "You can take our machines: we've got to track down the festive Gussy in the wood. We'll give him one for you when we catch him."

"Look here—"

But without waiting to hear more from Carboy, Monk and Lane dashed back to the stile and plunged into the wood.

They knew that D'Arcy meant to dodge them among the trees, and they guessed that his destination was the village, and so they had an idea in which direction to look for him.

The sound of a rustling in the thickets guided them as they plunged away towards Rylcombe, and presented a voice fell upon their ears.

"Bai Jove! This is weally wotten!"

Monk grinned.

"There he is, Laney."

"Yes, rather!"

"Quiet—don't give him a chance to dodge," whispered Monk.

Lane nodded, and they crept on quietly through the thickets.

In a few moments they came in sight of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The elegant junior of St. Jim's was struggling in the heart of a prickly bush, and his clothes seemed to be caught upon the thorns. He was trying to free himself, but without much success. He had left the footpath to avoid the Grammarians, and plunged into the thickets, with this direful result.

Monk burst into a laugh, which made D'Arcy look round hastily.

"Bai Jove! Those Gwammawian wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway, lend me a hand, deah boys! I am stuck in this beastly bush, you know! It is vewy painful, and my clothes are bein' absolutely wuined!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no weason whatever for wibald laughtah. Pway, lend me a hand, and I'll make it pax, deah boys."

"We'll lend you a hand," grinned Monk, "but we won't make it pax—not much! Yank him out, Laney!"

"Right you are!"

They laid violent hands on Arthur Augustus, and yanked. The swell of St. Jim's wriggled and gasped.

"Ow! Don't be so beastly wuff! Yow! Pway he careful, deah boys! Weally, you know, you are a pair of wascally wuff wottahs!"

"There you are! We've rescued you!"

"Ow! You might have done it a little more gently, deah boy! I wegard you as a pair of extwemely wuff beasts!"

"That's gratitude!" said Frank Monk, with a shake of the head. "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to—"

"Oh, pway, don't be an ass, deah boy! I should nevah have got in this fix if you hadn't been playin' the giddy ox!"

Bai Jove! What's that?"

Frank Monk looked round him.

"Sounded like a curlew."

"Bai Jove!"

The cry sounded faintly from afar once more, but this time the swell of St. Jim's did not notice it, for Frank Monk and Lane, exchanging a look, had seized him.

Arthur Augustus struggled violently in the Grammarian's grip.

"Pway welease me, deah boys! I—"

"You have made Carboy fall into a ditch," said Monk. "We've promised him to make you wriggle."

"I wefuse to w'iggle! I—"

"Then there's Kerr, who met Gilson this afternoon and

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swiped him. Gilson came in with a nose like a double-barrelled beetroot."

"Weally, I am not wresponsible for Kerr."

"What about that giddy jape you played on us the other day, coming to the Grammar School in disguise as new boys?" demanded Monk.

Arthur Augustus grinned.

"It was weally vevy good, and we made you sing small, deah boy, but I twust you will not—"

"Lemme see," said Lane reflectively. "If we roll him in the ditch, and put frogs down his back, and tie his hands to his ankles, and leave him to wriggle home, I think that will about meet the case."

"You howwid wuffian—"

"Or suppose we drop in at the charcoal burner's, and black him all over with charcoal, and—"

"You feahful wottah!"

"Or we could tie him up to a tree, and leave him to be found—"

"I wegard you as a beast!"

"Or what price chucking him into the thorny bush, and—"

"You wottah—"

"Now, which would you prefer, Gussy?" said Frank Monk. "We want to be obliging, and you've only got to state your views."

"I wegard you as beasts! If you do not immediately wesease me, I shall have no wresource but to give you a feahful thwashin'. I am desiwous of avoidin' a wuff encountah, as I was goin' to call on a lady, but if you do not immediately wetire, I shall have no alternative. Wesease me at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I twust you will not force me to thwash you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus hit out in earnest. Monk received a tap on the nose, and Lane one on the cheek.

The next moment Arthur Augustus was rolling in the bracken, with the two Grammarians rolling on him.

He gasped and struggled fiercely.

"Wesease me, you wottahs! Ow!"

There was a rustle in the thickets. In the hope that it might be juniors of St. Jim's at hand, Arthur Augustus shouted for help.

"Wescue! Gwammah wottahs! Wescue, deah boys!"

The curlew cry was repeated. It was evidently a signal of human beings, and did not come from a bird. Then there was a rustle in the thickets, and two or three forms emerged into view, dashing quickly up to the spot.

Arthur Augustus squirmed round to look at them.

Then he gasped.

"Bai Jove! Cousin Ethel!"

The Grammarians leaped to their feet. They stared at the new-comers in amazement. Frank Monk gave a whistle.

"My only hat! The Girl Scouts!"

CHAPTER 7.

Cousin Ethel, Patrol-Leader!

THE Girl Scouts they were!

Cousin Ethel emerged from the thickets, and stood in full view—a handsome and graceful figure.

She was dressed differently from usual. Her garb was of a very different cut—strong, serviceable, with belt, thick boots, and a broad-brimmed hat. She carried the Scouts' staff in her hand. There was a rosy flush of health in her cheeks, and a bright sparkle in her blue eyes.

"Cousin Ethel!"

Ethel laughed at the amazement in her cousin's face.

"Arthur!"

"Bai Jove!"

"We seem to have arrived in the right moment," said Ethel.

"Yaas, wathah!" Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet. He was feeling very dusty and dishevelled. "I was comin' to Wylcombe to see you, Ethel, when these Gwammah wottahs collahed me!"

Frank Monk grinned as he raised his cap to Cousin Ethel.

"It was only a jape, of course, Miss Cleveland," he said. "We wouldn't hurt Gussy for worlds, would we, Laney?"

"Not for whole solar systems," said Lane solemnly.

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"I am sure of that," she said. "But you must hand over your prisoner to us. We are the Curlew Patrol."

"Bai Jove!"

"We have rescued you, Arthur. Are you going to hand him over, or—"

"Yes, rather!" said Frank Monk, with a polite bow. "We couldn't think of resisting the Curlew Patrol. I suppose you would lick us otherwise?"

"Bai Jove!"

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"Yes, I suppose so," assented Cousin Ethel cheerfully. Lane chuckled, but Monk gave him a warning look.

"Shut up, Lane!"

"Certainly—ha, ha, ha—certainly!"

"Good-evening, Miss Cleveland," said Frank Monk, raising his cap again. "I hope we shall see you while you are staying about here. We do some scouting at the Grammar School, you know."

Cousin Ethel inclined her head.

"I hope so, certainly," she said graciously.

And the two Grammarians disappeared into the wood. They had no desire to try conclusions with the Girl Scouts for the possession of their prisoner.

Cousin Ethel turned to D'Arcy, who was dusting himself down.

"So you were coming to see me, Arthur?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You would have found me gone," said Cousin Ethel brightly. "We're out for training. I don't know whether you have met my scouts. You know Ailsa Macgregor, of course."

D'Arcy bowed gracefully to the sister of Macgregor of the Sixth, and then he was introduced to the third scout, Flora Bell. Arthur Augustus, in spite of his doubts on the subject, could not help admitting that the Girl Scouts looked very fresh and healthy and fit. "You wished to speak to me, Arthur?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Very good. Join me at the camp."

The two girls saluted, and disappeared.

"Bai Jove! I see you have established discipline, deah gal!" Arthur Augustus remarked.

"Yes, certainly. The Curlew Patrol is as well disciplined as any Boy Scout patrol you could name," said Cousin Ethel proudly.

"Yaas, wathah—bettah than some of our patwols at St. Jim's!" said Arthur Augustus frankly. "They nevah wefuse to obey ordahs?"

"Never."

"And nevah punch the patwol-leadah's nose?"

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"Certainly not."

"Bai Jove!"

"Will you come my way, Arthur?" asked Ethel. "We can talk as we go. I am out for training, you see, and I must not lose time."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Ethel entered the footpath and walked on with a quick, springy walk. Arthur Augustus looked at his cousin dubiously.

This was a new Ethel—unlike the one he knew.

The more he thought about it, the less inclined he felt to speak on the subject that had brought him from St. Jim's. He walked on for some minutes in silence. Miss Cleveland looked at him at last.

"Well, Arthur?"

"Well, Ethel?"

"You had something to say?"

"Ya-a-a-s, wathah!"

"Why don't you say it, then?"

"Yaas, so I will. You see, Ethel"—Arthur Augustus cleared his throat—"you see, deah gal—"

"Yes?" said Ethel wonderingly.

"You see, deah gal, you—er—see—"

"No, I am afraid I do not see, so far," said Ethel, demurely. "Perhaps if you would be a little more explicit, I should see."

Arthur Augustus coloured.

"You see, it is wathah an awkward subject," he remarked. "Howevah, as your cousin and your natuwal advisah, I will go for it. You see, deah gal, I am not quite sure wethah you are actin' wisely in the pwesent case."

"Indeed!" said Ethel.

"You see," explained D'Arcy, "I have always been vevy pleased to see that there is none of the new woman about you, Ethel."

Ethel's cheek dimpled.

"Are you quite sure about that, Arthur?"

"Weally, Ethel—"

"But go on! What have I done wrong, now?"

"Oh, weally, deah gal, you surely cannot think that I could imagine you had done wrong, you know. But you see, the case is like this—like this."

"Like what?"

"You see, women are comin' vevy much before the public now," said D'Arcy. "There is a vevy estimable lady who goes up to the House of Commons periodically, and punches the policemen there. I weward that as goin' wathah too fah. Of course, it seems to me vevy wude to wefuse a woman the vote if she wants it, but there's a

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limit, you know. The question is, whethah the gals of our time oughtn't to stay quietly at home, and set a good example to their sex. I t'wust you see what I mean?"

"Not quite, yet!"

"This ideah of yours is a weally wippin' one in many respects, but I am wathah doubtful about whethah you ought to go in for it, you know."

"Indeed!"

"Yaas, wathah! I have thought it out vewy carefully, you know. Of course, if a male velation of yours advised you to drop it, you would do so at once, and, therefore, I feel a sense of responsibility."

A glimmer of fun came into Cousin Ethel's eyes.

"But are you quite sure I should drop it at once?" she asked.

"Weally, Ethel—"

"I might be foolish and obstinate enough to think that I know best."

"Oh, weally, deah gal, I know you wouldn't be foolish and obstinate."

"But suppose we disagree on the subject?"

"Yaas?"

"And cannot come to an agreement?"

"Yaas?"

"Then, I suppose, one of us will have to be considered foolish and obstinate?"

"Ya-a-a-as."

"And as you are sure it could not be I—"

"Yaas—"

"Then, I suppose, it would be you, Arthur?" said Cousin Ethel cheerfully.

"Bai Jove!"

"Now don't be foolish and obstinate, Arthur, will you?"

"Weally, deah boy—I mean, Ethel—"

"It is just barely possible that you are not quite able to think the matter right out and decide for me?" suggested Ethel. "It is within the bounds of possibility that I may be able to judge better what is good for myself."

"Oh, weally, Ethel—"

"So suppose we let the matter drop, Arthur," said Ethel, laughing. "You are a good boy."

"Thank you vewy much," said D'Arcy sarcastically.

"But you don't understand things."

"Bai Jove!"

"But if you want to see how girls can scout, we're quite willing to enter into any contest with a scout patrol from St. Jim's."

"Yaas, wathah! But I am thinkin' what this may lead to, you know. Now, the natuwal supewiowity of men—"

"The what?"

"The natuwal supewiowity of men—"

"If I were a boy, I should say 'Rats!'" said Cousin Ethel, smiling. "As I am a girl, I suppose I must only think it."

"Bai Jove! Weally, Ethel, you will be wantin' a vote next."

"Well, why not?"

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy feebly. "Why not?"

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"You see, Ethel, man natuwallly takes the supewiah posish. He looks after the woman, and wescues her from dangah, and so on."

Cousin Ethel, remembering the scene with the Gram-marians, could not help laughing again. She tapped D'Arcy gently on the cheek.

"My dear Arthur, the world is changing, and you haven't noticed it. When you grow up—"

"Weally, Ethel—"

"When you grow up, you will see things in a different light."

"Weally, Ethel, you speak as if you were years oldah than I am, and, as a mattah of fact, you are youngah."

"Yes, in years," said Ethel, with a smile. "Don't worry about the matter, Arthur. I do assure you that even a girl has a brain, and can use it to think with. You need not trouble your head about me. Really!"

"Yaas, but—"

"Now, come, Arthur! You promised not to be foolish and obstinate."

"Did I?" said D'Arcy dazedly.

"Well, you ought to have promised, if you did not. Now, I have convinced you—"

"Convinced me?"

"Yes. Now I have convinced you, you can come to tea with us. We're camping, and getting tea ourselves. You must come, if only to see that mere girls can manage as well as boys," said Ethel, laughing.

"Weally, Ethel—"

"Come on!"

"Oh, yaas, with gweat pleasure."

And Arthur Augustus, still feeling a little dubious in his mind, followed Ethel to the rendezvous of the Girl Scouts.

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"JACK BLAKE'S PLOT."

CHAPTER 8.

In Camp.

THE curlew call rang through the wood again, and Cousin Ethel turned her head, and listened. She answered the call, and again it sounded, from the direction of the lane. Ethel looked puzzled.

"They should not be in that direction!" she exclaimed. Arthur Augustus grinned a little.

"Pewwaps they have mistaken the instnuctions?"

Ethel shook her head.

"Oh, no! Girl Scouts don't do that!"

The call rang again through the trees.

A few moments later, a slim, but athletic, form came into sight through the wood, and D'Arcy uttered an exclamation.

"Figgins!"

"Figgins it was!"

The New House junior raised his cap to Cousin Ethel, with an expression of surprise and pleasure on his face.

"Miss Ethel!"

But Cousin Ethel was looking severe.

"Was it you answering the call, Figgins?"

"Yes; but you—"

"I am the leader of the Curlew Patrol," said Miss Cleveland, with dignity. "I really think, Figgins—"

"Oh, I'm sorry! You see, we have a Curlew Patrol at St. Jim's," explained Figgins hastily. "I heard the call from the lane, and answered it. I thought I should find some of our fellows here."

Cousin Ethel smiled again.

"Oh, I see! Then I will forgive you."

"And you are a Girl Scout?" said Figgins, gazing at Cousin Ethel, in great admiration.

"Yes. Arthur is a little shocked!"

"Oh, Ethel!"

"He is doubtful whether he can allow me to proceed."

"Weally, Ethel—"

"But I have persuaded him not to be foolish and obstinate."

"Bai Jove!"

"And he is coming to tea at our camp."

"Good egg!" exclaimed Figgins. "May I come, too, if I sha'n't be in the way?"

"We shall be very pleased."

And Figgins walked on beside Cousin Ethel to the Girl Scouts' camp.

As they walked, Cousin Ethel chatted cheerfully, but it was Figgins who received most of her remarks, and answered them. Arthur Augustus was chiefly a listener. It was frequently thus when Figgins was about, but now, more so than ever.

For Figgins was an enthusiastic Boy Scout, and he seemed to think the idea of a Girls' Patrol a simply stunning one.

He had none of D'Arcy's doubts upon the subject.

He eagerly discussed details of camping, all sorts of details, relating to Scout life, with Cousin Ethel.

He was liberal with "tips" gained by his own experience, and which Cousin Ethel, as a beginner, received gratefully enough.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy to himself, as he walked on in silence. "Pewwaps I have made wathah an ass of myself."

"Here's the camp!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel suddenly.

It was in the heart of the wood, on the bank of a little woodland stream called the Feeder, where some time before the juniors of St. Jim's had camped when they were playing Indians.

The whole patrol was there now.

The Girl Scouts saluted their leader, and went busily on with their work. One was attending a fire that crackled cheerily on a hearth of pebbles gathered from the edge of the stream. Another was making tea, and a third cooking eggs in a tin pot over the fire. A fourth was mounting guard. All was quiet, orderly, and disciplined. Cousin Ethel glanced round with an eye of pride.

"How do you like our camp, Figgins?"

"Ripping!" said Figgins enthusiastically.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ah! You are beginning to think that we can manage, Arthur!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel, laughing.

"Weally, deah gal—"

"The tea is made. Sit down!"

The guests of the Girl Scouts seated themselves upon grassy knolls. The scouts refused to allow them to take any hand in the work. They were guests, and to be looked after. Hot tea and eggs and rolls and butter made a very pleasant repast in the light of the sunset that glimmered through the trees.

Figgins was evidently in the seventh heaven, and D'Arcy was feeling very comfortable.

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"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "the committee is now sitting; and it will continue to sit in the same place till Master D'Arcy satisfies it." "Hear, hear!" said the committee.

Everything about that tea was very clean and neat, much more so than was the case among the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's. The orderliness natural to the gentle sex made itself noticeable in everything.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, at last. "This is weally wippin'."

"What-ho!" said Figgins.

"And you are weally takin' up this scoutin' ideah sewiously, Ethel?"

"Seriously, Arthur."

"And you, Miss Macgregor?"

Ailsa Macgregor laughed.

"Yes, quite seriously."

"How long will you be in these quarters?" asked Figgins.

"We are staying here a week," said Cousin Ethel.

"But when Ailsa and I are gone, the patrol will remain in existence. Flora Bell will become leader."

"But while we are here," said Ailsa, "we want to meet the scouts of St. Jim's in a contest."

"Bai Jove!"

"We'd rather back you up," said Figgins.

Cousin Ethel shook her head, laughing.

"No, that would be no use; we are going to send a challenge to St. Jim's. We are going to—knock you sky-high. I think that is how Tom Merry would put it."

"My deah gal—"

"Arthur, of course, must take his part in it, to cure him of his curious idea that girls cannot scout as well as boys."

"Weally, Ethel—"

The Girl Scouts laughed: Tea was over, and the camp broke up. The juniors of St. Jim's took leave of their entertainers.

They walked back to the lane in silence, and when they crossed the stile, Figgins turned towards D'Arcy.

"Look here, you ass—"

Arthur Augustus gave a start.

"Eh! Did you address me, Figgins?"

"Yes, I did, you duffer!"

"I wefuse to be called a duffah."

"What do you mean by humbugging Ethel about being shocked, and that rot?" demanded Figgins aggressively.

D'Arcy jammed his monocle in his eye, and looked at Figgins in surprise.

"I wasn't humbugging, deah boy. I was wathah doubtful in my mind as to whethah I could allow it, that is all."

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Figgins snorted.
"Do you know what I'd do if you weren't Ethel's cousin?" he asked.

"I twust you would not do anythin' impertinent. Othah-wise, I should have no wresource to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"I should roll you in that ditch," said Figgins.

"Wats!"

"And I've a jolly good mind to do it now."

"Wubbish!"

Figgins's eyes glimmered, and he made a step towards the swell of the School House. D'Arcy regarded him tranquilly.

"Pway don't be an ass, Figgins. What has it to do with you, anyway?"

Figgins coloured a little.

"Never mind that. You're a howling ass!"

"I decline to be called a howlin' ass. I fail to see what business it is of a New House watah, in any case. But, as a mattah of fact, deah boy, I am watah comin' to the conclusion that it is all wight."

Figgins sniffed, and went in search of his bicycle. Arthur Augustus recovered his own machine, and they went back to St. Jim's in company, but without another word.

CHAPTER 9.

Skimpole Makes Signals.

TOM MERRY met D'Arcy as he came away from the cycle shed after putting his machine up. He tapped the swell of St. Jim's on the shoulder.

"Did you see Cousin Ethel?"

Arthur Augustus nodded. "Yaas, watah!"

"Is it all right?"

"Yaas. I am watah inclined to think that pewwaps Cousin Ethel is wight, aftah all, and the Gal Scouts is a wippin' good ideah, you know."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I could have told you that at the start, Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it is watah bad form to say 'I told you so,' you know. By the way, I am thinkin' of formin' a new patrol of Boy Scouts."

"What about the patrols we have already?"

"I am thinkin' of formin' a new one," said D'Arcy obstinately, "with myself as leadah. Cousin Ethel is goin' to send us a challenge, you know, and I weally think I ought to be leadah in the contest."

"Rats—and many of 'em!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We'll pick a special patrol for the purpose, if Cousin Ethel sends us a challenge," Tom Merry said thoughtfully.

"With myself as leader—"

"Wats!"

"And Blake and Lowther and Manners, that's four, Noble and Figgins, that's six, and say young Reilly—"

"You have not mentioned my name at all," said D'Arcy sarcastically.

"By Jove, no, I forgot you!"

"I uttably decline to be forgotten."

"Well, we might take you in, too," said Tom Merry.

"As Ethel is your cousin, perhaps we ought to give you a bit of a show."

"Weally, deah boy—"

"We'll consider that settled, then."

"The mattah can hardly be considahed settled till I am made leadah. Howevah, nevah mind that now. Cousin Ethel's patwol is twainin' evewy aftahnoon in the wood, so she tells me, and it would be bettah for us to meet them on some half-holiday. Bai Jove! There's that cad Goah listenin' to us. Not that it mattahs at all."

Tom Merry and D'Arcy entered the School House.

Gore, of the Shell, had been walking quietly behind them in the dusk, and hardly a word of what they had said had escaped his keen ears.

A satirical grin came over Gore's face.

The cad of the Shell had a special dislike for Tom Merry and his friends, and among them he included Cousin Ethel, who knew the nature of the cad of the Shell too well to ever speak of him if she could help it.

Gore looked after the juniors with an ugly smile on his face. He slowly followed them into the School House, and went up to his study. His room in the Shell passage was next to Tom Merry's, and he shared it with Skimpole, of his own Form, and Mellish, of the Fourth, who had been placed there temporarily. Mellish was Gore's chum, and a fellow after his own heart; but Skimpole was very different. Skimpole was the brainy man of the Shell, amateur Socialist, scientist, Determinist, and general bosh-merchant, as Jack Blake elegantly termed it.

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Gore kicked open the door of his study, and looked round for Mellish. Mellish was not there, but Skimpole was. And Skimpole's actions at that moment were so curious that Gore's gaze was arrested as it fell upon him.

Skimpole was standing before the looking-glass, and he had a poker in his hand, and was waving it in the air in a very peculiar way.

He seemed to be occupied in watching his reflection in the glass as he stabbed and jabbed the air with the poker, and he was muttering with satisfaction.

"Excellent! Excellent!"

"You utter ass!" growled Gore, advancing into the study. "What the dickens are you up to? Yooroooh!"

Skimpole was just sweeping the poker round in a wide circle, and Gore caught it on the side of the head, with a crack like a pistol-shot.

He staggered and sat down, clasping both hands to his head.

"Ow! Yow! Grooh!"

Skimpole spun round in astonishment.

"Dear me! Is that you, Gore?" he exclaimed, blinking at the cad of the Shell through his big spectacles. "I am sorry—very sorry! Did the poker strike you?"

"No!" yelled Gore. "I'm doing this for fun! Oh, you howling lunatic, I'll pulverise you for this!"

"Really, Gore—"

Gore sprang up. His head was singing. He made a wild rush at Skimpole, and the amateur Socialist dodged round the table.

"Pray be reasonable, Gore. As a sincere Socialist, it is against my principles to strike anybody; but as a Determinist, I shall hit you with the poker if you attack me, as the desire to defend oneself from bodily harm is an instinct which is the inevitable outcome of one's heredity and environment. I—"

"You dangerous ass! I'll—"

"Please keep off. You may get hurt."

Skimpole was brandishing the poker recklessly, and it certainly looked as if Gore would get hurt if he ventured too near. The poker crashed against the clock on the mantelpiece, and smashed the face in, and Gore gave a yell.

"You—you villain! That's my clock!"

"I am sorry, Gore. I attribute this accident to you. However, under Socialism all clocks will be nationalised, so your loss is practically nothing, as Socialism will shortly be established. Pray keep off! There, I was sure that you would get hurt if you ventured too close."

Crack!

Gore yelled as he caught the poker on his elbow, and he jumped back, cured of any further desire to get at close quarters.

"You dangerous ass!" he muttered savagely.

"Not at all, Gore. I was practising a new system of signalling when you interrupted me," explained Skimpole. "I have decided to join the Boy Scouts—"

"My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not see anything comical in my decision to join the Boy Scouts. I shall undertake the command, for their own benefit. I have perfected a new system of signalling to be used instead of the Morse code. You see, the flags can be seen from a great distance, and give the show away to an enemy. By signalling with a poker or a rod of about the same size, you avoid that danger. The poker could not be seen from a distance."

Gore gave a roar.

"What about the people you are signalling to? They couldn't see it, either."

Skimpole rubbed his bony forehead.

"Dear me! I am afraid I had not thought of that detail."

"You shrieking ass—"

"Really, Gore, I—"

"Oh, get out of this study! Where's Mellish?"

"I really do not know. I have been perfecting my system of signalling for the past hour, but I had quite overlooked the detail you have pointed out. A mighty brain cannot grasp these small details. H'm!" Skimpole dropped the poker into the grate with a clang. "I will go and see Tom Merry about forming a patrol with myself as leader."

And he quitted the study, just in time to escape a volume hurled after him by Gore. A few minutes later Mellish, of the Fourth, came in, and found Gore still engaged in rubbing the side of his head, where the poker had smitten him. And if anybody looked into the study after that, he might have seen the two cads of the School House with their heads together, talking in low tones; and anybody who knew them would have guessed at once that some cowardly mischief was afoot.

CHAPTER 10.

Declined with Thanks.

"BAI Jove, I'm feelin' quite peckish!" Arthur Augustus remarked, as he entered the School House with Tom Merry. "I twust those boundahs have some tea weady in No. 6. I have had tea with the Gal Scouts, you know, but I did not eat vevy much. I weally could manage a little tea now."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Blake has had tea long ago," he remarked. "He's in the gym. now, doing marvellous things on the parallel bars. Come up to my study. We're late with tea, and I'm just taking the tommy in, as a matter of fact."

"I wegard that as most hospitable, Tom Mewwy, and I shall be vevy pleased indeed to come."

And Arthur Augustus, having changed his collar—an indispensable preliminary to having tea out—repaired to Tom Merry's study.

He found the Terrible Three there, and just going to begin. D'Arcy tapped and entered.

"I twust I am not late, deah boys."

"Not at all. Sit down."

Monty Lowther helped D'Arcy to the ham and eggs. Manners filled his teacup, and pushed over the sugar and milk towards him. Arthur Augustus settled himself down comfortably, and Tom Merry slipped a cushion behind his back.

"Weally, deah boys, you are vevy good!" said D'Arcy, as he sugared his tea. "This is weally vevy comfy."

"The fact is," said Tom Merry solemnly, "we want to make you comfy."

"Thank you vevy much, deah boy."

"What's this about a challenge from the Girl Scouts?" said Lowther. "Has Cousin Ethel sent it by you, Gussy?"

"Oh, no; I think she is sendin' it along to-morrow."

"Oh! And which patrol is to be challenged?"

"I am thinkin' of formin' a special patrol for the purpose, deah boys. If you fellows back me up, it will be all wight."

"My dear chap, we couldn't allow ourselves to be licked in a contest by the Girl Scouts, for the honour of the corps, you know."

"If you imagine that my leadahship would necessawily lead to a lickin', Lowthah, I can only remark that you are an ass."

"Thank you, Gussy. Are you always as polite as this when you go out visitin'?"

D'Arcy coloured.

"Bai Jove, I forgot! I weally beg your pardon, Lowthah."

"Granted," said Lowther loftily. "Now—"

There was a tap at the door, and Skimpole came in. He blinked at the four juniors round the table.

"I hope I am not interruptin'," he remarked.

"You're too sanguine," said Lowther; "you are."

"I should like to stay here for a few minutes," went on Skimpole, unheeding. "Gore is in a vevy bad temper. I accidentally gave him a crack on the head with the poker while practising a new system of signalling, and he appeared to be vevy annoyed by that trifling accident."

"Some chaps are unreasonable," said Tom Merry. "Sit down, Skimmy, and have some tea. Don't talk, old chap."

"The fact is, Merry, I have come here to talk. I have a proposition to make to you."

"Oh, don't! I'd rather have a proposition out of Euclid." "Really, Merry, this is an important matter. I am thinking of joining the Boy Scouts."

The juniors stared at him.

"Good!" said Lowther. "First recruit for the Specs Patrol. Password, Socialism!"

"Really, Lowther, it is no subject for jesting. With my great intellectual powers, I shall be able to revolutionise the whole thing. I am willing to join your patrol, Tom Merry, and you will naturally cede the leadership to me."

"Yes—I don't think!"

"Really, Merry, I don't think you ought to allow personal pride and vainglory to stand in the way of benefiting the corps," said Skimpole, in a tone of remonstrance. "However, I will join you in a subordinate position, if you like. It will be like Agamemnon becoming a follower of Thersites. But no matter."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Skimmy, old man, I don't think you will do. You're too clever; you've got too much brain. Better stick to Socialism."

"I have decided about it, Merry."

"I haven't a word in the matter, then?" grinned Tom Merry. "As patrol-leader, I might be supposed to have a whisper on the subject."

"You will hardly refuse a recruit with more brains than the rest of the patrol put together, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry rubbed his nose thoughtfully. He wouldn't

have hurt Skimpole's feelings for worlds, but he had no intention whatever of dragging about the short-sighted, helpless bookworm of the Shell in a Boy Scout patrol.

Skimpole evidently regarded himself as a valuable recruit, but the opinion of his Form-fellows was very different.

"The patrol's full up, Skimmy," said Tom Merry, at last. "You must look out for another one."

"Ahem! It would be somewhat infra dig. for a Shell fellow to join a Fourth Form patrol, but I will join you, D'Arcy."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Skimpole.

"That you won't, Skimmay, deah boy!"

"My dear D'Arcy, a fellow like you requires a lieutenant with some brains, to help him out in difficult positions," urged Skimpole. "A fellow like yourself, of a low intellectual order—"

"What?"

"Practically incapable of thinking for himself—"

"Eh?"

"Do not think I blame you for your mental shortcomings," said Skimpole gently. "It is all due to hereditament and enviroiny—I mean to heredity and environment. Bred of a played-out, used-up aristocratic race, trained in the homo of luxury without any incentive to intellectual effort, how could you be anything but what you are—a harmless, brainless, useless creature."

Arthur Augustus jumped up wrathfully.

"Tom Mewwy, I have a gweat objection to makin' a wov in anothah fellow's quartahs, but I weally must kick this duffah out."

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry heartily. "Kick him out by all means."

"Really, Merry—"

"Are you goin', Skimpole?"

"Certainly not! A sincere Socialist regards it as an inalienable right for anybody to remain anywhere he chooses, and I decline to go. Under Socialism all studies will be nationalised."



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By Martin Clifford.

NEXT
WEEK:

"JACK BLAKE'S PLOT."

"I shall be sowwy to kick you——"

"Hold on! On second thoughts, I will retire, as——"
Biff!

Skimpole was retiring a little too slowly. Arthur Augustus's foot caught him as he passed through the door. It was not a hard kick, but it helped Skimpole nicely out into the passage.

He turned there and blinked at the swell of St. Jim's.

"D'Arcy, this violence only proves the utter incapacity of your mental powers. I could prove to you that——"
Slam!

Tom Merry's door shut noisily, and Skimpole's flow of eloquence was cut up. He rubbed his bumpy forehead, and drifted away down the passage. More than ever the genius of the Shell felt that he was misunderstood and unappreciated at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 11.

The Special Patrol.

TOM MERRY came downstairs the next morning early, with the intention of taking a run round the quad, before breakfast. He found Arthur Augustus standing in the hall, looking up at the letter-rack. The swell of St. Jim's appeared to be lost in thought; and he came out of his reverie with a jump as Tom Merry slapped him on the shoulder.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Twopence for your thought, Gussy!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Are you trying to work out a problem in Euclid, or composing a poem for the next number of the 'Weekly'?"

"Neithah, deah boy. I was thinkin' that my Cousin Ethel seems to have made a mistake in addressin' a lettah. Do you think she is the kind of gal to make a mistake in addressin' a lettah, Tom Mewwy?"

Tom shook his head.

"No, Gussy, I don't. She's a sensible girl."

"Not at all likely to address a lettah by mistake to the w'ong fellow?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then I suppose that lettah is for you, Mewwy."

"Eh?"

"There's a lettah in the wack addressed to you in my cousin's handw'itin'," explained D'Arcy. "I was thinkin' that it was a mistake, and that Ethel meant to address it to me. Howevah, as it is addressed to you, you can open it."

"Why, you young ass——"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

Tom Merry took the letter. It was addressed to himself in the well-known hand of Ethel Cleveland.

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and regarded Tom Merry attentively as he opened the letter and perused it.

"Well, deah boy, is there a mistake? Is that lettah intended for me?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"No. It's the challenge from the Girl Scouts, and it's addressed to me as the scout-leader of St. Jim's."

"Oh, I see! Pway wead it out, deah boy!"

Tom Merry read the letter out.

"Dear Tom,—Arthur will have told you about our patrol, and our intention of sending a challenge to the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's. Will you accept it? We are willing to meet you in any contest of scouting, in a friendly way, and Wednesday afternoon would suit us, if agreeable to you.—Kindest regards,
ETHEL CLEVELAND."

"Good!" said Arthur Augustus. "I suppose you will have no objection now to joinin' a special patwol, with me for leadah?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I will let you join my special patrol, Gussy."

"Wats! I——"

"Then I shall leave you out."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I should uttahly wefuse to be left out. As you are scout-leadah, I suppose I shall have to allow you to lead, if you insist upon it."

"Go hon!"

"But I w'egard it as wathah bad form on your part."

Tom Merry only laughed, and went off to show the challenge to his chums. It was agreed that there should be a special patrol formed to meet the Girl Scouts, as numbers had to be equal for a fair contest. But of whom was the special patrol to consist? There were many claimants.

Tom Merry, of course, was to be the leader. Jack Blake claimed the post of corporal. Lowther had to be in the troop; but Manners magnanimously gave up his claim, and announced his intention of going out for the afternoon with his new camera instead. Harry Noble, of course, could not be

left out, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as Ethel's cousin, had to be included. And as soon as news of what was going on reached the New House, Figgins came over like a shot to be included, and with him came Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

They ran Tom Merry down in his study after school, and Figgins burst into the room excitedly.

"Put my name down!" he exclaimed.

Tom Merry and Manners were at work in the study, and Lowther was looking out of the window. They stared at Figgins.

"Off your rocker?" asked Tom Merry politely.

"Put my name down."

"I haven't got your name."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't be an ass! I mean, put my name down on the list."

"What list?"

Figgins snorted.

"The special patrol to meet the Girl Scouts!"

"Oh, I see! You want to come?"

"I suppose the New House is going to be represented on the patrol," said Figgins aggressively.

"Blessed if I thought of it. I'd forgotten there was a New House, I think," said Tom Merry negligently.

Figgins glared. At any other time, Tom Merry's statement would have been followed by assault and battery upon the spot; but just now Figgins was anxious to placate the leader of the special patrol.

"Look here, Merry," the New House must be represented. Fair play, you know."

"Yes, rather," said Kerr. "Shove three New House names on the list, and that still leaves the School House a majority."

"Right-ho!" said Fatty Wynn. "And I suggest that both houses should contribute equally to standing a decent feed when the contest is over."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Impossible!"

"What! We shall all be hungry, and——"

"Ha, ha! I wasn't answering you, Wynn—you can stand a dozen feeds if you like. It's impossible to put three New House names on the list. We've got five names already that can't be dropped—mine, Blake, Lowther, Noble, and Gussy."

"You can drop Gussy."

"Bai Jove!" said a voice at the door. "There will be a wov if you do, Tom Mewwy. I should advise my cousin to withdwaw the challenge."

"Well, drop Lowther, then."

"Looking for a thick ear, Figgins?" asked Lowther pleasantly.

"Couldn't you drop Noble?" asked Kerr. "He's only a new boy."

"Well, he's a jolly good scout, and knows a lot he learnt in the bush in Australia, and can help us, you know. We can't leave him out."

"Then there's Blake——"

"My dear chap; if we left Blake out, the School House wouldn't be big enough to hold him. We don't want any earthquakes. Blake's in."

"Then suppose you resign yourself, Tom Merry?"

"I must resign myself to dispensing with your services," said Tom Merry blandly. "I feel quite resigned, in that sense."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, suppose we say two New House chaps," said Figgins grudgingly. "I don't want to make trouble now. Fatty Wynn can stay at home and eat lollipops. Kerr and I are coming in the patrol."

Tom Merry looked at his friends. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nodded his head.

"Yaas, wathah! That's only fair play, Tom Mewwy. Five School House chaps and two New House wottahs w'epresents the w'espictive importance of the two Houses."

"Rats!" said Kerr promptly.

"If you say wats to me, Kerr——"

"Well, I did say rats to you, Gussy."

"Then I shall have no w'esource but to give you a feahful thwashin'. It is imposs. for me to be said wats to. Pway put up your hands, Kerr."

"Order!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Gussy, I'm surprised at you! Excuse him, gentlemen; he can't help being a little rowdy."

"I uttahly wefuse to be chawactewised as wowdy. I——"

"Then don't make a row in another chap's study."

"Upon the whole, Kerr, I will defer that thwashin' to anothah occasion. I beg your pardon, Tom Mewwy."

"Granted! If you will only shut up. It's all right, Figg, you and Kerr join the Special Patrol; that's settled. Be ready at three on Wednesday afternoon. By the way, what are we going to call the patrol?"



Fatty Wynn had offered his services as cook, and from the camp-fire rose a thin cloud of blue smoke, as the Falstaff of the New House cooked a bundle of sausages in a frying-pan.

"The Donkey Patrol," suggested Lowther. "Then Gussy can do all the signalling for us, in his natural voice, and—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Merry!" Skimpole put his head into the study. "Ah! I have been looking for you. I hear that you are forming a special patrol—"

"Yes. Good-bye!"

"I think it would be a good idea for me to join this patrol—"

"No. Good-bye!"

"Really, Merry; I think you ought to give me a chance. I am specially desirous of joining this patrol."

"Look here, Skimmy—"

"Bai Jove! I wegard you as an ass, Skimmy!"

"I have invented a new system of tracking footsteps—I mean footprints," said Skimpole. "I am anxious to put it to the test."

"My dear chap, you can't scout. You would get worn out in the first mile," said Tom Merry patiently. "You haven't the physique, old chap. You want a few years' gentle exercise first to bring you up to form."

"The brain governs the body, Merry, and you will admit that I have more brain than anyone else present."

"In quantity, yes; but I don't know about quality. Now, take my word for it, Skimmy, scouting isn't in your line."

"Give him a chance on trial," suggested Monty Lowther, with a grin. "We can take him along as an auxiliary, and see how he sticks it."

"I regard that as a good suggestion, Lowther. What do you say, Merry?"

Tom Merry frowned at his humorous chum. He knew that Lowther scented fun in the idea of taking Skimpole along on trial; but the amateur Socialist was in so great earnest that Tom did not like to refuse further.

"Oh, very well!" he said. "You won't like it, Skimmy."

"I will chance that. I expect to be very useful to the patrol," said Skimpole, beaming round through his spectacles. "Has it ever occurred to you fellows what an enormous power for good the Boy Scouts would be, if they were all converted to Socialism, and spread the good news wherever they went?"

"I can't say it has," grunted Tom Merry. "Good-bye!"

"Really, Merry—"

"Take him away with you, Figgins."

Figgins grinned, and linked his arm in Skimpole's on one side, and Kerr helped him along on the other. Skimpole was marched out of the study, and Tom Merry got on with his work again.

Two seconds later the spectacles of the amateur Socialist were glimmering in at the door again.

"I say, Merry—"

Tom Merry jumped up and grasped the inkpot. Skimpole vanished; and Tom, with a chuckle, settled down to his work again. This time he was not interrupted.

CHAPTER 12.

Skimpole the Scout.

THERE was a muster of the Special Patrol on Wednesday afternoon, when the juniors turned out after dinner. Boy Scouting had taken a very strong hold upon the juniors of St. Jim's; and though some had taken it up and dropped it again, the majority of those who had once tried it stuck faithfully to it. There is a charm in the idea to any adventurous lad; and Tom Merry & Co. were likely to stick to the Boy Scouts until they were old enough to join the Territorials.

There were a good many patrols at St. Jim's; and the pick of them were gathered into the special patrol which was to contend with the Girl Scouts.

Tom Merry, Blake, Figgins, Noble, Lowther, Kerr, and D'Arcy made up a team which would, as its leader remarked, require a lot of beating.

The latest addition to the patrol, Herbert Skimpole, was not taken seriously by anybody but himself.

But Skimpole took himself very seriously.

Whenever he had a new idea, he went into it in deadly earnest, and for the once he was a Boy Scout, with great ideas of what he could do in that line.

When the Special Patrol mustered before the School House, Skimpole wasn't there; but he was coming. He was devoting unusual care to his attire for the occasion, for even the amateur Socialist was not above wishing to make a favourable impression upon the Girl Scouts.

Tom Merry looked over his patrol.

They looked very fit and in good order. Simple as the attire of the Boy Scout is, Arthur Augustus had contrived to make himself look very neat and elegant. Noble's well-developed figure showed off to great advantage; while Figgins's slim legs attracted a certain number of humorous comments. The humorous juniors, however, did not make their remarks to Figgins himself; for Figgy was a little touchy on that point, and he had an uncomfortable way of hitting out when he was chipped.

"We're all here," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah."

"What about Skimpole?" asked Blake, with a grin.

"By Jove! I'd forgotten Skimmy. I dare say he's forgotten all about it, too. Anyway, he's late, and we can't wait for him. The order was to muster at three."

"Yes, rather!" said Kerr. "Let's get off."

"Bai Jove! Here he comes!"

Skimpole came dashing out of the School House.

A goodly crowd of juniors had assembled to see the Special Patrol off, and they all looked at Skimpole, and there was a ripple of laughter.

Skimpole in the garb of a scout was a new sight to the juniors of St. Jim's.

Skimpole might be brainy. He might have whole libraries of knowledge crammed into his capacious mental apparatus. But he had never been called an athlete. He had never gone in for exercise of any sort. He said that it disturbed the mental serenity necessary for reflection upon abstruse subjects. Tom Merry preferred to develop his strength and let abstruse subjects look after themselves. But Skimpole was too wise for that—too wise by half.

And the garb of a Boy Scout seemed to be specially calculated to show off the defects of Skimpole's figure.

His head was abnormally developed, and Nature seemed to have compensated herself for that liberality by taking it out of his legs.

These limbs were thin, not to say skinny, and Figgins's legs looked quite plump in comparison. There was a rumour in the New House that Figgins wore double stockings to give his legs a more substantial appearance; though no one had ever ventured to ask Figgins if it was correct. But Skimpole might have worn a whole dozen of them without making his calves look anything like substantial.

"My only hat!" said Monty Lowther. "Suppose the wind were to catch him—he'd go over like—like a hammer stood on its handle."

"Ha, ha, ha."

Skimpole blinked at the juniors rather complacently.

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NEXT WEEK: "JACK BLAKE'S PLOT."

Perhaps it was owing to his short sight, at all events he rather fancied himself as a Boy Scout, and thought the attire suited him admirably.

"How do I look, Merry?" he asked.

Tom Merry gasped, and did not reply.

"It suits me, I think!"

"Oh—yes—no—ha, ha!"

"It is the first time I have donned the scout costume," said Skimpole. "I think I shall remain a Boy Scout. With my brain—"

"Come on."

"Bai Jove! Are you weally goin' to take that vevy remarkable-lookin' person out, Tom Merry?"

"Silence in the ranks."

"Weally, Mewwy—"

"Shut up! March."

And the Special Patrol marched.

A cackle of laughter from the crowd in the quadrangle followed them.

The scouts were grinning themselves. Skimpole blinked from one to another.

"Ahem! I rather think that eyeglass is out of place in a scout patrol, D'Arcy," he remarked.

"Bai Jove! Why?"

"The fellows seem to find it very amusing."

"Eh?"

"Surely you can hear them giggling, D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Silence there!"

"Excuse me, Tom Merry, as a sincere Socialist I claim the right of talking as much as I please, on any and all occasions."

"Corporal Blake!"

Jack saluted.

"Give Skimpole a thick ear if he opens his mouth again."

"Yes, sir."

Skimpole blinked at Tom Merry, and blinked at Blake; and did not open his mouth again.

CHAPTER 13.

Up a Tree—and Down!

THE Special Patrol marched down Rylcombe Lane. St. Jim's was left behind; and the deep green woods rose round the patrol. They were to enter Rylcombe Wood at the stile, and then the contest was to begin.

The contest was a simple one, but it was designed to call forth the powers of the Boy Scouts, and the Girl Scouts as well.

Tom Merry & Co. were to enter the wood at half-past three, and separate, taking different paths to reach the side towards the village.

The task of the Girl Scouts was to capture them before they got through. A touch, given by the hand or the staff, was to constitute a capture. If a majority of the Boy Scouts got through, they were to be considered winners; if a majority of them were captured, it was a win for Cousin Ethel's patrol.

Boys and girls were to meet afterwards at a rendezvous in the wood for tea: the space of an hour and a half being allowed for the contest.

Tom Merry glanced at his watch as the juniors tramped down the lane. It was a blazing afternoon, and the scouts looked forward to the shelter of the deep wood.

"By Jove! twenty-five minutes past!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "This is what comes of waiting for the Skimpole-ass."

"Really, Merry—"

"Double quick."

"Yaas, wathah."

The scouts broke into a trot.

In about one minute Skimpole was gasping for breath.

He was not of the stuff of which trotters are made, and he was already fagged by the tramp in the sun from the school.

His face was streaming with perspiration under his big hat, and he had already requested several of his comrades in turn to carry his staff for him: a modest request that had been unanimously refused.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "Wait a few minutes for me, Merry, while I get my breath."

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wats, deah boy."

"Sit down and rest," said Blake, kindly. "Then go home, and lock yourself up in your study, or drown yourself somewhere."

"Good wheeze."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Really, you fellows, I think you might wait for me, instead of racing along like this," panted Skimpole.

A Splendid Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.
By Martin Clifford.

The juniors chuckled. They were going at an easy trot, which would not have incommoded a "kid" in the Third Form.

Tom Merry looked back.

"Better chuck it, Skimmy."

"Really, Merry—"

"I told you you weren't up to scouting. Don't be an ass, old chap."

"I do not want to desert you, Merry. In this contest, you will stand in need of my assistance."

"More rats!"

"Keep it up, Skimmy. If you fall behind you'll lose us."

"Oh, dear! I feel quite exhausted."

The scouts trotted on, till the stile was reached. Skimpole leaned on the stile and blew like a bellows.

"Oh, dear! I am quite out of breath."

Tom Merry looked rather bothered. He had fully expected that run in the lane to make Skimpole drop off. But the amateur Socialist, though a general nuisance, was sticking it.

The question was how to induce him to give up the idea before the contest with the Girl Scouts commenced. The number of the contestants had been settled: and in any case, Tom Merry didn't want to give his chances away by letting in a hopeless duffer, such as Skimpole certainly was in the scouting line.

Jack Blake winked at him.

"Better observe the enemy," he remarked. "Order a scout up a tree."

"Good. Skimpole."

"Eh?"

"Climb that tree and report."

Skimpole blinked at Tom Merry, and then blinked at the tree the patrol-leader was pointing to. It was a big beech, with wide branches overhanging the deep, flowing ditch that bordered the lane near the stile.

"You—you are not serious, Merry?"

"Yes, I am—ascend that tree."

"Impossible."

"Do you refuse to obey orders?" thundered Tom Merry.

"I—I—I am not a good climber."

"A Boy Scout has to climb anywhere, on anything. Ascend the tree, or cut off. Quick—no time to waste."

Tom Merry expected the amateur scout to cut off: but Skimpole was made of sterner stuff. He blinked at the tree, and nodded.

"Very well, I will do so. But I am too short-sighted to view the enemy, I am afraid. However, I will do my best."

"Up you go."

Skimpole approached the tree, and laid his hands upon the trunk. The scouts watched him, hardly believing that he would attempt the ascent, and quite convinced that he would never get beyond the first branch.

Skimpole blinked round at the patrol.

"You are quite certain that it is necessary to ascend this tree, Merry?"

"Up you go!" roared Tom Merry.

"Oh, very well!"

And Skimpole clambered up the trunk.

The patrol watched him with great interest. Somehow or other he reached the first bough, and he hung over it to rest. The bough was a slim one, extending over the ditch: and Skimpole's weight made it sag.

"Up you go!" shouted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Up with you, deah boy."

"I—I—I feel quite exhausted. I must rest a little."

"Get off that branch, or you'll be in the ditch."

"I—I—I can't."

The branch, bending more and more, was sinking lower. It was on a slant down from the trunk now, and Skimpole was slipping along it, clutching desperately. His feet hung down and swung to and fro, about a foot above the water. Tom Merry uttered an exclamation of alarm.

"He'll get a ducking! Here, Skimmy, come down."

"I—I—I can't."

"Come back, you ass."

"I—I—I can't."

"Crawl back to the tree."

Skimpole made no reply, except by gasping. He could not have crawled back to the tree-trunk to save his life. He was slipping further along the branch.

There was a sudden ominous crack.

Blake gave a whistle.

"The bough's going!"

It had gone!

Skimpole's weight, nearing the end of the thin bough, had snapped it off close to the trunk: and the amateur scout shot suddenly downwards.

Splash!

"Ooooch!"

Feet first, Skimpole plunged into the ditch.

Anybody but Skimpole would have kept his feet then, and the water would only have come to his armpits: but Skimpole had lost his head, and the loss of his feet naturally followed.

He rolled sideways in the ditch, and disappeared.

"Phew!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Good-bye, Skimmy."

Tom Merry plunged knee-deep in the ditch and dragged the amateur scout out, as he came floundering and gasping above water.

Skimpole was puffing and snorting when he was landed in the bracken.

"Oh, dear! Where are my spectacles?"

"Sticking on your nose, old son."

"Dear me! So they are! Really, I have had a very bad shock. I think I shall have to give up scouting for today, Merry."

"Perhaps you'd better," agreed Tom Merry, concealing a smile. "You do look a little wet."

"I am very wet indeed." Skimpole knuckled the water out of his eyes. "I feel extremely uncomfortable. I am sorry I shall have to deprive you of my aid in this contest this afternoon, Merry."

"Don't mention it, old chap."

"It will probably lead to your defeat in the contest, but I fear that it cannot be helped now."

"We'll do our best without you, Skimmy."

"If you care to postpone the whole business for an hour or two, while I return to St. Jim's and get a change, I shall still be able to help you."

"That's awfully kind of you, Skimmy—but—but I don't think we'll wait."

And Skimpole went dripping down the road towards St. Jim's, and the Boy Scouts, chuckling, entered the wood.

Skimpole left a track of dripping water behind him in the dust, as he went squelching along in his soaked boots. Two juniors coming along from the direction of the school stared at him blankly.

"My hat!" said Gore. "What on earth's that?"

Mellish chuckled.

"It's Skimmy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole blinked at the cads of the School House.

"I have had an accident, Gore," he said. "It is no occasion for merriment. I am going back."

"Ha, ha, ha! Where are the Scouts?"

"They are going on."

"Good—buzz off!"

Gore and Mellish stood watching Skimpole till the dripping junior was out of sight in the direction of the school. Then they clambered over the stile into the wood, and plunged into the shadows among the trees.

CHAPTER 14.

The Contest Begins.

"WE separate here!" said Tom Merry.

He halted on the footpath under the heavy green shadow of the over-hanging trees. The Scouts stood at attention.

"You know the programme," went on the hero of the Shell. "You've got to get through the wood without giving the alarm, and run for it if you're spotted. We rendezvous at the foot of the old bridge. If four of us are caught, we're beaten. And look here, if four are caught, there will be four lickings distributed presently."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You can rely on two getting through," said Figgins. "About you School House chaps, though, I have my doubts."

"I was just thinking the same," Kerr remarked.

"You'd better use your thinkers in thinking out a way of getting through," said Jack Blake, warmly. "I've had a feeling all along that the thing will be messed up by those New House wottahs."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now, don't begin rowing—"

"Who's rowing?"

"Well, don't!" said Tom Merry pacifically. "There's the village clock striking half-past three. It's time we started."

"Yaas, pway don't waste time, deah boys. Of course, the whole mattah will be a walk ovah, as the gals cannot possibly be up to our form."

"Up to yours, I expect," grunted Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"We separate here, and keep a good distance apart," said Tom Merry. "I—"

"You are intewwupting me, Tom Mewwy—"

"I know I am, Gussy. Now march."

"I wegard you—"

"Order! Order!"

Arthur Augustus gave a sniff, to express his boundless scorn for his patrol-leader, and relapsed into silence.

"Now, kids, you're all ready," said Tom Merry. "Just go over the signal once more to make sure you've got it right."

The Special Patrol, being formed up of units from several other patrols, had adopted a special signal for the time being. It consisted of a short quick whistle, low but penetrating, which, twice quickly repeated, was a signal of danger.

Jack Blake chirruped the whistle, and the others repeated it.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Keep that in mind. A tap constitutes capture, remember—no resistance. It's a question of speed and dodging, not of physical strength. A chap who is captured should give the danger signal as a warning to others who may be in hearing."

"Right you are."

"Now start."

And the scouts of St. Jim's plunged into the wood.

Each of them took a separate path, ranging as far as possible from the others, and Arthur Augustus, who had stopped a minute to tie his bootlace, was the last to enter the trees.

The swell of St. Jim's, though he greatly fancied himself as a scout, had not given so much study to the subject as Tom Merry and the others, and he was far less able to find his way in a wood when once far from the beaten track.

He had seen Harry Noble discover all sorts of things from the bark of the trees, the state of the grass, and so forth; but the grass and the trees kept their secrets close from Arthur Augustus.

He plunged forward in the direction of Rylcombe, and followed what he firmly believed to be a straight line towards the village.

In about ten minutes he emerged into a footpath.

He glanced along it, and as he did so a sound of voices came to his ears from a spot a little further along.

"Bai Jove! Gore—and Mellish!"

D'Arcy looked in the direction of the speakers.

The two juniors were standing in the deep grass beside the footpath, speaking in whispers and grinning. Gore closed his lips and gave an imitation of the Scouts' whistle, and Mellish chuckled.

"It's exact!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

The two juniors started at D'Arcy's exclamation.

"My hat! It's Gussy."

The swell of the School House advanced towards them. They stared at him blankly.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Gore. "Have you given it up?"

"Certainly not, deah boy!"

"Then what have you come back for?"

"Come back!"

"Yes. What's the game?"

"I have not come back. I have just emerged into this wotten path, and I cannot quite wemembah which path it is!"

Gore stared at him and burst into a chuckle.

"I wealdy see no weason for wibald mewmwent," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Pway tell me where this path leads to?"

"Ha, ha, ha! If you follow it for two or three minutes it leads to the stile in Rylcombe Lane."

"What?"

"We're standing on the spot where you started from," grinned Gore. "You've walked round in a circle."

"Imposs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am afwaid you are deceivin' me, Goah!"

"Go and look at the stile, then."

D'Arcy, who knew better than to trust a word of Gore's, did so—the stile was there, and Gore was certainly telling the truth this time.

The scout had followed in a circle, and emerged into the path again only a dozen paces from the spot where he had quitted it.

D'Arcy's face was a study as he made this discovery.

Gore and Mellish yelled with laughter.

"Try again," said Gore, encouragingly. "Follow your right hand this time, old son, and come out in a circle on the other side."

"Wealdy Goah—"

"We'll wait for you here," said Mellish.

"Wealdy, Mellish—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I appeal to have made a twiffin' ewwah of calculation," said Arthur Augustus, coldly. "That is no weason at all for mewmwent. I shall twy again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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And he re-entered the trees, and was careful to bear a little more to the right this time. Gore and Mellish chuckled.

"That whistling was what we heard them practising in Tom Merry's study last evening," Gore remarked.

"Must have been."

"One short whistle as a signal one is near, and two to show that there is danger," grinned Gore.

"That's right!"

"I rather think we shall be able to chip in a bit, and cause trouble in the happy family. What?"

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather."

"Come on, then!"

And the two worthies followed the direction taken by the scouts. Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was tramping on. He knew that he must be considerably behind his companions, and that the Girl Scouts by this time must be on the alert, and all eyes for the Special Patrol.

But D'Arcy had every confidence in himself. Taking care not to bear too much to the left, he tramped on, showing his way through trees and underwoods.

Suddenly a sound caught his ear in the wood.

It was the call of a curlew.

He knew the signal of the Girl Scouts.

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy stopped, and listened. The curlew call was repeated, some distance to the left of him. Arthur Augustus smiled, and bore off a little to the right.

He tramped on through brambles, and uttered a sudden exclamation as his foot slipped on a root and he tumbled over in the bushes.

"Ow! Bai Jove!"

"Let me help you!" said a quiet voice.

D'Arcy jumped.

A hand was laid on his shoulder as he wriggled in the brambles, and he was helped out. Considerably scratched and dishevelled, he stood up, panting for breath, and looked into the face of Ailsa Macgregor.

"You are my prisoner."

"Bai Jove! So I am." Arthur Augustus bowed politely. Whatever happened to him, he never forgot his courtesy.

"My deah gal, it is a pleasure to be captured by so charming an enemy!"

And Arthur Augustus gave his parole and marched off to render himself at the camp by the stream.

CHAPTER 15.

Tom Merry Gets Through.

TOM MERRY paused to listen.

He was in the heart of the wood, and round him the trees were growing thickly together, with thickets and great ferns filling up the spaces between the trunks.

There was deep silence there, save for the twittering of the birds, and the rustling sound made by the patrol-leader as he forced a way through the underwoods.

Through the silence came a signal whistle.

Phweep!

Tom Merry paused, and listened for a repetition of the sound.

Twice given, it meant danger; once given, it simply meant that a comrade was at hand, to whom he could speak, of whom he could seek information, or whom he could help on his way.

Phweep!

It was only the echo.

Tom Merry turned in the direction of the sound, and pushed his way on. He whistled low in reply to the signal. Suddenly he gave a muttered exclamation.

He had caught sight of the head and shoulders of a St. Jim's junior among the foliage, and recognised Mellish, of the Fourth.

The junior was in the act of repeating the signal whistle.

Tom Merry's brow darkened.

"The cad!" he muttered savagely.

He plunged on towards Mellish, and the cad of the Fourth heard him coming, and whirled round, but too late!

Tom Merry's grasp was upon him.

He was borne to the ground, with a bump that shook nearly all the breath out of him, and Tom Merry planted a heavy boot upon his chest, and pinned him there.

"Ow!" gasped Mellish.

"You rotter!" growled Tom Merry. "What were you whistling for, eh?"

"Ow! It was a-a-a-j-j-joke!"

Tom Merry smiled grimly.

"You won't work off any more jokes like that on us, you cad! You have found out our signal, and have been imitating it to confuse us in the contest with the Curlew Patrol."

"I—I—I—"

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"Isn't that the truth?"

"Ye-es," stammered Mellish. "I-i-i it was Gore's idea."

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

"Is Gore in the wood, too?"

"Ye-es."

"Well, I'll put a stop to your little games, anyway. Stand up!"

"I—I—I—"

"Stand up, you coward!"

Tom Merry removed his foot, and Mellish staggered to his feet. He was very white. He fully expected a thrashing for his attempt to spoil the sport of the afternoon for the Boy Scouts.

But Tom Merry did not touch him. He would have scorned to lay his hand upon the wretched sneak who trembled before him.

He took a length of cord out of his pocket, and unfolded it. Mellish watched him with anxious eyes.

"Put your wrists together!"

"M-m-my wrists!"

"Yes. Quick!"

Mellish obeyed without another word.

Tom Merry bound his wrists tightly together. Then he jerked the handkerchief from his pocket, and rolled it up tightly.

"Open your mouth!"

"M-m-m-m-my mouth?" stammered Mellish.

"Yes; sharp!"

The cad of the Fourth obeyed. Tom Merry thrust the improvised gag into his mouth, and tied it there with a string passing round the back of his head.

Then he surveyed his handiwork with considerable satisfaction.

"Can you speak?" he demanded.

"M-m-m-m-m!"

"Can you whistle?"

"M-m-m-m-m!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Then you're safe for the afternoon. You can get out of the wood like that, and get somebody on the road to let you loose. Get off!"

"M-m-m-m-m!"

Tom Merry lifted his foot menacingly, and Mellish hastened to get away. He went tramping through the thickets with his hands tied and his mouth silenced, effectually prevented from making any more false signals.

Tom Merry plunged on his way.

He had lost some time, and made a considerable amount of noise in the capture of the outsider, and his chances of getting safely through were considerably lessened. But he was glad that he had put a stop to Mellish's mischief.

He resumed his way; but before he had taken a dozen steps he paused again to listen to a signal that echoed through the wood.

It was the call of a curlew!

"Phew!" Tom Merry muttered.

The enemy were at hand!

The curlew-call was answered from the other side, and then a third signal was heard, directly in front of Tom Merry.

He set his teeth.

He knew very well that his movements had been heard by several members of the Curlew Patrol, and that they were closing on him from three sides.

He threw himself down on his hands and knees, and crawled cautiously into the depths of the thickets.

He stopped dead, completely hidden from view, as he heard footsteps close at hand.

Peering through the foliage, he could catch a glimpse of a form near at hand, but too dimly to distinguish whose it was.

A voice came to his ears. It was that of Cousin Ethel.

"Did you see him, Flora?"

"No, I heard him!"

"Listen!"

The Girl Scouts were evidently listening hard, during the silence of some moments that followed, and Tom Merry held his breath.

It was Flora Bell's voice that broke the silence.

"He is gone!"

"Yes. Come this way!"

Footsteps moved off, and were lost in the silence of the wood.

Tom Merry lay a full minute, silent, after the footsteps had died away. Then he crept cautiously from his hiding-place.

He tramped on quietly, listening for the curlew signal, or any sound of the Curlew Patrol.

Suddenly there was a sharp exclamation from the bushes.

Tom Merry whirled round.

He was looking directly at Milly Lacy, the corporal of

the Curlew Patrol. A thick and impenetrable bush separated them.

Tom Merry smiled, and swept off his hat.

The Girl Scout laughed.

"I cannot reach you!" she exclaimed.

"I cannot say I am sorry."

Milly gave the signal, and it was answered. Tom Merry bowed.

"I fear I must leave you!" he said.

And he ran on.

Cousin Ethel came quickly through the bushes.

"It is Tom Merry!" exclaimed Milly hastily.

"Where?"

"This way!"

But Tom Merry was gone.

He did not slacken pace till he was out of the wood, and had reached the rendezvous at the foot of the old bridge over the Ryll. He was the first of the Special Patrol to arrive there.

He sat down on the stone parapet, and fanned himself with his hat. He had been thus occupied for about two minutes, when Harry Noble came running from the wood.

"Hallo, Kangaroo!"

The Cornstalk halted, panting.

"I've had a narrow shave!" he explained. "I was nearly caught."

"So was I," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Have you seen any of the others?"

"No! Let's wait for them!"

And they waited.

CHAPTER 16.

Scouts against Scouts!

PHEEP!

Jack Blake halted.

The whistle came just ahead of him, and as he had no suspicion of the game the cads of the School House were playing, he did not doubt for a moment that it came from one of his comrades.

Pheep!

Blake gave the whistle in answer, and plunged on.

Pheep-pheep!

It was the repeated whistle—the signal of danger!

Blake stopped again, undecided.

The signal was in front of him, and to keep on meant danger, that is to say, capture. At the same time, he knew that the Curlews were round him. He had spent a considerable time dodging them, and he knew that if he turned from the path he did so at the imminent risk of running into the enemy.

But there was nothing else to be done. The pheep-pheep! meant that a scout had been captured by the Curlews, and it was no use to rush on and share the fate of his comrade, since rescue was not permitted according to the rules of the contest.

He turned away from the line he was following, and started making a detour to avoid the spot of danger.

As he pushed his way through a heavy flowering bush, he touched the hand of someone who was pushing through from the other side.

There was a sharp exclamation, and Blake started back.

"You are my prisoner!"

Blake could have kicked himself.

The lithe figure of Cousin Ethel came through the foliage, and in order that there might be no mistake, she tapped Blake lightly on the shoulder with her quarter-staff.

The Fourth-Former of St. Jim's nodded grimly.

"It's all right, Cousin Ethel!"

"You are my prisoner!"

"Right-ho!"

Cousin Ethel smiled slightly at the glum expression upon Blake's face. The junior pulled himself together.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm your prisoner. I don't mind. Am I the first?"

"No; Arthur has been caught."

Blake grinned.

"Oh, Gussy! He was bound to go first! Any more?"

"Not that I know of, at present. You are the second I have seen caught," said Ethel, smiling. "Go to the camp by the stream, and wait there, please!"

"Right-ho!"

And Jack Blake went on his way. He was about half-way to the Girl Scouts' camp when he ran into Monty Lowther in the bushes. Lowther uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo, Blake!"

"Hallo," growled Blake, "I'm captured!"

Lowther grinned ruefully.

"So am I."

"Phew! You, too!"

"Yes. Ailsa Macgregor captured me," said Lowther. "I was getting along rippingly, till some ass started making signals, and I was thrown off my scent. I should have been through but for that, I think."

"It was the same with me. By Jove," exclaimed Blake suddenly, "is it possible that the Curlews know our signals, and are imitating them?"

"They couldn't know; we only arranged 'em last night."

"Well, it's curious."

"Yes, and beastly exasperating, too," grunted Lowther.

"I was avoiding a spot where the danger signal was given, and ran almost into the arms of Ailsa. She tapped me with her staff, and I was done for."

"Rotten!" said Blake. "Gussy is in already—that makes three! If one more is captured, our side chucks up the sponge."

And they marched on to the camp, where they found Arthur Augustus, but fortunately no other prisoners as yet.

There were still two juniors of St. Jim's in the wood, whose fate was undecided—Figgins and Kerr, of the New House.

Kerr, the cautious Scot, was not likely to fall into the hands of the Curlews; and, as a matter of fact, he was already very near the border of the wood when he was sighted by the Girl Scouts.

The curlew-call rang out in two or three directions. Behind Kerr, and before him, he heard the call, and from either side it echoed through the underwood.

The Scottish lad halted and listened. He was evidently surrounded by the enemy; and as he had to risk a foe whichever way he went, he decided to advance.

He dropped on his hands and knees, and crept through the bushes.

The curlew-call was repeated close in front of him, and almost at the same moment Kerr came in sight of a form he knew well, leaning against a tree and uttering that signal.

It was Gore, of the Shell.

"The cad!" muttered Kerr savagely.

He knew Gore's game at once.

Several times during his progress through the wood, Kerr had been confused and alarmed by the whistle-signals, and he wondered what his comrades meant. Now that he heard Gore imitating the calls of the Girl Scouts, he guessed that the cad of the Shell had been the author of the other confusing signals.

Gore was too busy to notice his approach, and the junior of the New House crept silently towards the tree against which Gore was leaning.

He was very close, when Gore heard a twig snap under his foot, and turned hastily. He changed colour as he saw Kerr.

"Put up your fists!" said Kerr fiercely.

Gore slowly obeyed. Kerr came on to the attack as he was speaking, and Gore had no choice in the matter. And although Kerr was only a Fourth-Former, and Gore was the biggest fellow in the Shell, the elder junior would gladly have avoided the combat at that moment.

He came on with a rush, and Gore's guard was knocked anywhere, and Kerr's right fist crashed home on his nose.

As he reeled under the blow, Kerr's left came in, in a terrific upper-cut that shot Gore fairly off the ground.

He crashed down into the underwood, and lay there gasping.

Kerr's eyes blazed as he looked down at him.

"Get up!" he exclaimed contemptuously.

Gore gave a groan.

"I—I can't! You've broken my jaw!"

"You cad! I—"

Kerr broke off suddenly.

The Curlew signals were closer at hand. He was in danger. Without giving Gore another glance, he dashed on through the wood.

A form sprang out into his path—a moment too late. Another emerged from the trees a minute later, and made a lunge at him with a quarterstaff; but Kerr was a foot beyond the reach of it.

He ran on, faster and faster, and pursuit soon dropped behind. The Scottish junior came out of the wood panting for breath, and joined Tom Merry and Noble at the bridge.

Three of the scouts of St. Jim's had come through, three had been captured. But where was Figgins?

CHAPTER 17.

Honours Divided.

FIGGINS had lost a considerable amount of time, soon after the start. He had caught sight of a Girl Scout keeping watch and ward, and had made a long detour to avoid the danger. Figgins, for the first time in his life, was not anxious to meet Cousin Ethel.

"Oh! Ow!"

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NEXT
WEEK:

"JACK BLAKE'S PLOT."

Figgins started as those sounds came to his ears from the depths of the wood, as he cautiously threaded his way onward, his eyes and ears open.

He stopped and listened.

"Oh, crumbs! Ow!"

"I believe I know that voice," murmured Figgins. "Somebody's hurt! It's a chap, anyway, not a girl, so there's no danger."

And Figgins turned in the direction of the sound.

"Ow, wow!"

"Gore, by Jove!"

George Gore was sitting on a log, nursing his chin in both hands, and at the intervals dabbing his nose with a handkerchief. Big red patches on the handkerchief showed that his nose had been damaged.

Figgins stared at him, and Gore stared at Figgins.

"Hallo! Hurt?" asked Figgins, good-naturedly.

Gore grunted.

"Yes, hang you!"

"Well, it's not my fault," said Figgins, who was far from guessing how Gore had come by his injuries, and for what reason. "It's no good scowling at me. Can I do anything for you?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Thanks, I'm not hungry. Have you seen any of our chaps?"

"Find out."

Figgins laughed.

"If you hadn't a swollen nose already, Gore, I should be inclined to make it swell for you. Have you seen anything of the Girl Scouts?"

Gore's eyes gleamed for a moment.

His false signalling was put an end to now—he was not in a state for further tricks of that sort. Mellish's had ceased some time before, Gore did not yet know why. But it was still possible to do mischief.

"There's Ethel Cleveland—" he began.

"What about her?"

"Perhaps she isn't injured after all."

Figgins jumped.

"Injured!"

"She may not have sprained her ankle."

"Sprained her ankle!"

"But it's nothing to do with me."

Figgins sprang towards him.

"Do you mean to say that Cousin Ethel has had an accident?"

Gore shrugged his shoulders.

"Tell me, you cad! Where is she?"

"I dare say you'll find her if you look for her."

"Do you know where she is?" roared Figgins, clenching his fists.

"No, I don't!"

Figgins glared at him, half-inclined to thrash him where he stood; but he reflected that he had no time to waste on Gore. He plunged into the wood again, but he was no longer thinking of the rendezvous by the old bridge. He was thinking of Cousin Ethel.

Cousin Ethel injured!

Figgins had had several falls himself that afternoon among the tangled roots in the thicker portions of the wood, and he knew how easy it would be for anybody to fall and twist an ankle there.

The contest between the rival scouts vanished from his mind—he forgot it. He was thinking only of Cousin Ethel, and of the necessity of immediately ascertaining if she was hurt, and getting help for her.

"Ethel! Ethel!"

He called out the name unconsciously as he plunged into the deep woods.

Where was he likeliest to find her?

If she were hurt, no doubt her scouts would convey her at once to the camp on the stream, after rendering her first aid. Figgins, who knew the Rylcombe woods like a book, dashed off in that direction.

There was a rustle in the woods behind him.

Ailsa Macgregor looked out of the thickets, and dashed towards him, with the quarterstaff ready to tap.

But Figgins did not even see her. He dashed on, at a speed that soon left Ailsa hopelessly in the rear. Crashing through bush and briar, falling sometimes among the tangled thickets, Figgins dashed on till he came in sight of the waters of the Feeder, glimmering through the trunks of the trees.

By the bank of the river rose a thin cloud of blue smoke from a camp-fire. The boy prisoners had lighted it, ready for tea when the contest should be over.

The New House junior dashed up at top speed.

Blake, Lowther, and D'Arcy were round the fire, and Fatty Wynn, who had strolled up since they were taken prisoners, was preparing a frying-pan with grease, for the cooking of a bundle of sausages. Fatty Wynn was taking

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no part in the scouting contest, but he intended to take part in the feed to follow.

The four juniors stared at Figgins.

"Hallo! You captured, too!" exclaimed Blake.

"Bai Jove! The gals have done us, deah boys."

"Looks like it," said Lowther. "Blessed if I see what Figgys is in such a hurry for, though. Hungry, Figgys?"

"Ethel!"

"Oh, Cousin Ethel captured you, did she?"

"No!" gasped Figgins. "I'm not captured!"

"Not captured!" roared Blake.

"No!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Ethel!"

"Eh?"

"Oh, he's wandewin'!" said D'Arcy, tapping his forehead.

"I've noticed before that Figgins is sometimes taken like that. Get him some watah in your cap."

"Ethel—she's hurt!" gasped Figgins.

"Hurt!"

"Yes. I met Gore in the wood, and he says she's sprained her ankle. Isn't she here?"

"No, we haven't seen her."

"Bai Jove, that's wotten!"

"How do you know Gore was telling the truth?" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "You know what he is! I have an idea that it was a cad about his size who has been giving false signals in the wood this afternoon!"

Figgins started.

"Well, he said—"

"Look out!"

But the warning came too late. Flora Bell had stepped out of the bushes, and her quarterstaff tapped Figgins lightly on the shoulder. Figgins swung round.

"You are my prisoner, Figgins."

"My hat!" said Blake. "That's a giddy sort of capture! Gore told you lies, I expect, and made you walk into the lion's den on purpose."

Figgins did not hear. He was looking eagerly at Flora.

"Is Ethel hurt?" he asked.

"Ethel hurt! Not that I know of."

"Bai Jove, she isn't!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"How do you know, Gussy?"

"Because here she comes."

Cousin Ethel and Ailsa Macgregor were coming out of the wood. The juniors took off their caps as they arrived at the camp.

Figgins looked at the Girl Scout leader with his heart bounding with relief. Certainly Cousin Ethel showed no signs of being hurt.

"Time is nearly up!" said Cousin Ethel, glancing at her watch. "We have four prisoners. I think it is a win for us."

"Ye-e-es."

"Figgins ran right into it," said Lowther. "Gore told him you had been hurt, and he came here to inquire."

"That was very reckless of you, Figgins—putting your head right into the lion's mouth," said Ethel smiling.

"Ye-es," stammered Figgins, "I—I forgot about the contest. I—I was jolly anxious, you know. You're not hurt?"

"Not at all."

"Then Gore was only rotting?"

"But it's not a fair catch," said Cousin Ethel.

"Oh, yes, that's all right—you've beaten us," said Figgins. "We don't want to get out of it."

"Wathah not, bai Jove!"

"It's all right, Cousin Ethel," said Blake. "We're done."

Ethel shook her head.

"No, we shall not count it a win. It's a draw. Leaving out Figgins, three have been captured, and three have got through. It is honours divided."

"Weally, Ethel—"

"Now, Arthur, you may go and fetch the others who have reached the bridge. Time is up, and tea will be ready in a quarter of an hour."

"Vewy good."

And Arthur Augustus trotted off. The others were very busy round the fire, helping Fatty Wynn in preparing the meal. Figgins remained apart a little way, very red in the cheeks. Cousin Ethel gave him a smile.

"I suppose I was an ass?" Figgins remarked.

"I don't think so."

"Of course, I ought to have guessed that Gore was rotting."

"Oh, no! You cannot always guess these things till afterwards," said Ethel. "It was very, very good of you to care so much about it!"

"It's jolly of you to say that!" said Figgins, much relieved. "I was afraid you would think me an ass—"

"I say, Figgins—" began Fatty Wynn.

Figgins made an impatient movement, and did not reply.

"Figgins! Figgins! Are you deaf? Shall I cook sausages for you, or would you rather have poached eggs?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Figgins ungratefully.

CHAPTER 18.

D'Arcy Gives a Toast.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS came up to the bridge gasping for breath. He had run all the way from the camp in the wood.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Have you got through?"

"No, I'm a pwisonah."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I've come to call you to tea. Time's up, and the othahs have been captured. Thwee pwisonahs, and Figgins has made a hash of it and doesn't count."

And D'Arcy explained as they walked to the camp.

"We'll have something to say to Gore and Mellish about this to-morrow," said Tom Merry, with darkening brows. "They've messed it all up. But for their tricks, I expect four or five of us at least would have got through."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Harry Noble nodded.

"Never mind that," he said. "It's a draw in this contest—no allowance made in the rules for accidents or outside interference. Miss Ethel could fairly claim a win; and at the best for us it's a draw."

"That's right," said Kerr. "But it's a comfort to think that I gave Gore an upper-cut that he'll feel the effects of for a week!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors arrived at the camp by the stream. A most appetising smell of frying sausages and poaching eggs and freshly-made tea greeted them.

Fatty Wynn had lent his services as a cook, and the Girl Scouts had accepted them; but Cousin Ethel made the tea, and Ailsa poured it out, and Milly cut bread-and-butter galore.

In the blaze of the setting sun, the Boy and Girl Scouts sat down to tea on the thick green grass sloping down to the water.

And a merry meal it was.

Honours were divided between the rival scouts—though the boys, chivalrous to the last, were quite willing to assign the victory to the Curlew Patrol.

The Girl Scouts insisted upon waiting on their guests, and Figgins insisted upon waiting on Cousin Ethel. Everybody was in high good-humour, and that tea in camp was the most enjoyable meal any of them remembered.

And when the time came to part, Arthur Augustus, who had been turning several things over in his mind, filled his cup with weak tea and rose to propose a toast.

"Ladies and gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!"

"I have the honour to pwopose the toast of—"

"Hear, hear!"

"The Gal Scouts! I have had my doubts upon this subject, and at first I was wathah inclined to exert my authority as a cousin, and fwon upon the whole thing. But on reflection I have come to the conclusion that I was w'ong—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And I am an ass—"

"Hear, hear!"

"I am an ass—"

"Bravo!"

"I am an assuahed and convinced supportah of the ideah of patwols of Gal Scouts, therefore I wish to pwopose the toast of the Gal Scouts of the United Kingdom in genewal, and of the Curlew Patwol in particulah!"

And the toast was drunk with enthusiasm.

Cousin Ethel replied gracefully, and then, Fatty Wynn having hastily bolted the last sausage, the party broke up. The Special Patrol arrived at St. Jim's in good time for locking-up, and in high spirits—so high spirits that they could afford to take no notice of two dark-faced juniors who slunk away to avoid a meeting with them. The contest between the Girl and Boy Scouts was voted a great success, and in the next number of Tom Merry's Weekly appeared a lengthy article, signed "A.A.D.A.," in cordial praise of the Boy Scouts' Rivals!

THE END.

Another splendid complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's next Thursday, entitled "Jack Blake's Plot," by Martin Clifford. Order your "Gem" Library in advance. Price One Penny.

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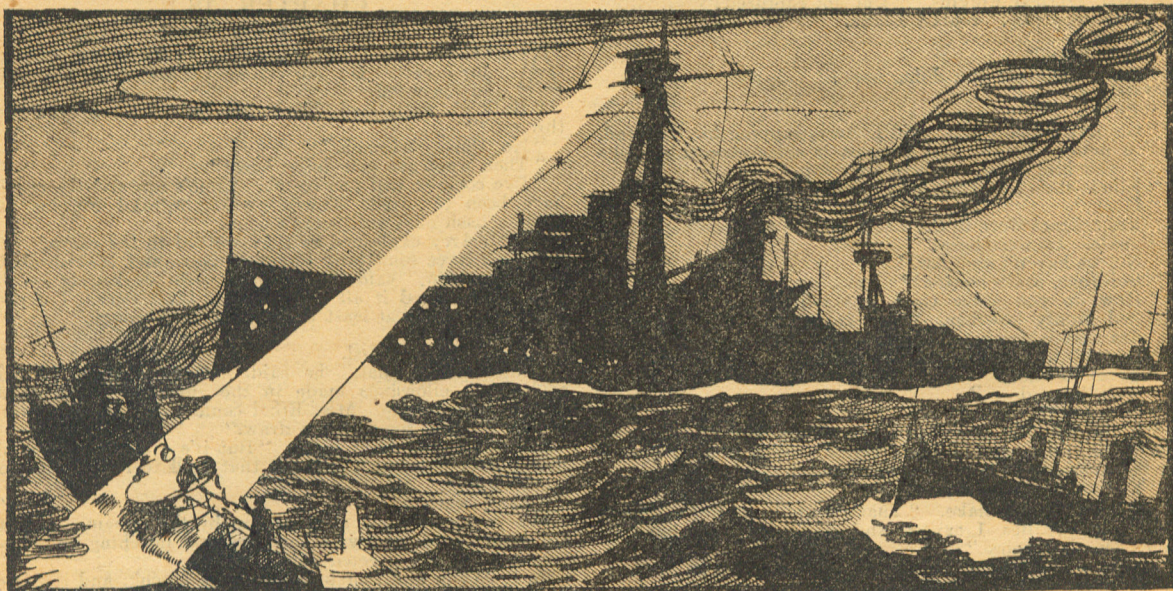
A Splendid Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.
By Martin Clifford.

NEXT
WEEK:

"JACK BLAKE'S PLOT."

Please tell your Friends about this Story.

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 and Stephen have just come up the Thames with important news for Lord Ripley. Hearing that the whole of North London is in German hands, they go thither and investigate. Before very long, however, they make the City too hot to hold them, and are forced to make for the South side of the Thames again. They attend a mass-meeting that is being held by a man named Mulholland for the purpose of forming a League of Britons against the invader. The two scouts are recognised by the crowd, and forced on to the platform. "Will you join me in the League?" asks Mulholland, with deep feeling.

(Now go on with the Story.)

The Stranding of the Vanity.

"We sha'n't be of much use to you yet; our work lies elsewhere," said Sam. "But when the time comes, we'll be proud if you'll let us add our little help. When do you think the thing will come to a head, and the real rising can take place?"

"It will take ten days or a fortnight to prepare," said Mulholland. "We must make no blunder, and the work before us is immense. We have to arm and warn all the able-bodied men, and arrange a code. Fortunately, I have all the details well ahead already. But a fortnight will see us through. I want you with us, if the regulars can spare you. All classes have such faith in your luck."

"Like the goat that marches with the Welsh Fusiliers," said Stephen, laughing. "We'll be in at the death, sir, if we live till then. In the meantime, can you let us out of this building by the back way?"

The crowd were clamouring for Mulholland again; they wanted to hear what they were to do. Sam and Stephen

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slipped out quietly at the back of the platform, and were relieved to get out into the open again.

"My word, he's a queer-looking card, isn't he?" said Stephen. "But he's goin' to do this job."

"You bet he is! That's a man in ten thousand! The League'll do the work."

"If the Germans let 'em start."

"How can they help it? They can't police the whole country. He'll get the arms in, an' see it through. Most likely the enemy'll pooh-pooh the whole thing. Well, they'll learn their error. There'll be rivers of blood, but Britain will come out on top. Hallo—who's there? Ned, by jingo!

It was Ned of Northey sure enough. His smack had been lying in the Surrey Docks since the boys came up in her.

"I didn't expect to meet you, gents," he said, "but was hopin' I'd chance on you pretty bad. Your mother an' sisters are here, aboard your father's yacht in the lower docks. They're goin' out by sea, an' when I told the lady you were about, she'd never rest till I found you."

"Mother and the girls!" exclaimed Stephen. "Good heavens!"

"Let's get there at once!" said Sam. "I never knew they were in London. An' I wish they weren't, though I'm dyin' to see them."

It was with anxious feelings that the boys set out for the docks, and there they found their father's steam-yacht, a fast-looking, white vessel of fifty tons measurement. A minute later, Mrs. Villiers was embracing both the boys in the saloon, and Daisy and Madge, their two sisters, were laughing and crying over them by turns.

"My boys," said the silver-haired old lady, her voice quivering, "there is no mother in Britain prouder of her sons than I. We know the work you have done."

"We haven't done much. Where's the dad, and how is he?" said Stephen, in a breath.

"Your father and his troop of Yeomanry are out to the westward, and have done some fine work, too. He has been wounded, but is all right now, and in the saddle again."

"But what brings you here, mother?" exclaimed Sam. "It's the last place I'd wish to see you in. The danger—"

"You see, Aubrey, when we left Cotehill Towers, we were forced to abandon our next refuge, and went to live at

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By Martin Clifford.

Windsor. But there is so much fighting threatened there now that your father insisted on our leaving for safer quarters. We are going to your uncle's house, near Newhaven."

"But why not go overland? It's much safer."

"Well, my dear boy, I came into London one day by motor, because I heard our old housekeeper was ill here; and the misery of the place overcame me," said the old lady, sighing. "I could not bear to leave so much suffering behind and do nothing, as we are still well off. Your father's yacht has been at Chatham since the war began. When I heard the Germans were driven from the Medway, I ordered her to be brought up here, and I am going to take as many poor little children, who are starving here, as I can. We shall go to Newhaven by sea."

"But it's not safe. Why not go by rail?" insisted Sam.

"It is safe," said the old lady obstinately. "Do not dictate to me, Aubrey. The German ships are all driven out of the Channel. The southern railways are in such a state now that it is quicker and more certain to go by sea. We start to-night."

Sam knew it was useless to argue with his mother when she had made up her mind.

"Well, perhaps it's as good as any other way now," he said; "but we shall come with you, mother."

"Oh, do!" cried Daisy; and the other sister echoed her. They were both burning to see more of the brothers who had been so long away and done so much. They had all been the best of chums together at Cotehall.

"You bet we will," said Sam. "In the meantime, we've several things to do before we go, so we'll do 'em an' join you before you sail. On the early morning tide is it? All right."

The boys left at once to see Devine and report their departure. If ever there was a time when they were glad not to be attached to any corps, or answerable to any superior, it was now.

"The League an' the scoutin' will have to do without us for a couple of days," said Sam. "We aren't so important that it'll make a difference to anybody, an' I mean to see the mater and girls safe before we start campaigning again."

"Sha'n't be sorry to get another sniff of sea, either," said Stephen. "It'll be plain sailing enough down Thames and round to Newhaven. There'll be no German vessels for miles. The only thing I don't like about the trip is Fowkes, the yacht's skipper."

"That's one of the chief reasons I'm going," said Sam. "I wonder the governor didn't sack him long ago. Don't fancy him a little bit for a job like this."

"You don't think he's a coward?"

"Oh, no; not that! But he's a sulky, pig-headed chap, and I don't believe he's really competent. He's no sailor."

"Not much sailing wanted to take a steam-yacht round to Newhaven in fine weather," observed Stephen. "However, we'll see."

The day had dawned some time when the steam yacht Vanity glided out of dock and headed down the river. Sam was standing near the bridge, and his sister Madge came out and watched the vessel thread her way down.

"It's the funniest freight the Vanity ever carried, Aubrey, I should say," she remarked. "We've got eighteen kiddies down below, most of them squalling, and some in arms. Their mothers were glad to get them into safe quarters. Mamma and Daisy are feeding 'em with condensed milk, and it's my spell on deck. How foggy it is!"

"Yes," said Sam, "it's pretty thick. Rather an advantage, as it saves us bein' sniped by any stray shots from playful Germans on the north banks. You'd better get below, Madge."

The girl—who was as much a Villiers in pluck as her brothers—refused, however. She liked the excitement; and as there was really no danger, in the mist, of any rifle-shooting, Sam did not insist.

As they passed Gravesend, and the weather became thicker still, Sam became anxious. It was so foggy that once into Sea Reach they could hardly make out the shores on either side, and soon these faded from view altogether, while the swell rolled in slowly from the sea.

"I wish it'd clear," said Sam. "It'd be awkward if we went aground, and the sands run so far out."

"Especially on the north side from the Essex shore," said Stephen.

Sam looked grave. The Chapman lighthouse, its spidery iron legs standing on the outer edge of the sands, came vaguely into view, and was lost again. Then a black-and-white buoy was seen—one of the Kentish ones—on the Blyth boat. After that, the fog shut in everything, and the yacht teamed steadily ahead for the open sea.

Sam moved nearer the skipper, so that he could see theinnacle compass and notice the course that was being

steered. The boy's anxiety grew stronger and stronger. He knew every inch of the Thames Mouth and East Coast, and he doubted whether Captain Fowkes did, for he was a deep-water skipper.

"A good way to the norr'ard, aren't we, skipper?" Sam eventually asked the captain.

"Norr'ard? No! D'ye think I don't know where I'm going?" grunted Captain Fowkes.

"I should bear away to starboard, if I were you. We must be very close to the Maplin Sands."

"Maplin Sands be hanged! We're a mile to the south of 'em. Don't you try to interfere with me, young sir! I'm responsible to your father, an' to no one else, an' don't you forget it. This ship—"

There was a bump and a grinding, scraping noise; a wave surged past, and the Vanity was hard and fast aground.

Captain Fowkes was in a fury. He put his helm hard over; he rang his engines full speed astern, and bawled orders by the dozen, but to no purpose.

"She's stuck like a limpet," said Sam grimly, "and won't come off till next flood, for the tide's falling fast—that is, if she ever comes off at all."

Mrs. Villiers and Daisy came on deck to inquire anxiously what the trouble was. Captain Fowkes blew a shrill blast on the steam-whistle.

"Stop that noise!" said Sam sharply. "You thick-headed ass, you're giving us away! Here, stop it, or I'll make an example of you!" he added, striding forward angrily.

"You leave me alone," snapped the skipper. "We're on the Cant Edge, Kentish side, and that'll bring a tug out of the Medway to pull us off. You—"

"Cant Edge? We're on the Maplins, you idiot!" said Sam impatiently. "Hark!"

A bugle rang out, not far distant, loud and clear.

"What did I tell you?" growled Fowkes. "That's our soldiers at Sheerness."

"I wish to Heaven it were!" said Sam bitterly. "That is from the German troops at Shoebury, and we're stuck fast on their side!"

There was a sensation among the crew. Captain Fowkes denied it hotly.

"And it's likely enough they can see us, or our masts, though we can't see them," added Sam grimly. "The fog's thinning, and there's the sand showing fifty yards inside us. We'll be high and dry in half an hour, and they'll seize the yacht as soon as the fog lifts. Get the boat in the water."

"There is no boat fit to use. It's stove in," said Fowkes. Sam turned on him savagely.

"I'll deal with you presently, you lout, for putting to sea like this, and endangering women and girls! Yes; I'm to blame for letting you do it. Are there any rifles on board? Let the men be armed at once, in case the fog lifts and we're attacked. See to it, Stephen."

In a twinkling Stephen had eight Marlin rifles out of the after-cabin, and ammunition, which he served out to the yacht's crew, who were all smart men and willing enough.

He had scarcely done it when a warm wind blew through the fog. The veil of haze lifted like a blanket, and showed the morning sun shining on the sands and the shore beyond.

A cry broke from the men. The yacht was on the Shoebury, or Essex, side, as Sam had said, and out over the broad sands, even now, two companies of Saxon riflemen were advancing quickly towards the yacht, while Uhlands cantered over the beach nearer shore.

"They're coming for us!" cried the bo'sun.

"Get below, mother—quick!" said Sam, kneeling at his place behind the bulwarks. "Take the girls with you. We must do what we can. Let no man fire till I give—"

Crack went a rifle from the fore-deck. A man fell in the German ranks; and instantly the enemy halted, and, dropping to one knee, they fired a rattling volley.

The bullets sang over the yacht and rattled on her plating. A sharp cry broke from Fowkes's lips, and he fell heavily to the deck, and lay there limp and still, while a bullet drilled one of the fo'c's'le hands through the shoulder. Then, with a hoarse shout, the Saxons sprang up and doubled towards the stranded yacht at full speed.

The Germans' Bluff.

"Get below quickly! Don't wait!" cried Stephen, in an agony of anxiety for his mother and sisters, for they were not yet down the companion-way when the bullets began to fly.

Mrs. Villiers looked as though she would as soon have stayed on deck with her sons, danger or no danger. But Stephen meant to take no chances. He hurried them below, and locked the hatch on them to make sure.

"Who fired there without orders?" cried Sam, with anything but a blessing on the man who had forced the attack so soon. "The next man who disobeys I'll shoot him myself! You hear, on the fore-deck there? Now let 'em have it!"

"That fool nearly got the mater shot!" muttered Stephen, as he dropped on his knees behind the bulwarks and took a rapid sight along his rifle. He was paler than Sam had ever seen him. "This is a ghastly business. If only those sailors forward there could shoot!"

With a rattle of breech-blocks the firing opened, and, to the surprise and relief of both the boys, they saw the yacht's crew could not only shoot, but shoot well.

Eight or nine men pitched forward out of the front ranks of the attacking Saxons at the first discharge, and the sailors handled their weapons as quickly as experts. They were nearly all Brightlingsea men, and members of the Colechester Rifle Club, and several of them had seen service up to the taking of London by the Germans.

"By glory, I believe we can hold this lot off!" said Stephen, firing swiftly and accurately, accounting for his man at each shot; "though it can't do us much good in the end."

Not another word was spoken on the yacht. Every man handled his rifle in silence and with all the skill he could muster, his teeth tight shut, and his eyes measuring the distance.

The broad yellow sands stretched out over half a mile from the low shore of Shoebury, and the enemy had plenty of ground to cover before they reached the yacht. One company was a little behind the other, and they raced down towards the vessel with all the speed they could muster, encouraged by their officers.

At first glance it looked as though the Vanity was doomed to be captured within a minute or more, for the Saxons were already half-way. But the sudden stiffening of the defence put a very different aspect on the fight.

The range was short, the approach as flat as a billiard-table, and the Marlin repeating rifles, though not good enough for long-range fighting, were better than Army weapons in such a strait as this. They allowed the defenders to pump in shot after shot almost with the rapidity of revolvers, and it told on the enemy heavily.

"Keep it going!" cried Sam, his spirits rising. "Steady an' sure! Let 'em have it low!"

The Saxons were charging now in desperate silence. They outnumbered the little crew of defenders by four to one, but it is very hard for infantry to advance across open ground in the face of modern rifle fire.

In this case it proved impossible. The companies had left an increasing trail of dead and wounded the whole way across the sands, and more than half of them were down. To halt and return the fire from the bare sands, and with no cover, would have been madness.

In response to Sam's call the shooting increased still more viciously, and so great was their loss when still three hundred yards from the yacht that the Saxons began to waver, in spite of their officers' cries of encouragement.

They almost halted; and as the pitiless Marlins concentrated their fire on them the men fell like ninepins.

"They're breaking! They're done!" cried Stephen.

Even the officer now abandoned the hope of storming with the men that were left, for it looked as though not one would reach the yacht's side alive.

The command was given, and the Saxons scattered and fled back for the land, pursued by accurate, deadly shooting from the yacht's crew.

A rousing cheer rang over the sands from the Brightlingsea men as they saw the foe turn tail and run.

"Well done!" cried Sam. "Very pretty shootin'! How are you off for ammunition?"

"Not too much of it, sir, I'm afraid," said the mate. "We've used about a third."

"Cease firin', then. They'll be comin' on again in a minute. Don't waste a cartridge."

He was right. Already two more companies had been brought out, and joined the broken ranks of the first under the sea-wall.

"We'd better rig up some coal-sacks for cover, for a heavy rifle fire from the lot of 'em'll make things hot for us," said Stephen.

"They won't do that," returned Sam, breaking another packet of cartridges. "I wish they would. They know we've got real good cover here, an' if they tried it we could hold out long enough for the tide to float us an' get away. They'll storm her without delay, for they mean havin' her. Here they come! Give it 'em, lads!"

Again the rifles cracked and spat, opening fire the moment the enemy started. There were double the number of men this time, and they advanced at a greater speed.

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NEXT WEEK:

"JACK BLAKE'S PLOT."

Already the Marlins were telling on them, and Stephen wondered that the German commander at Shoebury should risk so many men to capture a private yacht.

"Do they know we're aboard?" he said, as he crammed a fresh cartridge into the Marlin's magazine.

"Don't flatter yourselves we're so important," laughed Sam grimly. "It's the vessel they mean to have. They reckoned to get her easily, an' they can't afford to be beaten off now they've started."

It did not explain to Stephen why they should want her so badly; but there was no time to hazard guesses just then. The Saxons were coming on in very open order now, and better shooting was needed to make any impression on them.

"They'll reach us this time," said Sam quietly.

It was soon evident that the Saxons could not be stopped twice. Their greater numbers and more scattered advance made it impossible to hold them back with so small a force as defended the yacht.

Stephen said nothing. He was picking out the officers of the attacking companies, and dropping them with quickly-taken and unerring aim. Much was in his favour—the bare sands, the morning light, and the perfect accuracy of the Marlin's sights. Each uniform that betokened a commissioned officer was instantly a mark for his rifle, and not once did he miss. He knew well that the force which loses its leaders was half as weak again, and he was fighting always with the thought foremost in his mind of those in the cabin who depended on the defence.

On came the companies, grim and silent and determined, their boots spurning the wet sand as they ran. Their loss had been heavy. The number of dead that had lain on the sands was now doubled, and less than a half of those who started reached the goal.

"Meet them with the butt when they reach us!" shouted Sam. "Remember, every man of you is fighting for his life, and those who are taken prisoners will be shot!"

The yachtsmen knew it too well. They were all civilians, not belonging to any recognised service, and would get no mercy if taken in arms against the Kaiser. Grimly each man rose up to do his utmost.

One last rattling discharge of the rifles, that stretched out eight or nine of the foe, and then the Saxons were upon the defenders.

Upon them—round them, rather. The Vanity's sides were high and steep, and there was yet water round her. The foremost of the storming-party sprang up at her, and some reached and grasped her rail by a nimble spring, but the heavy Marlin butts, wielded by brawny British arms, crashed upon their spiked helmets and through to the heads beneath. Down went the assailants limply back into the shoal water, and the others swarmed up thickly.

The rest was a furious melee, in which butt and bullet were used as served best, and those on deck battled like fiends to keep the sacred planking guarded.

Not till now did the Saxons fully realise what a task they had set themselves. It was not like storming the side of a stranded sailing-vessel, with plates and channels to help them to climb, nor a low-sided torpedo-boat. The smooth white walls of the Vanity's free-board, and her rounded bilge, made it impossible to get any foothold, and it was only the tallest and most agile that could as much as get their fingers on her rail by a powerful spring.

Standing high above the enemy, wielding their clubbed rifles, the defenders had all the advantage, and in the first two rushes a round dozen of the Saxons were laid out with split skulls or with bullets through them, nor had they been able to as much as reach the little crew. The vessel that had looked such an easy prey from the shore now showed herself a terribly hard nut to crack, and even the yachtsmen were surprised at the ease with which they were able to hold her against the storming-party. Only one side was open to attack, and the whirling rifle-butts defended every inch of it. The two attacks were made and beaten off in the space of barely two minutes.

There was confusion among the enemy, too, for their leaders were out of the fight, and the responsibility fell on sergeants and corporals, who shouted contradictory orders. The leading non-commissioned officer, seeing how heavy the losses were, shouted to his men to draw back out of reach and pour in a quick volley. Sam heard the order, and knew that one discharge would annihilate all his little party if it caught them unawares.

"Down behind the bulwarks, and pump the lead into them!" he shouted to the crew. "Shoulders only above the rail—don't show yourselves. Quick!"

The order was obeyed instantly, and no sooner had the Saxons drawn back than every man of the crew was on his knees behind the low steel-plate bulwark, and was rattling away with his Marlin into the thick of the enemy

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as they turned to fire. The hail of lead among their thinned-out ranks was the last straw to the Saxons. They replied with a ragged, shaky volley, that drummed all over the yacht and wrote great leaden splashes on the bulwarks, but only two of the crew were hit, and to face the fire from the Marlins, standing there in the open, was too much for the attacking force.

"Curse the Englanders, we can't take her like this!" yelled a man frantically, turning to fly. "They can shoot us all down! Back, and turn the guns on her!"

"We can't go back. Come on and take her!" roared the senior sergeant-major. But the men would not follow, and it was no great blame to them, for their dead already lay thick, and the merciless Marlins never ceased to ply, finding a billet at nearly every shot. The Saxons turned their backs on the fatal vessel and fled incontinently. The odds had seemed all in their favour at the start. By bitter experience they had learned it was the other way about. Less than a third of the original number were left to retreat.

"Cease firing!" cried Sam. "How many of you are hurt?"

There was one man dead, a Saxon bullet had passed between his eyes, and he lay under the bulwarks. The bo'sun was wounded through the left forearm, but had bound the wound and could still use his rifle.

"She's a death-trap to storm, this vessel!" exclaimed Stephen. "I wonder their officers tried it. I believe twenty men could hold her against an army on these open sands—barring guns."

"Ay, barring guns!" said Sam grimly. "Look there!"

Stephen whistled. He focussed the yacht's glasses on the spot Sam pointed out, and saw that two field-guns had been brought up with all haste, and were being mounted on the sea-wall.

"That's bad!" he said anxiously. "What now? We're in a tight hole this time!"

Sam's face was drawn and pale.

"It's the worst business that's ever befallen us," he said bitterly, "and I'd give my head to be out of it. It's mother and the girls we have to fear for—Steve, it's an awful thing to think of them in danger like this! And they've been brought into this awful peril by a miserable blunder that a bargeman could have kept clear of!"

"The blunderer's paid the price," said Stephen, nodding towards the captain's body, where it lay stiffening under the rail. "We must let him be. But what you say is right. I'd give my right hand to see us float off. Is there any chance of it?"

"The tide's flowing—has been for some little time. But it'll be an hour before the yacht can possibly come off—and it might as well be a year. My heaven, but this is a ghastly business!" he concluded, and he bit his lip till the blood ran. "I can never forgive myself for not taking the wheel and altering the course myself."

"They wouldn't hurt the women if the yacht were taken," said Stephen. "But it's those guns," he added wretchedly. "They'll blow the whole vessel to pieces, and wipe out everybody on board. She can't stand against shell-fire for twenty minutes!"

Sam was silent for some little time, watching them pull the field-guns into position ashore, his face white and tense.

"I don't believe that," he said at last.

"Don't believe what?"

"That they'll shell the yacht."

"Why on earth not?"

"Because they must want her too badly themselves. They'd never have risked losing all those men just to capture a handful of civilians. They'll be wanting her for a tender among the creeks and rivers here, for their troops and stores. You know how the country's cut up with water-ways hereabouts. They've lost most of their torpedo-boats and gunboats—that used to do the work—when our Fleet cleared the Thames and our torpedo flotilla wiped out theirs. The Vanity's big an' fast, an' she'd be a godsend to them."

"Then why the dickens are they mounting guns?" cried Stephen. "You don't suppose—"

"They mean it for a bluff, I believe," said Sam quietly, "counting on scaring us. But one shell sent home in this yacht would do for her as a vessel. They couldn't repair her, an' she'd sink as soon as the tide flows. I don't believe they mean hitting her."

Stephen shook his head. He thought Sam's idea much too hopeful, and the guns ashore were a grim reality. They were already in position.

"Keep the deck," said Sam. "I'm going below to see the mater."

He went down the companion-way, and found his mother and the girls, white but quite composed, attending to their duties among the cargo of rescued babies. It heartened

him the more to see the courage they showed, boxed up there below decks, while the fight had raged outside.

"You've beaten them off!" cried Daisy, running towards him. "I knew you would, Aubrey. Is everybody safe?"

"Most of us are for the present," said Sam. "Yes, Steve's quite sound, and fought the best of us all. Wish I were as good a shot. But—"

"Will they attack again?" said Mrs. Villiers, laying her hand on her son's arm anxiously.

"They may," said Sam; "but I want to tell you that you're all quite safe. We'll see you come to no harm, and the Germans won't hurt you and the girls, whatever happens. They'll see you safe ashore."

"But you!" cried Mrs. Villiers. "You won't let yourselves be taken, boys! I see what you mean. But you shall not surrender to save us—they would shoot you. I know they have threatened to do it long before. Aubrey, you shall not do it. We will—"

"You're only imagining things, mother," said Sam, smiling. "It's not so bad as that. You must leave it to us on deck."

He embraced his mother and sister with more affection than he had ever done before, and his eyes were a little moist as he left the cabin. But he was quickly on deck again, and battened the hatch down.

"How goes it?" he said to Stephen.

"The guns are ready an' their crews are by them. But there are several Germans away yonder at the flagstaff by the old artillery station. I've been watching 'em. There goes the first gun!"

Boom! came the first report, and a shell sung murderously over the yacht, a little distance above their heads. At the same time a string of four flags fluttered up to the peak of the flagstaff ashore.

"Meant for a threat and a warning," said Sam grimly. "That's an international code signal. Get the book out of the chart-house, Steve, and read it."

Steve was back with the book in a few seconds. He was used to code-signalling, and looking them up rapidly as they were hoisted, he read their meaning.

"If white flag not hoisted and yacht surrendered within two minutes, vessel will be bombarded and destroyed."

"Thanks," said Sam quietly. He thought for a moment. "Bo'sun, get a square of white cloth and bend it to the flag-halyards. Stand by, and don't hoist without orders."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Pass the word below for the engineer to keep full power up, and to stand by the throttle."

"You're goin' to give her up, then?" said Stephen.

Sam turned to him, and the boy's face showed the struggle he was undergoing.

"If they mean smashing her up," he said hoarsely, "we've got to hoist that rag an' give in for the sake of the folk below. They won't be hurt. I shall scuttle the ship before she's reached, so that the Germans can't use her. They'll shoot us, of course. But mother and the girls will be safe enough. It's only in the London riots they've shot women."

Stephen nodded.

"They'll be safe," he said. "Then when the first shall hit her—"

"Up goes the white flag."

"It's a beastly thing to have to do; when it's done they may shoot me an' welcome," said Stephen, with a gulp. "We've never come to that yet, but it's got to be done."

"Time's up," said Sam, who had been mentally counting. And before the words were out of his mouth the guns opened fire.

The shells came howling over the waste of sands like wolves hungry for slaughter, and each gun spouted its charge in turn. They were well served and fired rapidly.

But they seemed to be very badly laid. Most of the shells passed clean overhead and plunged into the sea beyond. Others tore up great furrows of sand and burst short. The deadly whir and roar of the projectiles was enough to shake the nerves of anyone new to warfare, for the air seemed to be full of them, and appallingly close. But the boys kept cool heads, for they saw that not one touched the vessel.

"You were right, by gum!" exclaimed Stephen. "They're bluffing us!"

"It may be only for a little time, though," muttered Stephen. "They may slap it right into us when they find we're holding out."

The gunfire continued, and the strain was intense for all hands on board. The bo'sun at the flag-halyards stood waiting for orders that did not come. Sam made no sign.

It seemed amazing that the yacht was not blown to pieces. The shells appeared to be bursting all around, and yet she seemed to the sailors, who did not know of Sam's belief,

to bear a charmed life. It was wonderful to see the projectiles tear up the water and sand about her, and yet leave her unhurt.

"By Jove, they know how to handle those guns!" murmured Stephen. "They'll get sick of this soon."

It was becoming pretty evident what was intended, even to those not "in the know." Some of the yacht hands, sitting under the bulwarks, began to laugh contemptuously, and in a little while no one could help seeing that the shells were not meant to come aboard at all. Stephen wondered why the enemy did not fire shrapnel to annihilate the crew, at least. But he reflected that shrapnel, at such short range, could not be used accurately, and at the distance would wreck the yacht almost as much as shell-fire.

"How long are they goin' to keep it up?" said Stephen. "If they'll only give us time, is there any chance of her floating?" he cried eagerly.

Sam shook his head as he glanced at the water. It had deepened considerably round the vessel, and was running in over the sands in a thin film.

"She wants another two feet before her engines'll shift her."

"We shall get it if they go on playin' the fool another half-hour!"

"Not they!" said Sam grimly. "Look at the men massing there by the sea-wall. They've got a whole battalion together, down from the camp. They mean to make it a certainty this time, an' they mean havin' the yacht."

"We'll need all our ammunition!" said Stephen anxiously. And his brother gave a bitter laugh.

"We shall do our best, but it'll be little enough now. We stopped two short companies by the skin of our teeth, but we can no more stop that lot than put wings on the yacht an' make her fly. Ten minutes'll do it, an' we need half an hour."

With beating hearts the boys watched the Saxon battalion make ready for the attack. It looked almost absurd—like sending an army to storm a toy fort. But the enemy had learned the lesson. They intended making sure, nor had they any intention of letting the coveted vessel slip out of their grasp, nor her crew go unpunished for the havoc they had done.

"There they come!" said Stephen, between his teeth, as a bugle rang out the notes of the German "Charge!"

The Saxons seemed to roll out from the shore in one wide, swift-moving, grey mass. The sands were covered swiftly, and the defenders' rifles opened fire again.

It was with a very different result this time. Among such numbers, the execution they did was hardly noticeable. A child could have seen that the defenders, now even weaker than before, might as well try to stop the flood tide itself as to check such an attack as that.

All hands were fighting grimly, with the one object of selling their lives as dearly as might be, when one of the yachtsmen, glancing over his shoulder, uttered a cry of surprise, and pointed to the southward.

Over the dancing waves, yet some distance off, came a long, low, strange-looking vessel at bewildering speed, a pillar of snowy foam before her bows, and black smoke and red flame streaming aft from her funnels. She had come out through the Medway's mouth, three miles away on the Kentish shore, and was hurling herself towards the stranded yacht like a living thing.

For a moment the defenders stared at her, unable to guess whether she were friend or foe, when a shout broke from Stephen's lips:

"It's the Sausage, as I'm a living sinner!"

Before Sam could make any reply, the torpedo-boat—for such she was—swept round in a great curve at full speed, and opened fire with a crash and a rattle, right into the on-coming ranks of the enemy on the sands.

A wild, heart-felt cheer went up from the Vanity's crew as the deadly fire was suddenly hurled from the stranger. The boys were so astonished at this Heaven-sent help that for some moments they could do nothing but stare.

Could it be the Sausage? (Stephen's unromantic name had clung to the captured torpedo-boat ever since he gave it her.) The hail of fire that came from her seemed to make it impossible. She was hurling shells at the rate of a destroyer, and the Sausage used to mount only one small quick-firer and two Maxims.

"It is her!" shouted Sam. "Bob's there on her bridge! Hurrah!"

Round came the torpedo-boat, and, tearing past the stranded Vanity, she kept her guns going with unerring power. The Saxons were already within a couple of hundred yards of the yacht when she began, and the effect on them was just what might have been expected. The sudden outburst of heavy machine-gun fire simply crumpled them.

In that short space of time the balance of the fight was

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 78.

NEXT WEEK; "JACK BLAKE'S PLOT."

turned. The Saxons tried to push on swiftly, and seize the Vanity by weight of numbers. But they were doomed.

Skimming round like a swallow, and poising herself at the edge of the deep water, nearly abreast the Vanity, and a hundred yards away, so that she could command the whole front, her guns swept the Saxon line from end to end, as a hose sweeps a garden border.

Those on the yacht looked on, and even though the victory meant life for them when they had expected certain death, they were awe-struck. The breaking of the Saxons was a terrible thing to see.

In full view, and with no cover within half a mile, they had to face the torpedo-boat's deadly battery, or fall. She carried a twelve-pounder and six-pounder Nordenfeldt quick-firers, a naval "pom-pom" throwing a hundred one-pounder shells to the minute, and four Maxims. All were perfectly served by the bluejacket gunners, and before them the Saxons went down like grass under a scythe.

The German guns ashore could give no help, for their men were right in line with the yacht and the torpedo-boat, and over-close. The Vanity's crew, after one long cheer, looked on in eager silence. They saw Cavendish, cool and spruce on his bridge, his white-covered cap showing plain in the sunlight as he directed the gun-fire. The gunners did their work like trained machines.

"Good old Bob!" said Stephen, with a sudden lump in his throat. "He's saved us, and all we were fighting for. They—"

"Rouse out there!" cried Sam sharply. "Get a wire hawser up as quick as you can! Bend a manilla bridle to it, and make it fast! Not to the bollards, they won't hold! Put it right round the hatch! Bend on a line ready to throw out!"

"By gum, yes—he'll pluck us off," cried Stephen, "if there's water enough!"

"If he doesn't, the German guns'll finish us as soon as their men fall back! Hurry there!" cried Sam, and, springing on to the bridge, he gripped the lever of the engine-room telegraph.

The moment the Saxons broke and fell back—as nothing could save them from doing before such a fire—Cavendish swept the Sausage round again, and came skimming up to the Vanity, lying to a few yards outside her, where the deep water began, and still keeping his forward guns going.

"Look sharp with your line!" he called. "Got it ready? Good men!"

A line went whizzing through the air from the Vanity's stern, and was deftly caught by a bluejacket on the torpedo-boat, whose crew rapidly hauled in the wire hawser that was attached to it. This they passed round their own after-hatch in the twinkling of an eye—preferring not to trust to bollards to hold it—and as Cavendish rang on his engines, Sam did the same.

The hawser tautened like a bar, and then came a time of tense anxiety. Would the yacht come off? Her own engines alone could not have moved her, though they were going hard, and the Sausage was straining at the hawser with all her power. If there were much delay the German guns would yet win their revenge.

"She doesn't move!" gasped Stephen anxiously.

Cavendish kept his Maxims pouring their belt-loads into the broken Saxon battalion that had tried to rally, while both his heavier pieces were firing furiously at the two German field-guns on the distant sea-wall. The latter were not masked. Their crews had no protection from the storm of British shells, for they had never dreamed of meeting with naval guns, and it kept their gunners back. So rapid and accurate was the aim of the bluejackets that at the time no man could stand to the German gunlimbers. The Vanity was so firmly fixed that it seemed impossible she could be moved for another twenty minutes at least.

But the enormously-powerful engines of the torpedo-boat did their work. Cavendish kept them going at full speed, not caring how much he strained his own prize nor the yacht, provided he got her off, and every second was precious.

"She's moving!" cried Stephen.

The Vanity groaned and quivered. It seemed the thick steel hawser must snap. But next moment the yacht gave a trifle, gave again, and then slid suddenly off into deep water with a rush, amid a cheer from her crew that echoed far over the sea.

"Round with her and away!" shouted Cavendish to Sam, his guns pounding the flying Saxons and the silent German guns. "I'll keep 'em busy if I can, while you get out of it. Straight for Sheerness!"

The cheer had not died out on board the Vanity when Sam took Cavendish at his word. He rang the engines to full speed ahead, and twisted the yacht round as nimbly as her steering-gear could take her. After the escape she had

made there was nothing to be gained by risking her again before the Saxon guns.

"At the battery on the wall! Nine hundred yards! Fire at nothing else!" cried Cavendish to his gunners. "Play on their guns for all you're worth! Go ahead, Sam—we'll catch you up presently!"

Away went the Vanity with every ounce of speed her engines could show. The welcome haven of Sheerness lay right before her, no great distance away, and Sam was aching to be inside it, and to place his well-loved human freight in safety.

Meantime, the torpedo-boat gallantly held off the German fire. Every gun that could bear strained upon the battery on the sea-wall. While she fired she backed away rapidly after the Vanity, knowing well that all depended on keeping the Saxon artillerymen back from those powerful field-guns till both were out of range.

But it could not be done for long. The Saxons, enraged at the thought of losing their prey, pressed forward to their guns under cover of a couple of carts filled with sand-bags, and forced upon the wall. Their artillerymen reached the battery, and instantly began to reply.

Swiftly the torpedo-boat was backing out, all her guns going hard, and soon she would have been out of reach. But it was too late. With deadly accuracy the field-guns hurled their shells after her, and, after a single miss, the projectiles struck home.

The frail craft crumpled under the shock like a band-box. Three sharp explosions burst aboard her, a shell tore open her bows, another wrecked her rudder and stern, while a third plunged into her quarter, full on the water-line.

"They've got her!" cried Stephen, on the flying Vanity. "She's going down!"

With the water pouring in like an avalanche at all three of her gaping wounds, the torpedo-boat reeled and sank, the sea closed over her buckled decks, and down she went, every gun spouting defiance at the enemy even in her death-throes.

The Last of the Sausage—The Saxons are Lenient.

"Sam," cried Stephen wildly, "we can't leave them to die!"

There was one moment of horror on board the flying Vanity, as her crew saw the smashed torpedo-boat slowly go down, till the waters joined across her decks. The Saxon shells, sent with deadly accuracy, had sealed the frail vessel's fate with amazing swiftness. And to the very last, Cavendish, cool and collected as ever, remained on the bridge and directed the firing of his gun-crews. Not till she was near her final plunge into the depths did he give the order to jump.

Sam's face was white and set. The yacht was all but out of danger by then, and those in the cabin, who had been waiting with much anxiety, were practically snatched from the jaws of death. Yet, for the honour of everybody on board, the young commander could not hesitate.

"Hard over!" he said to his steersman. "Round with her, though they'll sink us too! We can't leave Cavendish and his crew to drown!"

"And I thought we'd got our folk out of it at last!" said Stephen, between his teeth. "But mother herself wouldn't wish any different. Bob's givin' his ship an' his life to save us—to run away an' let him perish ain't to be thought of!"

Sam took the wheel himself, and the engines going at their utmost speed, the swift steam-yacht turned and raced back to the scene of the disaster. The Saxon guns had ceased firing, seeing that the Sausage had received her death-blow, and for the moment there was silence.

"Fire away!" said Sam, bitterly. "Turn your battery on us, you beggars ashore! We shall go down still easier than the other. One good shell 'll finish us!"

"They're waitin' to get us in full range," muttered Stephen.

In a very short time the Vanity had reached the spot where the torpedo-boat went down, and stopped sharply. The vessel had sunk very quietly, and as far as the boys could tell, she had not blown up. In the yeasty water that marked her disappearance, the heads of the crew could be seen bobbing over the short swells as they swam.

"Stream as many lines as you've got over the side!" shouted Sam to his crew. "Sling out life-buoys to the ones that need 'em most, and stand by with some rope-coils!"

The life-buoys went splashing out towards those who were apparently injured and in difficulties, and already two of the crew had lines thrown to them, and were hauled swiftly in. Foremost among the stronger swimmers was Cavendish.

"Pull round and clear out, you fools!" he shouted. "They'll sink you before you can say 'knife!' Leave us alone—we can swim to the sands, some of us!"

"An' be caught an' shot," said Stephen, helping one of the torpedo-gunners up the side.

"Shut up, Bob—I command this vessel," said Sam. "Get aboard as sharp as you can. The longer you keep me waiting, the worse for us."

Cavendish was aboard in another thirty seconds, and helping to rescue McBaine, the engineer, who came up the side streaming water like a Newfoundland dog. They had been all too absorbed in the work of rescue to pay attention to anything else, and it occurred to Stephen first that they were not under fire as yet, though in easy range.

"Are they waitin' till we've got 'em all aboard, to make sure of us?" he muttered, with a quick glance shorewards.

The tide was fast covering the sands, and the Saxon guns were still silent.

"I don't believe they mean to fire on us at all!" exclaimed Sam. "Are they satisfied with having sunk the torpedo-boat?"

Nobody had any time to give a thought to the question, however. Most of them expected the bursting shells about their ears at any moment, and the rescuing, since the Vanity had no boat, was anxious and difficult work. But it was done with sailor-like smartness. All those who were swimming had been hauled aboard within a few minutes; some of them very exhausted. And when not another was to be seen on the surface of the water, Sam gave the word, and away careered the Vanity again towards Sheerness.

Then, for the first time, everybody had leisure to be astonished at their safety from the enemy's guns. Each moment the Vanity drew further away at racing speed, but not a shot was fired from the shore.

"Great James," cried Stephen, "they're letting us off! There's some decency in 'em, though we never gave 'em credit for it. They draw the line at firin' into a rescue-party. They mean to let us go clear!"

"Their commander's a gentleman then, by gum," exclaimed Sam, with a great breath of relief, "an' we'll salute him for one! Aft there; dip the flag!"

The British colours on the yacht's poop-staff were dipped in salute, and to the surprise of all hands the flag on the enemy's distant flagstaff at Shoebury, now only just visible, lowered in reply and went up again. It made Stephen feel a little lumpy in the throat to see it, for the German commanding-officer was saluting the survivors of a hard-fought and gallant action, in which he had suffered very heavy losses himself.

"Their skipper's a white man, whoever he may be," said Cavendish, wringing the water out of his jacket. "I owe him the loss of my ship, but he's a white man all the way. It wouldn't have been any wonder if he'd taken a full revenge on us, considerin' the men he's lost."

"I call it jolly decent of the Saxons," Stephen replied, in heartfelt tones. "They'd got the yacht at their mercy, then, while we pulled you chaps out. A Prussian corps wouldn't have done it—they'd have sent us all to the bottom!"

"We're well out of the ugliest fix I ever was in," said Sam, "an' we owe it all to you, Bob," he added, gripping Cavendish's hand. "My word, but the way you came up an' knocked the dust out of 'em was splendid!"

"Saw you from Sheerness, through the fort telescope," said Cavendish, "though I didn't know who it was till we came up. You bet, I hopped aboard sharp, and good old Mac had got steam up ready for a cruise eastwards, luckily. What did you think of my new guns? I pinched 'em off a wrecked third-class cruiser that was brought in, an' made the old Sausage bristle like a little battleship. That twelve-pounder was a beauty!"

"We owe our lives to you an' the guns, that's sure. They'd got us as safe as houses if you hadn't arrived."

"Your pickin' us up squared that," said Cavendish. "I thought you'd be asses enough to come back, somehow."

"We never expected to find so many of you. You're all here, aren't you? How the—"

"No," said Cavendish, "poor Bates and Hunter are gone. They were crippled before she sank, I think, for I never saw them again after we found ourselves in the water. We got off lightly, as you say, but those three shells, though they opened her out like a sardine-can, didn't kill any of my men. They burst inside her, you see, an' luckily the boilers an' stokehold weren't hit. She went down very easily, an' Mac an' his stokers had time to come up from below. If she blew up, it was after she touched bottom. Mac closed the bulkheads and hatch before he left."

"There are some good men gone," said Sam. "Rest their souls. But we've got off easily, considering what a tough affair it was." He called to his crew: "Men, we're out of it at last, and I wish there was time to give you the thanks you deserve for a plucky fight. That we'll attend to later. Fall to, and help the wounded below."

"How on earth did you get into such a fix?" said Cavendish, while it was being done.

Sam told him briefly, and the young officer whistled. The boys did not dwell on the unlucky captain's mistake, and as

soon as the wounded were below the bodies of the two dead men were laid in the forepeak, reverently, out of sight, and a Union Jack placed over them.

"Run out the hose and wash down," was Sam's next order. "Our decks are an ugly sight still," he added in a lower voice, "and I don't want my mother and the girls to have any more shocks. They've had an awful time of it as it is. Thank Heaven, they're safely out of range at last!"

"Your mother!" exclaimed Cavendish, in amazement.

"Yes, my mother an' sisters," said Sam; and he explained how the cruise had been arranged. "I can tell you, I felt worse durin' the last hour than I ever have in my life."

"It's been awful!" sighed Stephen. "But, I say, d'you hear 'em rappin' on the hatch?"

"Keep 'em below for a bit," said Sam hurriedly. "Hurry up an' finish with that hose, men!"

Not till the last grim traces of the recent fight were removed, and the decks white again, did Stephen open the hatch. Mrs. Villiers and the two girls emerged, looking very white, but still calm.

"My boys!" said the white-haired lady, with a sob of relief. "You are safe, then! Are we out of danger?"

"Yes, mother; there's nothing more to fear. Our troubles are over."

"Then let us give thanks for this great deliverance," said Mrs. Villiers quietly, "before anything further is done."

They did so. Sam had been waiting for his mother's request, and he stopped the ship. She lay hove-to on the broad Thames mouth, the scene of the conflict lying far behind, while all hands uncovered and knelt upon the decks.

In a low, clear voice the white-haired dame gave thanks to Heaven for their deliverance, and never were they given more fervently. Then the yacht proceeded on her voyage, her crew with lighter hearts than before.

"I haven't presented Lieutenant Cavendish to you, mother," said Sam. "It was he who held the enemy back with his guns, an' pulled us off the sands. They sank his torpedo-boat, though."

Mrs. Villiers, with tears in her eyes, thanked Cavendish in a way that made the young officer flush pink.

"My sisters, old chap," added Stephen, "Daisy and Madge. Lieutenant Bob Cavendish, Daisy—and one of the best, let me tell you. But he's jolly well proved that."

There was nothing shy about Cavendish. He was soon on the best of terms with Mrs. Villiers and the girls. Both the latter were uncommonly pretty, as has been mentioned, and now that the danger was over, they were both very keen to hear all about the fight, of which they had seen next to nothing.

It was not long before Cavendish and Daisy wandered off to the other end of the yacht together, while Sam was taking her on to Sheerness. Cavendish seemed much struck with Daisy. Stephen winked at his brother, and remarked that the Navy was holding its own.

"It's no use trying to thank you for what you did," said Daisy. "You've saved all our lives, you know."

"I didn't do much. Those brothers of yours are rare chaps in a scrap," said Cavendish cheerfully; "jolly seldom they want any help. Never saw such luck as they have. How are the kids down below, Miss Daisy?"

"Do in splendidly! Would you like to inspect them?"

"No, thanks; not much in my line," said Cavendish hurriedly. "Well, it's been quite an interestin' mornin'—eh? Yes; I skipped pretty quick when the yacht was reported on the sands. Didn't stop to ask the port admiral's leave," he added, laughing.

"But you've lost your ship, haven't you?" said Daisy anxiously. "Didn't Steve say those horrible guns sank her? I am so sorry."

"Oh, never mind that!" said Cavendish. "In a good cause, you know."

"Well, you sha'n't get in a row about it," said Daisy decisively; "I shall go and see the red admiral—oh, port admiral, is it?—and tell him you lost her saving us, and you couldn't help it, and that he's not to make a fuss about it."

Cavendish grinned.

"He'd let me off at once, I know, Miss Daisy, if you did. But it's all right. I was only pulling you—hem!—I mean, I was only chaffing, you know. There isn't any port admiral now. As for the torpedo-boat, she isn't any loss to the British Navy, for she's only a prize we captured, and as she's done some pretty good work since, I don't think they'll make a row about it. Don't worry over that."

"Poor old Sausage!" said Stephen rather pensively, as the two came aft again. "It's a bit sad to think we've seen the last of her. Bob, old chap, I'm fearfully sorry about it. She was yours, an' you've lost her on our account. I'm afraid you'll be awful sick."

"Not a ha'p'orth!" said Cavendish, as cheerfully as ever. "She served our turn very well, but I never liked her as a vessel. I prefer something built on a Christian model, not a butt-ended Dutch bum-boat; an' her torpedo-tubes were enough to make a fellow lie down and cry. Now she's gone, maybe I'll get a better command, if one falls open. The Navy's awfully short of officers after the late losses."

"I hope you'll get a rattlin' good one," said Sam. "Clear the anchor there, for'ard!" he called to the crew. "Stand by to let go!"

The Vanity had steamed in past Garrison Point, and, entering Sheerness Harbour, anchored promptly just off the Lapwell Bank. Everybody being thoroughly tired out and in want of food, they retired below, where the cook, a placid person who never allowed anything to interfere with his duties, had already prepared an excellent meal, set out in the saloon and the fo'c's'le, too. In the latter place Cavendish's bluejackets fraternised with the Vanity's yacht-hands. The only drawback was that Mac could not be induced to join the saloon party, preferring to mess with the Vanity's engineer.

"It will be but a kindness to give you man a few pointers," he said, "as he's been guid enough to ask my advice. They're decent sailors, the Essex men, and unco' guid fighters, as I've seen. But losh! they're terrible poor engineers!"

It was no use pressing the point, so the saloon-party sat down without Mac, and made an excellent meal. When it was over, came the question of what to do next. Cavendish heard of Mrs. Villiers' former plans with amazement.

"I hope you'll give it up," he said to his hostess. "A day or two ago it might have been done, but, believe me, it isn't safe. You might easily get picked up by a German warship on the way to Newhaven—one of their old prowling pirates, very likely. We've hardly any guard in the Straits now."

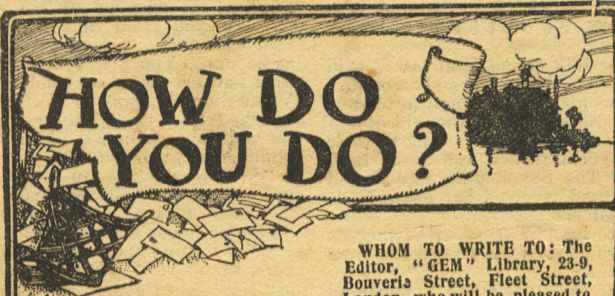
"You think it can't be done?" said Mrs. Villiers.

"Look here, mother," said Sam earnestly. "I've obeyed you since I was two feet high, but this is a case in which I've got to put my foot down. I know you've the pluck of six, but you can't go on down Channel while the Germans are about. The Vanity mustn't leave Sheerness."

"So be it," said Mrs. Villiers. "I fear I have been foolish. I had set my heart on going round by sea, but, since what has happened to-day, I feel I have no right to take the girls through such risks. Only, what is to be done with all my infants?"

"We'll arrange that," said Cavendish. "There are three trains goin' from Chatham this afternoon, empty, to Dover and to Newhaven, where they're going to pick up some Colonial troops that are expected to land. I'll get Colonel Vincent at once to let you take your party to Newhaven by one of them, infants an' all. How's that?"

(Another long instalment of this stirring serial next week.)



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