

"The Schoolhouse Secret."

A Long, Complete
Tale of
Tom Merry & Co.

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VOL. 3.
NO. 83.

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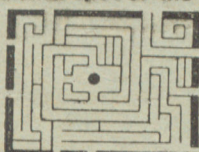
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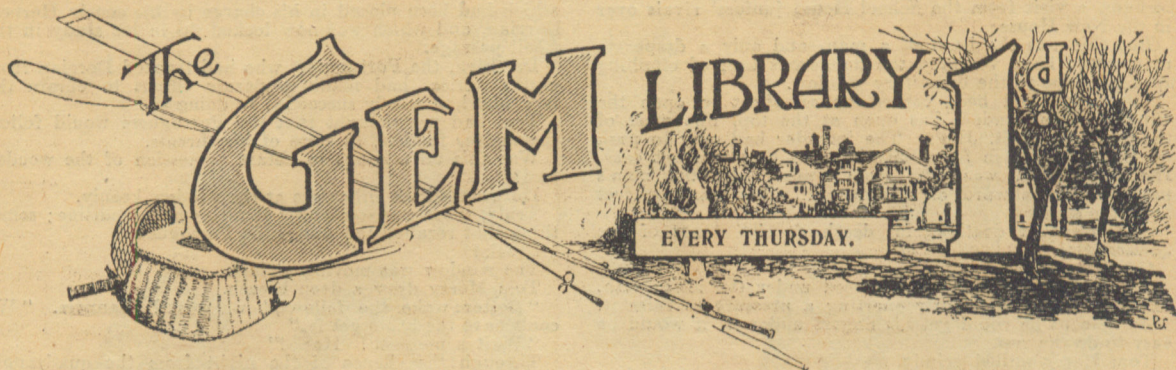
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The SCHOOL-HOUSE SECRET.

A Tale of
TOM MERRY & Co.,
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

The Enemy.

TOM MERRY stirred in his sleep—and awoke. The cool September night was very quiet and still. The School House at St. Jim's was wrapped in silence and sleep—the hour of midnight was long past, and the latest light had been turned out, the last door had closed.

The high windows of the Shell dormitory in the School House glimmered with silver light.

The round moon rode in the sky, and the light fell in silver flakes in the wide quadrangle, and glimmered in at the windows.

Across the dormitory it lay in ghostly patches, broken by the shadows of the beds, abnormally long in the clear light.

Tom Merry turned his head on the pillow.

He had awakened—he did not know why. There was no sound in the house; not a footstep, not a shutting door, at that hour. Faintly through the dim dormitory came the steady breathing from the other beds.

Yet what was that?

In the deep stillness, a faint creak sounded, faint, slight, but sufficient to catch the ear of the awakened boy by contrast with the heavy silence.

Tom Merry started.

As he lay in bed his eyes were upon a patch of moonlight that streamed in at the nearest window, and lay in a silver flood beside his bed.

The patch of light had been suddenly darkened. A new shadow lay on the floor.

It was not the shadow of a branch stirred across the window by the wind. It was a shadow huge, abnormal, eerie—but unmistakable.

The shadow of the head and shoulders of a man.

Tom Merry lay quiet, breathing hard; fully awake now, with his heart beating like a hammer.

A man at the window!

That was what the shadow meant.

Slowly, cautiously, the junior turned his head so that he would be looking at the window instead of at the floor.

The glimmering square was darkened by the outlines of the form outside.

Head and shoulders.

A black silhouette.

Tom Merry's lips came together hard. He could see nothing but the black mass of the head and shoulders; the features were invisible. Yet it seemed to him that the man was looking straight at him.

But that was only fancy. He could see that form in relief against the moonlight. The man could not see through the glass into the dim dormitory.

Tom Merry quietly stepped out of bed.

His heart was beating hard, but he was not afraid. He knew at once that it must be a burglar. Had he heard someone enter the dormitory stealthily, he would have taken it for granted that it was a Fourth-Form raid, or,

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No. 83 (New Series.)

perhaps, a visit from the School House juniors' rivals over in the New House.

But this was the head of a man—and only a desperate man would have ventured the dangerous task of climbing up a rainpipe to the dormitory window.

The creak had been caused by an effort to open the window. The window was open at the top, like most of the windows at St. Jim's. The intruder had only to push up the bottom sash from outside. But that was not easy. The lower sash was stiff from disuse, and the man's position was awkward, on a narrow sill more than fifty feet from the ground.

A fall meant death—grim death on the stones of the quadrangle.

Creak!

Some implement had been forced under the lower sash, and the man was steadily exerting a pressure to raise it.

As soon as he could get his fingers under it, it would be easy to do the rest.

Tom Merry smiled grimly.

The intruder did not know that the first sound had awakened one of the sleepers, and that his tell-tale shadow in the moonlight had betrayed his presence.

Tom Merry stepped to the next bed, where his chum Lowther slept, taking care to keep in the shadow, and not to step out into the patch of moonlight on the floor.

He lightly shook Monty Lowther by the shoulder, and then placed a hand over his mouth. The caution was necessary.

"Br-r-r-r!" mumbled Lowther, as he awoke.

"Quiet!" whispered Tom Merry.

"Wh-wh-wh-what—"

"Shut up!"

"I'll jolly well shut you up, you ass!" mumbled Monty Lowther. "What the—"

"Burglars!"

"Wh-what?"

"Burglars!"

"Honest Injun?"

"Yes."

"My hat!"

Lowther rolled out of bed. Tom Merry pointed to the window, and Lowther gave a gasp.

"Phew!"

"Quiet!"

"All right. I say, we'd better tackle him before he gets in. A shove would send him spinning off the window-sill."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It would kill him!"

"Well, I suppose a burglar has to take the risks of his business, like a soldier or a policeman," murmured Monty Lowther, who would have joked if he had been bound to the stake.

"Don't be a funny ass, Monty. Look here, he won't get that window open in a hurry. It's as stiff as anything. We ought to have some fellows here to collar him when he gets in."

"Better not let him get in. He may have a revolver."

"We can't knock him off the window-sill, though. Hang it; a man's life is a man's life, even a burglar's."

"Yes, but look here; he can't get in. He may have a pistol, and we're not going to have him in."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows in thought.

Creak!

The window was creaking, but it was hardly moving.

"Look here," whispered Lowther, "I'll get out and call Kildare and some more of the Sixth, and Mr. Railton. They can go into the quad, and call to him to come down and surrender. He'll have no choice, if there's some fellows ready to collar him in here, too."

"Good. Cut off. Keep in the shadow; he may be able to see you if you get into the light."

"Right-ho!"

And Monty Lowther, carefully keeping out of the patches of moonlight, made his way to the door, and silently left the dormitory.

Tom Merry stepped to Manners's bed and shook him, awakening him with the same precautions as in Lowther's case.

"What's the row?" whispered Manners.

"Burglars! Look at the window!"

Manners looked and shivered.

Creak!

"My hat!" murmured Manners. "I say, Tommy, there strikes me as something familiar in the cut of that fellow's napper. He's got a Homburg hat on. That Portuguese chap we were rowing with the other day was wearing one. He said we hadn't seen the last of him. Is it possible?"

Tom Merry started.

"Manuel Da Silva! By Jove!"

Was it possible?

Tom Merry had almost forgotten the mysterious box GEM LIBRARY.—No. 63.

which had been placed in his charge by his cousin Herbert Dorrian, and which was now locked up in his study in the Shell passage.

Da Silva, the Portuguese, who had tracked Dorrian from South Africa, had made desperate efforts to obtain the box, and had nearly succeeded in doing so.

Tom had not thought that the Portuguese would follow the matter further, in spite of his threats.

Was this an attempt to obtain possession of the wooden box?

He watched the silhouette at the window keenly.

Truly, there was something familiar in the outline; something that recalled the slim, lithe Portuguese.

Creak!

The window was moving at last.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Better wake the fellows," whispered Manners. "We can't have the brute get in."

"Wait a moment! Hark!"

Through the silence of the night from the quadrangle rang a clear, sharp voice.

"Come down, there! Come down and surrender!"

The shadow at the window gave a sudden start.

CHAPTER 2.

No Capture.

IN the old quadrangle of St. Jim's the moonlight lay in a sea of silver. Objects were almost as visible as by day.

A group stood under the window of the Shell dormitory in the moonlight. Monty Lowther had awakened the House-master and some of the seniors; and they had turned out immediately to look for the housebreaker.

Mr. Railton stood there, with a stout stick in his hand, and Kildare, Darrel, and Rushden, of the Sixth, with sticks or pokers.

There was not much chance for the burglar to get away, if he descended into the quadrangle.

Nor was there any chance for him inside the house.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, with North and Knox, had gone up to the Shell dormitory, in case the burglar should make a desperate break through the window.

Tom Merry and Manners huddled on their clothes quickly as Mr. Linton came in, and quietly left the dormitory to join the party in the quad.

"We'll jolly well have him now," said Tom Merry, as he picked up a cricket stump. "The brute ought to be shoved in prison. He might have scared some of us into fits. Not ourselves, of course."

"Of course not," agreed Manners. "Some of the others."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Come on!"

They hurried out into the quadrangle.

Mr. Railton was looking up steadily at the man on the high window-sill, who was looking down at him with eyes that caught strangely the gleam of the moonlight.

The House-master waved his hand.

"Come down!"

The black shadow did not move again, nor was a word uttered.

Only the glittering eyes were fixed upon the group below in the quadrangle.

"You cannot escape!" called out the House-master.

"Better come down quietly, or you will be seized from inside the window at great risk to yourself."

Still the black shadow did not move.

There was a creak at the window; but this time it was caused by the opening of the sash from inside.

Then the dark figure made a sudden, convulsive movement.

It rose on the sill, one hand clutching at the rainpipe that ran beside the window, and for a moment a terrible thrill ran through the group below.

Was the baffled burglar about to hurl himself from the window-sill to the ground? It was possible that a desperate man, with a long record of crime, might prefer death to arrest.

Tom Merry shuddered.

As the man rose, the moonlight gleamed on his face—the dark swarthy face and the black eyes of the Latin—and he knew that it was the Portuguese.

"Da Silva!" he muttered breathlessly.

The others did not hear him; and he did not speak again. Of the strange adventure with the Portuguese nothing was known at St. Jim's, excepting by Tom Merry & Co., and they were keeping the secret.

But it was not the intention of the Portuguese to hurl himself down to death.

Life was too dear for that, to the reckless, rascally adventurer from South Africa.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"SACKED!"

An Extra-long Complete Tale of
Tom Merry & Co



"Goah, you have spoken in a most insultin' way to Binks, the respected youth who takes charge of the boots and shoes in this establishment." Gore scowled and was silent.

His grip was on the rainpipe, and he swung himself clear of the sill as the window opened.

Mr. Linton looked out, and looked round to the side of the window where the rascal hung to the pipe. He was beyond easy reach.

But he was not descending.

He was climbing the pipe—higher and higher—and the group below guessed his intention at once.

He intended to climb to the roof of the School House, and make an attempt to escape over it.

Mr. Railton shouted to him.

"Come down, madman, come down!"

The Portuguese did not reply.

He climbed steadily on, watched with horror by the eyes below. Above the window, the rainpipe made an abrupt slant to the roof, and the climber had to work his way along it, swinging with his hands, with no foothold whatever, his feet dangling in the air against the bricks.

It was a dizzy sight.

A moment's failure of nerve, and the wretch's body would have come hurtling down to grim death on the stones.

But the man's nerve seemed to be of iron.

He swung on steadily, and reached the edge of the roof, and slowly but surely dragged himself upon it.

Mr. Railton gave a great gasp of relief.

"Thank Heaven he is safe!"

That was the general feeling.

Burglar and thief as the man undoubtedly was, all there felt that a human life had been in danger, and were intensely relieved to know that it was in danger no longer.

"Jolly glad he's done it," muttered Tom Merry. "But he'll get away now."

"Looks like it."

"Get round the house!" said Mr. Railton abruptly. "He must not get away. He is plainly a desperate character."

A crowd of fellows had been awakened by this time, and were pouring out into the quadrangle, dressed or half-dressed.

Willingly they spread round the buildings to search for the burglar when he should descend to terra firma.

But the search was not an easy one.

He might come down in any of a hundred places, or he might remain hidden on the roof for hours to tire out their patience.

There were plenty of fellows who would willingly have climbed to the roof and searched for him there, but that the House-master strictly forbade.

It was better to let the burglar escape than to risk life and limb for his capture.

After the hunt had lasted nearly half an hour, Mr. Railton gave orders for the boys to return to their beds.

Taggles, the school-porter, was told to let his dog loose in the school quadrangle, a sufficient precaution against the return of the burglar, although under the circumstances he was hardly likely to return.

Then the boys went back to their beds, and the house was locked up again.

Needless to say, it was a long time before sleep revisited their eyelids. The excitement in the Shell dormitory was keen.

"It's curious that the chap should try to get in here," Harry Noble remarked. "There must be easier ways of getting in, I should think."

"Nothing in this room specially to steal, either."

"Off his rocker, I should think."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows in the darkness. Why had the Portuguese tried to enter the Shell dormitory? Had he discovered that that was Tom Merry's room? And did he want to get at the hero of the Shell?

Perhaps he thought that Tom was keeping the mysterious

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NEXT
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box in the dormitory, as, indeed, he had thought of doing. Perhaps he had thought of waking the boy, and with threats, forcing him to reveal where the box was placed. But, in that case, how had he known anything about the Shell-room? How did he know that Tom Merry was sleeping there? Was he in communication with someone inside the house?

"That was a startling thought.
"It was the Portugee, right enough," Monty Lowther whispered to Tom Merry, from his bed.

"Yes. I saw his face distinctly."
"He was after the box, do you think?"

"I suppose so."
"Or after you?"

"Possibly."
"We shall have to keep our peepers open, Tommy. It wouldn't be a bad wheeze to borrow Herries' bulldog, and keep him in the dorm. of a night, for a bit."

"H'm! I think I'd rather have the burglar."
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me!" said a voice from Skimpole's bed. Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, the inventor of impossible airships, and still more impossible theories for social improvement, was in a very perturbed frame of mind. "Dear me, that is a good idea, Lowther! I do not like Herries' bulldog, but I think it would be a good idea to have him in the house for a time. It may save me from irreparable loss."

"Eh! What have you got to lose?"

"Surely you know why this desperate attempt was made to enter the house, Lowther?"

"I think I can guess."
"Undoubtedly, the rascal was the emissary of a foreign Government."

"A what? Of a which?"

"An emissary of a foreign Government," said Skimpole firmly. "His object was to steal the plans of my new aeroplane."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing whatever to laugh at, Lowther. I have already written to the War Office to offer to place a fleet of aeroplanes at their disposal, each capable of carrying fifty men and a couple of machine guns, if they will place a few million pounds at my disposal. I have received no answer to my letter."

"Amazing!"

"By Jove, something ought to be done about this," said Gore. "Those War Office chaps are always neglecting the true interests of the country. If the Germans come in a fleet of Zeppelins, we want a fleet of Skimmelins to meet them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Gore—"

"Perhaps their reply has been intercepted by the emissaries of a foreign Government?" suggested Harry Noble.

"I have thought of that, Noble. It is very probable, and this attempt to enter the School House is the result."

"Oh, carry me home to die!" murmured the Cornstalk.

"What do you say to wiring for a regiment of Territorials to guard the secret of the Skimmelin, Skimmy?"

"Pray do not be absurd, Noble! That would be far too sensible a thing for our War Office to do. Some precaution must, however, be taken. I am thinking of borrowing the electrical apparatus from Glyn's study, and putting up an electric burglar alarm."

"My only hat!" said a voice from Glyn's bed. "I'll burglar-alarm you if you go into my study collaring my things!"

"As a patriot, Glyn, you must be—"

"Rats!"

"I shall require your apparatus—"

"You'll require a surgeon afterwards!"

"As a sincere Socialist, Glyn, I must claim my right to use the apparatus if I wish. Under Socialism all electric bells will be nationalised."

"Oh, go to sleep!"

"I cannot sleep under the circumstances."

"Sleep under the blankets, then!"

"Really, Glyn, you are absurd. I shall remain on the watch all night. The burglar undoubtedly knows that I keep the plans of my aeroplane in my pocket, and he knows to which room to come for them. I shall remain on the watch."

"Oh, go to bed!"

"Better get in, Skimmy. You'll fall asleep, anyway."

"Not at all, Merry. I shall walk up and down the dormitory all night to keep awake."

"You jolly well won't!" roared Manners. "I'm going to sleep if you're not. Get into bed, and don't be an ass!"

"If I find myself getting sleepy I shall sing to—"

"You'll find yourself getting broken up, if you do," said Clifton Dane, groping in the darkness for a boot.

"Really, Dane—"

"Oh, go to sleep!" sang out a dozen voices.

And the Shell fellows settled down upon their pillows. Skimpole thought it out, but it was cold out of bed, and he finally decided to sit up in bed with the clothes round him, and watch there.

He did so for five minutes. Then he had an ache in his back, and he reasoned it out that he might as well lie down, but it would be all right if he resolutely kept his eyes wide open.

He put his head on the pillow, and resolutely kept his eyes open for about ten seconds, and then they resolutely shut of their own accord, and Skimpole snored.

CHAPTER 3.
D'Arcy Keeps Watch.

"B AI Jove!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, uttered the ejaculation quite emphatically for him!

Arthur Augustus was not emphatic as a rule. Emphasis of any sort did not agree with the manners and customs of the swell of the Fourth Form, who studiously cultivated the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

Arthur Augustus was emphatic this time, however. He thought it really too bad. Arthur Augustus had slept all through the disturbance of the previous night. In fact, nobody in the Fourth Form dormitory had awakened at all. The Fourth-Formers naturally felt indignant. They had been left out of it. But that was not the worst. For, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy explained to his special chums—Blake, Herries, and Digby—he had not the slightest doubt that if he had been called he would have captured the burglar.

Hence the unusual emphasis of his ejaculation as he listened to the tale of moving adventure related by the exultant Shell fellows.

Jack Blake was really indignant.

"Why didn't you call us?" he demanded.

Tom Merry shook his head. He was about two months older than Blake, which was quite sufficient reason for assuming airs of seniority towards him, especially as that exasperated Blake.

"We thought it better to keep you kids out of it," he said. "You might have got hurt, you know, and then we should have had to explain to your sorrowing parents."

Blake glared.

"I'll sorrowing parent you—you—you mollusc!"

"Peace, little boy! It was for your own good."

"By Jove, I'll—"

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry to his chums. "The infants are getting excited."

And the Terrible Three walked away, leaving the Fourth-Formers fuming. D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and fixed a look upon the retreating form of Tom Merry which really ought to have bored a hole in his back. But the hero of the Shell did not seem any the worse for it.

"The cheek of these fellows is astounding," he said, turning his glance upon his chums. "I have a great mind to wash aftah Tom Mewwy, and bump him, but the wottah would be sure to stuggle and wumple a fellow's clothes: It was uttably wotten of them to leave us out of it. I am certain that if I had been upon the spot I should have thought of some wheeze for capturin' the burglah."

"Of course you would—not," agreed Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Oh, Gussy might have sung his top B-flat to him," said Blake. "Of course; that would have led to all the bother of an inquest."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Dear me! Is that you, Blake?" Skimpole came blinking along the passage. "Will you fellows help me? I want you to keep a watch for me."

"Certainly, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus politely.

"I'll put it on my chain, instead of the soveweign-purse. But why can't you keep it yourself?"

"Eh? I am going into Glyn's study."

"That's no reason why you can't keep a watch yourself, I suppose?" said the swell of St. Jim's, looking puzzled.

"Why, of course it is, D'Arcy! How can I go into Glyn's study, and keep a watch in the passage at the same time?"

"What on earth do you want to keep a watch in the passage for?"

"My dear D'Arcy, you see—"

"Oh, it's all wight, deah boy. I'll keep it for you."

"Thank you, D'Arcy. You are very obliging."

"Not at all, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus drew out the end of his watch-chain, where he wore a dainty little sovereign-purse, and detached

the purse from the fastener. Skimpole watched this proceeding through his spectacles with considerable surprise depicted on his countenance.

"Well, where's the watch, deah boy?"

"Eh?"

"Where's the watch?"

"What watch?"

"Bai Jove! The chap's off his wockah. Didn't you say you wanted me to keep a watch for you?"

"You misunderstand me, D'Arcy. I want you to keep a watch in the Shell passage."

"Oh, deah! The chap's certainly wocky in his uppah cwust. Come on, deah boys. I weally do not undahstand why I can't keep the watch here instead of in the Shell passage. But a pwomise is a pwomise."

Blake, Herries, and Digby followed their chum, grinning. They could see the little misunderstanding that was perplexing the swell of the School House.

Skimpole led the way upstairs, and stopped in the Shell passage, outside the study of Bernard Glyn, the young inventor. Glyn always had an almost endless supply of apparatus of various kinds in his study, and Skimpole, as a sincere Socialist, of course thought that he was entitled to use it when he wanted to. Glyn had other ideas on the subject, and instead of arguing it out in words of four or five syllables, as Skimpole would willingly have done, he had a brutal way of bringing a cricket-stump or a boot into the argument.

Hence certain precautions were necessary when Skimpole attempted any practical application of his theories to Glyn's study.

"Stand here," said Skimpole mysteriously.

"Bai Jove! How long are we to stand here?"

"Until Glyn comes, or I come out of the study."

"Oh, vewy well. Where's the watch?"

"Eh?"

"You want me to keep a watch?"

"My dear D'Arcy, you don't understand. I want you to keep a watch for Glyn."

"Why can't he ask me himself if he wants me to keep his watch?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake, exploding all of a sudden.

"Weally, Blake, I fail to see any cause for laughah. I wegard Skimpole as bein' absolutely off his wockah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha! You ass—"

"I wufuse to be called an ass."

"Ha, ha! You see, Skimmy wants you to keep a watch for Glyn—to watch for him. The verb to watch—I watch, thou watchest, he watches, nous watchons, vous watchez, ils watchaient," explained Blake, conjugating the verb for the further enlightenment of his chum. "You're to watch for Glyn, in case he discovers that Skimpole is nationalising his property."

"Oh, I wegard you as an ass, Skimmy."

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Why didn't you explain that before?"

"You are so remarkably obtuse. You see, with your deficient brain power, as the last output of an old and an exhausted race—"

"With my what?" said Arthur Augustus, pushing back his cuffs.

"Pray do not be offended, D'Arcy. You are not to blame for being the last rotten and decayed product of an outworn race, as any Determinist would explain to you—"

"Lemme go, Blake. I have no wesource but to give him a feahful thwashin'."

"I did not mean to offend you, D'Arcy. We will drop the subject. You understand at last, I hope? You are to watch in case Glyn should have the effrontery to interrupt me while I am getting the apparatus I require for my burglar alarm."

And Skimpole popped into the study.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I did not know that Skimmy was comin' here to commit a burglary to pwevent a burglary. I weally don't know whethah we ought to keep a watch for him."

"You've said you would, now."

"Yaas, wathah! But weally—"

There was a paiter of feet in the passage, and Bernard Glyn, of the Shell, came tearing along, looking very excited.

"Has that dummy Skimpole come this way?" he gasped.

"Somebody says he's getting up a new burglar-alarm, and he—"

"Yaas; we're keepin' watch for him here in case you come along," said D'Arcy, putting up his eyeglass, and staring at the excited Shell fellow. "Bai Jove! Now I think of it, I ought to call out and warn Skimmy. Skimmy, deah boy—Skimmy!"

But the Liverpool lad had already rushed into the study. The chums of the Fourth grinned, and awaited events.

There was a sound of a struggle, and a terrific puffing and gasping in the study, and then a form came flying through the doorway, and a boot was seen behind it—the boot evidently furnishing the motive power.

Skimpole flopped at the feet of Arthur Augustus, and gasped:

"Ow! Dear me! Yow!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Dear me!" Skimpole scrambled up. "I—I think I will depart, as Glyn seems to be very much excited."

And Skimpole shot down the passage. Bernard Glyn rushed out of the study and shot after him, and they disappeared helter-skelter, leaving the chums of the Fourth roaring with laughter.

CHAPTER 4.

Arthur Augustus Feels That He is Responsible.

TOM MERRY came out of the Shell class-room after morning lessons, and made a straight line for the quadrangle. The Fourth Form were already out, and most of them were exercising their lungs to the fullest capacity. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not taking part in the general hilarity which followed dismissal of classes.

He was standing under one of the elms, leaning against the trunk—very lightly, in case he should soil his Eton jacket—and regarding the merry scene in the quad with unseeing eyes.

His monocle was jammed into his right eye, but merely from force of habit; he was not looking at anything in particular.

Tom Merry stopped and regarded him curiously.

"Sorry, Gussy!" he said softly.

D'Arcy started, and looked at him.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy! What are you sowwy about?"

"About the waistcoat."

"What waistcoat?"

"The one that doesn't fit."

"I twust, Tom Mewwy," said the swell of St. Jim's, with a great deal of dignity—"I twust you do not imagine that I have a waistcoat that does not fit?"

"Oh, I thought it must be that," said Tom Merry gravely. "I saw you looking as if the world were coming to a sudden and painful end, and so I naturally concluded that your tailor had been giving trouble."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it would be a howwid thing to be disappointed in the fit of a waistcoat, although you appear to wegard it in a fivivolous light. It is not, how-evah, quite so bad as that. I have not been disappointed by my tailah. I am wathah wowwid. It's about Binks."

"Binks!" said Tom Merry, in surprise.

"Yaas, wathah; Binks, the page in the School House. You know what a young ass he is; always weadin' those wotten American twashy stowies, and thinkin' that it would be wippin' to go to the Wocky Mountains and call himself Deadshot Binks. I have noticed for a long time that he's wathah a funnny beggah, you know."

"So have we all," said Tom, laughing. "But Binks is all right. His blood-and-thunder never goes any further than reading about it in rotten books."

"Yaas, but you wemembah the time he played those wotten twicks by pwetendin' to be a ghost in the secwet passage?"

"Oh, yes, I remember."

"That shows that he's capable of bein' led away to do asinine things," said D'Arcy; "and lately he has been lookin' more peculiah than evah. I've noticed it."

Tom Merry laughed.

"But Binks isn't in your charge, you know," he suggested gently. "It's not exactly your business to look after Binks."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I am wathah surprised at you," said Arthur Augustus, with a considerable amount of severity in his manner.

"Eh?"

"I wepeat that I am surprised. Binks is a silly ass—"

"Oh, I see; you think that like should look after like?"

"I do not think anythin' of the sort. What I mean is, it's up to a chap of supewiah bwain powah to look aftah a silly ass, you know. You know that when we had our little wun to Coventwy and to Livahpool, I looked aftah you fellahs—"

"Why, you cheeky duffer—"

"I wufuse to be chawactewised as a duffah. It's up to a chap like me to look aftah you fellows. Now, Binks is a gweater ass than you are—"

"Thank you!"

"Not at all. You see, Binks is a poah chap, and has

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nevah had anybody to look aftah him. He had a mother—

"I believe most chaps have at some period of their career."

"Pway do not make funnay wemarks on a sewious subject, Tom Mewwy. Binks had a mother, and he has one still, for that matter, but he lives a long way fwom her, and she cannot look aftah him. I undahstand that she is a washerlady—"

"A what?"

"A washerlady," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I object to the term 'washerwoman,' which seems to me to have a dispawigin' sound, especially as the washerladies are a most estimable and deservin' class of female. In fact, I have sometimes wected that while the country could do without any dukes or earls at a pinch, it would be vey hard to do without the washerladies."

"Ha, ha! Good for you, Gussy!"

"That is a reflection that has occurred to me, Tom Mewwy. Binks's estimable pawent is a washerlady, and I believe she has quite a large family of small children to support. It is a common custom for washerladies to have large families of small children to support; I have observed the same phenomenon in othah cases. Binks is a silly ass, you know, but he is a good duffah. I know perfectly well that he sends nearly all his wages home to his estimable pawent. I do not know what his salawy is, but I believe the salawy of a boots is not a vey large one."

"Less than a thousand a year, I believe," said Tom Merry, cocking his head thoughtfully on one side, and appearing to make a mental calculation.

"Pway don't be an ass, Tom Mewwy. Now, Binks bein' a deservin' chap, and also a silly ass, it's up to a fellah of my bwain powah to look aftah him. I feel a certain amount of wespensibility in the mattah."

"Good! You are going to adopt him, I suppose?"

"Nothin' of the sort! He is oldah than I am, and it would be widiculous—oh, I see you are wottin', you wottah! I am goin' to look aftah him."

"Well, there he goes," said Tom Merry, indicating the figure of the School House page, which had just then come into sight under the green elms. "There he is, Gussy. Wait till he's passed, and then you can look after him."

"Pway don't be an ass!"

"By Jove, though, he does look a little more rocky than usual!" remarked Tom Merry, looking at the page.

Binks was coming straight towards them, but he did not see them.

He was walking along with his eyes on the ground, and a deep frown of thought upon his brow.

At intervals he raised his right hand in the air, with the fingers clenched, and gave it a flourish.

He was muttering to himself, and the juniors could catch his words as he came along:

"Aha! They little know!"

"I've heard the ass say that before!" Tom Merry remarked. "But it does seem to be getting rather thick, and no mistake! Speak to him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha! They little know! Clean those boots, Binks! Have you done the knives, Binks? Ha, ha! Little do they dream of the thoughts in the mind of Binks! The day will come when, mounted upon my coal-black charger, I will—Oh!"

Binks broke off as he nearly ran into the juniors. He blinked at them. Tom Merry took him by the shoulders, and ran him against the tree, and pinned them there.

"Now, Binks, what's the matter?"

CHAPTER 5.

Binks is Mysterious.

BINKS blinked at Tom Merry, evidently very much confused, either at being so suddenly startled out of his reverie, or at Tom Merry's mode of questioning.

"Wh-wh-what, Master Merry?"

"What's the matter?"

"The—the matter?"

"Yaas, wathah, Binks! We are goin' to look aftah you—that is to say, I am goin' to look aftah you, and Tom Mewwy is goin' to help me," said D'Arcy. "I wegard it as bein' up to me to look aftah you, you know, because you are a silly ass!"

"I don't want lookin' after."

"That is not the point, deah boy."

"I won't be looked after!" said Binks sullenly.

"Pway keep to the point!" said D'Arcy, waving his hand.

"I am goin' to look after you, you know! That's all wight! Now—"

"I ain't going to be bullied!" said Binks. "Lemme alone! I cleans your boots, don't I? You ain't nothin' to complain of. I know I ain't the same as you. I ain't 'ad

the chance. Master Gore says I'm a low beast! P'raps I am. I ain't 'ad the chance to be nothin' better, 'ave I?"

Tom Merry turned red.

"Did Gore say that to you, Binks?"

"Yes; he did."

"I'll speak to Gore presently," said Tom Merry. "Don't take any notice of the cad, Binks! There's always a worm like Gore to be found everywhere. The mongrel isn't worth taking notice of! You've never found any decent chap here talking to you-like that."

"Well, I know I ain't," said Binks, looking a little less sullen. "You wouldn't do it, Master Merry, nor Master D'Arcy, neither."

"Wathah not! I wegard Goah as a wottah, and I shall make it a point to give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"Leave that to me," said Tom Merry quietly. "I'll see that no chap in my Form insults anybody who can't answer him back. But look here, Binks—"

"Yaas wathah! Look here, Binks—"

"You see—"

"You see—"

"Leave it to me, Gussy."

"Wats! I'm lookin' aftah Binks!"

"You'd better let me—"

"More wats! As a fellow of tact and judgment, not to say supewiah bwain powah, it is my biz to look aftah Binks!"

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"Wats! Binks, deah boy, I am vey much concerned to see that you are gwowin' wockiah in your nappah the last few days—"

"I'm all right!" grunted Binks.

"You are not all wight, deah boy!"

"I ain't goin' to be hordered—"

"Pway don't talk German to me, Binks! I do not speak it sufficiently well—"

"Who's talkin' German?"

"I imagine that hordered is a German word. It sounds like one."

"I said hordered, and that's plain English."

"What does he mean by hordered, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ordered, I suppose," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Oh, I see! It is a case of a misplaced aspivate. I am not ordewin' you, Binks. I have no authority to ordah you; and, in any case, I should not take advantage of your position in the House to give you ordahs. I should wegard that as the act of a cad, like Goah, for instance. I am goin' to look aftah you in a fwriendly spiwit."

Binks blinked at him.

"Ow can you be friendly with the likes of me?" he demanded.

"I am afwaid, Binks, that you are no gentleman," said D'Arcy severely, "otherwise you would not suspect the motives of a chap who wanted to be fwriendly."

Binks grinned.

"I am goin' to look aftah you as a fwriend," resumed D'Arcy. "I am vey much concerned to see that you are makin' an ass of yourself! What was that wot you were muttewin' about a coal-black chargah?"

"Why shouldn't I 'ave a coal-black chargah?" demanded Binks. "Dead-Shot Dave was a boot-cleaner till he shot his governor and 'ooked it—"

"He what?"

"'Ooked it."

"What does he mean by ooktit, Tom Mewwy?"

"Hooked it, I think."

"Bai Jove! I'm nq wisah than before. Is to hook a verb, Binks?"

"It means ran away," grinned Tom Merry.

"Oh, I see!"

"He 'ooked it," said Binks, "and he mounted on a coal-black chargah, and became the terror of the Rocky Mountings."

"The howwid wascal!"

Binks gave a sniff at D'Arcy's ignorance.

"He wasn't a rascal, Master D'Arcy; he was the 'ero!"

"Bai Jove!"

"The rascal in the story was the detective who tried to arrest him. Dead-Shot Dave and his trusty band hung him on a pine-tree and riddled him with bullets."

"Bai Jove! The howwid wottahs! And this is the stuff you wead, is it?"

"It's good," said Binks. "I learn a lot from them books—a lot that will be useful to me later hon!"

"When you are a pirate?" grinned Tom Merry.

"Oo knows?" said Binks mysteriously.

"Binks, I wegard you as an ass! I don't believe there evah was any such person as Dead-Shot Dave, but if there was, he ought to have had a feahful thwashin'! I wegard it as my duty to stop you weadin' those wotten American books!"

"They're better'n what you read," grunted Binks. "I've

looked through some of your penny books, and there ain't a single bit of bloodshed in the 'ole lot! Gimme something lively!"

"You have a wotten bad taste in litewature, Binks!"

"Mebbe it won't be always reading, too," said Binks darkly.

"Bai Jove!"

"I don't suppose I shall be long in this 'ere berth."

"You're not going to leave St. Jim's!" exclaimed Tom Merry, really concerned. He liked Binks, in spite of the boy's peculiar tastes in lurid literature. Binks was all right at heart, and it was only want of education that made him prefer cheap American trash to decent English stories.

"Come now!"

"P'r'aps I've got some new prospects."

"A new situation, do you mean?"

Binks gave a hollow laugh, in the true style of the Mysterious Marauder of Dead Man's Gulch.

"P'r'aps I'm going to South Africa," he said. "P'r'aps I've got a friend who'll show me how to git to the diamond mines."

"What about your mother, if you leave England?" said Tom Merry, seeing plainly enough that the lad had some foolish idea in his mind, and thinking to touch him upon what he knew was Binks's tenderest spot.

But Binks only grinned.

"That's all right," he said. "Mother'll be pleased, I s'pose, when I send her a packet of diamonds from the mines."

"You young ass!"

"Oh, all right; you'll see, Master Merry! When I'm leading my trusty band of freebooters in the veldt, I may send for you and give you a job."

"Freebooters! Do you mean to say that you are going to steal things?"

"W-w-w-well, not exactly steal," said Binks, wriggling a little. "You—you see, they don't c-c-call it stealing!"

"What is it, then?"

"Freebooting!"

"What's the difference?"

"Well, you see——"

"Yes, you're a young ass!" said Tom Merry. "Luckily, there's no chance of your getting abroad, anyway. You would be certain to act the giddy ox!"

"That's all you know, Master Merry!"

"Undah the circs, Binks, I should wefuse you my permish. to go abword. I am goin' to look aftah you."

Binks wriggled away from Tom Merry.

"You ain't a bad sort, Master D'Arcy," he said. "When I'm the terror of the diamond mines, I'll send you a thousand pounds' worth of diamonds as a present. Now I've got to go and clean the knives! Aha! They little know!"

And Binks scuttled away, leaving the juniors staring after one another blankly.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry. "I'm blessed if I quite know what to make of Binks this time!"

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"I'm goin' to look aftah him," he said. "It will be all wight, Tom Mewwy, with me lookin' aftah him!"

CHAPTER 6.

Glyn Shows a Spirit of Commercialism.

TOM MERRY could not help thinking of the Portuguese adventurer as the sun went down that day. It was likely enough that Da Silva would make another attempt to enter the school, in spite of the precautions that had been taken.

Tom Merry was a great deal worried in his mind as to whether he ought to tell the Head all he knew of the foreign scoundrel. But the story of the wooden box trusted to him by his cousin, and which he had accidentally discovered was crammed with valuable diamonds, was too strange. The Head would certainly refuse to allow such a thing to remain in possession of a junior; and Herbert Dorrian had impressed upon Tom Merry the necessity of his keeping it in his own charge, and not saying a word about it to anyone.

Yet when he heard the surmises on the subject of the burglary, Tom Merry felt a guilty sense of concealing something.

It was an awkward position for him, and he heartily wished that Herbert Dorrian would return and claim the box he had left with him.

But of that there was no sign.

Since the day Dorrian had placed the box in his hands, under the trees in Rylcombe Wood, he had seen and heard nothing of his cousin.

The junior had finally decided to keep his own counsel. But when the night drew on, he felt that he could not trust to the precautions that satisfied the masters.

Taggles's fierce mastiff was to be turned loose in the grounds. The police at Rylcombe had been informed of the matter, and were supposed to be on the look-out for suspicious characters in the neighbourhood.

But Tom Merry, who knew that this was no ordinary burglar, was not satisfied. The average crackman, of course, would have fled from that part of the country immediately after his failure on the previous night. But with the Portuguese it was different. He would not go till he had laid hands on the wooden box Herbert Dorrian had brought from South Africa.

Tom Merry, knowing the man he had to deal with, believed that he would return, and his chums shared his opinion.

But as they could not take the upper powers into their confidence, they had to decide for themselves what they would do.

Skimpole, who was firmly convinced that the housebreaker was an emissary from a foreign Government, in search of the plans of his new aeroplane, had planned out the most elaborate precautions against a second attempt; but the Terrible Three did not feel inclined to rely upon Skimpole.

They consulted with the chums of Study No. 6, who knew most of the circumstances of the case, and they had plenty of advice, practicable or not.

"It's a great pity," D'Arcy remarked, "that you didn't call me last night. If the wascal had been capchahed, all this wowy would have been averted."

"Of course, you would have captured him," said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! I should have spwung upon him, and hurled him to the gwound, and——"

"You'd have had to make a jolly big spring, to get to the dorm. window."

"Pwaw don't be fwivolous, Lowthah. Tom Mewwy, havin' neglected to call up the chap who was weally required to deal with the mattah, the burglah escaped. Pewwaps I had bettah wemain on the watch to-night."

"On whose watch?"

"I decline to discuss the mattah in a fwivolous spiwit."

"You can have my bulldog in the Shell dorm, if you like," said Herries. "I don't mind. Towser will jolly well see that no burglars get in."

"I object to Towshah. He has no wespect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs."

"The Shell fellows aren't going to bed in their trousers, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Herries' idea is jolly good," declared Blake. "Have Towser in the dorm., and it will be all right."

"But suppose the rotter gets in another way?" suggested Manners. "He might try another window this time, you know."

"Can Towser be in two places at once, Herries?" asked Blake.

Herries stared at him.

"Eh? No, I suppose not."

"Sure not?"

"Yes, ass. What do you mean?"

"Oh, I know any common dog couldn't, but Towser is such a wonderful dog, you know," said Blake blandly. "I thought I'd ask you. There's no telling what Towser can do."

"Look here——"

"But if the rotter gets in at one of the other windows, he's bound to come to the Shell dorm. for Tom Merry," said Digby. "He can't look for his blessed box without Tommy to help him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How the deuce does he know which room is the Shell dorm., or that Tom Merry is in the Shell at all?" exclaimed Blake, puzzled. "I can't make it out."

"He must have had information from somebody inside St. Jim's."

"Yes, that's pretty clear; but whom?"

"Perhaps he's jawed to one of the maids."

"Well, they wouldn't be likely to have anything to say to a ruffian-looking foreigner like that Portugee chap. I can't make it out."

"He might have got it out of one of the fellows."

"It's a blessed puzzle. But, anyway, there's the fact—he does know. And as he knows which is the Shell dorm., he may know which is Tom Merry's study."

"Bai Jove! It's quite poss."

"And in that case he might search there first without coming to the dorm. at all."

Tom Merry started.

"Of course, I keep the box there," he said.

"In a safe place?"

"Well, locked up in my desk."

"I don't suppose that would bother the Portugee long."

"N-n-no, I suppose not."

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"SACKED!"

"Pewwaps you had better entwust it to me, Tom Mewwy. I will take the gweatest care of it."

"Thank you, Gussy, I think I'd rather look after it. But I'll jolly well take it up to the dorm., and hide it in my trunk."

"That's a good wheeze."

"And look here, you can change your trunk for mine—in the place of mine, I mean," said Manners. "The rotter seems to know a lot about our arrangements, and he might know where to look for your trunk."

"Good egg!"

"D'Arcy! D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove, here's Skimmay! What's the mattah, Skimmay?"

The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's came along rather hurriedly.

He presented a sight that told of trouble.

His collar was torn loose, his necktie hanging over his left shoulder, and his jacket was partly split up the back. There was ink on his face, and a swelling on his nose.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Skimpole in great interest and curiosity, and the others stared at him.

"Bai Jove! Have you had an accident, Skimmay, deah boy?"

"Been wresting with a lawn-mower?" asked Blake sympathetically.

"Or a motor-car?" said Monty Lowther.

"Really, I have been used with shocking brutality," said Skimpole, blinking at them through his big spectacles. "I simply paid another visit to Bernard Glyn's study, to obtain the apparatus I need for my burglar-alarm, and Glyn and Noble and Dane came in while I was there."

"Hence these tears!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"I tried to explain to them that, as a sincere Socialist, I was entitled to the use of anything that was useful to me, and that under Socialism, all insulated wires would be nationalised; but they refused to listen."

"Too bad!"

"They seized me in a rough manner. As a Socialist, I could not return violence for violence, great patience under injury being a principal part of Socialism. But as a Determinist, I struggled violently, my temper on this occasion being the outcome of my heredity, and therefore quite excusable, as no fellow can be supposed to be responsible for his heredity."

"Nor for his actions, in your case, Skimmay."

"You mean that remark in a frivolous spirit, I fear, Blake; but, as a matter of fact, you are right. No Determinist is responsible for his actions."

"Ha, ha! Get on with the thrilling tale! Did they kill you?"

"Pray do not be absurd. I struck Glyn upon the nose, with considerable force, and he—"

"Died?"

"He laughed—laughed in the most disrespectful manner. Then they hurled me forth from the study."

"Where did you pick up that nose?"

"I think I must have knocked my nose on something—my elbow, or Glyn's elbow, or Noble's boot, I am not quite clear which."

"Well, it really doesn't matter, so long as you've got the nose," said Digby.

"I want D'Arcy to help me—"

"Weally, Skimmay, I cannot undahtake to thwash thwee fellows in the Shell. I should find it quite a sufficiently big ordah to thwash Kangawoo by himself."

"You jolly well would," chuckled Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I did not wish you to thrash them, D'Arcy. Glyn appears to regard this matter in a spirit of vulgar commercialism. He says that he paid money for these things—five or six pounds, I forget which—and he wants them himself. It is a very common thing, this absurd and brutal importance which is attached to mere money. If you could hand over the price of the articles, I have no doubt Glyn would give me the apparatus I need."

"Bai Jove!"

"You probably have a few pounds about you. Of course, as a matter of fact, the money is as much mine as yours."

"How do you make that out, deah boy?"

"As a sincere Socialist—"

"What I like about Skimpole," said Blake, "is his peculiarly polite and grateful way of asking a chap to lend him money, as well as his moderation in fixing the sum."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If D'Arcy hasn't the money, he can send a wire to his father," suggested Skimpole. "I should be perfectly willing to walk down to the post-office and send the telegram. It is one of the first principles of a Socialist to be obliging."

"You can't refuse an obliging chap like that, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"It's no good wirin' to the governah," he said. "Since

the new Budget came in, he's been gwin' jollay close with the money. He says the super-tax hits him vevy hard, and he can't afford so many fivahs. Of course, one's governah is allowed to say things of this sort, and I wouldn't mind so long as he sent along the fivahs all the same. But he has weally been keepin' me short of money."

"Hard cheese!"

"Yaas, wathah! I have w'ritten to him on the subject. I have pointed out that Mr. Lloyd-George meant to tax him, not me, and it is weally not cwicket to shift the burden of taxation off upon the shouldahs of a chap at school. How-eh, he has not yet sent the fivah. He can't answer my arguments, but these governahs are all the same, you know. They fall back on their authowity, which I do not wegard as playin' the game."

"Then you cannot lend me five pounds, D'Arcy?"

"I weally think I should not lend it to you if I had it, Skimmay. I also wegard the mattah in a spiwit of vulgah commercialism, you know."

"But I must have the apparatus for a burglar-alarm."

"Wats!"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"More wats!"

"And many of 'em," said Tom Merry. "You're jolly well not going to fix up rotten electric alarms in our dorm., anyway."

"Really, Merry—"

"More bosh!"

"I will explain to you that as a sincere Socialist, I—Dear me, how extremely rude of fellows to walk away while I am talking to them!" murmured Skimpole. "I must, however, have the apparatus. I shall have to watch my opportunity while Glyn is out of his study. This surreptitiousness is not in accordance with true Socialism, but what is a fellow to do when he comes into conflict with the spirit of vulgar commercialism?"

CHAPTER 7.

Visitors for Gore.

"BINKS!"

Binks gave quite a jump. He was leaving the School House in the dusk of the evening when Tom Merry called to him. He slowly and hesitatingly turned back.

"What do you want, Master Merry? My work's done."

"I don't want you to do anything for me, Binky," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I want you to come with me for a few minutes, that's all."

"I'm goin' out, Master Merry."

"Are you in a hurry?"

"Well, I've got an appointment," said Binks.

"Never mind, then; but I shouldn't keep you more than five minutes."

"I'll come with you if you want me, Master Merry. Five minits don't make no difference."

"This way, then."

Tom Merry led the way upstairs to the Shell passage. As he passed the door of No. 6 in the Fourth, he tapped at the door and looked in. Blake and D'Arcy were there—D'Arcy brushing a silk topper, and Blake roasting chestnuts.

"Coming along?" asked Tom Merry.

"Where, deah boy?"

"To Gore's study."

"I am not on visitin' terms with Gore, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Neither am I. We are not going to visit him. He wants to apologise to Binks for having been rude to him, and I thought there ought to be witnesses."

"Bai Jove! If Goah is goin' to do the decent thing, I shall be vevy pleased to be on the spot," said D'Arcy laying down the pad, and placing the hat in the hat-box. "It will be a great surprise to me, and I shall congwatulate Goah on doin' the decent thing. Yaas, wathah!"

Blake looked at Tom Merry with a grin.

"Has Gore agreed?" he asked.

"Well, you know what a disagreeable chap he is," said Tom Merry. "You can't expect him to agree."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I say—" began Binks.

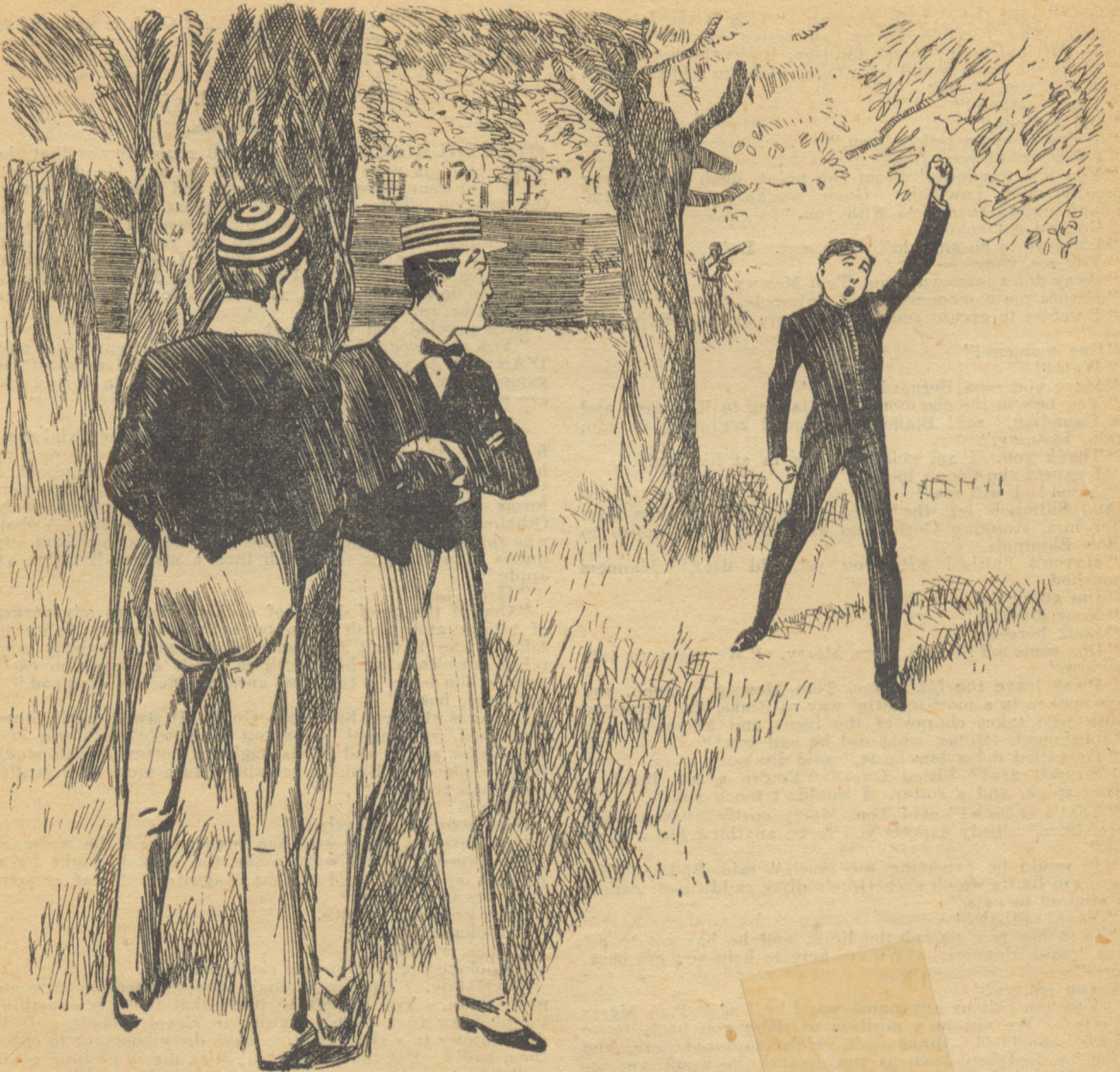
"Am I to undahstand, Tom Mewwy, that Goah has not agreed to apologise?"

"Well, you see, I thought you would be able to explain things to him, Gussy, in your well-known style, and induce him to play up," said Tom Merry. "If not, Blake and Lowther and Manners and myself will try persuasion."

"I think I catch on," said Blake, rising. "I'll come with pleasure."

"Yaas, wathah! I have no doubt that I shall be able to put it stwaight to Goah, and induce him to do the wight thing."

"Come on, then."



Binks the page was walking along, waving his hand in the air. He was muttering to himself, and the juniors could catch his words as he came along: "Aha! they little know!"

They walked on together up the passage. Manners and Lowther joined them at the door of Tom Merry's room, and they passed on to the next study, which belonged to Gore and Skimpole. Tom Merry knocked and opened the door. Skimpole and Gore were there, and the sound of voices in hot argument was heard.

"It was mean, rotten, and absolutely disgusting of you to break my telephone, Gore. I regard it as the act of a savage."

"My dear chap," said Gore, "I'm descended from savages. We are all descended from savages. Our remote ancestors were all barbarous. Now, my heredity has been on the rampage, that's all. I've inherited the savage desire for destruction, hence I've chucked a cricket-bat at your telephone."

"It was too bad——"

"As a sincere Determinist, you cannot possibly blame anybody for being a victim of his heredity," said Gore, who delighted to catch Skimpole on the most absurd of his many "isms." Some of Skimpole's "isms" were all right, though he was not old enough to understand them. But on the subject of Determinism Gore found endless sport with the unfortunate Determinist.

Skimpole rubbed his long, thin nose thoughtfully. Gore certainly had him there.

As a Determinist refers every action to a fellow's hereditary instincts or to his environment, and declines to

blame anybody for anything, Skimpole couldn't logically condemn Gore for smashing his telephone.

It was a cruel and ill-natured action, and Determinism was all nonsense, and Gore knew that, but Skimpole was a slave of his theories.

"Still, you might have let it alone," said Skimpole weakly. "You know it's a great loss to me."

"My dear chap, if I take a fiendish delight in inflicting losses upon you, it's the fault of some remote ancestor of mine," grinned Gore. "Or, rather, it's the fault of some remote ancestor of yours. In fact, you can take it right back to the monkey age, when all the population of the world lived in trees and looked like Herbert Skimpole."

"Really, Gore——"

"Oh, no more jaw!" said Gore. "I've convinced you on your own principles that I have a right to bust your telephone with a cricket-bat if I choose. What more do you want?"

"I think you are a beast!"

"Very likely. I suppose I had some beastly ancestor—that's heredity—or perhaps it's my beastly environment—that's you," grinned Gore.

"Bai Jove!"

"What do you fellows want in my study? Get out!"

"It's my study as well as yours, Gore, and Tom Merry and his friends are perfectly welcome to enter it."

"They're not! Get out, you rotters! Chumming up with

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"SACKED!"

a boots!" said Gore, with a sneer. "This is the latest, I suppose. The Terrible Three had better change its title to the Terrible Four; latest addition, Binks the boots."

"Binks the boots would be a more welcome addition than a cad like you, Gore."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, get out!"

"We've come to talk to you."

"I don't want your jaw."

"You are wandwin' f'rom the point, deah boy. Pway close the door, Lowthah. Goah, we have a wathah important mattah to discuss with you."

"Go and eat coke!"

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

"You see, Gore—"

"Pway don't intewwupt me, Tom Mewwy. I—"

"Excuse me a moment," said Skimpole, "I—"

"I wefuse to excuse you if you intewwupt me, Skimmay. I—"

"One moment!"

"Wats!"

"Have you seen Bernard Glyn?"

"Yes, he's in the common room, jawing to Kangaroo and the Canadian," said Blake. "No good beginning on him again, Skimmy."

"Thank you. I am going to look in at his study."

"I expect the door's locked."

"Ahem! I will see."

And Skimpole left the study. Manners closed the door after him, stopping Gore, who evinced a great desire to follow Skimpole.

"Haven't finished with you yet, old dear," Manners remarked.

"I'm going out if I like."

"Your mistake."

"Look here—"

"Oh, come off!" said Tom Merry. "We want to talk business."

"Pway leave the biz to me, Tom Mewwy. Goah, you have spoken in a most insultin' way to Binks, the respected youth who takes charge of the boots and knives in this establishment. Binks, what did he call you?"

"He called me a low beast," said Binks.

"So you are!" hissed Gore. "You're a low beast, a gutter snipe, and a rotter. I wouldn't touch you."

"That's enough!" said Tom Merry curtly. "Now, look here, Gore, nobody expects you to be anything but a dirty cad."

"It would be expecting too much," said Blake. "But there are limits which even Gore's dirty caddishness cannot be allowed to pass."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gore has now passed the limit, and he has got to get back," said Manners. "We are here to help you get back, Gore."

"You rotters!"

"You can call us any name you like," said Tom Merry quietly. "We are in a position to slang you back, or to punch your head. Binks isn't. He's employed here, and if he knocked you down as you deserve, he would get the sack. Only a coward and a cur would take advantage of that."

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, of course, Gore is a coward and a worm," said Lowther; "but our business is to keep his cowardice and his wormishness within bounds."

"Exactly."

"You—you rotters!"

"Pway shut up, Goah, and listen to me. It is impos- sible that you will evah undahstand how to act as a gentleman should, but I will do my best to explain—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Ordah! I decline to be intewwupted."

"Leave off talking piffle, then, you ass," said Gore savagely.

"I wefuse to be called an ass, and to have my wemarks chawactewised as piffle," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I think the pwoceedings had better stop for a few minutes, deah boys, while I thwash Goah."

"Hold on! Gore, shut up!"

"I won't shut up. I—"

"Stand ready, you chaps. If he makes himself objection- able, bump him—and bump him hard. You needn't mind about damaging the floor."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore scowled savagely. But the juniors looked as if they meant business; and Gore, though he could rag Skimpole and bully Binks, was not of the stuff that heroes are made of. He had a certain amount of dogged courage, but he did not want a tussle with half a dozen "bumpers."

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass severely upon the cowed bully of the Shell.

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"SACKED!"

"Vewy good!" he said. "Now that Goah is weduced to ordah, I will pwoceed."

And he proceeded.

CHAPTER 8.

Gore Apologises.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS glanced round to see that the juniors were properly attentive, and found that all of them were looking serious and solemn, as befitted the occasion. Then he fixed his eyeglass upon Gore again.

"Goah, you have addressed our respected friend Binks in a wude and insultin' mannah. If you had addressed me in a wude and insultin' mannah, I should have given you a feahful thwashin'. Unfortunately Binks is not in a posish to do so. Therefore, as decent fellows, we have taken the matter up."

Gore scowled and was silent.

"You may wegard us as a committee of pwpowicty," said D'Arcy. "As you do not appeal to know the wules of the game, I will explain them to you. People in this world are placed upon an unequal footin'."

"Go hon, Gussy!"

"The people in a highah posish have more matewial comforts than the people in a lowah posish. Therefore they have more duties to perform. Ewewy extwa hundwad a year bwings new duties with it. A twue gentleman performs all these duties in the most punctilious mannah. Othahwise he is no gentleman, but only a parasite. A chap who takes the good things of life, and does not perform any duties in weturn, is no better than a maggot livin' in an apple."

"Hear, hear!"

"One of the chief duties of a chap who has advantages of money and posish is to be extwaordinawily polite to fellows who haven't the same advantages. Anybody who takes advantage of his posish to insult a chap who can't answer him back, is the most unspeakable sort of a cad."

"Hear, hear!"

"That is what you have done, Goah. If stwict justice were wendahed, you ought to be put in a boot's uniform and sent below stairs, and Binks ought to be put in this study in your place, as Binks is certainly much more of a gentleman than you are."

"Bravo!"

Gore scowled savagely.

"However, a chap who has twansgwessed the wules of good bweedin' can always make the mattah wight by a pwpoh apology," said Arthur Augustus. "That is your only wesource, Goah."

Gore gritted his teeth.

"Apologise!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Apologise to a chap that cleans boots!"

"Certainly."

That is anothah misappwehension on your part, Goah. You appeal to think that there is somethin' dewogatory to a chap's dignity in cleanin' boots. It is dewogatory to a chap's dig. to have dirty boots, or to clean them badly. But there is nothin' infra dig in cleanin' boots well. It has often occurred to me that there is a great deal of weal art in cleanin' boots weally well. You see, your posish. is absurd. Why does Binks clean the boots here?"

"Because he's paid for it, I suppose," snarled Gore.

"Yaas, certainly; the labowah is worthy of his hire," said D'Arcy, with a nod, "and Binks must live. But you seem to forget that the Head is wesponsible for Binks's engagement here as boot-cleaner."

"What about that?"

"Why, if there is anythin' base or dewogatory to a

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chap's chawactah in cleanin' boots, what should we think of the Head for givin' a boy such a job? The Head would be responsible for Binks doin' a disgraceful thing—a vewy-gwawe responsibility. The fact that a gentleman of such an esteemed chawactah as Dr. Holmes employs Binks to clean boots, shows that there is nothin' in boot-cleanin' to which the most fastidious person could possibly object."

Tom Merry gave D'Arcy a sounding slap on the shoulder. "Jolly good, Gussy! You talk like—like a gramophone!"

"Yaas, but pway don't dislocate my shouldah, Tom Mewwy. You see, Goah, in wunnin' down Binks's occupation in this weckless way, you are weally attackin' the chawactah of our respected head-mastah, who is responsible for Binks bein' so employed. Of course, you do not undahstand that, with your defective bwain, but I twust I have made it quite plain to you. And you will bear in mind, Goah, that nothin' can possibly be so disgwaceful to the man who does it as to the man who employs him to do it, if the thing is disgwaceful at all."

"Oh, rot!"

"I wefuse to have my wemarks chawactewised as wot. Pway hold my jacket, Tom Mewwy, while I thwash Goah."

"Order! Keep to the point, Gussy."

"But—"

"Order!"

"Well, pewwaps I had bettah go on."

"You'd better shut up," snarled Gore, "I've had enough of this. If you want to chum up with a boot-cleaner you can, but I'm not going to."

"I twust that Binks would have too much sense of what is due to his chawactah, to chum up with a fellow like you," said D'Arcy. And the juniors chuckled at the expression upon Gore's face.

"You—you—you—"

"But that is not the point now. I have explained to you that you have neglected the duties of your posish, and that you are required to apologise."

"I won't."

"It is the only way you can set yourself wight in your own eyes. Havin' acted like a wotten cad, you are bound to make the amende honorable."

"Rats!"

"You wefuse?"

"Yes."

"Very well," said D'Arcy, letting his eyeglass drop to the end of its cord, "I have done my best to bring Goah to a sense of his duty, deah boys, but I seem to have failed. I leave him to you."

"Good."

Gore made a rush for the door, but he was collared and dragged back in a moment.

"Bump him!" said Tom Merry, briefly.

And Gore was bumped.

It was not a gentle process, and Gore yelled and wriggled. "Lemme go! Leggo! Yah! Yow! Leggo!"

"Are you going to apologise?"

"No!" roared Gore.

"Bump him!"

He was bumped again.

"Will you apologise now, Gore?"

"No!"

"Bring out the ashpan."

The ashpan was pulled out from under the grate. It was pretty full of ashes, and Gore eyed it with considerable apprehension.

"Shove his head into it."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard that as a good ideah."

"Ow—yow—help!"

Gore's head was put in the ashpan, and the ashes were stirred up with his hair. He gasped and wriggled and yelled.

"Are you ready to apologise now, Gore?"

"No!" screamed Gore.

"Bai Jovè! He's stickin' it out!"

"Oè, let 'im alone," said Binks, "I don't want 'im to 'pollergise. Let 'im alone. I'd rather you didn't rag him, sir."

"That is a vewy pwopah sentiment on your part, Binks, but this is a question of the dig of the whole House. In a merely personal mattah you could pardon him. But he has disgwaced the School House by actin' like a cad."

"That's it," said Blake. "Are you ready to apologise now, Gore?"

"No! No! No!"

"See if there's any jam in the cupboard."

"Here you are—three pound jar, strawberry, half full."

"Good! Mix it up with his topknot."

Gore shuddered.

The ashes were bad enough, but to have jam mixed up

with them in his hair was a prospect that overcame even his sullen obstinacy.

"Ow! Don't! Keep that jam off, you beasts!"

"Are you weady to do the wight thing, deah boy?"

"Beasts! Rotters!"

"Are you going to apologise?"

"No—yes! Yes."

"Good! Get up."

Gore staggered to his feet. He presented a shocking spectacle, though he had certainly had no more than he fully deserved.

"Now, then, go ahead!"

Gore turned towards Binks, palpitating with fury.

"I—I apologise," he stuttered.

"Very good. You are sowwy you acted in a caddish way?"

"No—yes."

"You are weally sowwy?"

"Yes."

"Are you satisfied, Binks?"

Binks grinned.

"Yes, thank you, Master D'Arcy, I am quite satisfied."

"Vewy good. I am satisfied too, then, and we are done with you, Goah."

Binks chuckled, and left the study. The whole affair appeared very humorous to him, though the juniors were in deadly earnest.

"One word more," said Tom Merry, sternly, "we shall keep an eye on you, Gore. We know you; you are the kind of fellow to try to take it out of Binks, because we have ragged you into acting decently for once. Let us see a sign of that, and we'll give you such a time that you'll think this a joke to it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the avengers quitted the study, leaving Gore in a frame of mind bordering upon frenzy.

CHAPTER 9.

An Alarm in Study No. 6.

"HAVE you seen that ass Skimpole?" It was Bernard Glyn who asked the question wrathfully. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy lowered his teacup, and looked at the red and excited face that was looking in at the door.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good. Where is he?" demanded Glyn. "The ass has been to my study. I left the door unlocked—"

"That was wathah careless of you, considewin'—"

"Well, a chap can't always be locking his door, can he? I left the door unlocked, and he's been there."

"Anything missing?" grinned Jack Blake.

"Yes; a hundred-yard coil of insulated wire and a set of electric bells and pushes," said the Liverpool lad. "I was going to use them for an experiment, and he's collared the lot."

"How do you know it was Skimmay?"

"Of course it was Skimmy."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"It would be unjust to condemn Skimmay on such fwivolous gwounds," he said. "You did not see him."

"Ass! He's been trying to get into my study all day."

"But you did not see him, therefore you do not know—"

"I do know, dummy! Look here, where is he? You've seen him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, tell me where he is?"

"Undah the cirs, as there is no diwect pwoof of Skimmay's guilt, and it is only a suspish against him, I wefuse."

"You utter ass!"

"Weally Glyn—"

"You champion duffer!"

D'Arcy raised his teacup to his lips again, to show Glyn how scornful he felt by loftily taking no notice of his words. Glyn stamped out of the study, and slammed the door with a terrific slam.

Arthur Augustus gave a howl.

"Ow, yow!"

The hot tea from the cup had swooped out over his waistcoat with the start he gave at the slamming of the door.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "What did you do that for, Gussy?"

"Oh, my waistcoat's wuined!"

"Well, you can't expect it to stand that sort of usage."

"It was an accident, of course. It was caused by that duffah Glyn slamming the door."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy jumped up, and commenced mopping his drenched waistcoat with a silk handkerchief. The silk handkerchief was soon reduced to the state of a limp rag.

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake. "You are an ass, and no

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mistake! You'll never get the tea stains out of that handkerchief!"

"That's all wight!"

"Looks like a good one, too."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, if you don't mind——"

"I don't mind a bit, deah boy. You see, it's not my handkerchief," said Arthur Augustus calmly, as he mopped away at his waistcoat.

"Ha, ha, ha! Is it Dig's?"

"My word!" exclaimed Digby. "If——"

"It's all wight, Dig, deah boy, it's not your's. It's Blake's."

Blake gave a yell.

"Mine!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Jack Blake jumped up. Arthur Augustus held out the sopping silk handkerchief to him with a bland smile.

"Thank you, deah boy. I've finished."

And he sat down at the table.

Blake took the handkerchief, and looked at it, and looked at D'Arcy. But the face of Arthur Augustus was so beautifully unconscious that he swallowed his wrath. He threw the handkerchief into a corner, and sat down himself.

"I don't know whether you'll ever be found dead in the School House, Gussy," he remarked, "but if you do, you'll know the reason."

"I should uttably wefuse—I mean, I wegard your we mark as widiculous."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries suddenly. Herries had not the quickest wit in the Fourth Form, and it sometimes took him a few seconds to see a joke, and his great laugh often came along after the rest had been reduced to gravity again.

Blake stared at him.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"Then what's the matter?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Nothing."

"If there's nothing the matter, what are you making that ghastly row about?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm not making a ghastly row."

"Well, it sounds like one," said Blake. "The sooner you——"

He broke off suddenly.

Instead of finishing the sentence, he whirled round in his chair, and fixed his eyes with an expression of great surprise upon the oak-pannelled wall.

The others followed his glance.

"What's wrong?" asked Digby, instinctively hushing his voice.

"Listen!"

From the oaken wall came a slight sound.

The juniors started in wonder.

In that pannelled wall was the secret opening that was as old as St. Jim's itself, and which had been accidentally discovered by Binks, the school page, who had used his knowledge to play tricks on the fellows whose rooms were accessible by means of the secret passages.

St. Jim's, one of the oldest buildings in Sussex, was honey-combed with secret passages, a part of which were known, and were laid down in the plans of the school.

But the network of passages, mostly in the thickness of the great stone walls, that were accessible by the secret panel in Blake's study, was not laid down on any plan. It was known only to a few of the juniors.

Jack Blake had discovered Binks in the act of playing his tricks there, and had agreed to keep his secret on condition that he never played a trick again—which Binks, in his terror of the "sack" had gladly promised not to do.

But the sound that was now audible from behind the panels of the wall, seemed to tell of an explorer in the murky recesses.

Jack Blake listened intently.

Again a sound, and this time he knew what it was. It was the sound of a boot scraping on the rough stone of the passage.

The junior's eyes gleamed.

"You heard that?" he whispered.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's Binks!"

"But he promised——"

"Yaas, wathah! He pwomised, Blake, and I weally do not think that Binks, with all his funnay mannahs and customs, would bweak a pwomise."

"He promised not to play tricks," said Blake. "He didn't promise never to enter the passage again."

"Yaas, there is a distinction there."

"Of course there is."

Digby nodded thoughtfully.

"Perhaps there is," he remarked. "But if Binks isn't playing tricks, what the dickens should he want to get into a dusty, dirty old passage for?"

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"Yaas, wathah!"

"We don't know it's Binks," said Herries.

"It must be," said Blake, shaking his head. "No one outside this study knows the secret of the panel, except Binks."

"That's so, too."

"It's Binks. The question is, what is he up to? He went out over an hour ago, and he may have thought of dodging in quietly this way, if he's overstayed his time. There is a secret passage under St. Jim's leading to the old priory in the wood, as you know."

"That's it, I expect."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, Binks will have to learn not to use the secret passage, and to take liberties with our study," said Blake, frowning. "We'll jolly well give him a start."

He stepped quietly to the wall.

There he felt over the panels, black with age, till his finger found the hidden spring which moved the secret doorway.

"Ready, you chaps, and give a yell when I open the panel!" he whispered.

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

"Ready?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then go!"

Blake pressed the spring.

The tall, narrow panel flew open, leaving an aperture wide enough for a human form to pass. Black darkness lay beyond.

"Hallo-o-o-o!"

The four chums sent the yell together, with the full force of their lungs, into the dark aperture.

There was a sudden exclamation.

"Oh, Lor'!"

"Binks!"

"Oh, Master Blake, you startled me!"

There was a sound of scuttling feet in the gloom. Binks came into sight, looking very pale and scared.

"Was anyone with you?" asked Blake.

"You startled me," said Binks. "I—I didn't know what was appening."

"Come in," said Blake severely.

Binks stepped into the study. Jack Blake shook a warning forefinger at him.

"The next time you use this study as a means of getting into the school when you're late, you'll get bumped, and it will hurt," he said. "Now scoot!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Binks, looking very much relieved, scooted.

CHAPTER 10.

Caught!

BUZZ!
"Dear me!" said Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell.

He was entering the Shell dormitory in the School House, when the sudden buzz in the silence of the room startled him.

The dormitory was very dark, for it was late in the evening, and near the bedtime of the Lower School.

Only a glimmering showed the high windows, at one of which the desperate Portuguese had attempted an entrance the previous night.

Buzz!

"Dear me, what can that be?"

The buzz of an electric bell in the silence naturally startled the Shell-master, as he had had no previous knowledge of the existence of an electric bell in the Shell dormitory.

He advanced into the room, however, and struck a match to light the gas. As he did so, he caught his foot in a wire across the floor, and stumbled and fell headlong.

The match went in one direction, and the box in the other, and Mr. Linton uttered a word or two that would have sent a shock through the Shell if they had heard. He scrambled up, still murmuring things about the person who had stretched the wire there, and started again as the buzz rang in his ears.

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Linton. "This is most extraordinary—most extraordinary indeed! The place seems to be haunted."

Buzz-z-z-z-z!"

"Oh, dear! What on earth can it mean?"

Buzz!

The Shell-master groped for the matchbox.

He knocked his head against a box, and his hand against the leg of a bed, and said things in a higher key.

And again, as he touched the bed, there came a louder and more prolonged buzz.

Buzz-z-z-z-z!"

The buzz reached other ears than Mr. Linton's.

In the junior common-room, where the juniors were



"Come down, madman, come down!" shouted Mr. Railton from the quad below. But the Portuguese did not reply. He climbed steadily on, watched with horror by the eyes below.

putting away chess and whatever they had in hand, preparatory for bed, Skimpole gave a sudden jump.

He was reading a big book—a book that weighed about a dozen pounds avoirdupois, and was probably heavier still in the reading, to judge by the look of it.

The great volume, which contained the latest lucubrations of Professor Softtop on the subject of Determinism, went to the floor with a crash.

Skimpole jumped up, his spectacles nearly sliding off his nose in his excitement.

"Hark!"

"I hear the watchdog bark!" said Monty Lowther.

"It was not a watchdog, Lowther," said Skimpole, who never pretended to be able to see a joke. "It was the alarm."

"What alarm?"

"The burglar-alarm."

"Which?"

"There is only one—the one I have fixed in the Shell dormitory," said Skimpole, blinking excitedly. "It was for that I borrowed Glyn's wires and bells—"

"You—you ass!" growled Glyn, who had just come into the room. "I've been looking for you. Are you ready to be slain?"

"Please do not be violent, Glyn. If you must fight, let it be for a noble cause, not in a spirit of vulgar commercialism," said Skimpole severely.

"Well, my hat!"

"Besides, there is a burglar!"

"Where?"

"In the Shell dorm. Listen!"

The buzzing could be clearly heard, in spite of the distance of the Shell dormitory from the room downstairs. The bells were large ones, the battery Skimpole had borrowed very powerful, and the ringing was very loud indeed.

The Shell fellows stared at one another.

"Sounds as if there's something in it!" said Noble.

"Something in the Shell dorm, anyway," grinned Lowther.

"By Jove! If it's the giddy burglar—"

"Let's look!"

"He wouldn't come as early as this."

"He might have come to get in before we go to bed!" exclaimed Dane excitedly. "It might be his dodge to hide under one of the beds, or to dodge into one of the empty studies, and wait till it was safe to come out."

Tom Merry could not help a start.

The thought of the savage, unscrupulous adventurer from GEM LIBRARY.—No. 83.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"SACKED!"

An Extra-long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

South Africa being hidden in the house, waiting a favourable moment to emerge, was a disquieting one.

"Let's go and have a look, anyway!" he exclaimed.

"He is after plans of the aeroplane," said Skimpole. "I have placed especially more wires round my bed and my box, so that a mere touch will sound the alarm. The plans are hidden under my mattress, and the villain is after them. Come on! Don't bring a light, or he will be alarmed, and fly. If he escapes with the plans of the aeroplane, we may have a fleet of German aeroplanes coming over the week after next.

"Skimmelin ahoy!" sang out Monty Lowther.

"Pray be quiet, Lowther!"

"Yaas, wathah, Lowthah, deah boy. Shut up!"

"Come on, you chaps!"

The Shell swarmed upstairs.

They reached the open door of the dormitory, and the buzzing of the bell was now simply furious, mingled with gasps and jerky breathing.

There was certainly somebody in the dorm.

"Come on!" whispered Tom Merry. "We'll rush him in the dark, and collar him, before he's got a chance to skip!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Go it, ye cripples!"

"Now, then, all together!"

And the juniors rushed in.

They knew the lie of the land, so to speak, well enough to be able to run about the dormitory in the dark, without knocking against any of the permanent articles of furniture there; but they weren't prepared for the electric wires.

There were grunts and gasps as feet were caught, and the owners of the feet went wildly stumbling.

Several of the juniors, however, rolled up a struggling form on the floor, and promptly seized it.

The form began to struggle furiously but they grasped it, and piled upon it in numbers.

Arthur Augustus received a knock under the chin from an elbow in the excitement, and rolled over on his back.

"Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of the School House, under the impression that the burglar had struck him. "Bai Jove! You wottah! You have hurt my beastly chin considerably. Bai Jove! Collah him!"

And Arthur Augustus reached out, and seized a throat, and rolled the owner thereof on the floor, and sat on him, bumping him in high excitement.

His unfortunate victim gasped and struggled, but D'Arcy was strong enough when he exerted himself, and he exerted himself now, and his prisoner was pinned on the floor.

"Help, deah boys! I've got him, and he's stwugglin' like anythin'!"

"Get a light!"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"A light! A light!"

"I've got him!"

"We've got him, too!"

"Bai Jove! Then there are two of them!"

"Keep him tight!"

"Get a light somebody!"

"A light! A light! Quick!"

Monty Lowther struck a match. He turned on the gas and lighted it, and the scene was suddenly brightly illuminated.

"Bai Jove! Lend a hand, deah boys!"

"Gerroff!"

"Gweat Scott!" Arthur Augustus gazed down at his prisoner in dismay. It was Digby. "Dig, you uttah ass! What do you mean?"

"What do you mean, you spluttering idiot?"

"I wefuse to be called a splutewin' idiot! I wegard you as an ass. This is not the time to pwetend to be a burglah."

"You ass! You didn't give me a chance."

"Pway don't attempt to excuse yourself, Dig. It was weally too bad."

"You shrieking idiot!"

"You uttah ass!"

A yell of amazement from Tom Merry interrupted the Fourth-Formers.

The supposed burglar had been extracted from under the heap of sprawling juniors, and in the ruffled, rumpled, red, and excited prisoner, the Shell recognised their Form-master.

"Mr. Linton!"

CHAPTER 11.

As One Gentleman to Another!

MR. LINTON staggered to his feet, gasping for breath. He was in such a rage that he could hardly speak.

"Oh, sir!" gasped Tom Merry, in dismay. "We—we are sorry, sir."

"Bai Jove! I should say so!" exclaimed D'Arcy, turning his attention from Digby to the much-injured Form-master.

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"It's too bad! It's all the fault of that uttah ass, Skimpole, with his fat-headed burglah alarms."

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Wats! You ought to be licked!"

"Boys!" Mr. Linton found his voice at last. "This—this trick—"

"It—it wasn't a trick, sir. It was quite an accident. We never thought—"

"We took you for the burglar, sir."

"We thought it was that rotter breaking in again, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I believe you, so far," said the Shell-master, almost choking. "But these wires were placed on the floor to catch someone."

"Weally, sir—"

"I came here to see that the windows were secure before you went to bed, and I was caught in this villainous trap, and hurled to the floor."

"Oh, sir!"

"Skimpole!"

"Yes, sir."

"You placed these wires in the dormitory?"

Skimpole blinked at him.

"I am very sorry for the accident, sir."

"Did you place these wires in their present position?"

"I really hope you are not hurt, sir."

"I am hurt."

"Then I am very sorry."

"Will you answer my question, Skimpole? I asked you whether you placed the wires in their present position."

"I should prefer to change the subject, sir."

"Answer me, boy!" thundered the Form-master.

Skimpole rubbed his nose thoughtfully. It was extremely probable that he would get one of the soundest canings he had ever experienced, if his guilt were proved. Skimpole was a Determinist, but he had his wits about him in other respects.

"Really, sir, is it quite the thing to ask a chap to accuse himself?" he asked. "If I am upon my defence, I have a right to be silent, sir. That is law, sir."

"Skimpole!"

"Yes, sir? We are going to greatly improve the laws when Socialism is established, sir, in the course of a few months from now; but that law is all right, sir."

"Skimpole, I know you were the guilty party, from what D'Arcy just said. I shall, therefore—"

"Pway allow me a word, sir. I wegard it as not bein' owicket to take advantage of an unguarded expression dropped by myself. It is placin' me in the posish of a sneak!"

"Silence!"

"Certainly, sir. I twust, howevah, upon reflection, that you will not place me in the posish of a sneak."

"Leave the room, D'Arcy!"

"With plesuah, sir. Before I go, howevah, I must remark that, as one gentleman to another, I twust you will not place me in the posish of a sneak."

And Arthur Augustus walked out.

Mr. Linton looked round upon the juniors. He was not really a bad-tempered man, and now that he was cooling down, he realised that, perhaps, it would not be advisable to take advantage of the words accidentally dropped by D'Arcy.

"I will give you a chance to explain, Skimpole," he said.

"Why did you place the wires in this position?"

"I should be happy to explain, sir, without prejudice," said Skimpole, "that is to say, without admitting anything to tell against myself. That being admitted, I will explain that the wires were placed as a burglar-alarm."

"Oh!"

"I was expecting the burglar to return to-night, sir, to carry out the nefarious project which was interrupted last night."

"What? Is it possible, Skimpole, that you are acquainted with the burglar's object in entering this dormitory?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"And what was his object?"

"To steal the plans of my aeroplane, sir!"

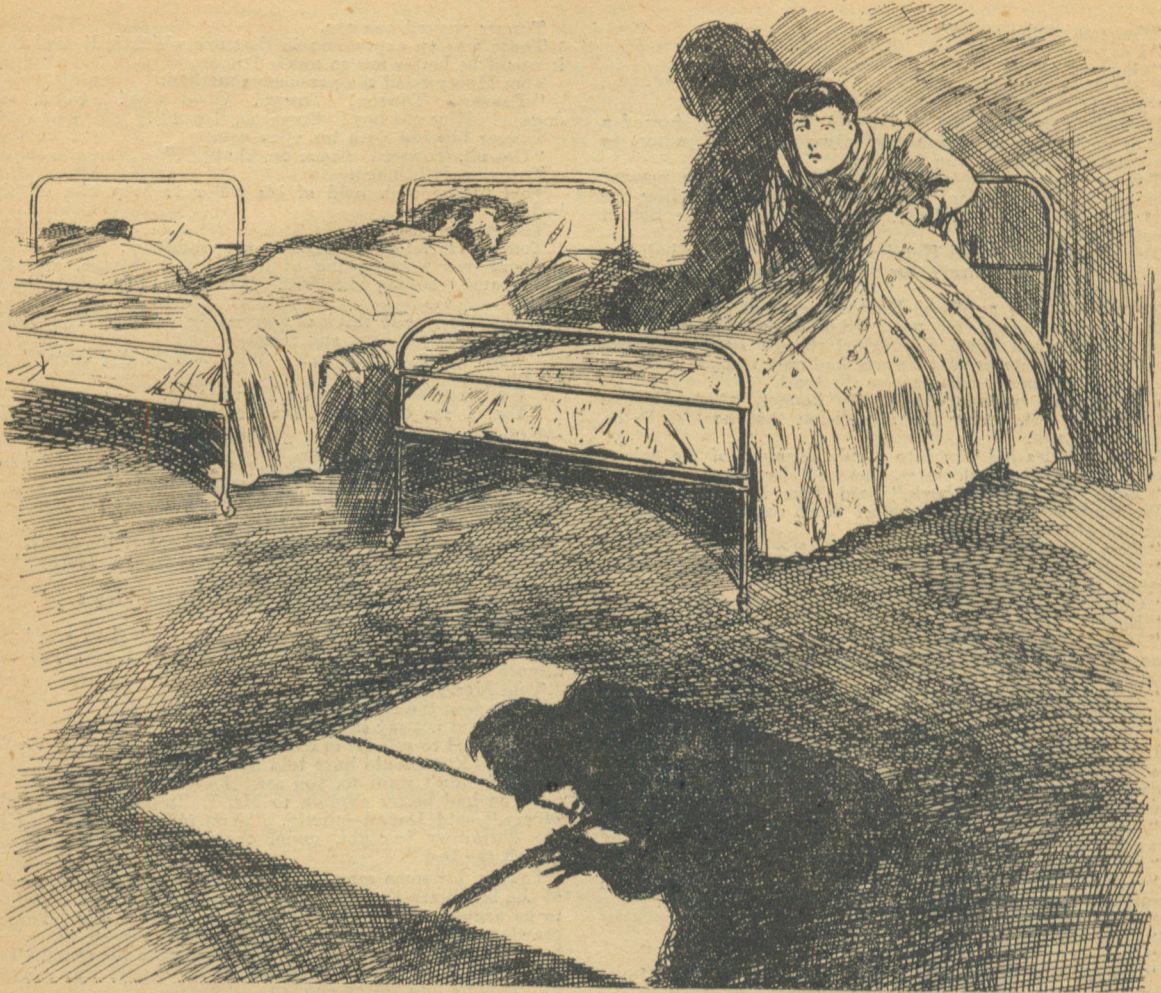
Mr. Linton almost staggered.

"To—to what?"

The juniors could not suppress a giggle. The expression upon the Shell-master's face was too funny, added to the perfect seriousness of Skimpole.

"To steal the plans of my aeroplane, sir. I have invented an aeroplane, compared with which the Bleriot machine is a toy. Had I received financial assistance from the War Office, I should have flown across the Channel, and won the 'Daily Mail' prize of £1,000. Unfortunately, I was unable to build my machine. Some foreign Government has sent an emissary—"

"A what?"



Tom Merry started up in bed. The patch of light on the floor had been suddenly darkened by a shadow—the shadow of the head and shoulders of a man!

"An emissary, sir, to steal my plans."

"Skimpole, I begin to believe that you are little more than an idiot!" exclaimed the master of the Shell.

"Really, sir!"

"If I thought you were joking, I should cane you severely. I suppose, however, that you are talking this utter nonsense seriously."

"It's not nonsense, sir," said Skimpole, in astonishment. "It seems nonsense to you, sir, owing to some mental defect—"

"Bless my soul! You will write five hundred lines, Skimpole, for impertinence."

"I made my confession without prejudice, sir, in a legal sense—"

"I am not punishing you for this folly, but for your impertinence—"

"Really, sir—"

"Upon the whole, however, I pardon you," said Mr. Linton. "You are really hardly a fit subject for punishment. But if I find any more burglar-alarms in the dormitory, Skimpole, I shall make an example of you."

"But, sir—"

"No more. You may go."

And the boys crowded away.

"Jolly good of Linton to take it like that," said Manners. "Skimpole, of course, ought to be in a lunatic asylum, instead of a school, and Linton knows it."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, joining them in the passage. "Has Linton let the uttah ass off, deah boys?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Jollay good. I shall have to acknowledge it to him."

"Better keep off the grass," said Tom Merry, catching the swell of the School House by the arm. "Linton isn't any too sweet just now."

D'Arcy pulled himself away.

"I feel bound to give Mr. Linton a word of recognition on the subject, Tom Mewwy."

"Ass!"

"I refuse to be called an ass."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy marched into the Shell dormitory.

Skimpole was collecting up his burglar-alarms under the severe eye of the Form-master.

"If you please, sir—"

Mr. Linton looked at him.

"What do you want, D'Arcy?"

"I wish to express my sense of your kindness and pwopah conduct, sir, in lettin' off that uttah ass Skimpole, sir."

"Indeed!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir! I wegard you as havin' played the game, sir, and as one gentleman to anothah I beg to tendah my acknowledgments, sir."

Mr. Linton looked at him curiously.

"Very good, D'Arcy. It is a distinction indeed for a Form-master to earn the approval of a junior boy. You may go."

"Yaas, sir."

And D'Arcy went, perfectly satisfied with himself, and with the way he had put it to Mr. Linton, as one gentleman to another.

CHAPTER 12.

Good Old Towser.

"B R-R-R-R-R-RR!"

"Keep that beast away from my legs, Herries!"

"Rats! Keep your legs away from Towser!"

"Look here—"

"Get out of the way!"

"I say——"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"Bai Jove, Hewwies——"

"Bash!"

Herries dragged on the chain, and Towser, who showed a strong inclination to sample the calves of all the juniors in the passage, followed him ambling.

Towser wasn't allowed in the house, but the present occasion was of sufficient importance to justify eluding the rule on the subject; at least, so the juniors of the School House thought.

Tom Merry had asked Herries for the loan of his bulldog, to keep in the dormitory for the night, and Herries had gladly acceded.

Towser was the apple of Herries's eye, and his faith in him was unbounded. He persisted in a belief that Towser had once tracked down a burglar, though Blake declared with equal persistence that Towser had only tracked a kipper which had by chance come across the trail.

Towser had willingly left his kennel, when Herries fetched him out, under the impression that he was to be taken for a run.

When Herries led him into a side doorway of the School House, and up the back stairs, Towser objected.

"Mind he doesn't bark," said Tom Merry anxiously. "We don't want a giddy prefect down on us for bringing him into the house."

"He's all right."

"Shall I hold my hand ovah his mouth, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Certainly. If he bites you——"

"Eh?"

"If he bites you, I've got some stuff you can rub on the place—jolly good stuff. I've used it myself, and it's a caution."

"Is he likely to bite me, Hewwies, if I put my hand ovah his mouth?"

"Well, only in a playful way."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Herries, and then upon the bulldog. Towser's splendid array of teeth seemed to indicate that even a playful bite from them would not be a wholly pleasant experience.

"Upon second thoughts, Hewwies, I will not put my hand ovah his mouth."

"Shove yours there, Tom Merry."

"Ahem! Towser looks very quiet. It would be—er—an insult to Towser to suggest that he couldn't keep quiet."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, doggy!"

"Gr-r-r!"

"Sounds like sharpening a saw, doesn't it?" said Monty Lowther. "I say, is he likely to break out at all in the night, Herries?"

"He's as quiet as a lamb."

"Yes, he looks it," agreed Harry Noble. "I like specially the sweet, calm look in his eyes."

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

Herries grunted, and dragged Towser into the Shell dormitory. Skimpole had finished collecting up his burglar-alarm, and had taken them away, with dire threats as to what would happen if he ever contrived any more of them. Skimmy was a little worried about the danger of the plans of his aeroplane, but he realised that it was of no use to argue with an obstinate Form-master.

The amateur Blieriot blinked at the bulldog as Herries dragged him in.

"Better tie him to my bed, Herries," he said. "The emissary of the foreign Government is certain to make for my bed."

"Rats!"

"Really, Merry——"

"Tie him to Tom Merry's bed," said Blake.

"Right-ho!"

Towser was secured to the leg of the bed. He was persuaded to lie under the bed, out of sight, the chain being a long one and allowing him plenty of room.

"That's all wight," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust that he will not feel hungwy in the night and climb on the bed and make a meal of Tom Mewwy."

"Well, I'll leave him a few biscuits," said Herries.

And Towser was left under the bed.

About ten minutes later was the bed-time of the Shell, and as it was a prefect's duty to see them to bed and extinguish the light, Tom Merry decided to cut up first and make sure that Towser was out of sight.

He entered the dormitory and lighted the gas.

"My hat!" he exclaimed.

Towser had climbed on the bed, and was asleep in the middle of it, breathing away very comfortably there.

"Hi, Towser! Towsey!"

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Towser opened one eye.

There was an expression in that eye which indicated that it would be better not to touch Towser.

Tom Merry tried the persuasive method.

"Towser! Towser! Towsey! Good dog! Good, old doggie! Nice old boy! Come on, Towser!"

Towser blinked with his open eye.

"Get off, Towser! Come on, chappy!"

Towser only blinked.

Tom Merry took hold of his collar to help him off the bed.

Towser growled.

Tom Merry let go the collar rather suddenly.

There was a trampling of feet in the passage, and the Shell came trooping in to bed. Darrel, the prefect, followed them.

It was too late to think of concealing Towser. The Sixth-Former looked at him, and frowned.

"What does this mean? Why is this dog here?" he asked.

"Well, you see——" began Tom Merry.

"Yes, I see that you have broken a house rule," said Darrel.

"It's the burglar, you see."

"What on earth do you mean? Towser is the burglar?"

"Ha, ha! No. I mean, it's the burglar we are afraid of—not afraid, I mean, but we want to be ready for him, and Towser——"

The prefect looked attentively at the hero of the Shell.

"Do you think the burglar is likely to return, Merry?"

"Yes, Darrel."

"Then you must have some reason for thinking so?"

"Ye-e-es."

"That is, you know more about the affair than you have told the masters," said Darrel sternly. "I give you one minute to explain yourself."

Tom Merry coloured.

"I've seen the chap before, that's all," he said.

"You did not say so before."

"He tried to rob me in the wood a week ago."

"Oh! You should have told Mr. Railton so."

"I—I didn't want to, you see. I——"

"You had better explain to Mr. Railton in the morning, Merry," said Darrel quietly. "You may keep the dog in the dormitory to-night, under the circumstances. Towser, get off the bed."

Towser, for some reason of his own, obeyed the deep voice of the big Sixth-Former. Darrel was not the kind of fellow to be argued with, either by a junior or by a dog. Towser crawled under the bed, and Tom Merry turned in. The hero of the Shell was feeling very unquiet in his mind. The box Herbert Dorrinan had placed in his charge was causing him trouble and worry enough.

The lights were turned out, and Darrel said good-night and left them. Then a still, small voice was heard from Skimpole's bed.

"Tom Merry."

"Hallo!"

"Did I hear you say that you had seen the burglar before?"

"How do I know?"

"Eh? Surely you know——"

"Surely you know whether you heard me or not."

"Ah! I mean, did you say so?"

"Oh, yes! I said so."

"Then you have seen him before?"

"Yes."

"May I ask what you know about the man?"

"Certainly."

"Well, what, then?"

"Lots."

"What is it, though?"

"A secret."

"Really, Merry, you said——"

"I said you might ask——"

"I am afraid that you are given to quibbling, Merry. I particularly want to know all I can about this emissary of a foreign Government."

"Ass! He's nothing of the sort."

"Is he a foreigner?"

"Well, yes."

"Ah, I thought so! Of what nationality?"

"A Portuguese. Go to sleep."

"Ahem! The Portuguese Government is hardly likely to attempt the robbery of my aeroplane," said Skimpole. "Doubtless, however, he is an emissary of a nearer Power—Germany, for instance."

"Go to sleep!"

"I cannot go to sleep while my aeroplane is in danger. You had better tell me all you know, and I will——"

Snore!

"Really, Merry! However, perhaps you will let me tie

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"SACKED!"

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wser to my bed, as I am in the greatest danger of an
ack from the burglar.

Tom Merry chuckled in the darkness.

"You can have Towser, if you can move him."

"Ahem! Perhaps you had better bring him here."

Snore!

"Will you bring Towser here, Merry?"

Snore!

"I do not believe you are asleep. That nasal ebullition
simply an inarticulate attempt at prevarication."

Snore!

And Skimpole gave it up.

CHAPTER 13.

An Amazing Mystery.

ARKNESS and silence lay upon the School House.
In the Shell dormitory, Tom Merry slept with the
soundness of healthy youth and a clear conscience.

Towser, under the bed, gave him every confidence, for
pawer, whether he possessed the trailing virtues attributed
him by his master or not, was certainly all that could
be desired as a watchdog.

If Tom Merry shifted on his pillow, Towser gave a move-
ment; and, in fact, if he slept at all, he must have slept
with one eye and one ear open.

Midnight had tolled out from the clock tower, unheard
by the sleeping ears.

Towser had blinked in the darkness as the sound rolled
rough the silence of the night.

A quarter of an hour passed, and then the quarter sounded
once faintly; and then another sound, fainter still.

Fainter, but closer at hand. It was the sound of an open-
ing door.

The door was opened with the greatest caution, but it
made a slight sound, and Towser's eyes opened wide in the
room.

He looked towards the door of the dormitory, but he did
not growl. He bared his teeth, and crept out from under
the bed, and his eyes blinked greenish in the deep gloom.

Towser was on his guard.

If the collar had not been on his neck, he would have
leaped upon the dark form that entered the dormitory with
a single bound.

As it was, he watched him. A dark, shadowy form, loom-
ing up in the darkness vaguely, eerily.

Towser's jaws opened. The alarm was about to ring forth
on them, but it did not. For the intruder, after pausing
for some moments inside the doorway, made straight towards
Tom Merry's bed.

He was advancing directly upon Towser. And Towser,
like a wise dog, withheld his barking, and prepared to use
his teeth instead.

And still all the dormitory slept.

Nearer and nearer, with hardly a sound, and hardly
visible in the gloom, came the shadowy form.

There was a sudden growl, a jingle of a chain, and then
a fearful yell rang through the Shell dormitory.

Tom Merry started up in bed.

For the moment he thought he was in the grip of a night-
mare, so wild and terrible were the sounds that rang
through the dormitory.

The growling of the dog, the trampling of feet, the hoarse
creaming of a startled and terrified man, mingled in a
wild uproar.

Tom Merry sprang out of bed. After the first moment of
confused surprise, he understood. It was the enemy.

The junior had placed matches and candle beside his bed
in case of need, and in a few seconds he had a light.

Bernard Glyn, at the same moment, switched on the flare
of an electric glow-lamp, and a bar of white light fell across
the strange scene in the dormitory.

A little, lithe man was struggling fiercely with the bull-
dog. Towser's grip was on his leg, and there was blood
upon the dog's jaws, and the burglar seemed to be terrified
out of his wits.

Tom Merry seized a cricket-stump and sprang towards
him.

It was the Portuguese. He knew the dark, hard face of
Da Silva, the swarthy face of the adventurer from South
Africa. He stooped quickly and snapped open the fastening
on Towser's chain. At the same moment the Portuguese
tore himself desperately from the dog, and ran for the door.

Towser was after him in a flash.

The foreigner was wearing a dark, sack-like coat, and
Towser's teeth fastened in the cloth, and the bulldog was
ragged away by the flight of the Portuguese.

"After him!" roared Lowther.

A crowd of Shell fellows rushed out into the passage. The
whole House was alarmed. There was a sound of opening
doors, of loud voices calling to know what was the matter.
Fellows poured out of the other dormitories, and Sixth-

Formers turned out of their rooms, in all sorts of attire or
no attire, with all sorts of weapons in their hands.

Tom Merry ran into Towser in the passage. He fell over
the bulldog, but was up again like a shot.

"Light here—quick!"

Glyn's light flashed on the bulldog.

Towser had a great piece of cloth in his teeth. But there
was nothing to be seen of the Portuguese.

"He's got away from Towser."

"He can't be out of the house yet."

Mr. Railton's voice rang out above the din.

"Guard the doors and windows, and he cannot escape."

"Bai Jove, that's a good ideah!" ejaculated Arthur
Augustus D'Arcy, coming out of the Fourth Form dormitory
in a really elegant pyjama suit, with an Indian club in his
hand. "Guard the windows, deah boys!"

And he gave his club a swing, which was followed by a
sort of war-whoop from Reilly, of the Fourth.

"Arrah! Faith, and is it after smashin' me legs ye
are?"

"Bai Jove! Did it hit you?"

"Faith, and it's nearly sprained me!" roared Reilly,
clasping his leg and dancing.

"I'm sowwy."

"You gossoon—you ass!"

"I wofuse to be called an—"

"This way, Gussy!" said Blake, dragging his elegant
chum off to the stairs. "Don't let those Shell-fish capture
the giddy burglar."

"Bai Jove, that's wight!"

Doors and windows were soon guarded by crowds of eager
fellows, who were only too anxious for the midnight intruder
to try conclusions with them. Not a door, not a window
was found unfastened.

But nothing was seen of the Portuguese.

They hunted high and low—studies and passages, box-
rooms and bed-rooms, even the garrets were explored—but
the enemy was not discovered.

Da Silva was gone.

Mr. Railton was extremely vexed. He had no doubt that
it was the same burglar as on the previous night, and that
the rascal had some special purpose to serve by entering
the School House.

How had he entered, how had he escaped?

Those questions could only be answered by his capture,
and he was evidently not to be captured.

"The wretch must have a key to one of the doors," Mr.
Railton said at last, in great surprise and uneasiness. "I
cannot understand it."

It was evidently useless to keep the search up longer.

An hour or more had been expended, and a hundred boys
had searched everywhere, and it was quite plain that the
intruder was gone. But how he could have obtained a key to
a door of the School House was a mystery. The School
House was a huge, rambling building, which had been added
to again and again at different periods, and there were
doors in the structure in the most unexpected places. If
the burglar had a key, he might have entered or left by
any one of them. He was gone now, and the search had
to be given up. But Mr. Railton was very much perturbed.
If the man really had a key, it certainly pointed to collusion
with someone inside the house; and that was a very dis-
turbing reflection.

When the boys went back to their beds, Towser was
chained again to Tom Merry's bed, and he went to sleep
contentedly under it, looking as if he knew he had deserved
well of his country.

CHAPTER 14.

Arthur Augustus Thinks it Out.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY took his eyeglass
from his pocket, and polished it carefully upon his
silk handkerchief.

He didn't want to use the eyeglass just then, but he wanted
to think, and he had often declared that he thought better
with the monocle in his eye.

It was the morning after the burglar's adventure with
Towser. The whole school was in a buzz of excitement
about it.

That the man should make a second attempt to enter the
house, and that he should particularly seek to get into the
Shell dormitory, astonished everybody—with the exception,
of course, of Tom Merry & Co.

Figgins & Co. came over from the New House to hear
all about it, and the whole school, from the head of the
Sixth down to the lowest fag, discussed the second burglary
during the morning, even in the class-rooms.

The police-inspector came from Rylcombe, and Tom Merry
was called into the Head's study, Darrel having reported,
as in duty bound, that the head boy of the Shell had
admitted knowing something about the burglar.

Tom Merry was questioned, and he replied frankly enough
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that the man had tried to rob him the previous week in Rylcombe Wood, and had been prevented by the other juniors. Further into details he did not go.

The wooden box entrusted to him by Herbert Dorrian was Dorrian's secret, and Tom felt that he could not mention it.

That the man was a Portuguese, that his name was Da Silva, the police learned from Tom Merry, and a complete description of him was furnished.

But Tom had very strong doubts as to whether they would succeed in capturing him.

The Portuguese was lying very low, though it was pretty certain that he was still in the neighbourhood.

Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was thinking about the matter.

When his chums in the Fourth Form found him standing in the doorway of the School House, polishing his eyeglass with a slow and deliberate carefulness, they knew that Arthur Augustus had something on his mind.

And they immediately gathered round him with solemn faces.

D'Arcy went on polishing his eyeglass.

"Speak!" said Blake, as if addressing an oracle.

"Go ahead," said Digby.

"Fire away!" urged Herries.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"What could you have done if you had been called in time last night?" asked Blake, with great interest. "Caught the burglar, of course?"

"It is extremewly pwob., deah boy."

"And now—"

"Going to track him down?" asked Digby, with interest.

"Have you found a clue—the track of a boot revealing the colour of his eyelashes, or anything of that sort?"

"Pway don't be an ass, Dig."

"I don't mind putting Towser on the scent, if you're thinking of tracking him down," said Herries. "He must have gone somewhere—"

"Go hon!"

"And Towser would soon nose him out. Let's ask the Head's permission to cut classes this afternoon, and go after him."

"I can see the Head granting it—I don't think."

"Pway listen to me, deah boys."

Jack Blake waved his hand.

"Listen to the words of wisdom."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Each sentence complete in itself, and every sentence a gem," said Blake solemnly. "Go ahead, Gussisimus."

Arthur Augustus screwed the monocle into his eye.

"Pway don't wot, Blake. I have been thinkin' ovah the mattah, and I have soluted the mystewy—I mean I have found the solution."

"Good. Let's hear it."

"Pway come with me."

"Whither?"

"Follow your uncle," said D'Arcy, in Tom Merry's best style, "and don't ask questions."

Blake, Herries, and Digby exchanged glances. Upon the whole, they decided not to bump their elegant chum, but to follow him and see if there was anything in it.

Arthur Augustus settled his silk hat more firmly on the back of his head, screwed up a considerable portion of his countenance round his monocle, and marched into the quadrangle. Blake, Herries, and Dig followed him.

Straight to Taggles's lodge Arthur Augustus led the way. Taggles, the much-tried porter of St. Jim's Collegiate School, was sunning himself upon a little bench outside his lodge.

He looked up in what Blake described as Taggy's suspicious way as the juniors came up; but, considering the rubs he had had with the chums of Study No. 6, Taggles might be pardoned, perhaps, for being a little suspicious of them.

Arthur Augustus raised a silk hat.

"Good-mornin', Taggles!"

"Mornin'," said Taggles.

"I twust you find yourself well this mornin', Taggles."

"I'm the same as usual, I s'pose," said Taggles, far from graciously.

"Bai Jove! I was hopin' to find you bettah, you know."

Taggles glared at the solicitous swell of St. Jim's.

"Look 'ere," he exclaimed, "what do you want?"

"Nothin'."

"Then take it and go," said Taggles.

"Wrap it up for us," said Blake.

Taggles snorted.

"The fact is, Taggles, deah boy—I mean my deah fellow."

said D'Arcy, "I have stwolved across the quad to have the pleasure of talkin' with you for a few minutes."

Taggles grunted.

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"If you've brought us across here to jolly well listen to you doing it, Gussy, you're going exactly the right way to work to get a thick ear," said Blake wrathfully.

"Patience, deah boy—"

"Rats! I'm not—"

"Pway wing off while I talk to Taggles. I undahstandin' Taggles, that your mastiff was let loose in the quadrangle last night, in case the burglah should weturn."

"He was," said Taggles.

"Did he alarm you at all?"

"He didn't."

"You didn't hear him bark, or anythin'?"

"No."

"You weren't woke up by the wow in the School House?"

"Which I was too far from the School House to be woke By up."

"Then you didn't know anythin' about the wascally wottah weturnin' until this mornin', Taggles?"

"Not a word."

"Have you seen any twaces of him in the quad?"

"Nothing of the sort."

"You are sure the mastiff didn't go to sleep?"

Taggles sniffed.

"Course I'm sure."

"Then how do you account for the wottah gettin' in and out of the School House without the mastiff givin' the alarm?"

Taggles's reply was worthy of a great philosopher.

"I don't account for it," he said.

D'Arcy raised his topper again.

"Thank you vewy much, Taggles. That's all."

And he strolled away. There was a thoughtful frown on his face, and he seemed to have forgotten for the moment that his chums were with him.

They looked at him, and waited for him to speak, but he could not. He was evidently thinking deeply, but he did not even glance at them. It was Blake who broke the silence in an ominous tone.

"Well?"

Arthur Augustus started.

"Bai Jove, I had forgotten you, deah boys! It's all right."

"What's all right?"

"My theowy."

"What theory?"

"About the burglah."

"I give you one minute to explain yourself before I bash your topper over your eyes," said Jack Blake, talking out his watch.

"I should uttably wefuse to have my toppah bashed ovah my eyes, Blake. But it's all wight. I know how the burglah got into the School House."

"My hat! You do?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How, then?"

"By the secwet passage in Study No. 6."

CHAPTER 15.

An Interview with Binks.

D'ARCY made the announcement with perfect calmness. But Blake, Herries, and Digby gave simultaneous jumps.

"What?"

"Eh?"

"The secret passage."

Arthur Augustus smiled with satisfaction. He had succeeded in surprising his chums, at all events.

"Yaas, wathah!" he said quietly. "I have worked it out, deah boys. There is a secwet passage, as you know, leadin' f'rom the old pwioy to the School House, and you can get into it by the panel in Study No. 6."

"I know that, Gussy. But—"

"But the Portugee doesn't know it," said Digby.

"I wathah think he does."

"Look here, you're an ass. How could a chap fresh over from South Africa—a chap who has probably never been in existence before, know anything about a secret passage in the School House here?"

"He might be told."

"But only us four know it."

"And Binks!"

"Binks!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

D'Arcy's chums stared blankly at him. They were beginning to catch on now to the theory in the mind of the swell of St. Jim's.

"But Binks wouldn't take part in a burglary," murmured Digby.

"Wathah not. But he might be talked into showin' that wascal the secwet passage. How would he know he was a burglah?"

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Well, a chap with any sense—"
Binks hasn't any sense, deah boy."

Well, that's so, too."
Binks is an awful ass. I told you that he was goin' re than evah off his wockah lately. He's gassin' about and n' to South Afwica, and joinin' a gang of what he calls gleebotoahs there. Of course, it's all wot. But he used to jawin' about goin' to Amewicah, and becomin' the wwah of the Wocky Mountains. Why has he changed the ne of his silly dreams fwom Amewicah?"

"Blessed if I know."
"I've worked it all out in my bwain, deah boy. I had to nk like anythin'! It's because he's got acquainted with he chap from South Afwica."

"By Jove!"
"This chap is a wascal, and has found out what a silly wawah Binks is, and has filled his head with all sorts of nonsense, so as to make use of him."

"My only hat!"
"And Binks has shown him the secwet passage. When he ne in that way last evenin', he wasn't just comin' home. u wemebah we thought we heard somebody with him ere. I watah think it was the Portugee. You wemebah how awfully scared Binks looked."

"I remember."
"And that is the way the wottah got in, and the way he t out, without openin' any of the doors and windows, and thout alarmin' the mastiff in the quad."

Blake rubbed his nose.
"By Jove," he said, "I believe Gussy's hit it. But the st time the Portugee came, Gussy, he tried to get in at the onrm. window—"

"Yaas. I watah think he had been learnin' things fwom nks, but Binks hadn't then mentioned the secwet passage. he course, the chap wouldn't think of such a thing till Binks mentioned it himself."

"That's so."
"I think we had better question Binks, deah boys, and ke sure about it. If we explain to him that the man he s been helpin' is a howwid burglah, I've no doubt he will vewy sowwy, and will own up like a little man."

"Good. We'll see Tom Merry first, as he's the chap incipally concerned in the matter," remarked Blake.
"Vewy good. There he is, goin' down to the cwicket."

The Terrible Three were in their flannels, going down to e cricket before dinner. Cricket was drawing to an end, but the weather was still splendid, and the chums of ute School House were by no means tired of the great mmer game yet.

ah Blake & Co. called to them, and the chums of the Shell ahopped. Tom Merry listened to D'Arcy's explanation of s theory with great interest, and when the swell of St. m's had finished, gave him a tremendous slap on the ack.

"Jolly good!" he exclaimed.
"Ow! You wuff ass!"
"Jolly good!" repeated Tom Merry. "I believe Gussy's t it! Blessed if I don't take some serious step about that t Binks reads now! It's jolly near got him into hard our, if this is correct! The police jolly well wouldn't believe he was innocent if they knew he had helped a arglar to get into the house!"

"Yaas, watahah!"
"Let's go and hunt for him!"
"He is probably in the kitchen now, you know."
"Then we'll have him out!"
And the juniors entered the School House. The regions low stairs were taboo to the juniors, but Tom Merry & p. ventured down. Mrs. Mimms, the House-dame, met em at the foot of the stairs, and barred their further gress.

"You must not come down here, Master Merry."
"We want Binks."
"Yaas, watahah!"
Mrs. Mimms sniffed.
"Binks has another of his headaches," she said. "He's one up to his room."

"Thank you, Mrs. Mimms!"
And the juniors took their departure.
"Sowwy to disturb him if he has a headache, but this is n important mattah!" said Arthur Augustus; and he led e way up to the remote region where Binks's bed-room as situated.

He tapped at the door. There was no reply to the tap, nd D'Arcy put his mouth to the keyhole and called out e page:

"May I come in, Binks?"
For Arthur Augustus was always well-bred, and he would e taken no more liberties with the page's room than with e Head's study.

Binks opened the door. A folded paper was sticking out his pocket, showing at a glance the true nature of the adache he was suffering from. When Binks felt an

overpowering desire to follow the thrilling adventures of Dead-Shot Dave, or Cowhide Bill, he retired to his room under the plea of a headache—a departure from the truth which D'Arcy did not suspect.

"I am sowwy you have a headache, Binks," said the swell of St. Jim's, as he entered the little room. "Can I do anything for you?"

"I—I—I'm all right now, Master D'Arcy," he stammered.
"If you would like to bathe your forehead, deah boy, I will get you—"

"I'm all right."
"Pewwaps a little medicine—"
"Oh, no, thank you!"
"I could get you some of Tom Mewwy's medicine. His old govahness sends him lots of it, and he nevah dwinks it. He's got bottles and bottles of it."

"I—I don't want any medicine, thank you, sir!"
"You are sure you feel well?"
"Oh, yes, quite, Master D'Arcy!"
"Vewy good. I am vewy pleased with your wapid wecovewy, Binks. I want to talk to you, deah boy. What's the book you have been weadin'?"

"Gold-Dust Bill, the Red-hot Raider of the Haunted Gulch."

"Bai Jove!"
"You young ass!" said Tom Merry.
"Pway leave it to me, Tom Mewwy—I am goin' to talk to Binks. Binks, you were sayin' the othah day—yestahday, I think—that you were goin' to South Afwica?"

"So I am, Master D'Arcy."
"To become the Howwah of the Diamond Mines, or some-thin'?"

"The Terror of the Diamond Mines," said Binks.
"Yaas. I don't quite follow the distinction between a howwah of the diamond mines and a tewwah of the diamond mines, but it's all wight. You have made the acquaintance of a fellah fwom South Afwica?"

"Suppose I have!" said Binks, half-defiantly.
"I think I could descwibe him to you," said D'Arcy.
"A little chap, not much biggah than yourself, with a skin like mahogany and eyes like a cat."

Binks looked at him in astonishment.
"You—you've seen him, Master D'Arcy?"
"Yaas, watahah! His name is Manuel Da Silva."

Binks shook his head.
"Tain't! It's Don Diego Fernandez!"
"Wats! The wascal probably has a new name for ewevy-body he meets!" said D'Arcy. "Now, how did you come to tell him about the secwet passage in the School House?"

At this sudden and unexpected question Binks simply staggered—literally! He staggered back several paces, and collapsed in a sitting posture on his bed.

"H-h-how did you know?" he gasped helplessly.
The juniors exchanged glances. Binks, in spite of his ambition to shine as a freebooter, a pirate, and a terror of the diamond mines, was not of the stuff of which criminals are made, and he had no nerve to speak of. He gave himself away completely at the first word!

CHAPTER 16.

A Burnt Offering.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY jammed his monocle afresh into his eye, and regarded Binks with an air of great severity.

"Binks, you have revealed the secwet of the pwison-house—I mean, the secwet of Study No. 6!"

"Oh, Master D'Arcy!"
"You have told that wotten Portugee about the secwet passage!"

"Oh, Master D'Arcy!"
"You have enabled the wotten wascal to entah the house!"

"Oh!"
"And he has done so!"
Binks jumped.

"He ain't, Master D'Arcy—I swear he ain't! I showed 'im the secwet passage from the old Priory—that's all! He's a good sort! He has been a reg'ler chum to me the past few days!"

"Yaas, watah! And I know why!"
"He's a good sort!" said Binks, recovering himself a little. "I like him! When I met him in the wood, and he looked like a chap from foreign parts, I took to him at once. I thought he'd tell me about them furrin countries where I mean to go some day!"

"Mounted on a coal-black chargah, I suppose?"
"I got into talk with him," said Binks. "He listened when I told him about Dead-Shot Dave in the most polite way. He told me he knew fellers like that in South Africa, GEM LIBRARY.—No. 83.

and that there were plenty of openings there for a lad of spirit."

"Yaas, he saw the kind of silly ass you were, and fooled you to the top of your bent!" said D'Arcy scornfully.

"Oh, Master D'Arcy!"

"He knew that you belonged to the school?"

"Well, you see, I told 'im. He was very interested in that, too."

"I suppose he was," Tom Merry remarked grimly. "You young ass, he was only stuffing you up because he wanted to get a hold on somebody here!"

"Oh, Master Merry! He told me yarns about the diamond-fields, and offered to help me out there, and it was jolly good of him. I've agreed to go, too. I'm going! This time next year you'll read in the papers of the deeds of—"

"Dead-Shot Binks, I suppose?" grinned Jack Blake.

"Why not?" demanded Binks. "I ain't fired off a revolver yet, but I s'pose I can soon learn, and I don't see why I shouldn't be a dead-shot!"

"Shot dead, more likely, if you begin handling fire-arms, you ass!"

"So you are goin' to South Africa to be a freebootah?" said D'Arcy. "You unspeakable ass! And you have helped a burglar to get into the school for a start!"

"A—a—a burglar!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But—but—" stammered Binks. *Binks*

"That Portuguese chap was the burglar last night!"

Binks gave a sort of yelp, and sat with wide open eyes and mouth. That had evidently not crossed his mind before.

His evident amazement was a relief to the juniors. It was a direct proof that the page had not knowingly had a hand in helping a housebreaker.

"Is—is it true?" gasped Binks at last.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But—but he said—"

"How did you come to tell him about the secret passage?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, I was tellin' him about the burglar that tried to get into the Shell dormitory, sir, and he seemed werry interested. Then he spoke about whether there might be any other way of getting into the school, casual like. I told him about the passage as a great secret, of course."

"And then he paid us his second visit last night," said Monty Lowther. "He must have been very much obliged to you, Binks!"

"Oh, Master Lowther!"

"I suppose you can see that you've acted the giddy goat now, Binks?" said Tom Merry. "This Portugee chap saw what an ass you were, and stuffed you up with those yarns about South Africa. He was making use of you to burgle the school!"

Binks burst into tears.

"Boo-hoo!"

"Here, this won't do!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Dead-Shot Binks can't turn on the pump like this! Draw it mild!"

"Boo-hoo!"

"Buck up! What would your trusty band think to see their red-handed chief booing and hooing like a kid?"

"Boo-hoo!"

"Pway, don't wot him, Blake. He has been an ass, and now he has seen it and wepented, I think we can ovahlook the mattah," said D'Arcy. "The weal fault lies with those wottahs who sell those wotten cheap American twashy books. If Dr. Holmes knew about Binks lettin' that wascal in, he would undoubtedly sack him! That would be vewy wuff on Binks, who can't help boin' a silly ass!"

"Oh—oh—oh, Master D'Arcy!"

"But Binks must do his little bit if the mattah is to be ovahlooked," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He must consent to part with all his wubbish!"

"Oh, oh!"

"You must not wead that wash!" said D'Arcy firmly. "I have often wead of cases where boys have been led into cwime by weading goww wash. When such a case happens, ewevy ignowant and ill-natured person gets up on his hind legs and says nasty things about boys' literature—as if all boys' books were necessarily of the same sort. It is just as if a person were to condemn w'itahs like Shakespeare and Milton because Pope and Dwyden w'ote immowal poetry. But you cannot get these ignowant and pwejudiced people to distinguish between a good healthy book and a wotten, twashy, blood-and-thundah wag. Therefore, ewevybody ought to be down on this American stuff. Binks is a glawin' example of the harm that may be done. Theahfore, if we are to ovahlook Binks's fault, he must destwoy all this wubbish!"

"Oh, Master D'Arcy!"

"There is no alternative, Binks!"

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"Oh! Oh!"

"But I do not wish to put you to a gweat loss in cash, I will pay you the cost twice of the papahs, Binks."

Binks lifted his head.

"I won't take a penny, Master D'Arcy. I ain't that sort of 'Vewy well,'" said D'Arcy. "I am sowwy to have destwoy this wubbish, if it causes you pain, but a chap must not shwink fwom his duty."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "But I'll tell you what Binks. I've got a lot of old numbers of decent clean paper and you shall have them for nothing."

"Thank you, Master Merry!" said Binks heavily. It evidently went straight to his heart to part with Golden Bill and Red-Handed Dick & Co., and the offer of wholy some literature in the place thereof was not wholly comfort. What was the use of a story without a single murder or a drop of blood in it, Binks thought mournfully.

"Where is the wubbish?" asked Arthur Augustus.

Binks rose, and went to the cupboard over his bed. The juniors watched him curiously. He opened the door of the cupboard, and revealed piles and piles of books with glaring and flaring covers.

There were pictures of galloping Indians and creeping assassins, of men being hanged, and men being shot, men being stabbed, and men being drowned. Every variety of homicide was depicted in startling colours on those valuable books.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Why, the must be hundreds of them."

"I keep all the numbers," said Binks.

"They must have cost you a small fortune."

"Yaas, wathah! Bwing them out!"

"But—but—"

"Bwing them out!"

Binks brought them out by handfuls and armfuls, and pitched them on the rug. D'Arcy carefully drew on a pair of gloves, pushed back his cuffs, and began to cram the books into the grate.

"Pway give me a match, Tom Mewwy!"

"Here you are."

The match was applied.

The grate was soon in a flare with burning paper, and D'Arcy stirred the pile, and added to it slowly and carefully.

Binks watched him speechlessly.

D'Arcy looked round, and caught the page-boy's mournful eye, and stopped his destructive hands.

"Binks, deah boy!"

"Yes, Master D'Arcy?" said Binks, in a hollow voice.

"You know this is for your own good, don't you?"

"Ye-e-e-s."

"It is a sort of burnt offewin' on the altah of common sense and decency, you know."

"Ye-e-e-s."

"But if you weally feel vewy bad about it, I won't go on, said D'Arcy, with an effort. "I don't want to ovah-wule a chap who isn't in a posish to object. I'll let you keep the wubbish, if you like."

Binks hesitated a moment.

Then he showed by his reply that his heart was in the right place, even if his intellect was not of the first order.

"No, Master D'Arcy. You've been vewy kind to me, but I might have been sent to prison if you had told about me. If—if you think you ought to destroy them, go on!"

"I weally do think so, Binks."

"Then go on, Master D'Arcy!"

"Vewy well."

And D'Arcy went on.

The juniors stood round, helping him to cram the "bloods" into the grate, and stirring them up with a poker to make them burn.

The heap was gradually worked through. Binks handed them to D'Arcy, with slow and reluctant hands. One book, as the heap grew steadily smaller, seemed to wish to keep back.

"What's that papah, Binks?"

"The Mysterious Marauder of the Moonshine Mountain or Red-Handed Richard, the Blood-Bedabbled Buster of Golden Gulch," said Binks. "It's a ripper!"

"It must be, with a title like that! Pass it on, deah boy."

And the Blood-Bedabbled Buster was added to the pyre.

"What's that one, Binks?"

ANSWERS

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"Broncho Bill, the Dead-Shot Detective!"
 "Pass it on! And that one?"
 "The Gold-Hawks of Gorgon Gulch."
 "Shove it in! And that?"
 "Dead-Shot Dave, or Barrels of Blood!"
 "Bai Jove! Shove it in!"
 "Dead-Shot Dave, or Barrels of Blood" followed "The Gold-Hawks of Gorgon Gulch." Arthur Augustus did not ease from troubling, and was not at rest till the last page of the last book was gone.
 By that time the grate was a heap of burnt paper, and rags were sailing and settling all over the room.
 "There!" said Arthur Augustus, rising with a red face and a smudge on his nose. "There, deah boys, that's finished!"
 "Good! You'll feel better for this bye-and-bye, Binks."
 Binks did not reply.
 The juniors left the room, and Arthur Augustus looked decidedly satisfied with himself as they went downstairs. He was very warm.
 "I feel decidedly heated, deah boys," he remarked. "My face feels as if it had been fried. But I don't mind."
 "And there's a black smudge on your proboscis," Blake remarked.
 "Bai Jove!" D'Arcy rubbed his nose with his handkerchief. "Is it gone now?"
 "Ha, ha! It's all over your face now."
 "Well, I shall have to have a wash, anyway. I feel vey hot and dirty, but it was in a good cause, deah boys."
 And D'Arcy went off to the nearest bath-room with a muddy but cheerful face.

CHAPTER 17.

Tom Merry is Relieved of the Trust.

LETTER for you, Master Merry!"
 It was just after afternoon school the same day. Binks, looking more cheerful than when Tom Merry had last seen him in his room, brought the letter to Tom Merry as he strolled down to the quadrangle.

"Thank you, Binks!"
 Tom Merry gave a start as he read the superscription on the letter.
 It was in the hand of his cousin, Herbert Dorrian.
 The postmark was London. Herbert Dorrian was still in England, then. Tom Merry went under the elms, and opened the letter.
 "Dear Tom," it ran, "I hope you are keeping safe the box I trusted to you. It contains all my fortune! Perhaps I should have explained more to you, but I did not wish to alarm you more than I could help.
 "I hope you have seen nothing of the enemies I feared had tracked me to England. The Portuguese, I warned you of was the most dangerous. The others were merely spies in his pay.
 "The man, Da Silva, is a criminal with a bad record, and for many years he has defied the police. I hope, however, as I have seen nothing of him, that he has fallen into their hands at last. If so, he is safe for ten years, at least.
 "I am now ready to take the box from you, and I will meet you for the purpose this evening. This time I will visit the school after dark, and you shall hand the box down to me from the wall in the lane. I will not allow you to run any more risks for my sake.
 "In the lane to-night at half-past eight, then!"

"HERBERT DORRIAN."
 Tom Merry breathed a deep sigh of relief.
 The wooden box had been a trouble to him ever since it had been placed in his hands, and he was decidedly glad of the chance of getting rid of it.
 He smiled grimly at the thought that the Portuguese rascal would probably enter the school again that night, ignorant of the fact that the box was gone.
 Tom Merry burnt the letter, to make sure of it, and he waited anxiously for the hour of the appointment with his cousin.
 He took the box from his trunk in the Shell dormitory, and concealed it in an inner pocket, when the time drew nigh for going to meet his cousin by the lane that bordered the walls of St. Jim's.

Monty Lowther and Manners stopped him as he was leaving the School House in the dusk of the evening.

"Whither bound?" asked Lowther pleasantly, digging him in the ribs. "Wherefore these mysterious looks?"

"Wherefore that frowning brow?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's all right." He tapped his breast pocket. "I'm going to get rid of this."

"The box?"

"Yes."

"Then your cousin is back?"

"Yes."

"Right. Where?"

"In the lane outside at half-past."

"We'll come and see you safe."

"Thanks, old man. Keep it dark!"

And the Terrible Three strolled out into the dusk. Manners and Lowther gave Tom Merry a hand up to the wall, and Lowther followed him. Half-past eight rang out from the tower.

Tom Merry looked down into the dusk of the lane.

A voice came from the black shadow of the wall below.

"Is that you, Tom?"

It was Dorrian's voice.

"Yes."

Tom Merry slipped down to the ground outside.

Dorrian grasped his hand.

The young man was muffled in a coat and a cap, and was quite unrecognisable in the gloom; but Tom Merry knew his voice.

"You have the box, Tom?"

"It is here."

"Safe?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

Tom Merry, gladly enough, handed back the box. His cousin pressed his hand again.

"You have been in no danger, Tom?" You have not seen my enemies?"

"I have seen one of them."

Dorrian started violently.

"The Portuguese?"

"Yes."

"Heavens! How? Explain!"

Tom Merry concisely explained his adventures with the desperado from South Africa. Dorrian breathed hard as he listened.

"The villain! Then he is here?"

"He is."

"He is certain to enter the school again to-night, Tom?"

"I think so."

"Then—then it will be easy to deal with him. Tom, since he has been here, I—I must explain more. Has he told you anything?"

"He told me the diamonds had been stolen by him and by you, or, rather, illicitly bought from Kaffirs working in the mines."

"You did not believe him?"

"No!"

"It was a lie, Tom."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"I was sure of it."

"But I will explain. There is a great deal of I.D.B.—illicit diamond buying—at the mines in South Africa. It is easy to get up a charge against a man—and not easy for him to prove his innocence. Those diamonds, Tom, I found myself—prospecting in the Kalahari mountains. They were mine—mine by discovery and honest labour. Da Silva tried to rob me. He failed—and then, with the help of several rascals like himself, he tried to get up a charge against me—a charge of I.D.B.—a charge more serious than that of murder, in the eyes of the mine-owners," added Dorrian, bitterly.

"I understand."

"If I had been arrested, the diamonds would have been taken, and the charge would have been considered proved. I could not prove that I had found them in the desert. I fled—and he tracked me here. I escaped him there—and he was forced to return to his original plan of robbery."

"I see."

"I have been with my friends in London while you have guarded the box, Tom—and have made arrangements for the sale of the stones. They pass out of my hands this very night."

"Good."

"As for Da Silva, I do not fear him, once the diamonds are safe. He cannot come out into the open himself—he is afraid of arrest. But if he is arrested to-night, I shall be secure from his revenge, at all events."

Tom Merry set his lips.

"He shall be—if he comes to the school."

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"You must run no risks, Tom."

"I will have one of the masters in the study ready for him, and some of the Sixth. He will have no chance."

"Good. Then if he comes he cannot escape?"

"We shall see to that."

"Good, again. Good-bye, Tom—you have done a great deal for me, but I would never have asked you if I had known the risk it would entail upon you. Good-bye, again."

"Good-bye, Herbert."

And Herbert Dorrian disappeared into the darkness.

"Give me a hand up, Monty!"

Lowther stretched down his hand. Tom Merry went quickly on top of the wall, and he dropped down inside.

"It's all right?" asked Manners.

"Right as rain."

And Tom Merry's face was very cheerful as he walked back to the School House.

CHAPTER 18.

The Last of the Portuguese.

M R. RAILTON raised his eyebrows, and fixed a curious glance upon Tom Merry. The hero of the Shell stood before him in his study; he had just related as much of the story as he thought the House-masters should know. The amazement of Mr. Railton was the greatest of all at the relation of the story of the secret passage.

"This must be seen to at once," he said.

And he proceeded immediately to Study No. 6. There the secret panel was shown to him, and he was satisfied as to the correctness of the information.

He glanced into the recesses of the secret passage, and then closed the panel again.

"Very good," he said. "This passage will probably be used again to-night—and we shall see! I need not caution you to keep silent in the matter."

Mr. Railton made his arrangements for the night quietly and thoroughly.

The boys went to bed at the usual time, only Tom Merry of the juniors being allowed to join the party that was waiting for the Portuguese in the study.

Kildaro and Darrel of the Sixth were there, with Mr. Railton, and Inspector Skeet, of Rylcombe, came to the school late at night, and was quietly introduced into Study No. 6.

At eleven o'clock they were ensconced in the study, with no light but that of the moon glimmering in at the window.

The table, the bookcase, and the screen were used for cover, to conceal the watchers from anyone who should enter by the secret panel.

Not a sound was heard in the study when the school clock had struck eleven.

An hour glided slowly past.

The vigil was long and weary.

But they waited patiently. Mr. Railton and the prefect and Tom Merry were keen to catch the rascal who had given them so much trouble. Inspector Skeet was almost bubbling with joy at the prospect of making a capture that would get into the London papers.

Twelve strokes through the gloom.

Midnight!

The watchers breathed more quietly, their eyes gleaming in the shadows. The hour was at hand!

Another half hour fled on wings of lead.

Then a slight sound was heard in the dead stillness.

Click!

Tom Merry's heart beat almost to suffocation.

He crouched lower in the cover of the study table.

The panel flew open.

In the dark aperture a glimmering face could be seen catching a gleam of the moonlight from the window.

It was the face of the Portuguese.

He stood still, listening, watchful as a cat. He was ready to scuttle back into the secret passage at a sound.

But no sound was made.

The watchers could hear the deep hiss of the breath he gave, as he stepped out into the study.

Quickly, but with stealthy silent feet, he crept toward the door.

Click!

Mr. Railton had stepped out from behind the screen and closed the secret panel.

"At him!" shouted the inspector.

And he sprang upon the intruder.

The Portuguese gave a snarl like that of a wild animal. His hand went under his coat, but the inspector grasped his arm and tore it away, and a knife clanged on the floor.

Tom Merry sprang at the ruffian, and grasped his collar

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behind and dragged him down. The prefects were upon him the next moment.

But the Portuguese was as wily as a panther.

He wrenched himself loose, seemed to wriggle away like a snake, and made a bound for the door. He knew it was useless to attempt to reach the secret panel, with the massive form of the House-master looming up before it.

He tore the door open and dashed into the passage, barely eluding the outstretched hands behind.

"After him!" panted Kildare.

There was a sudden yell in the passage, a sound of tramping and struggling and gasping.

Then a well-known voice:

"Bai Jove! Help, deah boys!"

"Gussy!" gasped Tom Merry.

They rushed into the passage.

The Portuguese was on the floor, struggling desperately in the grasp of four or five juniors, who were sprawling wildly over him.

"Lend a hand, deah boys. I've got him."

"Collar the brute!" cried Kildare.

The prefects laid hands on the ruffian, and the inspector and Mr. Railton were only a moment behind.

In the grasp of many hands, the ruffian had no chance.

The handcuffs were fastened upon his wrists, and then even the savage nature of the South African adventurer gave way, and he yielded.

Gasping and exhausted, he was dragged to his feet.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, picking himself up, "I wogard it as wathah fortunate that I was on the spot, deah boys."

Mr. Railton looked at the juniors sternly. Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy, and Manners and Lowther and Harry Noble were there. They looked very meek under the stern glance of the House-master.

"What are you juniors doing here?" demanded Mr. Railton.

"Captuwin' the burglah, sir."

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"We thought it would be a good ideah to keep watch in the passage, sir, in case the burglah should bweak away," explained D'Arcy. "I wathah think you must admit, sir, that we've been of some use."

The House-master's face broke into a smile.

"Under the circumstances, I shall excuse you. Go back to bed."

"Certainly, sir. Pewwaps you would like me, howevah, to accompany Inspectah Skeet to the station, to see that the burglah does not escape?"

"Shut up, you ass!" whispered Blake.

"I wefuse to shut up. I—"

"Go back to bed, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, sir, but—"

But Tom Merry & Co. dragged him away before he could get any further.

Inspector Skeet and Mr. Railton, with the prisoner, went in the Head's trap to the police station in Rylcombe, and the Portuguese was disposed of in the safety of a cell.

Tom Merry slept like a top that night, as may be imagined, and did not wake very easily at rising bell the next morning.

Of the Portuguese we need say but few words. His own Government claimed him as a criminal who had long evaded justice, and he was sent to Portugal, where he was likely to be taken care of for many years to come. The only one who was not satisfied with the result of the affair—at St. Jim's—was Skimpole. Skimpole was still feeling uneasy in his mind.

"This is not the last of the affair," he remarked, with a wise shake of the head.

"But the chap's in pwison, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

"Oh, yes, that chap."

"And there's nothin' here now that he would want to come back for, anyway."

"That is all you know, D'Arcy."

"Weally, Skimmay—"

"He was simply the emissary of a foreign Government, which can easily obtain other emissaries," said Skimpole, "and the plans of my aeroplane are still here."

"Bai Jove!"

And D'Arcy contented himself with that ejaculation; not attempting to demonstrate to Skimpole that nobody was after the plans of his aeroplane. The secret passage leading into the School House was blocked up; but Skimmay shook his head still. He was convinced that further attempts would be made to steal the plans of his aeroplane; and for a long time afterwards, Skimpole looked with the greatest suspicion upon anyone of the slightest foreign aspect who happened to come near St. Jim's.

THE END.

(Another long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Thursday, entitled "SACKED!" By Martin Clifford.)

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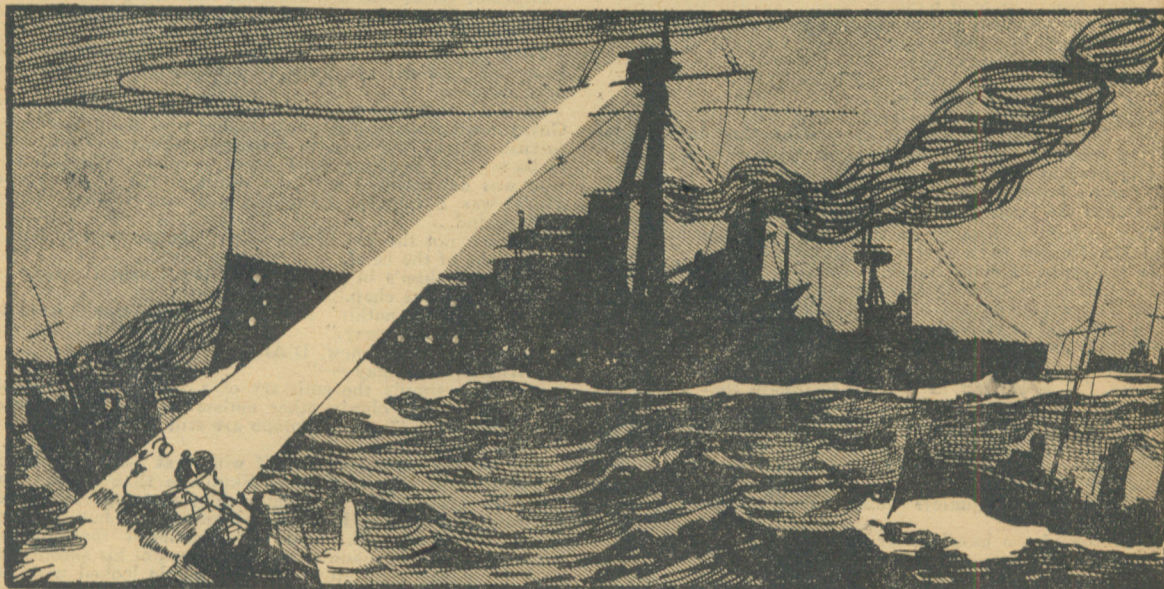
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THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

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 VorrKrantz, the German commander. At the time when this instalment opens, Sam and Stephen are with a Lieutenant Cavendish, who is in command of a captured German war-ship named the Furst Moltke. The Furst Moltke is being chased home into the Thames by a German submarine, which, having fired one torpedo and missed, is preparing another with all speed. Cavendish is making a desperate effort to reach dock before the second torpedo from the submarine can reach the Furst Moltke.

(Now go on with the Story.)

A Trap—and its Result.

The command was a surprise to everybody, but it was carried out in the twinkling of an eye. Sam and Stephen, suspecting an enemy had been suddenly sighted, looked all round the horizon, but saw nothing whatever, save the waiting torpedo flotilla. The boys stared in astonishment.

"Message from the admiral, sir," said the midshipman, suddenly appearing with the telegraph orderly in tow.

"Read it out, Sam," said Cavendish, his eye still to the telescope, fixed on the flotilla, "quick as you can."

Sam read the wireless message out rapidly from the paper on which the operator had jotted it down.

"Gave you no orders leave harbour. Repeat instantly message you say received.—HOWARD."

"Open fire!" cried Cavendish, before the last word was fairly out of Sam's mouth. "All guns on that flotilla! Give 'em blue blazes! It's a German trap!"

The crash and roar of the big guns at once broke out, mingled with the wicked rattle of the larger of the quick-firers.

About the flotilla, which had now begun to move, white

spruts could be seen, as the first shells from the cruiser struck the water, and then, amid a great white puff of steam one of the torpedo-boats reeled and disappeared. A few moments later another was struck. The remaining five leaping into their stride like greyhounds, came at a furious pace towards the Furst Moltke.

For the first few moments the two brothers were horrified for they had not grasped the situation so quickly as Cavendish. It looked as though he were destroying his own flotilla.

"D'you mean to say they're Germans? Is it a plot?" cried Sam, suddenly understanding.

"Germans, yes! Thank goodness we're just in the nick of time to catch them out!"

Seeing their perilous position, and being strong in numbers, the torpedo-boats had decided to try and "rush" the cruiser, as being no more dangerous than retreating.

Had they been half a mile nearer at the start, the five of them might well have done it—one, at least, would have got home at the Furst Moltke.

But the distance was too great. Long before they came within striking distance the cruiser's superbly-handled gun had sent two to their last account, and a third was struck and sunk immediately afterwards. Seeing the attack hopeless, and destruction certain, the remaining two turned and dashed away back again with all the speed they could muster.

One received a shell amidships as she fled, and she closed over the wreckage of her and left no sign behind.

The last of all, with her rail all cut away on one side was the only one to escape, and she drew out of range just in time and fled to the westward, her funnels red-hot and flames pouring from it.

The Furst Moltke, altering her course again, calmly steered in towards the lightship.

"My only aunt!" said Cavendish, with a sigh of relief. "That was a near thing. If we'd gone ahead another half mile before spottin' what was wrong, they'd have got us!"

"But what on earth's the meanin' of it? How did they come to be there, and who sent that wireless message tell us to join 'em?" exclaimed Sam.

"That's what I'd like to find out," Cavendish replied. "It beats me. There's the admiral's latest message telling us he never sent any such orders. Pass the word for the telegraph operator to come here."

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The expert arrived on the bridge at once, and answered Cavendish's questions.

"There was no difference in the message I got at Sheerness, sir," he said. "It was in our code, just like the others. I wasn't able to call up Lord Howard's flagship to reply for some time; but I managed it soon after we left the land behind, and telegraphed that the message was received, an' we were proceeding to Galloper Light as ordered. A little while after I got that message my orderly just brought you."

There was silence on the bridge. Cavendish wondered what to make of it. The sea was cleared of his enemies, and the danger was past, but the mystery of it worried him. He left the bridge in Elcombe's charge, and went to the Marconi apparatus with the operator.

Every now and then the glass tube would show a spark and buzz ominously. The expert explained that wireless messages that were passing across the sea caused this, only they were not in the proper key to work his instrument, and make it record them.

Meanwhile, the Furst Moltke was steaming slowly towards the Galloper Light, and all on board were waiting anxiously for more news.

Presently the instrument began to work. For a little while it hung fire, and the operator was kept busily answering certain signs and codes. A couple of minutes later the telegraphist gave the message to Cavendish.

"It's from Lord Howard again this time, sir. I can vouch for it," he said.

Cavendish read the words eagerly:

"Germans have obtained possession our secret Marconi fleet code, apparently through spy. Disregard all messages in former code after this. Key all instruments according to instructions following, and use the alternative reserve code, as arranged."

"Great Scott!" said Cavendish. "I thought that must be it; but I hardly believed it possible! Look here, what if any of the enemy's ships have intercepted that message and read it, as they know the code?"

"Not possible, sir; this is in another key."

"Then, can you communicate with the rest of our fleet safely now?"

"Yes, sir; there are two secret codes, in case of accidents, and now we've to fall back on the second one. The Germans can't have got hold of both possibly."

"Thank goodness for that! Send this message off as soon as you can call up the flagship, reportin' what's happened and askin' for orders."

Cavendish hurried down to the bridge again and took charge. The brothers soon learned what had happened.

"What a business!" said Sam. "The fleet code stolen, by gum!"

"Yes; there's been some pretty ugly treachery somewhere," said Cavendish gloomily. "That sort o' thing makes one sick, for it must have been one of our fleet who gave it away."

"An' it was used to trap the Furst Moltke, fleet of all; or else only one ship knew it. By Jove, but they're keen on gettin' rid of her!"

"It was the likeliest trap ever set for a ship, I should think," opined Stephen. "You were a wonder to spot it so soon, Bob."

"It's largely luck that I didn't walk straight into it," owned Cavendish. "I never dreamed of anything wrong; an' they'd faked their craft to look like British boats, too, an' done it well, considerin' the short time. But I've commanded torpedo-boats myself, an' there was just one thing about 'em that made me smell a rat. All this work's making me suspicious, I suppose. We stopped barely in time, or there'd have been no more Furst Moltke!"

"Who d'you think laid the trap, an' sent you that message?"

"Ah, that we shall never know, I think! Very likely the German admiral to whose squadron the Furst Moltke belonged before we captured her, if it was he who got hold of the code. It was quite a fair game for him to play, of course, and uncommon smart, too. However, no harm's done. They've lost six of their torpedo-boats, thanks to my gunners!"

"Is that the seventh comin' back along there?" said Stephen, pointing to windward, where his keen eyes had picked out a low hull tearing southward over the seas. "She's comin' our way!"

Cavendish clapped his glass to his eye.

"What sight you've got, young 'un! No; that's the real thing this time—one of our vessels."

"What! Our own flotilla?"

"We've no flotilla, you chump!" said Sam. "Don't you understand that was part of the German bunkum? A destroyer, isn't it, Bob?"

It was a British destroyer, sure enough, and as she came nearer it was seen she had been in action, for she was much battered by small gun-fire or shrapnel, and her smoke-

stacks had several ragged holes in them. The Furst Moltke hoisted her colours, and flew a signal, and the destroyer, racing down towards her, hove-to just abreast the cruiser and under her lee.

"It's Tom Brabant and the Sprite," said Cavendish, "my old chum at Whale Island."

"Hallo, Bobby!" came the hail from the oilskin-clad officer on the destroyer's bridge. "Beg your pardon—Commander Cavendish! What-ho! Heard about your luck! Jolly good business! Where bound?"

"Wish I knew. What news from up North" hailed Cavendish.

"The fleets are closin', an' we expect to bring the Germans to action at any hour now. My destroyer flotilla, under Barnaby, has just wiped up the second German destroyer division—eleven of us to thirteen, an' we made hay of 'em. Sunk eight."

"Good! I've done the same for six A class torpedo-boats here. Where are you bound?"

"Scoutin', that's all. Orders to attach myself to any of Frankie's squadron if I can find 'em; but I can't. They're to the eastward somewhere. So-long! Wish you luck with the command!"

"Here, hold on a bit!" hailed Cavendish, as a wireless message was brought him. "I may want you."

He read the message, which was brief:

"Well done! Get on course for Dutch coast, report any German warships sighted. Intercept anything worth stopping and capture. HOWARD."

"That's a rum' un!" said Cavendish, as he read it out. "I'd rather have had orders to go North. But it ain't bad; and I bet he knows what he's about." The young commander paused and thought for a moment. "Sprite ahoy!" he hailed.

"Ay—ay!"

"Follow me one mile astern on course South 80 East. You will attach yourself to me until you find Sir Francis."

"Very good, sir!" said the destroyer's commander, after a slight pause of surprise.

"We'll take him with us. Make the beggar useful," said Cavendish to the brothers. "Mr. Elcombe, put her on that course at once."

The Furst Moltke turned and sped away, with the wind on her beam, leaving England right astern her.

"What are we bound to the Dutch coast for?" said Stephen.

"I don't know. Leave it to the admiral," said Cavendish, with a wink. "It surprised Tommy Brabant, my annexin' him like that; but I shouldn't wonder if that destroyer came in handy."

He began to flag a set of instructions to the vessel, and by the time they were finished, the growing dusk had turned to dark. The cruiser and the destroyer, no great distance apart, held slowly on their way across the North Sea, at much reduced speed, through the blackness of the night.

"We don't want to be too near the coast till mornin'," said Cavendish; "there'll be work with the dawn, I doubt."

The night passed as peacefully as though there were no such thing as war, or the fleets of two great nations striving to fly at each other's throats. Not a vessel was sighted. Only the occasional glare of a searchlight upon the skyline, and once a far-distant rocket soaring upwards like a tiny thread of gold, told of the steel hosts that thronged the sea to the north.

Dawn broke cold and grey, and with it the long, low line of the Dutch coast came into view, desolate and forsaken-looking in the morning light. A good way astern the Furst Moltke lay Brabant's destroyer. Cavendish, coming up on the bridge from a short nap in the chart-house, signalled to her, and she gradually dropped astern nearly out of sight.

Quietly the cruiser held on her way northwards along the coast, and, beyond a few Dutch fishing-boats from Ymuiden, not a craft did she see till the morning was well spent.

"Pretty lonely this side. We don't look like seein' much scrapping here," remarked Stephen, who, with his brother, had taken the opportunity to get a good night's rest.

"We shall run against something presently, I think," replied Cavendish. "What d'you call that?" he added, a little later, as two smudges of smoke, streaming out straight as sticks, came into view over the horizon ahead.

"Two craft travellin' as fast as their engines'll take 'em," said Sam critically; "an' comin' south, this way. Warships, I should say."

"They are. I can make out the shape of 'em," said Stephen.

"You're right," returned Cavendish, focussing his glass; "and Germans at that." He watched a little longer.

"Third-class cruisers, and if they've nothing else, at least they've plenty of speed. Now, do they know the Furst Moltke is now a British ship, or are they just going to find it out?" he added thoughtfully.

"Is there more than one of this ship's class in the German Navy?" Sam asked.

"Four, exactly like her. But by this time it's safe to bet every ship in their fleet has been warned of the Furst's capture."

"What are those two doin' right over here?" queried Stephen. "I'd have thought they'd be more needed over on the British side."

"Ah, that's just it," said Cavendish softly. "I think, though, that, as they ain't heavy enough to be of much account in the fighting-line, they've been sent this way to escort something."

"Escort what? Hallo! They've smelt you!"
The two third-class cruisers, obviously German, had steamed up till nearly within range of the Furst Moltke, to which they began making long-distance signals, evidently taking her at first for one of her class in their own fleet. Suddenly, however, the nearest of the two fired a gun, and, turning about, went racing back the way she had come. The other followed suit.

Away went the Furst Moltke, surging after them at forced draught, in full pursuit. Cavendish smiled grimly, for he overtook them rapidly, and soon was in range. The Germans had no guns that would reach him at such a distance, nor would they stay to fight such an antagonist. One of the Furst Moltke's 9.2 shells, crashing into the hind-most vessel right amidships, crippled and stopped her. The other cruiser, severely hit, still held on her course.

Farther out from the land, a long way behind, a third vessel was seen—a much larger one, with four huge funnels, all pouring smoke as she tried with all her might to race away seaward and escape. Stephen raised a shout.

"Look!" he cried. "It's a liner!"

"Yes," said Cavendish, with a dry smile; "that's the escort." He turned the Furst Moltke, abandoning the chase of the two small German warships, and went in pursuit of the big steamer with every ounce of steam his engineers could raise. "Those two ducks were scoutin' ahead of her to keep off stray torpedo-craft. They're just too late."

"Who is she?"
"The Kaiser's mail. It's the Deutschland, the biggest steamer Germany owns. That's the plum the admiral meant us to pick—wily old bird!" Cavendish chuckled with delight. "She's our meat!"

"By gum! She's worth the best part of a million, isn't she?" exclaimed Stephen. "Why, I thought Germany claimed those big liners in war-time, an' turned 'em into armed cruisers!"

"So she has, all the other ones. This one's still kept to keep touch with America, an' carry the pick of the freight an' passengers, now the British Fleet's kept busy. There's one not too busy to attend to her, though," added Cavendish gleefully, as he called for still more speed.

"She thought she could nose down this side of the North Sea, an' slip through the Straits—eh?" chuckled Sam. "How could Lord Howard have known?"

"The old fox! This is his trial trip for me, to see if the Furst Moltke's up to her job. We're gainin' on her," continued Cavendish; "though she's a rare speed."

"I can't understand why those two cruisers don't engage us, an' give her a chance to escape!" said Stephen.

"They've got their orders from their own admiral, you can bet, an' they'll carry 'em out. Perhaps he don't want to lose 'em. He'll never see the first one back, anyhow. We're nearly in range!"

The great liner made a tremendous effort to escape, but the Furst Moltke overhauled her yard by yard, and presently the effective range was reached, and the big starboard gun of the cruiser's barbettes spoke. The huge shell went singing across the distant liner's bows.

The Deutschland still held on her course. But a second shell followed so close that she was forced to stop, for to go on in defiance was madness. She hovered, and the Furst Moltke raced up to her. In a very short time the two vessels lay motionless, the cruiser abreast her prize, and their two bridges level.

"My word! She's worth comin' to pick up!" exclaimed Stephen.

The enormous bulk of the liner was impressive—she looked like a city upon the waters. Even the big cruiser was dwarfed beside her. Her decks were thronged with a crowd of scared passengers, among whom no order was being kept.

"Deutschland ahoy!" hailed Cavendish. "Down with those colours! You are my prisoner!"

A frightened uproar broke out among the passengers at this.

"Whose prisoner?" shouted the liner's captain, in very moderate English.

"The Furst Moltke's, now of the King's Navy."

The German captain, a big, bulky man with a face smothered in black beard, shook two fists in the air, and cursed Cavendish and all his works.

GEM LIBRARY.—No. 83.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"SACKED!"

An Extra-long Complete Tale of
Tom Merry & Co.

"Vot was you shtop me for?" he cried blusteringly. "Dis vos a mail-steamer, and by der rules of war and der International law she must not interfered with be!"

"Don't try any bluff with me, uncle," said Cavendish. "There's no such law. Keep those squalling passengers of yours in order while I send a boat to overhaul you, an' don't try any tricks, for I'm very close. Cutters away there! Mr. Elcombe, take charge of the boarding-party."

Away went the Furst Moltke's largest Berthon boat, the bluejackets' steady Navy stroke covering the short distance between the two vessels almost as soon as they had got their oars out. The liner's gangway was sullenly lowered, and Elcombe and a couple of warrant officers boarded her.

The Deutschland's captain grew redder and redder in the face every moment, and Stephen openly opined that he would burst, like the frog in the fable. His rage consumed him. He was a man accustomed to lord it over a thousand underlings, and considered himself the salt of the earth, and the seas beside. To have to meekly submit to a beardless youth who looked as if he had not long left school, was a thing he had never dreamed of. But the cruiser's guns bearing on his ship in grim silence, were too real to be trifled with.

If looks could have killed Elcombe and his men as they boarded, the captain's glances from the bridge would have made short work of them, and so would the abundance of strong language he poured forth, mostly under his breath.

A way was cleared through the sullen sailors and gaping passengers, and Elcombe went below. He demanded the captain's keys, and they had to be given up. Then he went right through the ship as rapidly as possible.

The Furst Moltke waited, swinging slowly over the big swells, and her staff said little till Elcombe reappeared. He came back at once in the boat, bringing the liner's papers with him.

"A rare fat haul, sir," he said to Cavendish. "She's full up with only the most valuable freight, which had to be sent in spite of risks. There's all her provisions for the Atlantic passage, too, and she carries a good many thousand to feed. Then there's some specie in the strong-room, though it's a bit of a surprise to find that goin' out of Germany just now."

"Good!" said Cavendish. "We will now proceed to deal with the prize. Deutschland ahoy!" he hailed. "You are now formally assigned under the British flag!"

The skipper swore once more, but from among the hubbub on the liner's decks a scattered but hearty cheer went up. It came mostly from American passengers, who, in spite of the danger and inconvenience to themselves, were glad to see the Old Country getting her own back. A squabble arose at once, the angry German passengers protesting.

"If you can't keep better order on your decks than that I'll send somebody over to show you how!" hailed Cavendish to the captain. "Get under way at once, straight in for the land, and heave-to as soon as I bid you. There's deep water close in."

The Deutschland's captain, in spite of his rage, had to obey; and the cruiser followed her prize till they were both within a fair distance of the sandhills fronting the Dutch coast-line.

"Another four cables ahead," hailed Cavendish; "and don't you try to beach her, either," he added, "or I'll sink you with all hands! Right—bring her to! Now get your boats in the water, and land those passengers. Quick about it; I can't waste all day on you!"

The passengers were only too overjoyed to be out of it, especially as they learned that they could easily reach Ymuiden and the railway. With a very bad grace the liner started landing them by boat-loads, Cavendish sending a score of his men and a quartermaster to hurry the process.

"Passengers can only take their own hand-bags," ordered Cavendish, "except Americans, who may land all their belongings; only they'll have to hurry or be left."

With amazing speed the work of sending off the passengers was carried out, and soon the desolate shore looked as if an army had gathered on it, so numerous were they.

"They ought to be grateful," grinned Sam. "This'll give 'em all something to talk about for the rest of their lives. Captured by an ironclad at sea, an' marooned on sandhills! Hope they've got their lunch with 'em."

"They can lunch off the sand-which-is there, can't they?" suggested Stephen.

"I'll maroon you, too, if you fire off any more ghastly chestnuts like that!" said Cavendish. "If those fellows don't look sharp, I shall have to take the rest along. There are the fishing-boats coming out—that'll help."

Several beach-yaws and flat-bottomed Dutch smacks came sailing out, puzzled at the strange sight, and scenting a job. They were at once commandeered for transport service, and took the rest of the passengers ashore in large batches.

"At last," said Cavendish, "we're rid of that lot. I'm in' to keep enough crew on the liner to work her, an' all er engine-room staff, an' then we'll pack her off. Captain boy! Get aboard that smack, if you please! They'll put you ashore, an' you can start for the Fatherland."

The skipper had to obey, though he had nearly sworn himself to a standstill by this time. He was soon on the deck of the Dutch smack, which paid off her head and was about to steer for the shore close-hauled, when an exclamation came from Stephen.

A trail of smoke on the horizon to the southward had bidly resolved itself into a large battleship, heading towards the Furst Moltke at a rapid rate. Cavendish was ready scanning her through his glasses.

"By gum!" cried Stephen. "That's a German, surely! Looks like one of their biggest class, too—equal to our readnoughts."

"Hope not," said Sam. "For if so she's six times our fighting weight, an' we could never touch her to do any damage."

The Deutschland's ex-captain, aboard the smack, gave a natural shout of delight.

"That is the aiser's battleship Sachsen, as I'm alive!" yelled. "And she's coming up at her top speed. Now, you English pig-dog, I shall have the pleasure of seeing you sent to the bottom with all hands!"

"Signal the destroyer to close in," said Cavendish. "Mr. Lombe, put the warrant-officer and his men aboard the Deutschland, and order them to start her under way at full speed, and keep abreast me for orders."

"Very good, sir."

Sam and Stephen were looking pretty blank. It seemed to them that the burst of jubilation on the part of the German her's captain had only too much reason in it. The sight of that enormous steel monster coming up hand-over-hand from the southward was as good as the Furst Moltke's death-warrant, unless she could escape in time. And what was to come of the liner?

Not a moment's flurry did Cavendish show, however. He and his second-in-command were as cool, formal, and quiet as at fleet manœuvres. The young commander scanned the approaching battleship, measured the distance with his eye, and gave his orders in due turn.

In a twinkling the four men from the Furst Moltke were aboard the Deutschland. No prize-crew or guard was placed on her; her own swarming crew of Germans still remained, and the senior warrant-officer from the cruiser took command. Though he was outnumbered by several hundred to one, the engine-room telegraph was obeyed, and the great liner leaped into her stride.

The destroyer came racing up like a black greyhound, and it was from her that the impelling force came. There was no need to signal her, for she came close enough for her commander to hear Cavendish's instructions by word of mouth; and in that moment Sam and Stephen learned how stern Cavendish could be when the need rose for strong measures.

"Sprite, ahoy!" he called sharply. "You will keep station within easy striking distance of the Deutschland, with all your tubes charged. You will note her course by signal, as she receives it from me, and if she deviates from a single point, you will torpedo her without further warning. You understand?"

"Yes, sir!"

The destroyer leaped away to take her station astern and lightly to port of the liner, in such a position that there could be no possibility of a torpedo missing her.

"My aunt," muttered Stephen, "that settles her! But what if her German crew manage to drop her speed down as to let her get overhauled by that battleship? They know she's followin'."

Cavendish had allowed for that, as his next order showed. He took up a megaphone, and hailed the liner through it, addressing his warrant-officer on her bridge:

"Mr. Chapman, communicate with your engineers, and warn them that if the speed-gauges drop below 23 knots, our ship will be at once torpedoed and sunk with all hands! For shall I stop to pick anyone up?"

"Very good, sir!" came the hail in reply.

The three vessels—cruiser, destroyer, and liner—were now bearing away to the northward, showing the battleship their heels, and straining every gauge to keep up their speed. The Deutschland's ex-captain, on the fishing-smack, seeing her leave him, and fearing they might escape the avenger after all, gave a cry of rage, and sent an impotent revolver-bullet singing over the Furst Moltke's bridge.

"Never mind that fool," said Cavendish. "How's this or a speed trial—eh, Sam?"

The great battleship had drawn nearer while the preparations for departure were being made, and it was evident enough that she knew what had happened, and was burning for vengeance. When she saw the prey drawing away,

she made a great effort, and came on with black smoke pouring from all her funnels, and presently fired a sighting shot with one of her 12-inch guns.

Boom! Woo-oo-oo-oo! Putt! sang the huge shell as it tore its way through the air, and struck the water a bare twenty yards short of the Furst Moltke.

"Just nicely out of shot," said Cavendish, with a grin. "That's what I call gettin' away exactly in time. We've done her to a nicety!"

"Can't she get at us now?" asked Stephen eagerly.

"Not a ha'p'orth! Twenty-two knots is her speed. We do twenty-three and a half, and the Deutschland just about the same. As for the Sprite, she can go thirty if she likes; but her job is to attend on the liner."

Boom! came another shell, fired at the utmost effective elevation possible; but it fell ten yards shorter than the other, and soon it was plain to the naked eye that the German battleship was being left astern further and further. The difference in speed was not great, but enough to make capture impossible.

"Her only job now, if she chooses, is to communicate with his lonely majesty on the fishin'-smack," chuckled Cavendish. "I bet the Sachsen's captain is pretty sick at losin' two such plums as the Furst Moltke an' the Deutschland. Runnin' away is not a job I enjoy, but this time it's got to be done."

"No good tryin' a shootin'-match with a ship like that—eh?" suggested Sam.

"My dear chap, I've acquired a bit of an affection for this cruiser of ours, for all she was born a German. I take a pride in her, an' to throw her away uselessly, to be sunk in ten minutes by the Sachsen, is not a finish that I hanker after—especially as I couldn't do the enemy any damage worth mentioning."

"No; an' to lose a newly-caught prize like that liner, as well. Very poor game," said Stephen regretfully, looking at the Sachsen, now farther off than ever.

"Besides, I'm not here to indulge my personal tastes. I'm under, my admiral's orders, to say nothing of common-sense."

"What a pity this ain't a big battleship, though, so that we could have had a set-to with her," sighed Stephen.

"Well, I don't know; except for a big, slamming duel once in a way, you don't get much fun in a battleship. For instance, we should never have caught the Deutschland, or got any commissions of that sort. We'd have done nothing day after day but tramp about an' keep station with a squadron of others, waitin' and hopin' to bring the enemy to battle. Torpedo craft, an' especially cruisers, get all the nippest an' riskiest jobs."

"I thought you were burnin' to get into the fighting-line, though, and take a hand in a big scrap."

"So I am; but one wants both, I think. We'll trust in our luck, an' we'll do ourselves proud, if ever they do let me into the line. The Furst Moltke'd give a good account of herself in the main fleet against anything but the Dreadnought classes. They'll be mainly attending to each other, those big 'uns, when that time comes. It won't be long now."

"The Sachsen's on her way north to join 'em, I suppose," said Sam. "Wonder where she's been? She's out of sight now," he added, gazing astern.

"Yes; we can get rid of our consorts now," said Cavendish. And, after another five minutes, he altered course to the north-westward, signalling the other two vessels to follow suit. The Deutschland had kept up her highest speed all the way, nor had anyone on board her dared to question an order. The menacing black destroyer just astern, ready to deal a fatal blow at the first sign of mutiny, was sufficient.

Cavendish closed nearer to the destroyer, and gave her his final orders.

"You have lost the Sachsen now, and will not sight her again," he called. "Lay your course westwards and escort that liner into the Thames. Your former orders still hold good. Her provision stores can be sent up to relieve the Londoners."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said "Tommy" cheerfully from his bridge.

"The run is a short one, and you'll be in by morning. Give my warrant-officer all the help you can. She draws twenty-two feet. Take the navigation on yourself, and give him his courses by signals."

"Certainly, commander."

"You're not likely to meet with any of the enemy's warships on the run; but if you do, and it appears certain that the Deutschland will be recaptured, torpedo her, and sink her without fail. She is not to fall into German hands again, at any cost."

"Very good, sir!"

"Good-bye and good luck to you!"

Away went the Deutschland westwards for England, with her grim little constable following in her wake. Going at

full speed, in a little over half an hour she was out of sight.

"You meant what you said, then, about sinking her?" said Stephen.

"Yes," said Cavendish grimly; "it's no time for half measures. If the war hangs on a little longer, she'd certainly be armed and added to the German fleet as a fast cruiser directly she'd returned from this voyage, just as her sister ships have been—the Kaiser Wilhelm and Kronprinz Wilhelm. I don't understand why she hasn't been used so already; but they must have some reason for it."

"They won't use her now!"

"No; she'll be armed at once with guns from Woolwich, and sail under the British flag now. She'll make a splendid scout and commerce destroyer. I wish I could have put somebody other than a warrant-officer aboard, for she's a big handful to manage. But Tommy'll run her through all right, with the Sprite."

Cavendish was in remarkably good spirits as he left the bridge in charge of Elcombe, after putting the ship on a course to approach within touch of the Dutch coast again. He had every reason to be well pleased with his initial cruise in the Furst Moltke.

"Of course, there's been some luck in it," he said to the brothers; "but still, I think one may say we've done pretty decently, and the old man can't fail to give us a job worth having, now we've shown we can be useful."

"Lord Howard, you mean? Have you reported to him yet?"

"Can't do that till he picks me out an' asks for a report, an' I expect he's too busy to bother about our doin's. He's got our call; but we haven't got his. Wish he would, though, for I think he ought to know about the Sachsen moving up north."

It was not very long afterwards that the call came. The three of them, hearing that wireless waves were being repeatedly caught by the instruments, but that no message could yet be made out, paid a hurried visit to the operator in the hope of seeing one arrive. It came, in fact, just at that moment.

"Lord Howard asks for whereabouts of the Furst Moltke, and what she is doing," said the operator.

"Reply twenty-five miles nor-nor-west of Ymuiden," replied Cavendish quickly. "Report as briefly as you can that we captured the Deutschland about noon, and were chased by the Sachsen, which was left astern, heading north-west. Landed Deutschland's passengers, and sent her to the Thames in charge of destroyer Sprite."

The message went through, and after a pause the receiver-tube began to splutter and buzz again, and the reply was jotted down by the operator and read out:

"Well done, Furst Moltke! Time yourself to arrive within sight of Texel soon after dark. Lie with all lights dowsed, and watch for collier division. Let them get well out before you strike. Most urgent!
HOWARD."

"Now, what the dickens does that mean?" muttered Stephen.

"I know what it means," said Cavendish, with a smile. "Good old chief! Well, it's a rummy sort of job, but deuced interestin'. It means there'll be some Germans in a sweatin' rage, and plenty of illumination, and some German warships lookin' very blue before mornin'—that's if it comes off."

"Right! Let's go and annoy somebody by all means—I feel like it," said Sam. "There isn't any end to the troubles I'd like to pile on Germany, after what we've seen at home. But it ain't merely empty annoyance, is it?"

"No fear; we're all too busy for that. It's precious important, and may make a big difference to the final big fight, if that comes off soon. Only we mustn't be off the Texel before dark, or too near it, in case they send out scouts."

"What are we likely to be up against there? Torpedo-boats?"

"Oh, no! Just common, dirty tramps," said Cavendish grinning—"colliers. There may be a destroyer or two escort."

"Tramps? Is that all?" said Stephen, in disappointed tones.

"Oh, there's nothing showy about it—at first! There'll be later, though. Wait an' see. I wonder where the man got the tip from? Hope he's right. It's lucky we're over on this coast, if so."

The Furst Moltke reduced her speed till she was going dead slow, at which pace she proceeded for some hours. Cavendish would not say any more, and the boys did not care to besiege him with questions, though they were not quite clear as to what he meant to do.

When darkness fell, great precautions were taken to prevent the cruiser showing a gleam of light anywhere about her structure, and every likely place was carefully screened with tarpaulins. The dead-lights had all been shut long ago. The Furst Moltke increased her pace, though enough to cause her funnels to spark, and presently slowed down again and stopped dead.

"We're within sight of the Texel," said Cavendish; "if the beggars mean coming out, I hope to see 'em before they see me."

The Texel Island, where the deep inlet cut into the north Dutch coast and led to the naval port of the Helder, and the entrance of the Zuider Zee, lay some distance away on the starboard bow. Stephen, with his sharp eyes, said he could detect the opening; but Sam could see nothing more than a very faint line marking the low coast.

"Aro we after Dutchmen? This is a Dutch port, ain't it?" said Stephen.

"The whole of Holland's in German hands now, Sam," replied Sam; "not only the Scheldt and Antwerp where they sent their first flotillas from—but right at Texel."

"But if anything's comin' out of there, ain't they as likely to see us as we are to see them?"

"No," said Cavendish; "for I'm well down to the southward here, with the loom of the land more or less behind me. Of course, they may do, but we'll hope not."

The expectation of the two brothers was wound up to a high pitch, though not quite sure what they were to do. Consequently, as they saw nothing for a good two hours more, Stephen voted the performance slow. Cavendish, however, was perfectly patient the whole time, scanning the dark sea carefully with a pair of powerful night-glasses.

"Here they come!" he said at last, with much satisfaction. "One—two—by Jove, five of 'em!"

"What?" said Stephen, focussing his own glasses. At first he could not see anything; but presently, just clear of the Texel, he managed to make out a number of shadowy forms stealing westwards like dark ghosts upon the sea. "Why, they aren't warships, are they?" he said. "They look like common steamers—colliers, I should think."

"That's it—colliers. They're our meat."

"Have we done all that we can? We've got to waitin' to rope in a few dirty old coal-tramps," said Stephen, in disappointed tones. "Are you goin' to coal up for them?"

"The German fleet thinks it's goin' to do that. You don't seem to think much of 'em, young shaver, but you ought to know now that coal's just as necessary to a navy as to life-blood is to a man."

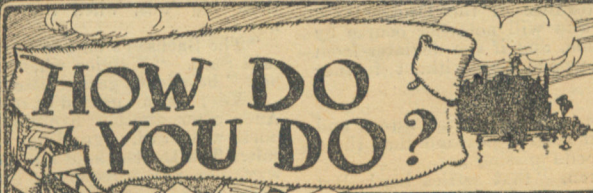
"Are those bound out to meet the Kaiser's ships, as to let 'em coal at sea?" said Stephen eagerly.

"That's it. An' the lot of 'em may make all the difference. Do you still feel inclined to teach that admiral his business?"

"No; I'll give him a lesson. Only I don't call it a lesson, as you said it'd be all the same."

"Maybe you'll change your opinion presently, I think there'll be a very pretty spectacle."

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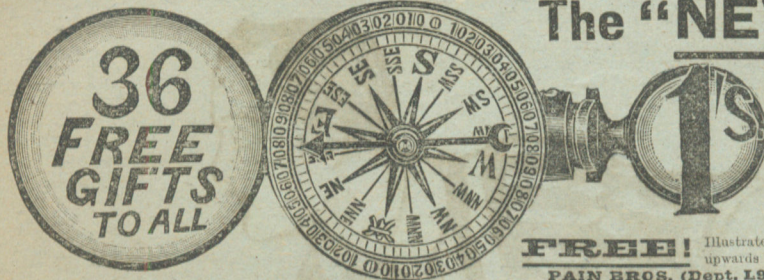


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