

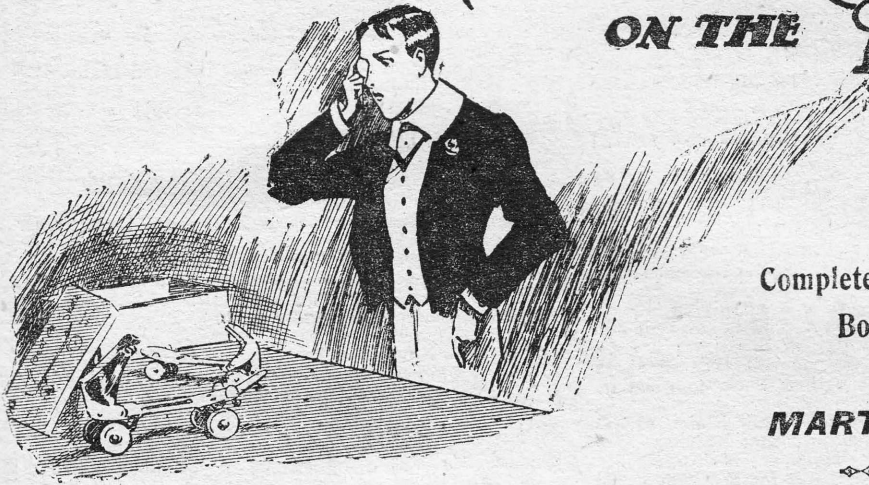
EVERY
THURSDAY

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**TOM MERRY
ON THE RINK.**



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

— BY —
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

**CHAPTER 1.
The Slackers.**

"I MUST request you to release my arm, Blake."
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House, spoke with a distinct air of dignity.
"I must request you wottahs to release my arm——"
"Well, what do you mean by saying you are going to cut footer practice?" demanded Jack Blake. "You jolly well know we are to play the Grammar School next Saturday, and you're as unfit and soft as new bread."
"Weally, Blake, I wefuse to be chawactahwised as new bread——"
"Well, but what's it all mean, ass?"
"And I must wefuse to be chawactahwised as an ass, deah boy. Wefuse my arm——"
"Look here, Gussy," said Jack Blake warningly, "it is up against me to land you on the footer-field next Saturday fit; I promised Tom Merry to do it, and I'm going to. You are coming to footer practice, kid."
"Imposs, deah boy. I have made othah awwangements."
"What other arrangements?" demanded Jack Blake suspiciously. "What other arrangements can you possibly have made since this morning, ass? You are shirking."
"No, weally, deah boy. I wathah think I am not in the habit of shirkin'. I have a pwessing engagement."
Jack Blake looked keenly at the aristocratic features of Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's was in a particularly obstinate mood that afternoon.
Jack became more suspicious.
"Look here," he said, "where are you going, Gussy?"
"Nowhere, deah boy—nowhere in partic——"
"But where, ass?"
"Into our studay——"
"Into the study on a glorious afternoon like this?" exclaimed Blake. "Don't be an ass! I say, you aren't going to meet Cousin Ethel, are you?"
"No, wathah not; it would be imposs. because Cousin Ethel won't be here until Fwiday evenin', when the new

American skatin'-wink is opened. I must wequest you to release my arm, Blake."

Jack Blake did so.
"Can't make you out this afternoon, Gussy," he said. "I believe you are off your rocker."
"No, deah boy, I am not off my wockah. I will see you latah."

He walked away carelessly. Jack Blake stood looking after him.

"Must be something pretty pressing to make the kid out footer practice," he muttered. "He's as keen on beating the Grammar School as any of us. And going to the study, too! Can't make it out. Wow!"

Jack Blake took a spasmodic jump forward, flung out his arms, and had only saved himself from falling by bringing up violently against the corridor wall. Someone had thumped him on the back.

"Cheer-ho, young Blake!"
"You rotter, Merry!"

Tom Merry, the hero of the Shell, grinned.
"You don't seem very steady on your pins this afternoon, Blake," he said. "You should take more exercise."
"I'm going to, you ass; I am going to flay you alive!"

"I don't think! But, I say, kid, we can't play the second eleven defence against the attack this afternoon because Lowther won't play, though I'm blest if I know why!"

"Lowther won't play?"
"That's what I said, young Blake. Absolutely refuses to turn out. Says he's got a pressing engagement or something. We nearly rowed about it."

"Phew!"
"What's up?"
"Why, Gussy won't play either!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Said he was going into the study, or some rot like that."
"Going into the study?"

"That's what I said, young Merry——"
"Yes. But Lowther said he was going into our study as

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

well!" exclaimed the Shell fellow. "I— Hallo! What are you New House fellows doing in the cock-house?"

"We've just left the cock-house, kid," grinned Figgins, the tall, long-legged leader of the New House juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Blake.

"Ho, ho, ho!" yelled Tom Merry. "Cock-house—New House cock-house—"

"Don't be humorous, Figgins."

"So it is cock-house," said Figgins warmly. "Everyone knows that. But it's pax this time. I—I—"

"Go on!"

"Don't be nervous!"

"I believe he's blushing."

"Don't be an idiot, Merry!" said Figgins. "But the truth of the matter is I can't quite keep to the arrangement we made this morning about the footer practice."

"Can't keep to the arrangement?" said Tom Merry severely.

"N-no! Kerr refuses to play—"

Figgins got no further with his exclamation. He seemed to have run into a mental cul-de-sac in the expressions on the faces of the School House juniors.

Jack Blake and Tom Merry were looking at one another solemnly.

"Kerr won't play—"

"Kerr—"

"Look here, Figgy," said Tom Merry, "the ass hasn't by any chance told you he is going into his study?"

"That's just what he did tell me!" exclaimed Figgins. "How did you know? Is this a rotten School House plot?"

"Seems to be a general sort of plot, as far as I can see," returned Tom Merry briskly. "Lowther has also refused to play, and has gone to his study."

"And D'Arcy has cried off as well," said Blake.

"And has gone into his study," added Tom Merry.

"My hat!"

The three leading juniors of St. Jim's looked blankly at one another. The fellows who had cried off were amongst the keenest footer men in the college. It was curious, to say the least of it.

"And the Grammar School people are training for all they are worth," said Tom Merry. "Old Monkey, the captain, is fearfully keen on beating us this time; is even coming over on his bicycle to see me this evening about something or other. It will make them buck up when he sees we are slack."

"D'Arcy ought to be boiled in oil!" said Blake, and it was proof that he was feeling keenly that he spoke disparaging of his chum of Study No. 6 before his friendly rivals. "He ought to be boiled in oil for the rest of his life!"

"And Kerr ought to be flayed alive!" said Figgins, also with feeling.

"And Lowther will be!" said Tom Merry.

"But what's to be done?"

"Yes, that's it! What's to be done?"

"We aren't going to run the risk of a beating from Monk's cripples just because three asses decide to go mad!" said Tom Merry indignantly. "Suppose it rains for the rest of the week. That will mean the idiots won't have had any real practice for a dog's age."

"That's a fact."

"We owe it to St. Jim's to show them the error of their ways," said Jack Blake darkly.

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry buttoned his coat grimly.

"Come along, kids!" he said.

And they went.

CHAPTER 2.

Closed Doors.

TOM MERRY, Jack Blake, and Figgins mounted the stairs, expressions of set determination on their faces. This was a serious matter with the football honour of St. Jim's at stake. There could be no half-measures in dealing with an affair like this.

"Study No. 6 first," said Tom Merry. "It's the nearest."

"Right-ho!" said Blake, and they went on.

The Fourth Form studies at St. Jim's open out into a very long corridor, and the three had not covered much of this when a slight crash caught their ears. It was followed by a second one, then an exclamation:

"Bai Jove!"

"Mum's the word!" muttered Blake. "We'll pounce on the young ass."

"That's the idea!"

They crept along the passage, making as little noise as THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 90.

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possible. Once before the closed door of Study No. 6, the historic room shared by Jack Blake and his chums of the Fourth, they all stopped dead. It was not with any intention of listening, but because a strange noise prevented them from thinking of moving for a moment.

It was a curious, swishing sort of noise, not unlike the sound caused by wheeling heavy furniture about.

"My hat!"

"What on earth can the young ass be up to?"

"Sounds as if he is collaring all the furniture—"

"Or wrecking his own study!" grinned Tom Merry.

"My only aunt!"

The curious swishing noise ceased abruptly, to be followed instantly by a terrific crash. The crash might have been anything, but the sound of breaking glass which followed it was distinct enough.

Jack Blake gritted his teeth.

There were more careful fellows in St. Jim's with their own property than Jack Blake, but even he did not like to listen to the sound of the happy home being broken up.

Tom Merry began to chuckle.

"You should have taken more care of him, Blakey; I could see it was coming on long ago."

"I'll take care of him now," rapped out the Fourth-Former—"jolly good care, too!"

And he twisted the knob violently.

The door was locked. At that moment the swishing noise commenced again.

"Open the door, you young ass!" shouted Blake. "Open the door! It is I—Blake—"

Another crash answered his words; then a voice, chilly with indignation, issued from the study.

"I wegard that as wotten of you, Blake, deah boy—I wegard it as wotten in the extweme! You have caused me to bweak a chair."

"Caused you to what?"

"Bweak a beastly chair, deah boy, not to say bark my wotten shins."

"I'll bark your head if you don't open this door—"

"I wegwet to say I must wefuse to open the dooah," came back the voice of Arthur Augustus. "I have a perfect wight to wemain in my own studay."

"But not to lock me out, ass!"

"You can come into the woom latah—"

"But I want to come in now, you shrieking lunatic!"

"I wefuse to be chawactahwised as a shwicking lunatic—"

"Open the door then!"

"Weally, Blake, I have explained twice already that it is impos. I must wequest you to leave me in peace."

"Sounds like peace, doesn't it?" chuckled Tom Merry. "This is jolly funny. Fancy a fellow wrecking his own study."

"I am not wecking my own studay; and it was Blake who bwoke the chair—"

"You howling ass!" shouted Blake.

"I wefuse—"

"What are you doing?"

"Sittin' on the flooah, deah boy—"

"Sitting on the floor!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What on earth for?"

"For a west," said Arthur Augustus—"for a west! Ha, ha, ha! I considh that wathah funnay. Sitting on the flooah for a west! Ha, ha!"

Jack Blake gasped in amazement.

Tom Merry was doubled up with glee. It struck him as humorous that Jack Blake should have to stand outside the locked door of his own study, listening to his room being wrecked by his chum. He chuckled loudly.

"Open the door!" began Blake again.

"Here comes Kildare," whispered Figgins.

The three looked at one another and hesitated. Jack Blake had made up his mind to enter that room, but he wanted to enter it without outside help. Besides, Arthur Augustus might be employed in a way that would not appeal to Kildare. He was making a great deal of noise, for one thing.

"Better scoot for the time being," said Tom Merry.

"Right-ho! Just you wait until I get hold of you, young D'Arcy," he added through the closed door. "You'll jolly well wish you weren't born!"

"I wathah wish I hadn't been born now, deah boy," groaned Arthur Augustus. "I have bumped my head on the beastly fendah."

"Bumped your head on the fender!" gasped Blake.

"Bumped—"

"Come on!" said Tom Merry. "Kildare will be asking questions in a minute."

They hurried away completely astounded.



Once inside the bathroom, Arthur Augustus d'Arcy gently bathed his nose, which was bleeding profusely.

CHAPTER 3.

Lowther's Bad Luck.

"Gussy must be a bit of a handful at times, Blake," grinned Tom Merry, as they made their way from the Fourth Form corridor. "A good big bit of a handful, I should think."

"Y-yes," answered Blake absently. "All right when he lets others think for him but dangerous when he launches out on his own."

"Y-yes!" "I should treat him with greater firmness if he were under my care," went on Tom Merry, grinning still more broadly as he noticed the puzzled expression on Jack Blake's face increasing in intensity. "Fancy being locked out of your own study."

Jack Blake did not answer at all this time. He was really puzzled about the affair, and try as he would he could not make head nor tail out of it. Tom Merry enjoyed the situation immensely, and dug Figgins in the ribs.

Figgins chuckled. "You ought to assert yourself more," the lengthy New House junior grinned. "I'd like to see one of the kids in

our House locking me out of my own study, like Gussy is you."

"Or a Shell fellow," agreed Tom Merry. "Fancy Lowther, for instance, oxing about, and—"

Tom Merry stopped speaking. He also stopped chuckling. He even looked rather upset.

The three had gained the passage which led past the Shell studios by now, and there was nothing strange in that, seeing that they had been making for Tom Merry's room. But what was strange was that the same noise they had heard issuing from Study No. 6 was to be heard also in the Shell corridor.

Tom Merry lengthened his stride. Figgins chuckled a little, then stopped. There was something a little uncanny about the curious swishing sound.

Tom Merry swung round, and attempted to push open his study door. The door was locked.

"Lowther, let me come in," he said quickly.

"Hallo! Is that you, Merry?"

"Of course it is; let me come in."

"Right-ho, kid; don't get ratty! Ripping afternoon, isn't it?"

"Hurry up!"

"And I shall be able to play footer, after all," went on

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Lowther's voice, accompanied by sounds which seemed to hint that Lowther was moving about the room. "I find I can play."

"Are you going to open this rotten door?"

"Of course, old chap. What on earth made you think I wasn't going to open it? You want it opened, don't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Figgins.

Jack Blake said nothing. He was still looking very puzzled.

Tom Merry seemed more upset.

"Look here, Lowther—"

"Hallo, old chap!"

"Open this door!"

"Certainly! I—there you are!"

The key was turned with a click and the three burst into the room. They crossed the threshold, to see Lowther limping towards a chair, book in hand. Tom Merry glared at him.

A moment or two passed in silence, then Figgins's voice broke the pause.

"My hat! You haven't half been playing tricks with your bookcase, Merry!"

"Bookcase! What bookcase? My aunt!"

There was a large bookcase in the room, and it had met with an accident. Both the large glass panes which formed the doors were broken.

Tom Merry did not look on in silence for long.

"Who did that, Lowther?"

"I did, old chap; caught my elbow against it."

"How the—"

"My hat, and look at your table, Merry!"

"Phew!"

"I did that as well," said Lowther, who was making tremendous efforts to appear at his ease. "I—I brought up against it rather heavily."

"And the clock!" exclaimed Figgins, who was peering about him with interest now. "It's smashed to atoms!"

"By Jove!"

"And the vase—"

"I—I did that, too," said Lowther, still more nervously. "I knocked them both off the mantelshelf with my shoulder."

"What on earth have you been up to, Lowther!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Up to?"

"What have you been doing?" went on Tom Merry, wrath taking the place of amazement. "Who has been in here with you?"

"N-no one, old chap!"

"Do you mean to say you've smashed all these things by yourself?"

"Y-yes; I've been unlucky!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Figgins. "I should say you had!"

"But what's it mean?" demanded Tom Merry. "Look here, Lowther, we want an explanation about all this. In the first place, what made you cut footer, why did you lock yourself in here and keep us outside such a dickens of a time, and what's the meaning of all this?" he added, waving his hand round the dismantled room.

"The meaning of what?"

"This!" yelled Tom Merry.

Lowther appeared to be thinking.

"I—I have been unlucky, Tom," he said, after a time. "But I'll furbish the place up, and all that. It hadn't we better change into footer things?"

"Footer things be blowed! What is it?"

Tom Merry rapped out the inquiry sharply, and the door opened to admit Kerr. The three stopped looking at Lowther to stare at the new-comer.

The Scotch chum from the New House began to talk rather rapidly as if he did not want too much attention paid to his appearance.

"I'm ready to turn out for footer practice after all, Figgins," he said. "I find I can."

The three were still staring at him.

"I'll—I'll go and change at once, shall I?"

The stare was not removed. Kerr looked uneasy, and ran his hand gently across his forehead. There was a large lump there. His nose also showed signs of having been bleeding in the near past, and his left eye was a trifle discoloured.

Figgins recovered himself.

"Hallo! What has happened? Been in a fight?"

"N-no! No, I haven't been in a fight—of course not."

"Then how on earth did you run up against that black eye?" said Figgins, looking puzzled.

"Black eye?"

"That's what he said, kid," put in Tom Merry crisply.

"I expect it is what he meant, too."

"Oh, this!" said Kerr, caressing his damaged eye. "I—I knocked myself."

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"Silly ass, then!"

"Where have you been?" asked Figgins.

"In the study, and—and I say, I have broken the window!"

"Broken the window!"

"Y-yes—yes! I put my hand through it."

"What on earth for?" gasped Figgins. "You must be a shrieking idiot!"

"Of course, I didn't mean to, Figgy," hastened to add Kerr. "It was an accident. Nothing else is damaged. I'll—I'll go and change into footer togs. They are down in the pavilion."

"So are mine," said Lowther hastily. "I'll come with you, Kerr."

"Here, wait a minute—"

"Stop, you asses!"

"Collar them, Figgins!"

But Lowther and Kerr refused to be collared, and disappeared along the corridor at a great pace. Lowther was limping a little, and would probably have been caught before he had gained the pavilion, had not Tom Merry suddenly seized Jack Blake by the arm.

"Here comes Gussy, Blakey!"

"My hat! So it is!"

"Get back in the room."

"Right-ho!" muttered Jack Blake grimly. "Not a word!"

Arthur Augustus came sauntering along the corridor, exquisite as to attire, and complacent in mind. He had just changed his clothes, and he had had a wash, and seemed at peace with the world, except that he occasionally felt his left elbow with his right hand rather gingerly.

"I wondah where the wottahs can be?" he was musing, as he came along. "I wathah think they must have cleahed down to the footah ground, in which circs.— Wow! You wottahs! You wuff w'etches!"

"Collar him!"

"Blake—Blake, to the wescue, deah boy!"

"Blake is here!" growled that junior for himself. "Very much here, you young ass!"

"Then I considah you are a wank outsidah to spwing out on me and put me in this beastly fluttah!" said Arthur Augustus. "W'elcase me—"

"We will, when we've got a little information we want," said Blake firmly. "Into your study with him, Merry!"

"I w'efuse to go into Tom Mewwy's studah—I w'efuse—"

But Arthur Augustus went into the study, despite his refusal to do so. The other three carried him in.

"Now, you shrieking duffer," said Jack Blake, "what does it mean?"

"I w'egard you as wude, wuff beasts!"

"Never mind how you regard us. What does it all mean?"

"And you have wumped my collah—"

"What does it mean?" repeated Jack Blake severely.

"What happened in Study No. 6 just now? What were you doing?"

"Weally, Blake, I fail to see—"

"And what have you been putting Lowther up to?" demanded Tom Merry. "The poor kid has gone mad!"

"And Kerr," said Figgins. "What have you been doing with Kerr?"

"Nothin', bai Jove! On my word, I haven't touched Kerr, and wathah think I haven't seen Lowthah all day."

"But the three of you have some plot going?"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye, and looked at Tom Merry witheringly.

"Weally, Mewwy, am I to considah that as pwoof that you do not take my word of honouah?"

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"Well, haven't you?"

"No, Merwy," returned Arthur Augustus stiffly. And the other three looked at one another.

None of them thought of doubting the word of Arthur Augustus in the least detail. He was not the sort of fellow whose word anyone could doubt. Still, the three were more than puzzled.

"Anyway," said Jack Blake, "if you don't know anything about Kerr's and Lowther's madness, you must know what you were doing in our study, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah! Of course I know what I am doing in the studay, bai Jove!"

"Then what was it?"

"I must wefuse to explain," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegwet to have to do so, but I wathah think I must."

"Lick the young ass until he does explain!" growled Blake, on the spur of the moment. "You're an unspeakable duffer, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to be chawactahwised as a duffah, and I shall wefuse to be licked."

"Well, why can't you explain?"

"I can, but I wathah think I don't want to, deah boy. I wegwet—"

"Oh, hang your regrets!" said Jack Blake, in disgust. "What shall we do with the idiot, Merry?"

It was a delicate question. Of course, Jack Blake had not been serious when he had suggested licking the swell of the School House in order to make him explain; and, apart from actual torture, there seemed little chance of making him speak. Tom Merry did not know what to suggest.

"Kick the utter idiot out of the room, and buy him a collar and a chain," he said. "Perhaps it would be better to kick him out of the window, though."

"Don't be widiculous!" said Arthur Augustus. "I must wequest you to do nothin' of the kind. I wepeat that I wegwet I cannot see my way, undah the circs., to explain; but later on in the week you will undahstand. It is a mattah which concerns myself only, deah boys."

"Doesn't concern yourself only if you are going to lock me out of my own room, ass!" growled Jack Blake.

"But I wathah think it will not be for long, deah boy."

"Then you are going to do it again?" said Jack Blake curiously.

"Yaas, wathah! I expect to spend a considahable portion of my time in the studay, deah boy."

"Oh, you do, do you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, go and spend some of it there now, you tailor's dummy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Jack Blake, ramming his hands in his pockets. "Coming down to change, Merry?"

They wandered from the study without taking further notice of Arthur Augustus, and the swell of the School House looked after them, surprise showing in his face.

"Weally now," he soliloquised, "Jack Blake seemed wathah wuffed, not to say watty. I wondah what can be the mattah with him, bai Jove!"

And Arthur Augustus walked back to Study No. 6, and, after carefully looking both ways, went in and locked the door. Not long afterwards the curious swishing noise, punctuated by frequent heavy bumps and exclamations of "bai Jove!" might have been heard again had there been anyone in the corridor to listen.

The row went on for quite a long time; in fact, only ceased when Arthur Augustus came out of the room again. He appeared agitated, and made for a bath-room with hurried steps.

Once inside, he gently bathed his nose, which was bleeding profusely.

CHAPTER 4.

Getting Fit.

"HERE you are, Figgy!"

"Oh, well played, sir!"

"Good shot, Merry!"

The cries were many, and the excitement was great, although the game was only a practice one with scratch elevens. But in the background of it all was the Grammar School match, which was to come off the following Saturday afternoon, and the fellows were working hard.

None of them meant physical unfitness to be the cause of their downfall, if there were a downfall at all.

They had been playing for some time now, Kildare refereeing, and presently the college captain stopped the game.

"That will be enough for to-day, Merry," he said, in his quiet way. "Don't want to overdo it."

"But we are hardly blown, Kildare!" panted the junior.

"Better stop, all the same."

"Yes; but— Oh, well, if you think we ought to chuck it, we will!" Tom Merry added.

The Shell fellow had fairly settled convictions on most things, but in a matter like this he was always ready to bow to Kildare's better judgment. The St. Jim's captain knew the ethics of training.

"Have a rub down and a bath," the senior advised. "Your shooting has improved, Merry. What is the matter with your knee, Lowther?"

"I—I knocked it," said Lowther, glancing at Tom Merry.

"How did you manage that?"

"I—I fell down."

"Humph! Looks as if it will go stiff a bit. Better slip into my study for some embrocation. Hope we win on Saturday."

Kildare walked away. He was one of the most popular seniors the old Sussex school had ever had, and it was said of him that he took as much interest in the second eleven matches as he did in the first.

Tom Merry linked his arm with Jack Blake, and they also walked away. They were thinking in the same groove.

"Blest if I can make it out!" Tom Merry muttered at last. "It's beyond me!"

"About the kids shutting themselves up in the studies, Tom?"

The Shell fellow nodded.

"And spending their time knocking themselves about," he added, with a grin. "That's a pretty nasty whack Lowther has on his knee."

"That's a fact."

"And Kerr is more or less a wreck."

"Jolly funny!"

"Merry," exclaimed a voice from behind—"Merry, I have been looking all over the place for you!"

"Hallo, Skimmy! Well, you've found me now!"

"So I perceive," answered Herbert Skimpole, the St. Jim's amateur Socialist, and every other known and unknown "ist." "Frank Monk, from the Grammar School, is waiting for you outside the gates. I told him to come in, and he made a curious remark about not wishing to be frog's-marched, or words to that effect. Do you think he feared a personal assault?"

"Shouldn't wonder," grinned Tom.

"Dear me," reflected Skimpole, blinking through his enormous glassess, "how these small matters tend to verify the great fundamental truths of Socialism! Here we have, in the twentieth century, a boy who is actually unwilling to enter the grounds of St. James's College for fear of personal assault, with attendant bodily injury. It is scarcely believable."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You utter duffer, Skimmy!"

"And then again," went on Skimpole, warming to his subject, and taking hold of the middle button of Tom Merry's football coat, "look at D'Arcy!"

"How can I, ass? He isn't here!"

"Don't be frivolous. Look at D'Arcy, I say—"

"But I tell you I can't, ass!"

"What's the matter with D'Arcy?" asked Jack Blake.

"What is the matter with him?" said Skimpole, with warmth. "Why, at this very moment he is suffering untold agonies through this ceaseless striving of one unit of civilisation to overcome another—another unit."

"My hat!"

"What's the idiot talking about?"

"What's happened to Gussy, anyway?"

"His nose is bleeding profusely," said Skimpole.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he cannot stop it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I'm bothered if I can see what Gussy's nose has to do with Socialism!" chuckled Blake. "He's an ass, I know, but—"

"How remarkably dense you are, Blake! Don't you perceive that it is this ceaseless struggle between man and man, this undying ambition to raise one's self above one's fellow-creatures that causes all the pain and suffering in the world?"

"Do you mean to say that someone has been going for Gussy, Skimmy," said Blake, looking puzzled.

Skimpole coughed.

"Not in this particular instance, I believe," he admitted.

"But I see you have caught my idea. I am glad of that."

"Never mind your idea. What is the matter with the one and only?"

"He informed me that he fell into the fire-grate, and knocked his nose on a piece of coal."

"What!"

"That's what he said. I thought it rather a ridiculous thing to do myself; but possibly ambition had obtained a grip upon him, that that enemy of perfection in human nature was flogging him on to attempt achievements—"

"Sorry to leave you, Skimmy," said Jack Blake. "I am afraid we shall meet again, though."

"But I was about to make a point—"
 "Make it when we've gone, then!" laughed Tom Merry.
 "My hat, Blake?"
 "What on earth can the young ass be up to?"
 "And Kerr and Lowther."
 Jack Blake nodded.
 "Tared with the same brush, obviously," he agreed.
 They looked at one another; then Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, let them go mad if they want to, kid! It's no business of ours, though I'm going to put a stop to Lowther's little game of wrecking our study just for the fun of the thing," the Shell fellow said. "I don't mind accidents; but when you get a whole series of them happening one after the other, I put my foot down."

"I'd put it down on Lowther, if I were you!" growled Blake. "Are you going to see what Monk wants?"
 "My hat! Yes; I'd forgotten about the kid. He dropped me a line to say he'd come over this evening, though what for, I'm blest if I can say!"

"Something about footer, I expect," answered Jack Blake, in a voice which showed that he was not thinking a great deal of what he was saying. "I'll come with you if you like."

"Good kid!"
 And they hurried towards the college gates.

CHAPTER 5.

Something on Frank Monk's Mind.

FRANK MONK, captain of the Grammar School, was pacing up and down before the stately college gates, a perplexed expression on his cheery, rather good-looking face. He looked puzzled, and did not appear to mind being kept waiting. He even started when Tom Merry and Jack Blake came into sight.

"Cheer-ho, Monkey!"
 "Hallo!"
 "Fit?"
 "Yes, thanks!" said Monk, as he shook hands cordially with his deadly rivals. "Fit enough to massacre your little team on Saturday."

"I don't think!"
 "Then why don't you begin?" asked the Grammar School fellow pleasantly. "You can't be too young, you know. But seriously—"

The others waited. Frank Monk was hesitating. It was unusual for him to hesitate.

"Fire ahead, kid!"
 "Don't be shy."
 "Don't you be an ass!" returned Monk. "Er—look here, what sort of an eleven are you turning out against us?"
 "Mustard!" said Tom Merry briefly.
 "Y-yes; but will it be the usual lot?"
 "Of course, ass!"
 "Humph!"

The college fellows stared at him. It was evident that there was something on Frank Monk's mind.

"Is that all you have come over to ask us?" grinned Tom Merry. "Or did you want to know what the score will be?"

"Four or five nil for the coll.," said Blake.
 "Don't rot!" said Monk. "Look here, you fellows, Carboy can't play on Saturday; he's sprained his ankle pretty badly."

"I'm sorry for that."
 "My hat, yes!" agreed Blake.
 "Who are you playing in his place?"
 "Well, that's the point," answered the Grammar School captain, hastily. "Of course, our place isn't like yours; we haven't nearly as many men to pick from."
 "No, of course not," said Tom Merry. "I'm jolly sorry about old Carboy."

"Yes; it is rotten."
 A pause followed. Tom Merry broke it.
 "Who are you going to shove in his place?"
 "I—I don't quite know," said Monk, gazing intently at nothing in particular. "There's young Wells, of course, but he's hardly up to it."
 "He's not bad."
 "N-no."

The college fellows looked at Monk again. There was still something on his mind, by all appearances. Frank Monk coughed.

"There is a fellow staying at the school, the Head's nephew," he began, "only—"
 "Does he play footer?"
 "Yes; but—"

"Put him in, then," said Tom Merry heartily. "It doesn't matter to us."

"But—but he's rather older than we are."

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"What the dickens does that matter?"
 "Make more of a game of it," said Blake, with true football modesty. "Put him in, if he's as big as Foulkes."
 "And—and he's rather good."
 "Don't see what you have to grumble at in that, kid," said Tom Merry. "I thought you were on the look-out for someone who could kick a ball."
 "Yes, of course," said Monk. "Well, if you chaps don't mind—"

"Mind?"
 "Why on earth should we mind," said Jack Blake, staring. "We should like to be extended."
 "Oh, if it comes to that, I dare say we could beat you one short."

"I don't think."
 "You dare say it," grinned Tom Merry, "but you'd be an ass for saying it, all the same. But play this patent game you have unearthed, Monkey, and we will quietly massacre you in spite of him."
 "He's awfully good."

"You said that before, Monkey," said Tom Merry loftily. "Then you don't mind—you are certain you don't mind?"
 "Of course we don't!"

"You can get five or six Casuals as well if you like," said Jack Blake. "More the merrier. We were afraid the game would be a walk over."

"It will," said Monk pointedly.
 "Yes, that's what I think," said Jack Blake.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" suddenly chuckled Frank Monk. "See you on Saturday. Ha, ha, ha!"

And he jumped into his bicycle saddle and pedalled off. Jack Blake and Tom Merry stood looking after him. Then they looked at one another.

Tom Merry was the first to speak.
 "That kid had something up his sleeve, Blake," he said.
 "Oh, they all have!" muttered Jack Blake. "Gussy, Lowther, Kerr, and now Monkey. We shall have the doctor coming along in a minute with a dark plot."

Tom Merry laughed.
 "Oh, Lowther and the others don't matter," he said. "We can put them down as mildly mad; but Frank Monk, he wasn't quite easy in his little mind."

"I don't see how his rotten plots can concern us, Merry."
 "N-no, neither do I. I wonder if it had anything to do with the footer next Saturday, though? The kid had something up his sleeve, I don't care what you say."

Jack Blake shrugged his shoulders.
 "Oh, bother the lot of them!" he growled. "Coming down to the gym. for half an hour?"

CHAPTER 6.

Mellish Pays a Visit to Study No. 6.

"HECK—and mate!" said Digby.
 "Oh, I don't move that castle!"
 "Yes, you jolly well do, Herries."
 "No, I don't."
 "You have moved it."
 "No; well, your arm was covering up that beately bishop."

The argument was getting heated. For the last quarter of an hour Digby and Herries, chums from Study No. 6, had been playing the ancient game of chess; and as so often happened when Digby and Herries played chess, they failed to agree on the minor point of rectifying unsatisfactory moves by putting the pieces back.

Digby got up.
 "You do that every beastly time, Herries."
 "You did it yourself last game we had."
 "Yes, but that was quite different. Oh, go away, Gussy!"
 "Hallo, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, coming into the room rather hurriedly for him, and half concealing a square cardboard box under his elegant coat. There was nothing particularly striking about the box. It might have contained a new pair of shoes by the look of it. "I trust you are not busay."

"Yes, we are. This ass wants to take back his castle."
 "This duffer keeps hiding half the board with his elbow."
 "I trust you are not busay," went on Arthur Augustus, "because I must request you to leave the woom."
 "Eh?" said Digby, looking round.

"What?"
 "I must request you to leave the woom, deah boys."
 "What for, you young ass?"
 "Because I request you to do so, Dig."

"Go and cat coke!"
 "Don't be widiculous. You can play chess in the common-woom, deah boys."
 "You can go and pick flowers," growled Herries. "About that move, Dig."

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle in his eye, and

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looked fixedly at Herries. Herries did not appear greatly perturbed.

"Weally, Hewwies, do I undahstand that you wefuse to leave the woom?" he asked stiffly.

"You can understand what you jolly well like, but we aren't going," returned Herries. "Go and do your photographs in the school dark-room."

"I have no desiah to do photogwaphs, deah boy."

Herries looked up.

"What do you want us to clear for, then, ass?"

"I have a mattah of gweat importance to attend to, deah boy."

"What?"

"It is a secwet. Blake, deah boy, I must wequest you to ordah Digby and Hewwies fwom this woom."

Jack Blake had just entered the study. He sat down without answering Arthur Augustus.

The swell of the School House repeated his remark.

"Blake, deah boy, please wequest these wottahs to clear."

"Tom Merry been in, Dig?" asked Blake.

"No."

"He's coming along for tea with Fatty Wynn. Figgins is going to drop in as well. Hallo, here they are!"

Arthur Augustus tapped Jack Blake on the shoulder.

"Weally, deah boy, do I undahstand that you have asked Tom Mewwy and Figgins into tea?"

"If you were listening, I expect you do," said Jack.

"Bai Jove, that is wemarkably awkward!"

"Why, ass?"

"Because you will have to altah your awrangements, and ask them for anothah day," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall be delighted with Tom Mewwy's company at tea, but this aftahnoon I wequire the woom for a mattah of gweat importance."

"Don't be a shrieking lunatic."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, don't be one. You oughtn't to blame a fellow for hinting at the truth, Gussy. Come in, you kids!"

Tom Merry, Fatty Wynn, with a hungry expression on his plump face, and Figgins came into the room at that moment. Arthur Augustus viewed them with disapproval.

"I wegwet to say there has been a misundahstandin', deah boys," he said. "Blake is sowwy, but he cannot ask you to stay this aftahnoon because I wequire the studay for a mattah of gweat importance."

"To turn it into a padded room for yourself, Gussy?" inquired Figgins.

"Don't be widiculous, Figgaw. Weally, Blake, I am deeply gwieved, but I must wequest you to ask these fellows to clear. Any othah aftahnoon—"

"Oh, dry up, ass!" said Jack Blake.

"Weally—"

There was a tap at the door at that moment, and in response to Jack Blake's cheery invitation, Mellish put his head into the room. He seemed to hesitate at the crowded state of the study.

"I—I'll look in again later on," he said. "I only wanted to see D'Arcy."

"Well, you can see him now," said Tom Merry. "Blake doesn't charge, I believe."

"I must wequest you not to be fwivolous, Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Anythin' you have to say, Mellish, deah boy, you can say now. I have no secwets fwom my fwields."

"What do you want this room to yourself for, then, ass?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Thought you had no secrets, you duffer."

Jack Blake laughed cheerily enough, but underlying his laughter there was more than a trace of resentment. Like most other people, the chief of Study No. 6 did not altogether appreciate a mystery which he could not solve.

"Anyway, what do you want, Mellish?" he exclaimed. "If it's nothing, you may as well clear."

"Well, it's nothing much."

"Clear, then."

Still Mellish hesitated. There was not a meaner spirited fellow in St. Jim's than Mellish. Gore at his worst had never been quite as contemptible, for he had always had a certain type of rough courage the other lacked.

"It's about the footer on Saturday," went on Mellish, after a pause. "I was wondering whether any of you chaps would care to—to make some sporting wagers. Of course," he added hastily, as he noticed the expression on Tom Merry's face, "not money wagers; just things. I don't mind offering that ripping pair of football boots I've hardly worn against D'Arcy's fishing-rod that the Grammar School beat us."

"You wottah!"

"Well, the football boots and my fountain pen, then."

"You unspeakable wottah!"

"Turn the cad out!"

"I'll add a penknife as well," said Mellish, who, amongst

other things, was rather dense. "That's fair enough, isn't it?"

Tom Merry was on his feet by now. He did not beat about the bush.

"This isn't my room," he said, "but I think I'm pretty safe in telling you to clear. You can choose between the window and the door."

"What's the matter, Merry?"

"Which is it to be, the window or the door?"

"I don't see anything to get upset about just because I offer to make a sporting wager," said Mellish, backing towards the doorway. "You are not much of a sportsman, Merry."

"Bai Jove, I considah that a wathah wotten wemark!"

Tom Merry was across the room by now, but Mellish had fled. The cad of St. Jim's was seldom ready to back his words up.

Tom Merry shut the door with a bang.

"What an outsider the fellow is!" he exclaimed. "Wants to make a few coppers out of every possible thing. Wish we'd frog's-marched him down the corridor."

"I wegard it as not worth our while, deah boy."

"And fancy wanting to back the Grammar School side!" said Figgins. "Betting even in articles is pretty low down, but to back the other side is the limit."

"Strange Mellish should want to back them, too," said Blake, glancing up. "On form, I'd say we stood a bit the better chance of winning of the two."

"Oh, I expect the cad knew jolly well none of us would back the Grammar School," said Figgins shortly.

Jack Blake nodded.

"That may be it," he admitted; "but it's rather curious. Mellish doesn't like taking chances; he prefers them to be certainties."

Then he caught Tom Merry's eye as he looked up. They both were struck by the same thought. Had this desire of Mellish anything to do with the very obvious something Frank Monk had up his sleeve?

Tom Merry buttoned his coat thoughtfully

"Coming, Blake?"

"To pay Mellish a return visit, kid?" grinned the Fourth-Former.

"Something like that."

"Right-ho!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy do I undahstand that you are goin' to intahview Mellish?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"I should think you might understand that."

"But I twust you are not goin' to make a wotten wagah with him, deah boy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I considah wagahin' as wank bad form undah any cires., but with a wottah like Mellish—"

"Don't you worry, Gussy."

"No, wathah not! I considah it widiculous to wowwy. bai Jove, and if you say you are not goin' to make a wotten wagah with the outsiders it is all wight."

"I am glad to hear that, ass!"

"I must wequest you not to address me in that mannah," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Howevah, I am glad you are leavin' the studay, because I want the woom for a mattah of gweat importance. I must wequest you othah fellows to clear as well, bai Jove!"

"Request away, Gussy!" said Figgins. "Play you chess, Dig, until the other kids return."

"Weally, Figgaw—"

"Will you have black or white?"

"Weally, Figgaw, I must considah this intwusion—"

"My move, then," said Figgins, and after a few further attempts to gain a hearing, Arthur Augustus lapsed into dignified silence.

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry Hears Some News.

TOM MERRY and Jack Blake found Mellish in his study. The cad of St. Jim's was busy.

A day or two before he had purchased a cricket-bat which was well past its prime, and had paid a shilling for it. He had heard now of a fellow in the Third who wanted a bat. Mellish was, in consequence, varnishing the battered old willow in a way which would successfully conceal the various springings. The cad of St. Jim's rather liked this sort of work.

He looked up in disgust as the other juniors entered his room.

"What do you want, here, Merry?" he said, in his rather objectionable, whining voice. "I didn't ask you to come."

"Not likely!"

"What do you want, then?"

"Not your pleasant company, kid," returned the Shell fellow cheerily. "When we want company like yours we can always get it in Taggles' lodge or Towser's kennel."

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"I suppose you think that's funny—"

"No, I thought it true," said Tom Merry simply. "But to cut the cackle, what induced you to offer to bet with us, Mellish?"

Mellish looked up, his cunning little eyes twinkling.

His attempts to obtain satisfactory wagers had proved a failure all along the line. Not one of the fellows would listen to his proposals, and a few of them had been personal about his desire to back the other side.

Mellish had been upset about it all.

"What's that got to do with you, Merry?" he said.

"That's what I want to find out, kid. Has it anything to do with us?"

"Well, find out!"

"We're going to—"

"Not from me—"

"Aren't we? First of all, do you mind telling us why you wanted to make the wager?"

"To add a little sporting interest to the game, of course."

"Rot, Mellish! We know you too well to think you'd make a wager from a sporting sense."

Mellish chuckled. He took Tom Merry's remark as a compliment.

"No, I'm not a fool, am I?" he said.

"Never mind what you are," said the Shell fellow, in deep disgust. "There are several opinions on the subject."

"But most of them similar," said Jack Blake. "What was your motive, Mellish?"

"What will you give me if I tell you?"

"A thick ear if you don't," returned Blake promptly. "You are a miserable little worm, Mellish!"

"You'll never make him realise that," said Tom Merry.

"What do you want us to give you?"

"That penknife with the corkscrew—"

"Oh, hang it all, you aren't going to bribe the cad, Merry?" exclaimed Blake.

It was an unpleasant point. Tom Merry wanted to learn what Mellish knew, and there were only two methods of learning. The one was to make him tell by force, the other by giving him the penknife; and the first, of course, was out of the question.

Tom Merry pulled the knife from his pocket.

"Oh, he can have it!" he said, enough contempt in his voice to have made any fellow in the school but Mellish blush. "A lot of good it will do him! Out with it, you cad!"

Mellish grinned.

"Ripping knife!" he said. "Thanks awfully, Merry—"

"Cut the cackle! What made you wish to bet with us?"

Mellish chuckled again.

"Do you know what sort of a team Frank Monk has out against us on Saturday?"

"The usual, I suppose."

"Carboy isn't playing and—"

"We heard that," said Tom Merry. "Monk has got someone else in his place."

"Then you know!" exclaimed Mellish. "Ha, ha, ha! I see now why you weren't keen on making a bet. Of course, Wenham is jolly hot stuff—"

"Wenham? Who is Wenham?"

"The Grammar School head-master's nephew."

"Yes, but—"

"Then you don't know," said Mellish. "You've heard of Wenham, the 'Varsity centre-half, haven't you? Well, this is the same."

"My only hat!"

"You don't mean to say Monk is putting the 'Varsity Blue in against us, Mellish?"

"I jolly well do, Blake, and you'll have a pretty lively time! Ha, ha, ha!"

The expression of blank amazement on Jack Blake's face was echoed on Tom Merry's. Mellish was greatly amused.

"Monk can't mean to do it," muttered Blake.

"It looks as if he does mean it, kid. I knew there was something up his sleeve."

"But Wenham—"

"The fellow who held the Casuals' forwards so easily! Hang it all, Monk must be dotty!"

"And not—not quite—"

Jack Blake did not finish his remark, but Tom Merry knew what he had been going to say. The Shell fellow shook his head.

"I don't see that, Blake," he said. "Monk asked us if we minded his playing Wenham—"

"Yes, he did that. He didn't say who Wenham was, though."

"Ten to one he thought we knew, old chap. Why, when I come to think of it, I've often talked to Monkey about the head-master's nephew and his footer career. If you work it out it was we who were dotty."

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"Well, we couldn't have refused to let the ass play whom he liked in any case."

"Exactly, kid. That's the point I've been trying to make. You wouldn't call Wenham a Grammar School fellow, but he's being coached there by his uncle, and Monkey gave us our chance of objecting."

"I'd like to see myself objecting if he had wanted to play Vivian Woodward," said Blake.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Then what's the trouble, Blake?" he asked. "Monk has got us in the cart, as it were, and the only thing up against us is to get him in the cart as well. We must counteract the great Wenham in some way."

"How?"

"I don't know how, but we must."

Jack Blake shook his head.

"Of course, we will all play up like Trojans, and put someone on to shadow Wenham, but what good will that do?" he said. "Wenham will play centre-half, and he'll just about make things too warm for words. His shooting was the talk of the 'Varsity, I've heard my brother say."

"My hat!"

Tom Merry uttered the exclamation in a shout. He banged Jack Blake on the shoulder, and waltzed round the study with him. Mellish looked on with disapproval.

"If you idiots are going to make that row you can clear!" he said. "I'm not going to have my study turned into a monkey-house."

"Then you'd better leave it yourself, old man," said Tom Merry excitedly. "Come on, Blake! I've the idea of a lifetime!"

"What is it?"

"Wait a minute! The Grammar School match is to be played on their ground, isn't it?"

"Of course, ass—"

"And St. Jim's first eleven have a match here?"

"Gone dotty, Merry? Of course they have—"

"Then it's probable we shall go over to the Grammar School in the 'bus?"

"You shrieking—"

"Got a telegraph form, Blake? I must have a telegraph form."

And Tom Merry pelted off towards the common-room. Jack Blake followed. He was getting heartily sick of all these plots and counter-plots.

He got a firm grip on the Shell fellow's arm.

"Out with it, ass!"

"Don't you understand—"

"I shouldn't want you to explain if I did. You can't be thinking of asking one of the first eleven men to play for us—"

"First eleven men be bothered!" returned Tom Merry, with increasing excitement. "Where is your brother now, Blake?"

"My brother—"

"Your big brother?"

"Look here, Merry," began Jack Blake, with much warmth, "if you think I am going to stand this rotting—"

Then he stopped.

"You don't mean—"

"But I do, kid," returned the Shell fellow quickly. "I mean it all the way, as we used to say out in America. Do you remember the game your brother played for Northwood Athletic against Newcastle United?"

"My hat!"

"Would he play for us, old chap?"

"Rather!" gasped Jack Blake. "He is an Old Boy, too! Phew!"

"We could play him centre-half," went on Tom Merry. "Manners has a brute of a cold, and won't be able to play, so we sha'n't have to stand anyone down. You are certain your brother won't mind playing for us?"

"My hat, of course he won't! We'll wire him at once, Merry. Ha, ha, ha! If this doesn't make poor old Monkey feel sick!"

Tom Merry chuckled loudly.

"The kids have all been having nice little plots on their own, and it's our turn now," he said. "I vote we don't breathe a word about it."

"Right-ho! What about Monk, though?"

"Oh, we'll work out a letter for him," returned the chief of the Terrible Three. "He was nice enough to ask us if we minded his playing Wenham; we'll now ask him whether he minds us playing a fellow who is not in the regular team."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But the thing will want some working," went on Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I mean, Kildare may drop on me to give him my team before we go on Saturday."

"Don't pick it until the last moment."

"Good egg! I wasn't going to as it happens, on account of Manners. I say!"

"What?"

"We'll use Skimmy."

"Use him! What for?"

"As a decoy duck if necessary," said the Shell fellow. "I'll explain that later; the point now is to get the wire off to your brother. Is he at home?"

"Rather! The governor and he patched up that quarrel about footer ages ago, and are the best of friends. He'll be delighted to come down, Tom."

"And I shall be delighted to see him. Monk won't, though."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the two friendly rivals of the School House hurried towards Tom Merry's study, their arms linked.

CHAPTER 8.

The Plotters are Unmasked,

TOM MERRY led the way to his study. The door was closed and locked, and a determined expression flashed across his face.

He thumped upon the door vigorously.

"We've had enough of this, Lowther. Open the door."

"Certainly, Tom."

"At once, or—"

The door was opened instantly, and the quickness after his previous experience, took the wind out of Tom Merry's sails. It soon came back again, however, when he noticed the state of the room.

The table was standing on end in the corner of the study, the carpet had been pulled up and rolled into a neat bundle near the window, and a light cane chair was in many pieces. Tom Merry gazed at his room in astonishment.

Jack Blake looked at Lowther.

The humorist of the Shell had a happy expression on his cheery face, and a square cardboard box similar to the one Gussy had been seen with under his arm. He was rather apologetic in manner for him.

"I am awfully sorry about the chair, Tom," he said, "but I could not help it. Look how I have barked my shin over the thing."

Tom Merry gasped.

"What on earth have you taken the carpet up for, ass?"

"And the table?" exclaimed Jack Blake. "What the—"

"The carpet—the table—"

"You hopeless duffer, Monty. If you want to go mad, why can't you go mad in common-room? Just look at the place."

"I am sorry, Tom," said Lowther hastily, "but it will not occur again. I can get along all right now."

"Get along—in what, ass?"

"In—in the something I was attempting to—to get along in," explained Lowther. "You will know all to-morrow."

"Oh, we don't want to know all if it comes to that," said Jack Blake loftily. "If you kids like to amuse yourselves without telling us how, you are welcome so far as I am concerned."

"You will be concerned to-morrow," said Lowther. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the dickens are you chuckling about, ass?"

"To-morrow—you will be awfully concerned then. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'd go and have a cold bath if I were you, Monty," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, Tom, I think I will. I feel awfully hot and dusty."

He went still chuckling, Jack Blake looking after him in disgust.

"Off their rockers, the lot of them," he said. "Wonder what he meant about to-morrow, though?"

"Oh, some silly ass trick he's got up his sleeve! Let's have your brother's address, kid."

The wire was sent, but, owing to some delay, the reply was not received until after tea the following day, Friday. Arthur Augustus brought the buff-coloured envelope into Study No. 6 himself.

"A wiah foah you, Blake, deah boy!"

"Good!" exclaimed Blake, ripping open the envelope. "Splendid. I must tell Merry this—"

"Wight-ho, deah boy. You will discovah Tom Mewwy puttin' on a clean collar in his studay. He is gettin' weady to meet Cousin Ethel."

"Yes, rather! I'm going to get ready myself in a minute."

"I twust you do not think of gettin' weady in this studay, deah boy?"

"Of course I am going to get ready in this study. Did you think I was going to use the doctor's room, ass?"

"Weally, I must wequest you not to address me as an ass," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Wegardin' the mattah of this woom, I wegwet to say you will have to

change in the dormay. I wequire the studay for a pwekking mattah!"

"Wequire it then," returned Jack Blake shortly, slipping the key from the lock into his pocket. "I've had enough of being locked out of my own room—"

"Stop, Blake—stop, you wottah!"

"I don't think. I say, where are we going to meet Cousin Ethel, ass?"

"At the American skatin'-wink, of course! It is to be opened to-night, and there is to be a wipping band."

"Good egg! It will be A1 sitting with Cousin Ethel, listening to the band—"

"Listenin' to the band. Hah, hah, hah!"

"What's the matter, Gussy?" said Blake suspiciously. "What are you cackling like an old hen about?"

"Hah, hah, hah!"

The sound of scuffling feet came along the passage to them. Then an excited shout in a well-known voice.

"Stop him, Blakey! Stop the young ass! Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake had been standing in the corridor just outside Study No. 6, during his conversation with Arthur Augustus. He turned quickly at the well-known shout.

"What's up, Merry?"

"Stop him! Stop the young rotter!"

"My hat!"

Jack Blake opened his mouth in amazement. Someone was careering towards him like the wind. The first glance seemed to suggest that it was Lowther, though a trifle tall for the humorist of the Shell.

And the speed with which he was coming along that corridor was better than anything Lowther had been known to do. It was too great for Jack Blake to think of getting out of the way even.

"Stop him! Stop the rotter!"

"Oh! Wow!"

The careering form, with its arms waving wildly in the air, had taken a sudden and unexpected dash for Jack Blake. The next moment the hero of Study No. 6 was lying on his back, wondering what had happened.

"Stop him—stop him, Blake, you duffer!"

"Sorry, Blake," gasped a voice; "it sha'n't occur again. Can't stop!"

Jack Blake sat up, looking dazed. The cause of the accident was continuing his uncertain career along the passage with a zigzag motion.

Then Tom Merry dashed up.

"You utter ass, Blake! Why didn't you stop him?"

"Oh!" groaned Blake. "Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm sorry, old man! Did you see who it was?"

"Lowther!"

"On roller skates," added the Shell fellow. "Come along and help me slay the young rotter! My hat, I see it all now!"

Jack Blake recovered himself. His fondness for sports made it easy for him to think and act quickly.

He was following Tom Merry in a flash.

"What's he doing on roller skates?" he panted. "The duffer will kill someone—"

"Or himself, which'll save me the trouble. Oh, he ought to be boiled in oil!"

"What's he done?"

"Done—done! Hasn't the young rotter been learning roller skating in my study just for to-night's opening of the American rink? I tell you he ought to be boiled in oil!"

"My only aunt, then Gussy—"

"Of course, and Kerr!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "That's what they have all been doing—locking us out of our own studies to steal a march on us and learn roller skating. There he is! Stop him, Taggles—stop him!"

Taggles was coming up the stairs. He had a scuttle of coals for Mr. Railton's room in one hand, and a jug of cold water for the flowers in Kildare's study in the other. He was coming up the stairs with his thoughts elsewhere. Then Lowther attempted an achievement which even his scanty knowledge of roller skating ought to have told him was impossible.

He tried to go down the same stairs Taggles was coming up, quickly and without removing his skates.

"Stop him!" yelled Tom Merry again. "Stop him, Taggles!"

Taggles obeyed. He could not help himself.

It appeared to him as if Lowther paused for a moment on one foot on the top stair, then deliberately threw himself into his, Taggles' chest.

Taggles flung the scuttle of coals in the air, and dropped the jug of water, which Lowther sat on. Lowther uttered a yell.

Then they both went down the stairs together.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry, rushing on. "If they haven't damaged each other this time! Come on, Blake."

Taggles was moaning loudly. He was not very much

hurt, but considerably startled. He sat where he was, and moaned.

Lowther was already on his feet.

He seemed to have but one settled conviction just then, which was to prevent Tom Merry and Jack Blake collaring him at any cost. He went his reckless way, turning the corner at the end of the passage by bumping vigorously against the wall.

Tom Merry and Blake came down the stairs by means of the banisters.

"Hurt, Taggles?"

"Which I am, an' badly!"

"Well, get up, man; you're sitting in a small ocean of water," said Tom Merry. "Get up."

"Which I can't, Master Merry, seeing my back is broke," moaned the school porter. "Master Lowther, the young lump, didn't ought to be at large, that he didn't, which I have been saying for years!"

"Taggles is all right!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "It's Lowther we've got to think of! Where will he have gone?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Goodness knows. Taggles, you ought to have stopped him! I told you to!"

"Which I consider a very 'eartless remark, seeing my back is broke!"

"Well, you won't mend it sitting in a pool of water, Taggy!" laughed Tom Merry, for he knew Taggles of old. "What shall we do, Blake?"

"I don't know what you are going to do, but I'm going to have a few minutes' quiet conversation with Gussy."

"By George, yes! He was in it with the rest. But I say, fancy us not spotting the wheeze!"

"Humph! Monk's giddy plot about Wenham put it out of our minds, I suppose. What a set of rotters! My hat, I suppose they mean to rink all the evening with Cousin Ethel!"

"Oh, they ought to be flayed alive!"

"What'll Figgy say?"

"What'll he do, you mean?"

"Come along!"

The pair went up the stairs, expressions of excited determination on their faces. Just as they gained the corridor, Arthur Augustus came out of the room.

He took one fleeting glance at the pair, then hurried away in the opposite direction.

"Stop, Gussy!"

"Come here, you duffer!"

"Gussy!"

But Arthur Augustus was deaf to their invitations. He disappeared amongst the labyrinth of corridors before Tom Merry or Jack Blake could come up with him.

"But wait until I do catch him!" said Blake darkly. "He'll get badly 'wumped,' as he calls it, then! Let's see if he's smashed anything!"

They went into the study, but apparently nothing more had been broken. Jack Blake glanced round the little room, and noticed a slip of paper on the table.

A few words were written there in the dignified handwriting of Arthur Augustus.

"I am very sorry, dear boy, but I shall be unable to accompany you to the rink to-night. I find that I shall make my way there by a different road!"

The note was signed by the swell of the School House.

"Humph!" grunted Jack Blake. "He's not such an ass as you would think! What shall we do?"

The door was flung open at that moment, and Figgins came into the room, hot and angry-looking.

"Pax, you chaps! I've found Kerr out! I know how he got that black eye!"

"Through trying to learn roller skating, kid?"

"My hat! How did you know, Merry? You weren't in the rotten plot, were you?"

"No, but Lowther was—"

"And Gussy—both of them!"

"Of all the young rotters!" panted Figgins. "I—I never thought of it—and yet I know Cousin Ethel rinks rippingly," he added, colouring a little as he usually did when Cousin Ethel's name crept into the conversation. "She—she was talking about it the last time I met her."

"Oh, they ought to be jumped on!"

"What's to be done?"

"Let's go and look for them!" said Tom Merry crisply. "Let's go and hunt all over the college for them—there's time before we start for the rink!"

There was time for the hunt over the college certainly, but there was not time enough to make it a successful hunt, all the same. Kerr, Lowther, and Arthur Augustus might have ceased to exist for all trace of them the three could find.

They had to give it up in disgust at last, and returned to their respective studies to get ready for their meeting with Cousin Ethel.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY ABROAD."

CHAPTER 9.

The Plot That Failed.

"BAI Jove, you do look wippin', Cousin Ethel!" "Do I, Arthur? It is awfully nice of you to say so!" laughed Cousin Ethel, as pretty and bright a girl as was likely to be found in all Sussex. "I am glad you like my frock, because I chose it myself!"

"It's weally wippin', and I wathah think I am a judge of fwocks! Do you wink, Ethel?"

"Do I—what!" exclaimed the girl, looking up in bewilderment.

"Wink, deah gal—do you wink?"

"Certainly not—oh, I am sorry!" Cousin Ethel suddenly exclaimed, laughing. "Yes, I do rink—I love it!"

"So do I, bai Jove!"

Cousin Ethel looked surprised.

"I did not know you could," she said. "Where did you learn, Arthur?"

"In the studay, deah girl. I will explain the wippin' wise I took out of Jack Blake latah on. I will put my wollah-skates on, and we will wink at once!"

Cousin Ethel had her skates on already. She had been round the big ring once or twice with her brother, Captain Cleveland, before Arthur Augustus—the first of the St. Jim's juniors to put in an appearance—had arrived.

Cousin Ethel had come over with the Cleveland Lodge party, ostensibly to listen to the very excellent band the enterprising American syndicate had obtained for the opening night. Arthur Augustus had heard of this proposal, and so Cousin Ethel's many chums at St. Jim's had made up their minds to meet her there.

They would all be there before long—the Terrible Three, the Study No. 6 fellows, and, of course, Figgins. It was not likely Figgins would stay away.

Arthur Augustus knew he would not be left alone with Cousin Ethel for long, and meant to make the most of his time.

He even consented to put on his own skates.

"Wathah a wipping fwoah, I considah!" he said. "Makes a remarkable difference, the fwoah, bai Jove!"

"Yes, of course."

"Yaas, wathah! Now, in a studay you have no woom, and you bweak such a lot of things—"

"Here comes Figgins!" interrupted Cousin Ethel.

"Bai Jove, yaas! We must have a wound before he awwives! I am weady, Cousin Ethel!"

The girl got up from her chair under the palms, and held out her hands. Arthur Augustus also got up. He did so by means of holding the chair Cousin Ethel had just vacated.

"Bai Jove!"

"Is anything the matter, Arthur?"

"Yaas, wathah—I mean, nothing, deah girl! A stwap has come undone, I feah!"

"No, the straps are all right."

"Yaas, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus was still holding the back of the chair. He did not look like letting go either.

"Well, aren't you going to take my hands?" exclaimed Cousin Ethel.

"Yaas, wathah—of course—bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus had released his hold on the chair-back, and had just succeeded in keeping his feet. He glanced at Cousin Ethel quickly to see whether she had noticed his indecision in the matter.

Cousin Ethel had noticed nothing. She was looking across the rapidly-filling rink to where Lowther and Kerr were hastily putting on their skates.

Then she turned to Arthur Augustus.

"Are you ready, Arthur?"

"Yaas, wathah! I have been weady foah a long time, deah gal! Bai Jove—oh—wotten!"

The swell of St. Jim's had held out his hand to Cousin Ethel, then, just as the girl was about to take it, had withdrawn it suddenly. For a moment or two he twisted round on one set of rollers, then he sat down on the floor with a bump.

"Bai Jove!"

Cousin Ethel tried not to laugh, but the expression on the aristocratic features of Arthur Augustus was too much for her.

Arthur Augustus looked bewildered.

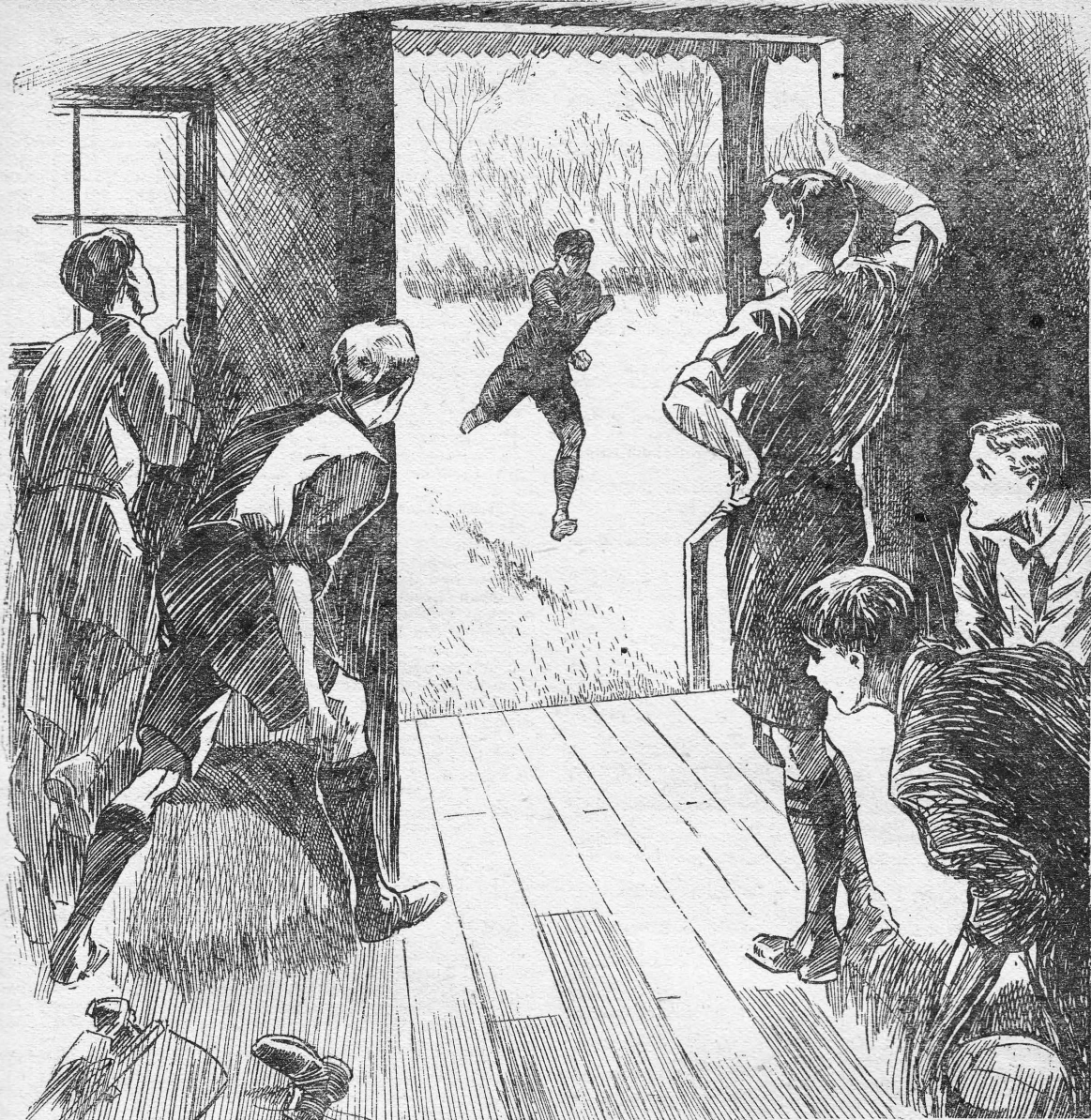
"Bai Jove! I considah this a w'etched fwoah!"

At that moment Kerr and Lowther came towards Cousin Ethel from different directions. Both were skating very deliberately, eyes fixed upon the floor.

Cousin Ethel seemed anxious.

"I should get up, Arthur, if I were you. Kerr doesn't look very—very sure of himself."

"Yaas, wathah—bai Jove!"



Jack Blake uttered a shout. Someone was running hard across the ground in football clothes. "It's my brother Frank!"

"Then why don't you get up?"
 "Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, I weally don't believe I can get up! I considah this flooah w'etched in the extweme!"
 "Look out, Gussy!" said Kerr's cautious voice breathlessly. "Look out, kid!"

Lowther began waving about recklessly.
 "Stop, Lowthah!" said Arthur Augustus, making frantic efforts to gain his feet. "Go anothah way, deah boy! Bai Jove!"

Lowther was coming straight for the seated form of Arthur Augustus. He had been able to rink all right in a study, where there were tables and things to guide himself by, but on this beautifully fast floor it was quite a different matter. Lowther could neither stop nor go another way.

Then Kerr turned unexpectedly, and Lowther and he careered towards one another.

"Look out!"
 "Steady there!"
 "My only aunt!"

There was a crash and a thud, then the pair fell in a heap on the floor. Arthur Augustus shuddered.

"Bai Jove!" he muttered. "That was a wemarkably neah thing! Anothah yard, and the weekless beggahs would have wun ovah me!"

Kerr and Lowther sat up and gazed at one another in disgust for a moment or two. Then Lowther, who would have jested at the stake, bowed to Cousin Ethel.

"How do you do, Miss Ethel? Excuse my not getting up!"

"Hah, hah, hah!" laughed Arthur Augustus. "I considah that wathah funnay, Lowthah, deah boy!"

"Do you?"

"Yaas, wathah! Excuse your not gettin' up! Hah, hah, hah! I wathah think you can't get up, deah boy!"

"Can't get up?"

"Can't get up?" repeated Kerr, staring.

"Of course we can get up!"

"Then why don't you?" asked Cousin Ethel. "People are laughing at you all sitting on the floor."

"Very rude of them!" muttered Lowther. "Get up, Kerr!"

"After you, Lowther!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wise to your feet, Lowthah, deah boy!"

"What's the good?" murmured the humourist of the Shell.

"I should only fall down again."

"Arthur, do please show them how to get up," said Cousin Ethel, who was enjoying the situation a great deal

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY ABROAD."

A Grand Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

more than the St. Jim's juniors were. "You can get up, I know."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it quite an easy mattah—bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus was on his knees by now, and gingerly attempting to gain his feet.

"There you are, deah boys—bai Jove!"

"Oh, dear!" laughed Cousin Ethel. "No, Arthur; put your feet like this."

"Yaas, wathah—my only toppah! Pway excuse my remark, Ethel, but I had no time to considah! Bai Jove, I weally believe I can stand alone now!"

"Oh, Arthur, you will be the death of me!"

"And the death of himself if he doesn't take care!" grinned Lowther. "Miss Ethel, you might help me up!"

"Weally, Lowthah, I am suppwised at your request!"

"Well, I can't sit here all the evening, Gussy!"

"Hah, hah, hah! Don't leave me, Cousin Ethel—I must request you not to leave me!"

"You are quite safe now, Arthur!" laughed the girl. "Now, Lowther, put your feet just as Arthur did—quite simple, isn't it?"

Kerr was also helped up. Then the three tried a few cautious strides. At first they were all at sea on the fast floor, but a very few moments were sufficient for them to get used to it.

They had got over the great difficulties in their respective studies.

"Bai Jove, this is wippin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Do you know, Ethel, I weally believe I could wink backwards like your bwothah ovah there!"

"I shouldn't try, Arthur."

"No, pewwaps it would be bettah not to wun any wisk—bai Jove!"

"What's the matter now, Gussy?"

"I've droppod my monocle, Lowthah, deah boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, I fail to see what there is to laugh at in my droppin' my monocle! I should considah it a weal favouah, though, deah boy, if you could pick it up foah me!"

"I don't think!"

Arthur Augustus stared.

"I request you as a fwriend to pick up my monocle, Lowthah," he said, with dignity. "As a fwriend."

"And I refuse as a friend—to myself—Gussy. Pick it up yourself."

"I must wefuse to do anythin' of the kind. As a mattah of fact, I do not care to wun the wisk of bendin' down."

"Same here, kid."

"Weally— Kerr, I ask you as a fwriend to pick up my monocle."

"Ask away," said the Scotch chum. "You'll have to ask a good many times, so may as well start now."

"Oh, I will pick it up for you, Arthur!" said Cousin Ethel. "Where is it?"

"No, weally, deah gal, I cannot pemwit such a thing! Lowthah, I twust you will not allow a lady to pick up my monocle!"

"N-no—"

"Then please pick it up youahself, deah boy!"

"No," said Lowther, more decidedly.

"Here you are, Arthur," said Cousin Ethel, and the swell of the School House flushed with indignation.

"I considah it wank bad form of you, Lowthah, and I also considah it wank bad form of Kerr."

"Not to mention yourself, kid."

"Weally, that is widiculous! I have already told you that I do not care to wun the wisk of bendin' down."

"Oh, dry up, ass!" muttered Lowther. "Cousin Ethel, may I take you round the big ring?"

"Please let me take you round first, Cousin Ethel."

"No, I asked first, Kerr!"

"Weally, you chaps, I am suppwised at your stwange requests," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "As Cousin Ethel's cousin, I considah I have the wight to take her round the big wing befoah you othahs."

"Doesn't matter what you consider."

"Let me take you first, Cousin Ethel."

"Bai Jove, Kerr, I can hardly believe my cahs."

"Don't believe them, then."

"Oh, please don't quarrel," said Cousin Ethel. "No, Kerr, I am sorry, but I cannot go round with you yet."

"With me, then?"

"No, Lowther, I am afraid not with you either."

Arthur Augustus beamed. The others stared at him. The swell of the School House held out his hands.

"I weward that as wippin' of you, Ethel," he said. "Of course, as your cousin, I have the wight to be the first to take you wound."

"No, Arthur, I am afraid I must refuse to go round with you as well."

"With me, then?"

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"No, Arthur, I am afraid I must refuse to go round with you as well."

"Weally—"

"Not with any of us, Cousin Ethel?"

"Not yet, Lowther," said the girl-chum, laughing. "You three can rink, but poor Tom Merry, Figgins, and Jack Blake are over there struggling desperately. I am going to teach them all."

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat!" muttered Lowther.

"Phew!" whistled Kerr, and they stood where they were, watching their girl-chum rink across the room.

Then the three turned and looked at one another.

"Bai Jove!"

"This is the limit," muttered Kerr.

"Well, I nevah," muttered Arthur Augustus. "I only learnt to wink in the wotten studdy to take a wise out of those wottahs!"

And the three stared steadily across the large room.

CHAPTER 10.

Tom Merry on the Rink.

"SAY, Cousin Ethel, this is ripping of you," said Tom Merry.

"Of course it is! Don't take such long strides to begin with though. Rinking is different from ice-skating, you know."

"Yes, rather. Thanks awfully, Cousin Ethel. My hat!"

It was not often Tom Merry found himself as dependant upon another as he was that evening. He was undergoing all the indignities of learning to rink, in company with Figgins and Jack Blake.

Cousin Ethel was instructing them, and at the present moment the other two were impatiently waiting their turn. Despite the laughter their efforts caused, the three were enjoying themselves.

"You're awfully good!" panted Tom Merry, as his turn came to an end. "Isn't she, Figgy?"

"Yes, rather," agreed the New House junior, blushing slightly. "It's—it's awfully sporting of you, Cousin Ethel."

"I am enjoying myself. Your turn, Jack!"

"Right-ho!" grinned Blake. "Gussy isn't doing so badly, is he?"

"No! He's just got over the most difficult part. Why don't they come and help you three?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"They daren't! Lowther daren't come near me!"

"And Kerr won't even look this way," grinned Figgins.

"I call it downright ripping of you to come and teach us, and leave them out of it," went on Figgins, with enthusiasm, which the other juniors noticed before he did. "It must have been an awful blow to Kerr. My hat!"

Figgins just saved himself in time, and to the accompaniment of chuckles from the other pair, and pretty, girlish laughter from Cousin Ethel, the lesson went on.

Once or twice Arthur Augustus glanced their way, staring rather loftily, but he did not venture up. He rinked about with Kerr and Lowther wearily.

Tom Merry, Jack Blake, and Figgins picked up the new pastime with wonderful celerity, and in something under half an hour each of the three could rink quite passably. They all took Cousin Ethel round the big ring in turn, then rinked coolly towards Arthur Augustus and the others.

Arthur Augustus watched their approach with mixed feelings.

Tom Merry nodded cheerily.

"Hallo, Gussy! Can I help you at all?"

"Help me, deah boy?"

"Take you round, you know?"

"Take me wound? Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And Lowther looks awfully shaky," added Jack Blake.

"You haven't got quite the idea, Lowther. More like this!"

"Well, of all the cheek!"

"And Kerr is as stiff as a scarecrow," said Figgins pleasantly. "Take my hands, Kerr, old chap."

"Come on, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! Of all the w'etched cheek—"

"Don't you want to learn to rink, kid?"

"Weally, I wathah think I could wink before you were born, deah boy, before—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally—"

"Oh, don't take any notice of them, Arthur," laughed Cousin Ethel.

"But I considah that it is imposs. for me not to take any notice of them undah the circs," said Arthur Augustus. "I considah that—"

"Shall Merry and I take you round, Kerr?" asked Jack Blake kindly. "We'll put you up to a few wrinkles, won't we, Tom?"

"No, Arthur, I am afraid I must refuse to go round with you as well."

"With me, then?"

"No, Lowther, I am afraid not with you either."

Arthur Augustus beamed. The others stared at him. The swell of the School House held out his hands.

"I weward that as wippin' of you, Ethel," he said. "Of course, as your cousin, I have the wight to be the first to take you wound."

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"I weward that as wippin' of you, Ethel," he said. "Of course, as your cousin, I have the wight to be the first to take you wound."

"No, Arthur, I am afraid I must refuse to go round with you as well."

"With me, then?"

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"I weward that as wippin' of you, Ethel," he said. "Of course, as your cousin, I have the wight to be the first to take you wound."

"Rather!"

Kerr, Lowther, and Arthur Augustus stared at the other three. The other three smiled quite cheerfully.

"No trouble at all, you know," said Tom Merry. "Don't refuse because you think it will be spoiling our evening."

Cousin Ethel laughed again in great pleasure.

"It serves you three right," she said severely. "Fancy shutting yourselves in the studies and learning to rink without telling the others. Arthur, I am surprised at you."

"Weally, Ethel—"

"And Kerr! I shouldn't have thought Kerr would have done a thing like that."

"Oh, I say, Cousin Ethel," began the Scotch chum, blushing deeply. "It wasn't to—to do the others down, but to get a chance of rinking with you."

"And Lowther. I shouldn't have thought a Shell boy could be so—so mean!"

"Really, Cousin Ethel—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry, Jack Blake, and Figgins were convulsed with laughter.

Arthur Augustus glared at them through his monocle.

"Weally," he said loftily, "I fail to see where the humah of the mattah comes in. Ethel, may I request the pleasure of your company wound the big wing?"

"Certainly, Arthur!"

"Hold him up, Cousin Ethel!"

"Don't let him fall!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus took no notice of the remarks and the chuckles. He rinked away with his cousin in as dignified a manner as was possible in the circumstances.

The five juniors left behind laughed heartily, Lowther being the first to speak.

"Isn't Cousin Ethel a brick?" he exclaimed. "Simply wouldn't take us round because we could rink, and insisted upon going and teaching you kids."

"That's Cousin Ethel all the world over," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "If you kids ran to a brain between you, you might have known the plot wouldn't work."

"You mustn't expect too much from them," grinned Jack Blake. "Coming round, you chaps?"

"Right-ho!"

They rinked away, each stroke they took making them more perfect in the art of roller-skating. By the time they had been round the big ring twice they were all feeling pretty much at home.

"This is ripping," panted Tom Merry. "I say, we'll do a lot of this during the winter, Blake."

"Rather! Jolly good training for footer. Hallo! There are some of the Grammar School asses."

"My hat, yes!"

"Can you see Monkey, Tommy?"

"I was just looking for the young ass," grinned the Shell fellow. "I say, come on and let's have a hunt for him. Better than writing a letter as we arranged."

Jack Blake nodded.

He liked the idea of meeting Frank Monk again.

They hurried across the room to where Lane, a shining light in the Grammar School firmament, was struggling to maintain his balance.

CHAPTER 11.

Frank Monk is Puzzled.

"HALLO, Lane!"

"Hallo, ass!"

"Monkey anywhere about?"

"Monk is over there, Merry," said Lane, his eyes fixed on his own feet, which appeared unreliable. "We shall massacre you to-morrow."

"I don't think. Yes, there's Monk. Come on, Blake!"

The captain of the Grammar School looked up as the college juniors approached, a somewhat uneasy expression on his good-looking face.

"H-having a decent time, old chap?"

"Yes, thanks," said Tom Merry carelessly. "Got your team for to-morrow?"

"Y-yes!"

"Carboy isn't playing, is he?"

"N-no!"

"Got a giant or someone in his place, haven't you?" put in Jack Blake.

"Not—not exactly a giant."

"But getting on that way, eh?" said Tom Merry. "I am in a bit of a hole with my team, too. Manners has got a brute of a cold, and Kildare won't hear of his playing."

"Oh, I'm sorry about that," said Monk heartily. "Give the kid my love. Perhaps I oughtn't to play—play—"

"Go on!"

"Fire ahead!"

"Perhaps I ought to get young Wells to play instead of—of—"

"Oh, don't you trouble," said Tom Merry. "One or two short won't make much difference to us."

"Oh, if it comes to that—"

"You could play our eleven by yourself," finished Tom Merry, with a grin. "Yes, you could play us; but, seriously, have you any objection to our putting in a fellow who isn't a regular member of the eleven in Manners's place?"

Frank Monk brightened up wonderfully.

"Rather not. Delighted—"

"He's rather big," went on the Shell fellow, purposely using the words Monk himself had used at the previous interview between the three. "Isn't he Blake?"

"Yes, he is rather."

"Doesn't matter an atom, old chap."

"And he's jolly good, Monk!"

"All the better," said Frank Monk, with great relief.

"I'm jolly glad you thought of it."

"And he isn't a college chap," went on Jack Blake. "In fact, he's an Old Boy."

"All the better. Do you chaps know, but I was half inclined to write to you and ask you to put in an Old Boy if you could."

"Eh?"

"Going to write to us? What on earth for?"

"Oh, to make a better game of it!" said Monk hastily. The college juniors grinned thoughtfully.

"That's fortunate, then," said Tom Merry. "You are sure you don't mind, Monk?"

"Of course not, delighted—"

"Right-ho!"

"See you to-morrow afternoon, kid," added Blake. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Tom Merry.

And Frank Monk watched them rink away, chuckling to themselves.

The chuckles made the Grammar School junior feel uneasy. He could not make it out.

"I suppose they have heard about Wenham," he decided at last; "hanged if I can see why they should laugh if they have, though. They won't laugh so much to-morrow."

Frank Monk grinned himself then and went on with his attempt to master roller skating. He was beginning to feel a little more certain of himself when Kerr came up cautiously.

"Look out, ass!"

"Stand where you are. Oh!"

The pair bumped together and clung to one another. Monk looked up wrathfully.

"You clumsy ass! What did you want to run into me for?"

"My dear kid, I could not help myself," said the Scotch chum. "It's the only way I can stop, to run into people."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, only it isn't always a laughing matter," grinned Kerr. "But I want to speak to you, Monkey."

"You are."

"Tom Merry gave me a message for you—"

"Throw it off your chest, then, old son."

"Yes," said Kerr, "that is what I am here for. Tom Merry wants me to tell you that Manners can't play for us to-morrow."

"Manners can't play—"

"No; he's got a brute of a cold."

"Yes, but I know all that!" exclaimed Monk in surprise.

"Still, he has been able to get someone else in Manners's place."

"I tell you I know, ass!"

"And Tom Merry hopes you won't mind."

"You shrieking duffer!" exclaimed Frank Monk. "Don't I keep telling you I know all about it? Tom Merry told me himself not three minutes ago."

"Eh?"

"Not two minutes ago, in fact."

"Humph!" coughed Kerr, beginning to grin. "Well, he wanted the message driven home, I suppose. Got out the mourning-cards for the Grammar School team yet?"

Kerr rinked away. Monk commenced some experiments in rinking backwards, a frown on his face.

"Silly asses!" he muttered. "Ought to be in padded rooms, the lot of them. Wait until they run up against Wenham to-morrow, though."

The frown on Monk's face gave place to a grin. He felt happy at the thought of what would happen to-morrow.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he chuckled. "Ha, ha! What the—who the—oh, you rotter!"

"Weally deah boy, I wegard your gweetin' as abrupt not to say wude," drawled well-known tones. "Howevah, I will admit I did not intend to hit you on the shouldah with

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sach force, and I twust I have not wumpled your collah—"

"I'll rumple your neck, you duffer!"

"Please don't be wicidulous, Fwank Monk, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I should wefuse to have my neck wumpled—don't be sillay—"

"Well, you'll have something rumpled if you come banging me on the back like that again, ass!" growled the Grammar School fellow. "I'm not so jolly safe on my pins on rollers at the best of times, but when a hopeless duffer like you comes and hits me in the back, I'm beastly unsafe."

"I have expressed my wegweets, deah boy, and there the mattah ends. I have some impowtant infoahmation foah you, Monkay."

"Let's have it then."

"Yaas, wathah; that is what I am heah foah, bai Jove! You know Tom Mewwy—"

"Of course, I know him, ass!"

"Weally, Monkay—"

"Oh, do fire ahead! What's happened to Merry?"

"Nothing has happened to him, deah boy; but he asked me as a favouah to give you a message—"

"Eh?" said Monk, starting.

"Yaas, weally; requested me as a fwiend to give it to you wight away. You know Mannahs, deah boy—"

"Look here, Gussy, I have had enough—"

"Then take your wollah skates off and come and talk to Cousin Ethel—but about the message? You know Mannahs? Yaas, of course you do, bai Jove! Well, he has wun up against a wotten cold—"

"I tell you I have had enough," said Frank Monk wrathfully. "I don't mind a joke, but you can have enough of one. Clear if you can't be sensible."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in surprise. "What is the mattah with you, deah boy; you are abwupt not to say wude—but about the message? Mannahs will not be able to play in the footah match to-morrow on account of his beastly cold."

"Are you going to clear, ass?"

"Weally, Monk—"

"Are you going to clear? I tell you I know all about it, you duffer!"

"Know about what, deah boy?"

"Manners and his beastly cold, of course."

"Imposs., Monkay," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "Tom Mewwy asked me to give you the news. You may know that Mannahs has wun up against a wotten cold, but it is imposs. that you can know that Tom Mewwy has got someone in his place for the footah match."

"I tell you I do!"

"Weally, I must request you not to intewwupt me, deah boy. Tom Mewwy has got someone else to play in Mannahs's place, and he twusts you will not object."

"Oh, you helpless duffer! I know all about it. Go and lie down somewhere."

"I must wefuse to do anythin' so wicidulous," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I considah it wemarkably sillay of you to suggest such a wotten thing. I twust I can tell Tom Mewwy that you do not object to his playin' someone else in Mannahs's place."

"Tell him I'll slay him when I find him."

"Bai Jove!"

"And tell him we shall get our own back to-morrow," went on Monk quickly. "If we don't massacre you asses!"

"Bai Jove, that is wathah too strong, deah boy! I wathah think there will only be one team in the picture to-morrow aftahnoon."

"Yes, the other team will be in a cart."

"Pway don't be wicidulous, Monkay; it is imposs. that you can weally believe what you are sayin' is twue."

"And you go and put some ice on your napper," added Monk.

"I wefuse to put ice on my nappah," said Arthur Augustus. "I wefuse to do anythin' so wicidulous. I undahstand I can tell Tom Mewwy that you do not mind his playing someone else in Mannahs's—"

"Oh, go and pick flowers, you shrieking dummy!"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye and viewed Monk with disapproval.

"I wegwet to say, Fwank Monk," he said, "that I have no alternative but to describe your tempah as wocky, not to say watty this evenin'. I twust you will have wecovahed befoah the mornin', deah boy."

"Oh, go and drown yourself!"

"No, weally; I am goin' to wink wound the big wink again instead—ha, ha, ha!"

And Arthur Augustus skated away, chuckling audibly.

Frank Monk looked after him, then someone from behind dug him playfully in the ribs. It was Lowther.

"Cheer-ho, Monkey, my son!" the humorist of St. Jim's said pleasantly. "Nice day except for the rain, isn't it? Heard about poor old Manners?"

"Look here—"

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"Yes, I am. Manners has run up against a beast of a cold."

"I tell you—"

"And Kildare won't hear of his playing to-morrow—"

"My hat, you utter idiot—"

"But Tom Merry has risen to the occasion and has managed to get someone else to play in Manners's place."

"Just you wait until I get these beastly skates off."

"And Tom Merry hopes you won't mind," added Lowther, who had been talking rapidly all the time in spite of Monk's interruptions. "See you to-morrow, and if you want to do a kindly action in your old age, get your team to make their wills."

And nodding cheerily, Lowther left.

Frank Monk rammed his hands in his pockets. Then he took them out again.

Figgins was coming towards him.

"Another of the asses," gasped the Grammar School captain, rinking away as rapidly as he could. "Only wait until to-morrow, though; only wait until the idiots have to meet the team I have out for them. There won't be so many grins on their little faces then."

Figgins laughed heartily and went back to Tom Merry, then a very enjoyable hour began. They could all keep their feet by now, and joined the happy throng at the big ring, each taking Cousin Ethel round until their girl-chum was too tired to skate another step.

It was a grand evening, thoroughly enjoyed by all; but like every other evening, happy and unhappy ones, it came to an end at last. They said good-bye to Cousin Ethel, making her promise to bring her brother to see the football match next day, and started for the college again, tired, but ready for the fray next day.

"And remember it's to be the game of our lives, you chaps," said Jack Blake as the chums of Study No. 6 turned into the large dormitory. "Slackers will be slain."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Yaas, wathah; I considah that quite the pwopah sentiment. I pwapose myself that all slackahs be tweated with scantay wespact. Bai Jove, though, I hardly think I shall be able to play, deah boy; I'm as tired as a wretched dog."

They all laughed, but they said nothing. Everyone knew the ways of Arthur Augustus at St. Jim's by this time.

CHAPTER 12.

Skimpole's New Role.

"THE thing is," said Tom Merry—"the thing is to prevent Kildare asking questions."

"The thing is, you mean, how to prevent him."

"That's what I mean, Blake, my son," returned the Shell fellow thoughtfully.

The pair sat gazing out of the study window.

Morning school was over, dinner just finished, and in less than half an hour the school 'bus would be at the college gates to take the second eleven to the Grammar School ground.

Tom Merry and Jack were talking the situation over.

Arthur Augustus came into the room at that moment, changed and ready for the match. He screwed his monocle into his eye and viewed the other two juniors through it.

"Bai Jove! I wathah think you had bettah get weady, deah boys—"

"Oh, there's plenty of time, Gussy; we don't have to part our hair!"

"Or polish our monocles—"

"Or generally make ourselves like a tailor's dummy," added Tom Merry. "Still, I must say you look the thing."

"Do you think so, deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus, with evident pleasure. "I wathah wanted to look the thing to-day because Cousin Ethel will be at the match. Is that mark on my footah shirt noticeable?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, I fail to see what there is to laugh at in a mark on my footah shirt."

"We were laughing at the silly dummy in it, old kid," grinned Tom Merry. "What do you think we'd better do, Blake?"

"Risk it, I suppose; Kildare mayn't think of asking about Manners."

"But he may, all the same. And then there is Railton."

"Still—"

"Mewwy, deah boy, you have not answahed my question. Do you considah this mark on my footah shirt noticeable?"

"No," said Tom Merry.

"Yes," said Jack Blake.

"Weally, I do not know what to do in the mattah. You do not agree on the subject—"

"We agree on the subject that you are a silly ass," said



"Allow me to introduce my brother, Monk," said Blake gravely. "He's turned up in time to play for us the second half!" Frank stared at Blake's brother, and gasped.

Jack Blake pleasantly; "but dry up. We have important things to decide. What was that idea you had about Skimpole acting as a decoy-duck, or something, Merry?"

"My hat, I'd forgotten that!"

"Shows it was a rotten idea, any way."

"Not it, my lad. Where is Skimmy, Gussy?"

"In his studay, w'iting a book on the importance of keepin' mattah subservient to mind. He wathah wanted to wead me the first foah chaptahs, but I could not remain—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, weally. I considah Skimmay wathah a duffah, you know, but a wattling good chap! About this wotten mark on my footah shirt, Mewwy—"

"Oh, hang your shirt, Gussy! Young Blake, do you mind slipping along and bringing Skimmy in here? I'm going to my study for a minute."

"Right-ho, young ass!"

"Weally, you two, I must wequest you to decide the mattah of this mark on my footah-shirt! Stop, Blake! Mewwy—"

But the leading School House juniors had departed.

They were back again before long, though, Blake bringing in Skimpole, and Tom Merry a rather motley outfit of football-clothing.

"Here he is, Merry—"

"And here they are," said Tom Merry, flinging the football-clothes down on the table. "Ahem!"

Skimpole blinked through his enormous glasses at the pair in turn, then faced Tom Merry.

"I must say I fail to see why I have been brought into this room, Merry!" he exclaimed. "I was in the middle of a work which will prove to be of world-wide importance—a work touching on the ultra-scientific but imperfectly understood subject of the relation of matter to mind. In his very lucid treatise on the subject, Professor Sletchnoko recognises a standpoint which it is my intention to prove entirely incorrect. In fact, I may as well say that I have already prove—"

"Bai Jove—"

"Yes, do ring off, Skimmy; we didn't ask you in here to listen to a blessed torrent!" grinned Tom Merry. "We wanted you to discuss an important matter about football."

"Dear me, Merry! Surely, even a fellow of your

admittedly low intelligence cannot think for a moment that the subject—

"Oh, dry up, Skimmy!"

"Really, Blake, you appear denser than ever this afternoon—"

"Ring off, ass!"

"Yes, do be sensible for once in your life, Skimmy!" said Tom Merry.

"Dear me—"

"And hold your tongue while your uncle proceeds to speak wisdom!" went on the Shell fellow. "Have you anything to do this afternoon?"

"I intend to finish the tenth chapter of my new book on the relation of mind to matter—"

"Anything important, I mean!"

"Dear me—"

"Then you haven't? Good! We want you to come over to the Grammar School ground with us, Skimmy."

"I regret to say—"

"Thanks awfully, old man!" said Tom Merry, with affection. "I knew you would consent instantly. We also want you to change your clothes."

"Change my clothes?" exclaimed the brainy man of the Shell, blinking in surprise. "Why should you want me to change my clothes?"

"Because even Mr. Railton wouldn't believe you were going to play footer in your ordinary togs, ass!"

"But I am not going to play football; I have never played football in my life, and have not the intention of doing so—"

"There are the togs," went on Tom Merry. "They'll be a yard or so too big for you, but that can't be helped—"

"Dear me—"

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, you dry up, Gussy!"

"Weally, deah boy, I must wefuse to dwy up—"

"Well, ring off, then!"

"I wefuse to wing off," said Arthur Augustus coldly. "I wewget to say I ovaheard a wemark you made just now about Skimmy playin' footah. With all due respect to my friend Skimmy, I must say I weward your wproposal as wiculous, not to say wotten in the extweme."

"You lie down, Gussy!"

"Let your elders arrange this affair. You don't understand."

"But I wathah think I do undahstand, Blake, deah boy; and I must wewpeat my obsahvation that your wproposal is wotten in the extweme—"

"It certainly is very absurd of Merry to think for one moment that I would consent to take part in a football match," agreed Skimpole firmly. "Of course, a man with my ability would be able to pick up the rudiments of any game within a few minutes, even if he had no previous knowledge of the rules of the game in question, as is the case with me respecting football. I will even go further, and say—"

"There, deah boys, Skimmy himself wecognises your wproposal as wotten in the extweme."

"Did you ever hear such a pair of cackling old hens in your life, Blake?"

"Like brooks, aren't they?"

"Do get into those togs, Skimmy, and cut the cackle!"

"Yes, slip the things on, ass!"

"No, Blake, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I must ordah Skimmy not to put the clothes on. I considah he is not the wpopah person to take Mannah's place in the second team. I weward Skimmy in a fwriendly mannah, though I wecognise that he is an uttah duffah; but I must wefuse to allow him to play footah against Fwank Monk's playahs—"

"Oh, you hopeless ass, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to be chawactahwised in that extwemely wuff-and-weady mannah, deah boy—"

"Well, for goodness' sake ring off! Hurry up, Skimmy! The 'bus will be along in a minute!"

"I regret to say that I shall be unable to oblige you, Merry," said Skimpole firmly. "I can quite understand your desire to strengthen your team, but—"

"Bai Jove—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I cannot consent to the waste of time," added Skimpole. "I am sorry to say my decision is final."

"Bwavo!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I considah that an extwemely bwainy wemark—"

"Oh, tell the asses, Merry!"

"Well, keep it quiet, you idiots," said the hero of the Shell. "You aren't going to play football at all, Skimmy, you duffer. It isn't likely. We want to beat Monk's cripples; not give an exhibition of how the game should not be played. You are only to be a sort of decoy-duck."

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"Dear me!" blinked Skimpole. "I fail to see how I can be a decoy-duck, Merry."

"Put on those togs and you'll find out, then!"

"Bai Jove—"

"Do ring off, Gussy! Never met such a fellow in my life. Hurry up, Skimpole!"

"Dear me! Do I have your word of honour that I shall not be forced to play?"

"Of course, you have, ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather!"

"Then I will consent to put these clothes on, though I fail entirely to see how it can be of advantage to you. I submit, though."

"Why didn't you submit before, ass?" said Tom Merry. "You've been wasting time, jawing as much as if you were that cackling old hen Gussy!"

"Weally, Mewwy, I must pwotest—"

"Don't trouble; we know you are in the wrong, but we don't say it is your fault. Skimmy, you'll have to take your clothes off jolly quickly."

"I will if you are anxious that I should," said Skimpole, who was one of the best-natured of fellows; "though, as I previously observed, I fail to see the usefulness of it all. Is that correct, Merry?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No, ass!"

"By Jove, wathah not! You put your footah-shirt inside your footah-knickahs, deah boy. Hah, hah, hah!"

"My hat!"

Skimpole certainly did cut a curious figure in football-attire. He was a thin, wiry youngster, with a long neck, and a big head which was very bumpy about the forehead.

The shirt Tom Merry had lent him was many sizes too large, and the knickers equally as small; but when he put on Kildare's old boots, the others roared with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only chapeau!"

"Bai Jove! Skimmy, deah boy, you are killin'!"

"I certainly feel very uncomfortable," said Skimpole; "though I fail to see what there is to laugh at. I have your promise, Merry, that I shall not be forced to play?"

"My only aunt! Yes!"

"Wathah! We want to win the game, deah boy. Hah, hah, hah!"

"Dry up, you chaps!" exclaimed Jack Blake, who, with Tom Merry, had been changing, while Skimpole was similarly employed. "We haven't any too much time, and it will be as well if we get Skimmy into the 'bus as soon as it arrives. I hope Kildare doesn't spot him, kid!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "You'll have to hurry, Skimmy. I'd better slip along and warn Figgins & Co. not to give the game away."

"Right-ho! Come on, you chaps!"

The three made their way quickly down to the school-gates, and, as luck would have it, the 'bus was already there.

Jack Blake bundled the somewhat surprised Skimpole into the vehicle.

"Don't let them see more of your face than you can help," he whispered; "especially Kildare, if he comes to look at us."

"Dear me! This seems a somewhat useless proceeding," said Skimpole. "I am wasting valuable time, too."

"Dwy up, deah boy! I wathah think Wailton is comin' now."

"My hat, yes!" muttered Jack Blake. "In with you, you kids. Let Railton see Skimmy. Cheer-ho, Figgins!"

"Hallo, kid! Fit?"

"Rather!"

"Fatty hasn't been eating pastry, has he?"

"Of course I haven't!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn warmly. "I have scarcely had anything—a pork-pie or two, and some sandwiches, with three or four buns to follow. Figgins wouldn't let me have anything more, and I feel faint already. It's this October weather; one's appetite always gets jolly keen in October, I find—"

"And any other month, in your case!" laughed Jack Blake. "Get in!"

The fellows scrambled into their places, Fatty Wynn being the last. He was always certain of a place, for there wasn't one in the team who would willingly nurse the New House chum.

Mr. Railton came up that moment. He glanced at the braeful of juniors, with rather a kindly glance.

"Just off, Merry?"

"Yes, sir!"

"I hope you win. Let me see, someone told me Manners was unable to play."

"That's so, sir. He has a cold, you know."

"Ah, yes; I remember! You have been able to find another player to take his place, I see!"

Tom Merry and Jack Blake said nothing; but they felt rather uneasy as they watched the House-master run an eye over the team.

Mr. Railton always came down to see that the elevens went off for their out-engagements with the full complement of players.

"My only aunt! Here comes Kildare!"

"Bai Jove, yaas, Blake!"

"We are ready!" exclaimed Tom Merry quickly to the driver. "Whip them up!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, the fat will be in the fish, deah boys, if our respected captain stops us."

"Our respected captain isn't going to!" said Tom Merry grimly. "He isn't going to ask any questions, either. Hallo, Kildare!"

"Got your team——"

"Jolly fine afternoon for the match, isn't it?" went on the hero of the Shell quickly, as they drove past Kildare's finely-built figure. "Hope you first team pull through all right."

"Thanks, youngster! But about Manners——"

"We are fairly going to make things warm for the Grammar School; mean to win or die!"

"Who have you got in Manners's——"

"Ground ought to be just ripping, too," added Tom Merry, beginning to shout, as the distance between the captain and himself increased; "take the studs nicely, and yet not wet. Good-bye, Kildare!"

Kildare shouted something back about Manners and his place in the team, but Tom Merry did not answer. He sat down on Figgins's knee and gasped.

"Pretty near thing, that," he grinned. "My hat, if he had come up earlier?"

"Bai Jove, yaas; it would have been wotten if he had come up earlier, deah boy!"

"Worse than that, kid!"

"Well, we are through now!" laughed Figgins. "Who have you really got in Manners's place, Merry?"

"Who do you think, kid?"

"How do I know, ass?"

"Blake's brother."

"My hat!"

"Not the fellow who played against Newcastle United for Northfleet?" gasped Lowther.

"The very same, my son."

"But——"

"It's to counteract Monk's little plot of playing Wenham," added Tom Merry. "Our friend Monkey is in for a shock before so long, I can tell you."

The fellows who were not in the know wanted further information, and Tom Merry gave it readily. Directly the idea was grasped there were choruses of delighted chuckles.

Then their laughing, happy faces became grave. They watched the telegraph-poles flying by, each turn of the wheel taking them nearer to the Grammar School ground.

They became very silent indeed as the ground was neared.

Would St. Jim's win their first match of the season with Frank Monk's eleven? They would if it rested with themselves. There was only one opinion on that point.

CHAPTER 13.

The Forgetfulness of Arthur Augustus.

"HERE we are, you chaps!"

"Bai Jove, yaas, wathah, deah boy! Do you know, I am all in a fluttah?"

"Well, flutter out of the waggonette, and let me pass. Come on, you chaps!"

A note of intense excitement thrilled Tom Merry's voice. The St. Jim's second eleven had gained the Grammar School ground. In a few more minutes the game everyone had been looking forward to for days would begin.

Already there was a large concourse of spectators round the ropes.

Tom Merry and his team bundled out of the waggonette, and hurried across the ground to the visitors' pavilion without catching sight of any of Frank Monk's players. The Grammar School fellows were evidently changing at the school.

Tom Merry grinned.

"All the better, kid," he whispered to Blake. "Make Monk's shock the greater when he spots your brother."

"Yes; but where is my brother?"

Tom Merry looked round quickly.

Not counting themselves, there appeared to be no one on the field dressed in football things. Tom Merry became anxious.

"My hat, I hope he turns up!"

"He promised——"

"Oh, yes, ass, I know he'll turn up if he can! I meant, I hope he hasn't missed the train, or anything like that. I wonder how he was coming?"

Jack Blake shook his head.

"Don't know any more than you, Tom. You saw his wire. I've got it with me—'Be on ground at three.—Blake.' Not another word."

Tom Merry brightened up.

"Oh, it's all right!" he said, turning into the pavilion. "I expect he had to wait a bit at Wayland on account of the branch train being late—it's market day at most of the places round here, you know. We might have looked up the time of the trains, though."

"Yes. My only aunt, if he doesn't turn up it will be an awful massacre!"

"He'll turn up all right, kid. I say, you chaps, have a look at your bootlaces. This game is going to be pretty close, and we don't want any asses running off the field to shove new laces in their giddy boots."

"Bai Jove, wathah not! But I wathah think my laces are all wight, deah boy, though this mark on my footah shirt——"

"Hang the mark on your footer shirt, ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Oh, do dry up, Gussy!" exclaimed Jack Blake, looking at his brother's telegram again with an anxious glance. "You are the worst old hen I ever met."

"Bai Jove——"

"Dry up, ass!"

"Bai Jove," repeated Arthur Augustus hastily, "you have just reminded me——"

"That you are an old hen, Gussy. Didn't you know before? Can you see anything of my brother, Merry?"

"Nct a sign!"

"Weally, it is most wemarkable, deah boy, and I fail to undahstand it——"

"Fail to undahstand what, dummy?"

"I wefuse to allow you to address me in that wuff-and-weady manner, deah boy. I wathah think it was the mark on my footah shirt——"

"What was the mark on your footer shirt, ass?"

"That caused the mattah to slip my mind, deah boy."

"Didn't know you had a mind, Gussy," grinned Tom Merry; "and we haven't the faintest idea what you are talking about. Is he light-headed, Blake?"

"No, Tom Mewwy, I am not in the wotten habit of being light-headed. It would be quite impos. for me to be light-headed. Blake, deah boy," he added, fumbling in the pocket of his football coat, "I wathah think this is foah you."

And he handed Jack Blake a little, orange-coloured envelope. It was a telegram.

Jack Blake stared at it.

"My only hat!" he gasped. "Where did you get this, Gussy?"

"Fwom Taggles, deah boy; he gave it to me with the request that it was to be given to you."

"My only aunt!" gasped Jack Blake. "You shrieking duffer!"

"What's the matter, Blake?"

"What's up, kid?"

"Not bad news?"

"You howling ass!" shouted Jack Blake to Arthur Augustus. "You hopeless, frabjous lunatic!"

"Weally, deah boy——"

"You absolute dummy!"

"What's he done, Blake?"

"Look, Merry! Read the beastly thing! Gussy, you ought to be boiled in oil!"

"Bai Jove, Blake, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "I wegard you with fiendly feelings, I even respect you, but I wefuse to allow you to chawactahwise me in that mannah. I twust the telewam has not bwought you wotten news; but, even if it has, I fail to see how I can be responsible for it!"

"Look, Figgins! Gussy, you hopeless ass, you bungling lunatic——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"The howling duffer!" shouted Figgins. "Frog's-march him!"

"I twust you are not weferring to me, Figgay?"

"I jolly well am, then! Frog's-march the dummy—frog's march him for the rest of his miserable life!"

"Bai Jove, I wathah think you are all off your wockahs!"

"Off our rockers!" gasped Jack Blake. "Do you know who sent that wire, ass?"

ANSWERS

NEXT THURSDAY!

"TOM MERRY ABROAD."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No 90.
A Grand Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

"Weally, Blake, I fail to see how I can know who sent you the wiah."

"My brother Frank, of course!"

"Weally? Well, I twust your bwother Frank is well, and

"Why didn't you give me the telegram before we left St. Jim's, idiot?"

"Because, as I remarked before, the mattah slipped my mind!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus coolly. "I wathah think the mark on my footah shirt—"

"What's it all about, anyway?"

"All about Lowther!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Listen. Sorry, but cannot possibly get to Rylcombe until three-thirty. Have started, and am changed; but you had better play someone else.—BLAKE."

"My only hat!"

"Phew!"

"Three-thirty!" muttered Figgins. "That means he won't turn up until the game has been in progress half an hour! Oh, Gussy, why were you born!"

"Don't be ridiculous, Figgay, deah boy. I wegwet the mattah of the wiah slipping my mind, and I twust it will not mattah. I wathah think it will not, because I mean to play up stwongly, and do the work of two playahs, deah boys."

"Do the work of a frabjous idiot, you mean!"

"I've told you to cage him before, Blake."

"What's to be done?"

"Yes, that's it, what's to be done?"

"What can be done?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It must be close on three!"

"It's gone three!" growled Figgins. "And here comes Monk!"

"My hat!"

The fellows looked at one another in dismay. It was known by all the St. Jim's team that Frank Monk was going to play Wenham at half, and Tom Merry's counter-move of bringing Blake's brother into his eleven had been greeted with delight. The turn things had now taken dismayed them.

Frank Monk looked in at the pavilion, a grin on his face. "Are you chaps ready, Merry? We want to start punctually, because the referee has to catch a train."

No one answered for a moment, and Frank Monk glanced at their grave faces. He stepped into the pavilion then.

"Anything the matter, Merry?"

"Well—"

"You see—"

"Yaas, wathah! Only you had bettah let me explain that the mark on my footah shirt caused the mattah of the wiah

"Oh, you lie down, ass!" said Tom Merry desperately.

"You've done more than enough harm for one day!"

"Weally—"

"Lie down, ass! Look here, Monk, the—the Old Boy we had got to play for us can't turn up until half-past three. Of course, you won't mind us playing short until he comes?"

"Of course not! I'm sorry, Merry!"

"That's all right, then."

"Of course!"

"And when you look at the mattah in a pwopah light, it does not mattah a gweat deal," put in Arthur Augustus. "I intend to play up stwongly, and shall do the work of two playahs, not to say three."

"You've done the work of nine asses already, you dummy!" growled Tom Merry. "We are quite ready, Monk."

"Right-ho!" answered the Grammar School captain, who looked a little anxious, as if his conscience was not quite clear. "I—I say, I suppose you wouldn't like me to lend you a player until your other man turns up? There are several kids in footer togs on the ground."

Tom Merry, Jack Blake, and Figgins stared steadily at the captain of the Grammar School.

"Lend us a player?"

"Lend—"

"What did you say, Monk?"

"You see, I have a very warm team out, and—"

"You hear that, you fellows?" said Tom Merry pleasantly. "Monk has a very warm team out—it may be a game, after all. I hate walk-overs."

"Oh, if it comes to that—"

"It usually does come to that, kid."

"We'll jolly well see! Why, you have eleven men here already."

"No—"

"He means Skimmy!"

"Yaas, wathah! Of course, he means Skimmy!"

"Oh, that's all right, Monk!" said Tom Merry. "Skimpole only came over so that we—we could work things. He isn't going to play."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 90.

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY ABROAD."

"No, wathah not! As a mattah of fact, my fwient Skimmy does not play footah—"

"But why on earth, don't you put him in?" exclaimed Frank Monk. "Even if he isn't a blood, he'd make one."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Sooner wait for the other man, kid."

"Yes; but why not play Skimpole until the other man arrives? You could easily change them then."

"Eh?"

"What's that?"

Frank Monk went on keenly:

"I'd be delighted if you would!" he exclaimed. "I'd much rather, in fact. You see, if you play only four forwards for half an hour, or, worse still, one back, it spoils the game. None of our chaps would mind you changing the men."

"Yes, but—"

"I weward that as a sportin' offah, deah boys, but I wathah think we should do bettah without Skimmy. He is a watting fellow, but he does not play footah—"

"Can't you play at all, Skimpole?"

"I don't know, Monk," answered the brainy man of the Shell. "I have never tried."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what do you say, Merry?"

"It's decent of you, Monk, to suggest it, but it's not quite the thing, is it?"

"I—I would much rather have it that way, because—because—well, because I would."

"Y-es, but—"

Then Skimpole settled the matter himself. He blinked first at one captain, then at the other, and coughed.

"I have listened to every word of the very interesting conversation which has just ended," he said, "and wish to make a proposal. When I left St. James's College in this very uncomfortable attire I received a promise from you, Merry, that I should not be forced to play. I now relieve you of that promise. I will play football for you until your other player arrives."

"But, you see—"

"I will go further than that," went on Skimpole, "for I will not take a refusal. As a sincere Socialist, I have a perfect right to play football when and where I like—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah, but you cannot play footah, deah boy!"

"How can you possibly know that, D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove—"

"Of course you cannot know it. In fact, it is impossible for you to know anything except that you yourself exist. Surely you were convinced by the very able arguments of Professor Rojenski in his book—"

"Of all the uttah duffahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Monk laughed with the rest; but the sound of the referee's whistle brought the more pressing matter of football back to his mind.

"Will you agree to playing him, Merry?"

"You really want me to?"

"Certainly, old chap; it would be doing me a favour."

"Then you play, Skimmy."

"Yes, of course," answered Skimpole. "I had already settled that point. D'Arcy, have you a book of the rules in your pocket?"

"Bai Jove—"

Arthur Augustus gasped.

The fellows trooped out of the pavilion and made for the ropes, which were now lined closely by a crowd of enthusiastic would-be spectators.

"Good luck, St. Jim's!" sang out a cheery voice.

"It's Harry Noble! Good old Kangaroo!"

"Good luck!"

And Cornstalk & Co., D'Arcy minor, and all the chums of St. Jim's, who had cycled over, gave a hearty cheer as Tom Merry led his men on the field of play.

CHAPTER 14.

Four Up!

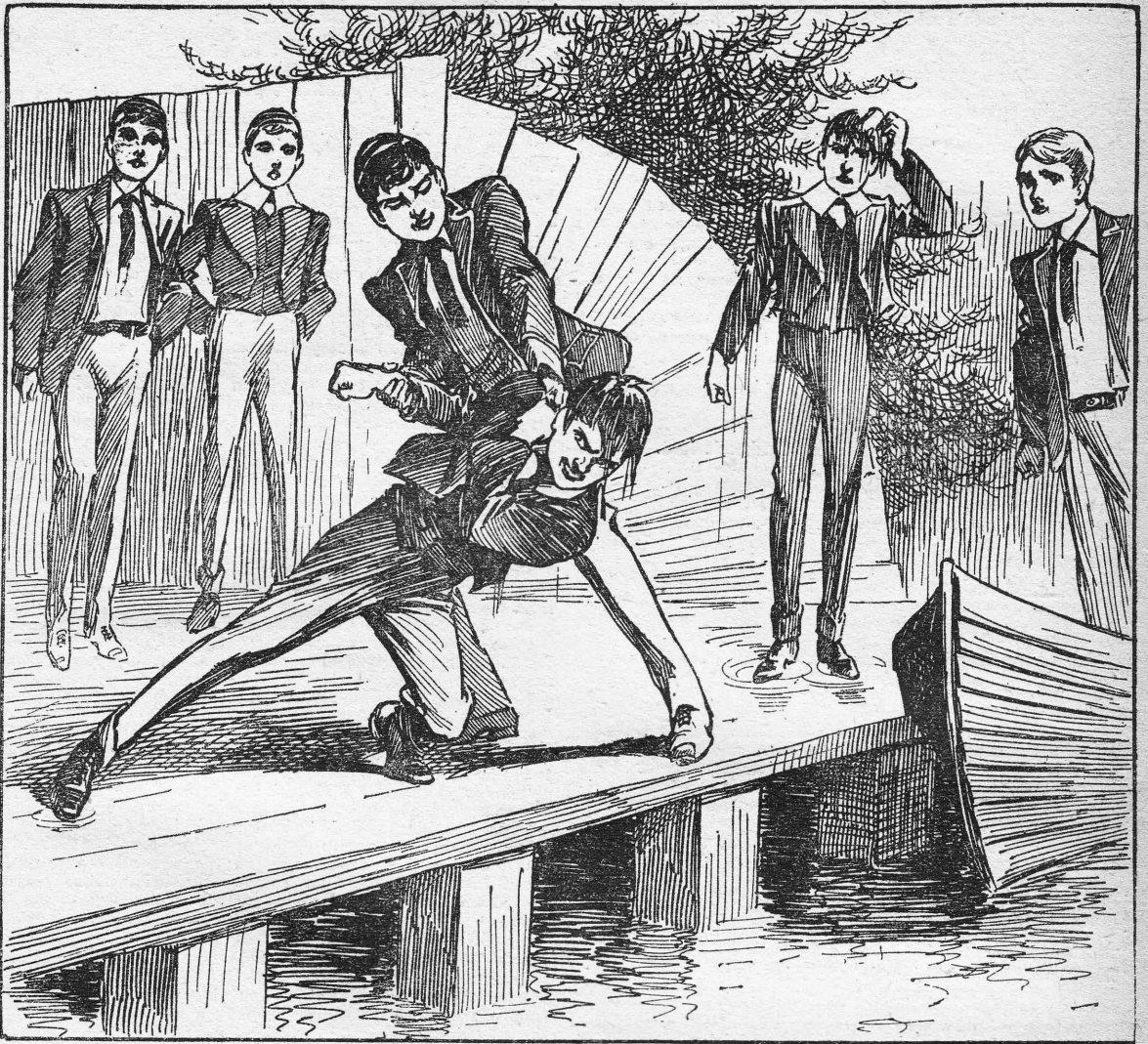
FRANK MONK led the way, chuckling in a silent manner to himself. Tom Merry exchanged solemn glances with the others and followed.

Standing near the centre ring was a remarkably well-built young man, nineteen years of age perhaps, in football clothes. It was towards him Frank Monk was walking.

The captain of the Grammar School had been looking forward to this moment for some days now. He very much wanted to see Tom Merry's face when he introduced his centre-half for the day's match to his rival captain.

It was as much as he could do to prevent himself from chuckling aloud.

A Grand Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.



"Apologise, or in you go!" said Tom Brown, the New Zealand junior, shaking the bully. (An exciting incident in the grand, long, complete school tale, entitled, "With Flying Colours," contained in the issue of THE MAGNET LIBRARY. Now on Sale. Price One Halfpenny.)

"That is Wenham," he exclaimed presently. "My centre-half for to-day, you know."

"Ah, yes!" said Tom Merry carelessly.

"The giant you unearthed!" murmured Jack Blake.

"Bai Jove, I wathah admire the colouah of his footah shirt, deah boy!"

"You know who he is, of course, Merry?"

"Wenham, you said, I think, kid—the 'Varsity man?"

"Y-yes!" muttered Frank Monk in a gaspy sort of voice. "One of the best halves the 'Varsity ever turned out."

"Good!" said Tom Merry, glancing round the field carelessly. "You'll need him this afternoon, Monkey."

"Yaas, wathah!" drawled Arthur Augustus. "I am extremely glad you have at least one decent playah on your side, Monkey."

"I—"

Frank Monk glanced from one member of the St. Jim's team to another. Arthur Augustus looked bored, Tom Merry and Jack Blake were talking carelessly about the state of the ground, and Figgins and Lowther were yawning.

Presently the Grammar School captain laughed.

"You rotters! You knew all the time!"

"Knew all the time?" echoed Figgins in mild surprise. "Knew what all the time, Monkey?"

"That—that I had got Wenham to play for me——"

Figgins looked at him blankly.

"Got Wenham to play for you? Why should we know all the time about that? You have Lane playing for you, too——"

"Yaas, wathah! I fail to undahstand yoah extremely funny mannah this aftahnoon, deah boy!"

"Oh, don't rot——"

"I wathah fancy that I am not in the habit of wotting——"

"Is there anything about Wenham that should have prevented his playing?" asked Tom Merry, with a great show of surprise. "A twisted knee or anything? If there is, don't hesitate to tell us; we will treat him carefully then."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that a wemark made in the pwopah spirit——"

"You silly, howling asses——"

"Weally, Fwank Monk——"

"Oh, go in homes!" growled the Grammar School captain. "Just you wait until you try stopping Wenham—that's all!"

"Try stopping him?" murmured Tom Merry.

"Twy stoppin' him, deah boy?" also murmured Arthur Augustus, emphasising the word "try." "Weally, Monkey, it appeahs to me that you are off yoah wockah!"

Frank Monk growled something none of them could hear, and Tom Merry's team took their places thoughtfully. They had carried matters along successfully up to the present, but how would things pan out now? There was no telling.

The referee brought the ball to the centre mark and glanced at his watch. Then he looked along the rival lines of excited forwards.

"Ready?"

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

Phip!

Clearly the referee's whistle sounded—a crisp note which seemed to start the game in a crisp manner.

Tom Merry kicked off, but losing the toss was not likely to handicap his side a great deal. There was no wind to speak of, and the sun was obscured behind light clouds, which gave warning of the approaching winter.

"Play up, St. Jim's!"
 "Keep to your man!"
 "Well taken, sir!"

The cries rang out from all parts of the ground. Right from the kick-off Tom Merry and his colleagues in the front line had managed to get away. As so often happens in a game where the rivalry is intense, it looked as if there were to be heavy scoring.

Not two minutes after the start Tom Merry sent in a rasping shot, which shook the crossbar, but from the subsequent clearance a different complexion came over the game.

As chance would have it, the ball went to Skimpole, whom Tom Merry had wisely put on the wing, and the brainy man of the Shell kicked to the best of his ability.

"O-oh!"
 "Steady, Skimmy!"
 "Silly ass!"

Skimpole had put the ball neatly on Wenham's foot.

The St. Jim's partisans gasped.

"Go for him, someone!"

The cry rang out, but not before it was answered. Tom Merry went for the 'Varsity Blue without a moment's hesitation.

Crash!

Shoulder to shoulder they met, and the youngster from St. Jim's was sent reeling back, but that did not matter to Tom Merry. He had gathered the ball—at least, he had managed to push it away from Wenham, and Jack Blake did the rest.

He dashed up and carried the game into the home defence.

"Shoot!"
 "Pass!"
 "Hang on, Blakey!"

The usual contradictory cries rang out from the ropes, but, as is still more usually the case, they were not heard. Jack Blake knew the game, but he forgot the circumstances. His pass out to the wing was quite correct, situated as he was; what was not correct was that Skimpole was the wing man.

"My hat——"

Skimpole "trapped" the ball because it hit him, then he dashed off as he had seen Jack Blake do.

"My-hat——"

"The othah way, you uttah duffah!"

"Pass!"

"Got rid of it, ass!"

"Bal Jove——"

"Dear me," gasped Skimpole, "this is a very absurd game! Merry—here you are, Merry!"

But Skimpole was not practised in the art of passing. The ball he meant for Tom Merry found its way to Frank Monk.

"Good!" grinned Monk, and he was off like a flash.

Wenham followed him up, and just as Lowther dashed at him, the Grammar School captain back-heeled the ball.

Without stopping to even steady himself, Wenham shot, and the next moment the ball was being fished out of the net.

St. Jim's looked glum.

Skimpole came down the ground and caught Tom Merry by his football shirt.

"Does that count to them or to us——"

"To them, ass!"

"Dear me! We must exert ourselves more, and endeavour to imitate our opponents, but I really fail to see what ultimate good this game of football can do to the world."

"Oh, go and dream, Skimmy!"

Phip!

Tom Merry answered the whistle by kicking off again, and, true to his word, Skimpole began to exert himself. He successfully robbed Jack Blake when that junior was in a by no means unfavourable position, then he accidentally tripped Wenham up.

Skimpole apologised, and explained that he was unaware that tripping was not allowed. Wenham laughed good-naturedly, then set Frank Monk going.

Monk had a clear run down the field this time, and he was not the player to miss his chances. But Lowther was ready now.

The humorist of the Shell got the ball in the nick of time, and sent up the ground to Skimpole. Skimpole stopped it very deliberately, looked about him, then someone bowled him over.

"Dear me, whoever did that?" he gasped. "What a ridiculous game! Dear me, I am considerably shaken!"

At that moment another terrific cheer went up from the Grammar School partisans, and Frank Monk came back from the goal-mouth grinning.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 90.

The Grammar School were two up.

"How unfortunate!" exclaimed Skimpole, when the state of affairs had been explained to him. "Do you think it would be to our advantage if I went in goal?"

"No, kid. If you went in a home it might be. Two up, Blakey!"

Blake nodded gloomily.

"And in less than two minutes, too," he said. "It's Wenham who makes all the difference."

"That's it, of course."

"It isn't that he does such a wonderful lot himself, but he opens out the game for Monk and his crew so."

"Yes, he's pretty warm."

"Well, buck up, then. Wish to goodness my brother would turn up! Skimmy is about as much use as a scarecrow."

"Not so much; he keeps getting in the beastly way."

The game was restarted; and though Tom Merry and the others did their best to keep the ball from going out to Skimpole, somehow that junior seemed to get more than his share of the play.

Skimpole did not take to games easily. He had scarcely ever played football in his life before, and his present attempts were of more service to the Grammar School than to his own side.

Still, he tried, and no one can do more than that.

The Grammar School spectators were in a happy mood, and Skimpole's attempts moved them to roars of laughter.

"Go it, Skimmy!"

"Well played, Skimmy!"

"Fine shot, sir!"

And Skimpole felt a curious thrill at his breast. He felt that his attempts were being appreciated, and everyone likes to feel that.

It spurred him on to greater endeavours.

Once he tried to dribble past Wenham; and though he failed in the attempt, he succeeded in kicking the 'Varsity man on the shin.

He followed Wenham about the field afterwards apologetically.

Tom Merry seized him by the arm.

"Oh, do keep out on the wing, Skimmy! You'll get trodden on in a minute."

"Don't you think I should be of more use nearer goal, Merry?"

"No, I'm blest if I do! Blake, this is awful."

Wenham was going up to the 'Varsity again the following week, and seemed anxious to get through all the work he could to keep fit. He was a remarkably unselfish player, too, and fed his forwards with beautiful precision.

Frank Monk & Co. were having a splendid time of it.

Another goal was added to their stock within ten minutes, and just before the whistle went for half-time they were four up.

Frank Monk could not conceal his pleasure, though his sporting instinct made him stop Tom Merry on his way to the pavilion.

"Sorry about your Old Boy not having turned up, Merry, though of course it would make no difference."

"You haven't won yet, kid."

"Four up."

"Wait!" said Tom Merry darkly; but his confident words hardly expressed his feelings.

Once inside the pavilion, he drew Blake and Figgins aside.

"My hat, we must keep the score down, kids!"

"That's about the only thing left to do. I wonder what on earth can have happened to your brother, Blake?"

"Goodness knows. Gussy, you ought to be flayed alive for not having given me that telegram at St. Jim's. We could have brought someone worth playing then."

"Weally, Blake, deah boy, I have apologised, and there the mattah ends."

"Does it, ass? What about the second half?"

"That will be all wight. I intend to buck up stwongly and do the work of two playahs."

"Silly ass!"

Tom Merry looked very thoughtful.

"Even if we had a junior in Skimmy's place, Blake, I don't think we should have done so much better. Wenham does pretty well as he likes when he gets the ball."

Jack Blake nodded.

"Rotten, anyway!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it wotten in the extwemo myself."

"Keep at it, that's all," said Figgins. "I——"

He stopped speaking. Someone was coming across the ground in football clothes.

He was running hard, taking the long, easy strides of a born runner.

Jack Blake uttered a shout.

"It's my brother!"

"My hat!"

"Certain, kid?"

"Of course I'm certain!" exclaimed the chief of Study No. 6 excitedly. "Frank—Frank, you old slacker!"

Blake's brother came into the pavilion at a run.

"Couldn't possibly get here before," he exclaimed, shaking hands with as many of them as he could. "Trains are running anyhow. Hallo, Merry, you young rascal! Who did you put in my place?"

"No one. Well, Skimmy acted as your deputy, but we want you to turn out now."

"What will Monk say, though?"

"It's all arranged, if you will turn out for us. They have Wenham playing, and—"

"Wenham, eh?" said Frank Blake. "I've played against him once or twice, and he's pretty good. What was Monk's idea of playing a fellow like that against you kids?"

Tom Merry was too excited at the moment to take exception to Frank Blake's description of themselves.

"Up against us, you know," he said. "The counter-move was getting you."

"What's the score?"

"Four nil against."

"Phew! Five to win—eh? Rather a tall order with Wenham against us."

But there was an air of determination about the young footballer, who had made a name in First League football for Northwood, which caused Tom Merry and Figgins to grin with pleasure.

"Don't let any of Monk's cripples see you, Blake," the hero of the Shell said quickly. "We want to spring you upon them. Same old wheeze, you chaps; look bored."

"Yaas, wathah! Undah the circs., I considah the ordah for the day is to take a wise out of Fwank Monk. What is it, Skimmay, deah boy?"

"I wish to speak to Tom Merry."

"Speak away, kid!" said Tom Merry for himself.

"I understand that Blake is the player you have been expecting?"

"You are right for once, then, Skimmy."

"Then I wish to say that I stand aside for Jack Blake's brother," went on Skimpole firmly. "It was my intention to continue the game, but I now waive my right to do so. Blake can take my place."

For a moment there was silence, the fellows being unable to make up their minds whether to laugh or not. Tom Merry settled the matter in his quiet way.

"That's the style, Skimmy!" he said cheerily. "Thanks awfully for turning out for us."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "I considah Skimmay has behaved in a most sportin' and fwiendly mannah."

And they let it go at that.

CHAPTER 15.

The Second Half.

TOM MERRY led the way from the pavilion looking very keen and determined.

"Now for it, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah! Now foah it, as you wemark."

Jack Blake did not answer, but there was a very grim expression on his strong, young face as he followed the others on the field again.

The referee had not yet come out, but Frank Monk and his team were at the goal, kicking the ball about in the light-hearted manner of a side well on the way to victory. Jack Blake heard his happy laughter, and dug Tom Merry in the ribs.

Tom Merry nodded.

"I say, Monkey, our eleventh mar has turned up all right."

Frank Monk stopped in the act of kicking, and hurried towards them.

"I'm glad of that, kid; make things a bit more even."

"Shouldn't wonder. Introduce your brother, Blake."

"Right-ho! Frank, this is Monk, captain of the Grammar School. What's the matter, Monkey?"

"Yaas, wathah! What is the mattah, deah boy?"

"You don't look well, Monk."

The remarks were fired upon him in quick succession, but there was not a trace of a smile on any of the speakers' faces. Frank Monk stared at Blake's brother, his mouth a little open.

"N-not your brother who played for Northwood, Blake?"

"Yes, kid; I only run to one."

"The—the First League man?"

"Yes, he has played in First League footer, but he's not much good, are you, Frank?"

"Not compared with the St. Jim's second eleven standard, youngster."

"But—but—"

Frank Monk was completely overcome. His plot to

astound the college eleven by including Wenham in the side against them had failed badly, and now Tom Merry & Co. had completely turned the tables.

The Grammar School captain could not even save the situation as far as appearances went.

Suddenly Arthur Augustus began to chuckle loudly.

"Bai Jove, deah boy, you look surprised, not to say bewildahed; but I wathah think you have no need to wowwy—"

"W—who is worrying, ass?"

"Foah, as a mattah of fact, Fwank Blake is wathah out of twainin', you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Figgins & Co., Jack Blake and his chums of Study No. 6, and the Terrible Three—now the Terrible Two on account of Manners' cold—burst into roars of laughter. Frank Monk went pink.

"I'm very glad your brother has turned up in time, Blake," he began. "Pity he wasn't here before."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling about, ass?"

"My hat!"

"Looks pleased, doesn't he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Monk walked away. He saw that it was too late to carry the situation through with advantage to himself, so he went.

Still, there was some satisfaction about it, after all. The Grammar School were four up. That meant Tom Merry's eleven would have to get through five times in forty-five minutes.

"And they won't do it," muttered Frank Monk. "They won't do it if Frank Blake plays the game of his life."

The excitement amongst the players and spectators increased wonderfully when the identity of the finely-built young man who was to play centre-half for the college team in the second half became known, and the referee's whistle was awaited in tense silence.

He came out at last, and glanced at the keen features of the rival captains, then started the game. Tom Merry dashed ahead.

Frank Monk had kicked off by passing to his inside man, and that youngster was a trifle slow in getting rid of the ball. He was also taken by surprise at Tom Merry's unexpected rush.

Over the Grammar School forward went, tackled by a clean, old-fashioned charge, the disusage of which has encouraged the underhand practices of tripping and the like so much.

The Grammar School player was bowled over, but he had been fairly bowled over, and he was on his feet again in a flash to see Tom Merry dashing past Wenham.

"Here you are!" said Jack Blake crisply, and the ball was passed.

Another dozen yards were gained, then Jack Blake slung the leather across to Figgins, and the long legs of the New House junior carried the game still further into the enemy's half.

But Wenham was following up grandly, and he robbed Figgins when that junior was in the act of shooting. Then he went away himself.

But he had a man marking him now who was worthy of his steel—a fellow of his own age and weight.

Frank Blake came to the rescue, and, with a pretty hook kick, took the ball from him.

"Well played, sir!"

"Oh, well taken!"

Thud!

The ball was sent up the field—not by means of a wild kick taken without thought of the result, but a beautifully placed kick, which landed the ball between the backs and a yard or so in front of Tom Merry.

"Go it, Merry!"

"On the ball, Tommy!"

The cries rang out loudly. Tom Merry heard them, but he did not understand them. All he cared about was that the ball was in front of him, and that the Grammar School backs were closing in.

There were two courses open to the St. Jim's captain.

He might shoot, but that would mean a thirty-yard shot—a not very promising chance with such an alert goalie as the Grammar School keeper—or he might attempt to get through.

That was the correct thing, to try and get through, and Tom Merry did try.

Straight for the ball he rushed, then the next instant the backs had sandwiched him. But Tom Merry's momentum carried him on, for the speed he had managed to muster swept the backs off their feet. Then, half-stumbling, the hero of the Shell went for goal.

"Come out!"

Frank Monk's voice sounded loudly across the ground, and the goalkeeper obeyed. But Tom Merry's head was steady now. He waited a fraction of an instant, then, as the goalkeeper came for him, coolly hooked the ball to one side. A moment later he had dribbled it into the net.

The cheers were deafening.
"Well played, youngster!" panted Wenham; and Tom Merry grinned with pleasure.

Anyway, four one was better than the first half had promised. The fellows were playing up, too, as they had never played before.

"Keep at it!" said Frank Blake, as they waited for the kick-off. "I rather think their forwards are tiring!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, we must beat the wottahs, deah boys!"

"Work like Trojans, then!" muttered Tom Merry. "Put every bit you know into it!"

And his team answered by actions instead of words.

The game fluctuated a good deal, of course, and once Wenham sent in a shot which looked like a scoring one from the moment it left his foot. But Fatty Wynn was ready, and he fung himself across the goal-mouth with an agility which no one looking at him would have thought him capable of.

He just scraped the ball out to Lowther, and the Shell fellow kicked strongly up the field.

"Good kick!"

"Well cleared, Monty!"

"Bai Jove!"

The ball had come to Arthur Augustus, and with that delicate footwork which seemed to harmonise so well with the temperament of the swell of St. Jim's, Arthur Augustus drew his man, then passed on to Figgins.

"Fiah ahead, Figgay, deah boy—only look out for that wuff bwate, Fwank Monk!"

No one laughed.

The second half of the first match between St. Jim's second eleven and the Grammar School was too serious a matter to laugh at.

Figgins sprinted grandly down the touchline, centring neatly as he neared the corner flag.

Nicely the ball dropped down in the goal-mouth, but Wenham was there, his height making it easy for him to head the ball. Tom Merry saw what would happen, and bundled into the big half.

It was not a heavy charge, but it just prevented Wenham heading, and the ball dropped down at Tom Merry's feet.

"Shoot!"

"Sho—ot, Merry!"

But Tom Merry was backing the goal, and a full-back was upon him. It was impossible to shoot.

"Blake!" he gasped.

Then he dropped down on one knee, and pushed the ball with his foot to Frank Blake.

What happened next was not actually seen. Frank Blake kicked, that was certain enough, and the next instant the ball was in the net—but how it got there none of them knew.

It was a shot Steve Bloomer might have been proud of some years ago.

Four—two

That was better still. Anything may happen with the score four—two. And St. Jim's were playing up grandly, too! There was more than a chance that the game would be saved.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Two more goals and the game is a d'waw, deah boys!"

"And three more and it's a win, ass!"

"Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy—though I must request you not to chawactahwise me as an ass; it is wicidulous, not to say wude!"

"Keep at it, kid!"

"Yaas, wathah! Cousin Ethel is waving her hand, deah boy!"

That was a further incentive, if one were needed. Cousin Ethel was on the ground with her brother. Her chums at St. Jim's did not mean to let her see the old school lose if they could help it.

Up and down the ground the two sets of forwards went, passing and repassing, but Wenham and Frank Blake proved great stumbling-blocks to the rival juniors.

For a long time it looked as if the score was to remain unaltered, then suddenly Jack Blake got away by himself.

Tom Merry raced after him, and the Fourth Former knew he was behind.

He waited until he was tackled, then backed the ball, and Tom Merry put the leather ahead again. That gave Jack Blake another run, and the chief of Study No. 6 was ready for it.

He went straight for goal, then, when everyone thought he was about to sling across to Figgins on the other wing, he twisted round and shot. Right for goal the ball sailed, and

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before the goalkeeper could get to it it had curled in at the foot of the post.

Four—three! And that after being four down at the interval!

The game went on, and Fatty Wynn was called upon directly after the restart by a long, high shot from Monk. The New House junior was ready, though, and he cleared well. Then Figgins went ahead.

Figgins had not scored yet, and it was seldom he failed to find the net at least once in a game. He meant to make amends for lack of chances with his present one.

"Go for him!" shouted Monk.

But Figgins was an awkward man to go for. He could run, and he had a habit of using his long legs in a way that prevented opposing halves getting near the ball. He did his best this time, too.

Down the wing he ran, then suddenly took it into his head to dribble right through the defence.

Through the backs he went, as coolly as if he had been without a nerve in his whole body; then he shot.

It was a fine shot, but the luck was against him. The ball rebounded from the post.

The spectators with the St. Jim's cap groaned loudly. Then they stopped to stare.

Tom Merry was there. The captain of the college second eleven had dashed up—from where, no one knew or cared. He was on-side because he had been behind the ball all the way—that was all that mattered, except that the next moment he had got to the leather before the Grammar School back.

Crash!

With a terrific left-footer, Tom Merry had made the score four all!

"Your goal, Figgy!" he said, as the pair hurried back. "Just luck my being there!"

"My hat! Thank goodness you were, kid!"

There were no greater rivals in St. Jim's than Figgins and Tom Merry, but that rivalry was only present when no common foe was. On the football-field, against the Grammar School, they sailed under one flag with Jack Blake and his chums—the St. Jim's flag.

But time was getting on now, and Tom Merry learnt from the wildly excited spectators that there were only about three minutes to go.

That looked as if the game were saved all right; but, somehow, a draw with the Grammar School was not what was wanted.

Three minutes more! It wasn't much, but you never can tell.

"Keep at it, then, youngster!" said Frank Blake. "You are all fine! Don't waste time by elaborate passing!"

The ball was kicked off, and the St. Jim's forwards managed to get it. Away they went, backed up by the halves. Would they get the ball between the posts again before the whistle went?

It looked as if they would not when Wenham robbed Tom Merry and cleared.

It was a hard kick, but it was fairly low, and Frank Blake sprang in the air. He caught the ball fairly on the forehead, and it was in the penalty area again.

"Shoot!"

"Oh, do shoot, some one!"

They were all trying to.

But suddenly there was a terrific thrill. A tall, wiry junior, wearing a monocle, dashed up.

"Bai Jove!" he panted. "Out of the way, Mowwy, deah boy! Bai Jove!"

And, throwing himself in amongst the crowd, Arthur Augustus rushed the ball into the net.

"Good old Gussy!"

"Bravo!"

The game was over. St. Jim's had won, and Arthur Augustus had scored the winning goal on the point of time. The excited scene which followed is beyond description, but that it was a sporting scene is proved by the fact that Frank Monk was one of the first to congratulate Tom Merry.

"Jolly good game, kid!" he said pleasantly. "We were the better in the first half, but you did us in the second. But you wait until we play you at St. Jim's!"

"Yaas, wathah! It will be a walk ovah then, deah boy!"

"That's what I mean!"

"My hat, yes!" grinned Tom Merry. "There'll only be one team in it!"

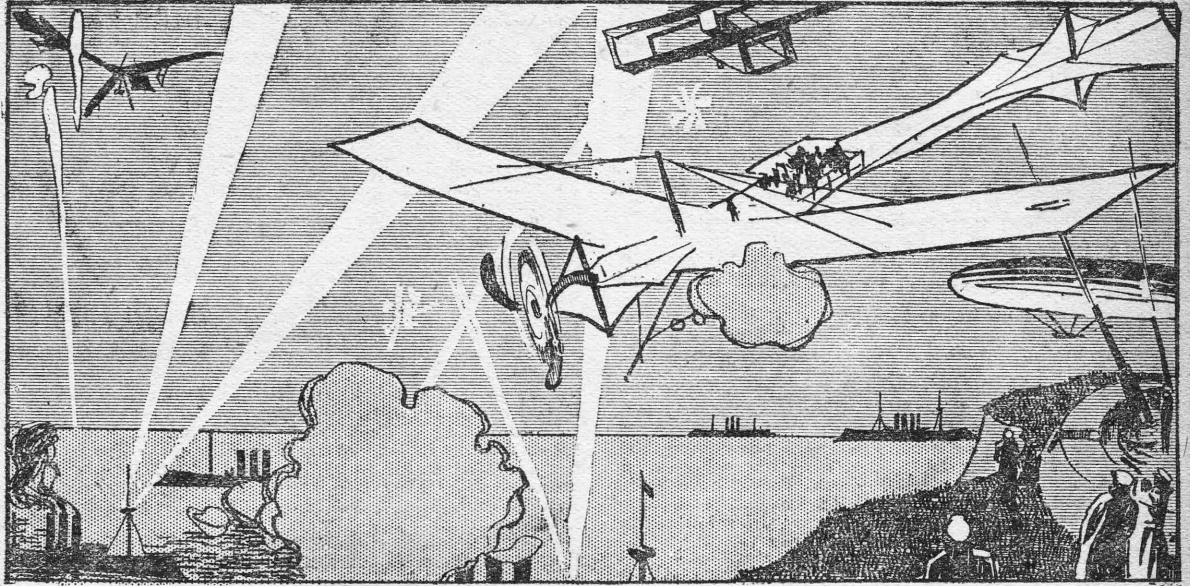
And the rival captains shook hands as the waggonette drove up to the ground to take the victorious Saints back to the old school, to replay the great game before the study fires over and over again.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of The Chums of St. Jim's next Thursday, entitled "Tom Merry & Co. Abroad," by Martin Clifford. Order your GEM Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

A Grand Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

Please tell your Friends about this Story.



BRITAIN'S REVENGE!

By **JOHN TREGELLIS.**

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS ARE:

AUBREY VILLIERS, nicknamed Sam Slick. A lad who has performed wondrous service for his country in her time of need, during the terrible invasion by the Germans.

STEPHEN VILLIERS, his brother. He is Sam's companion in all his exploits.

After the sweeping defeat of the Germans in London, as related in "Britain at Bay," Sam and Stephen take a short rest in the great, but now ruined, city, awaiting news.

The country is astounded one day—while the questions of terms are being discussed in the House of Commons—by two brothers named Carfax, who come forward with extraordinary offers.

John Carfax states that he is willing to place at disposal of the Government an absolutely perfect aeroplane: while Harrington Carfax, his brother, announces in the House of Commons that he has placed at the disposal of the Chancellor of the Exchequer £100,000,000. And he calls upon the two young scouts to testify the genuineness of his offer.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Condor Opens the Campaign.

Soon after the House rose, Sam and Stephen joined Harrington Carfax, who, after a short wait, took them with him to Downing Street, where the Premier and Chancellor of the Exchequer had arrived, and were in consultation. They received the gold-master and the two young scouts.

Of that interview there is no need to speak at length, but both the brothers testified separately to their knowledge of Harrington's power to fulfil his stupendous promise. They were believed, for the questioning was a matter of form, now that Harrington had given such proof himself, but the boys were implicitly trusted. They kept Harrington's secret, and left him to tell it or not, as he thought fit. When they departed, Harrington shook hands with them and thanked them warmly.

"Never forget you've a friend in me," he said; "and if the chance occurs I'll repay the service you've done me. You're off with my brother John next, aren't you? I knew he'd claim you. And now I must get back to the council-room. I've much to arrange with the Chancellor."

"He's a wonderful chap!" exclaimed Stephen enthusiastically, when they had parted from Harrington, and were on their way homewards. "Didn't he make the House sit up just! All that money already in hand—how could he make it and send it to London in the time?"

"He could make it in a few weeks, I should say," replied Sam. "You can bet they do it on a big scale at Andover. They've been at it some time—perhaps had it in store."

"But one hundred million pounds! It'd take a month to cart it here, and people would know—"

"Oh, no! It sounds a lot in cash, but in solid ingots I should say you could get it all into three or four big waggons, and a few men could handle it all into the Treasury, or the Bank of England cellars. My word, I can feel my boot soles tingling yet with that trip in the aeroplane!"

"It was immense. I can't realise it; it seems like a dream. Aren't you glad we're booked to sail with John? I'll bet he shows us some sport."

"It was queer how slack Parliament was about it, all the same. You'd think they'd jump at it, after what they saw."

"They'd like to jabber an' jaw about it for a fortnight," said Stephen disgustedly. "I wonder what job they'll give John to do? Or will the War Office take him over?"

"Let's get home and have some grub. They can settle that themselves. We must put some kit together, ready to go with John."

They left Westminster and made their way homewards towards Blackfriars. The newsboys were selling "specials" like wildfire everywhere, and accounts of the amazing airship seen over the Thames, and of the scene in the House of Commons, were in all the evening papers.

The two young scouts did not trouble themselves about rumours or conjectures, but made a hasty supper, and soon afterwards ensured themselves a long night's rest. They had been right in the centre of things, and did not need to read newspapers.

Next day, however, it came as a surprise to many people, early in the afternoon, that Germany was reported to be still standing to her position, and to have refused to lessen or alter her demands for the mutilation of the British Empire.

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"Are they tryin' to bluff us still?" cried Stephen, throwing down the newspaper.

"More likely they think we're tryin' to bluff them," said Sam. "I reckon Germany doesn't take much stock in the airships, and very likely thinks it's mostly bunkum about Harrington Carfax's gold. They rely on their huge army, an' don't mean to give up what they've won in Holland."

"It's great news that France is ready to join us!" said Stephen enthusiastically. "She couldn't do it while we were cooped up in our own country and unable to help her. But now we're free to lend a hand with our Army and Fleet, it's different."

"The German Army's a lot bigger than the French. But we couldn't have a better ally, nor a pluckier one."

"Wasn't it queer to give the thing out in Parliament, so that Germany could make preparations?"

"There was a good reason for it, you can bet on that. But it ain't even sure whether we shall fight or not yet, or France, either."

"Is there goin' to be another long spell of gassin' and chatterin'?" said Stephen, in disgust. "Why can't they decide one way or the other? What good does all this talk do?"

"There's always plenty of it when peace and war are being settled. If it's the latter, there'll be bullets and bloodshed enough when the talk stops. But, of course, we can't let the Empire go down. You and I won't be any the wiser for jawing about it, so let's hang on and wait. I fancy John Carfax'll bring us some news. They'll have given him some sort of idea what he's to do, surely."

"Wish he'd turn up! He's due at six. It's a quarter to now. I say, it'll be a bit of a sensation in the way of an afternoon call," said Stephen, grinning. "He said he'd come an' take us off from our own windows. Well, there's room enough outside."

The two windows of the room they were in looked out across the Thames from the south shore, and below were wharves and quays, now deserted. Again and again Stephen went to the window and looked eagerly at the sky, and in the meantime oiling and cleaning his beloved carbine, and wondering if he would ever see an enemy along its sight again.

"Here he comes!" cried Stephen. "On the very stroke of the hour, too!"

Sam sprang to the window, and far up in the sky the distant Condor was seen, looking no bigger than a cigar-box, away over Western London. It grew larger and larger as they watched, and a minute or two later the huge machine came soaring gently along over the course of the river, and slid to a standstill opposite the windows of the boys' room.

"Are you ready there?" cried John Carfax, from his place on the bridge.

"You bet!" exclaimed Sam. "Jump aboard, Steve, old chap!"

The Condor had drawn gently towards the house till its platform was within stepping distance of the windows. The two scouts sprang aboard, each in light marching order, and Stephen, of course, with his never-forgotten carbine and bandolier.

"I'm jolly glad to see you," said John; "it's a relief after all the flapdoodle I've been listening to. You look like work. Let her go, Hugh!"

Up soared the Condor, with a long swoop into the higher air, till the darkening city lay far below her, and she turned her head south towards Kent.

"Free at last!" said Sam, with a breath of relief. "My word, but it's a queer feeling aboard this airship of yours, sir, till one's used to it! Great thing to feel all the world's before one, though. Any news? We're dying to hear what's going to happen."

"The news," said Carfax, in a rasping voice, "is wretchedly unsatisfactory. There's one decent item, however. A fairly large force of our regular troops and Colonial columns is ready to start at once for the coast of Schleswig Holstein, and to land and occupy a position there to open the campaign against Germany. Only about 100,000 men; but they're all aboard the transports, and ready to go. They may even start to-night."

"Ah!" said Sam. "Then it's all settled—"

"Not at all!" said Carfax, with a frown. "It all depends on more talk. As far as I can gather, we're still asking Germany what she'll let us off for."

"Oh, but they're bound to do something now, aren't they?" cried Stephen. "Even Parliament can't hang back after what's happened."

"They're sure to give you a job, sir," said Sam, who saw that Carfax looked ruffled. He sympathised with the inventor, for Sam knew what it was to be kept hanging back when he wanted to get to work.

"The Premier said something about using the Condor for transporting troops—"

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"Transporting troops!" cried Carfax, with fierce contempt. "Just come here a moment, my lad."

He led Sam to the larger of the deck-houses, beyond the engine-shed, and, opening the doors, showed the boys an immense store of carefully-stowed ammunition of a peculiar sort. It was not such as artillery or naval guns use, but still, was evidently of great power.

"Now," said Carfax, "who is the greater power, lads, the Premier or I?"

Stephen looked rather startled. But somehow the Prime Minister had not impressed him much the day before.

"Why, well, I suppose just at this moment, it's you, sir," he said, glancing at the aeroplane, and the stock of explosives.

"That is my opinion, too," said Carfax grimly. "I am not here to transport troops, nor to wait on the orders of those gasbags in frock-coats down yonder, for another hour! I'm sick of all their shilly-shallying, and juggling with the interests of the Empire. I'm sick of hearing the Anti-patriotic party listened to. The Condor's adrift, and free to go to work in her own way!"

"What are you going to do, sir?" said Stephen, rather anxiously.

John pressed a switch, and the Condor, turning due east, leaped ahead at her utmost pace.

"I am going to Germany," he said grimly, "to dictate my own terms to Berlin! If they refuse, the Condor shall lay the land waste in a way that even Napoleon never dreamed of! They and their invading army scourged Britain with whips, but I will scourge Germany with scorpions!"

Carfax's face looked terrible as he spoke, his eyes piercing the gloom ahead as the Condor tore onward through the night sky.

"Phew!" muttered Sam to himself, in amazement. "This is a change, anyhow! Will he dare do it on his own? Yes, he will—he means to!"

"And right he is! Here's luck to him!" exclaimed Stephen to his brother. "I'm glad I'm here to see it!"

"There'll be a blazing row about it, but that don't matter if he succeeds!" said Sam, his eyes glistening. "Who's to give orders to any man with such a power as this?"

"Sorry you came?" said Carfax aloud, with a smile at the boys.

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"No, sir—wouldn't have missed it for a million!" said Sam and Stephen fervently. "Are we going straight to Germany?"

"By way of the North Sea, not across France. We shall be there soon after daybreak," said Carfax.

Silently, swiftly, the great machine hurled herself onwards through the dark skies. The coast was soon passed, a lighthouse or two twinkling like stars far below, and then for hour upon hour nothing was seen but a black void, around the faint glow of the Condor's lamps.

Nobody spoke much. The boys talked together in a low voice about the coming blow to be struck at Germany, but Carfax remained at his post the whole time, navigating the airship.

Dawn began to tint the clouds at last, and a wonderful sight it was, as the young day began to grow over the sky. Far below was an endless grey expanse of sea, and ahead and to the right, on the horizon, a faint line that was evidently land, could be seen.

The boys were about to ask what coast it was, when a sharp whirring, buzzing sound was heard in the deck-house. "Hallo!" said Carfax. "Wireless signals being sent from somewhere. That's our receiver catching them. Wonder if it's any of our ships?"

"Wireless message? What, when we're clear of the ground?" said Sam.

"Oh, yes! I've got a receiver that will record any current sent through the air."

"And can you read the message?"

"No; not unless I've got the code it's sent in."

"This is German code, I think," said Kenneth, the assistant, stepping out of the deck-house; "can't read it. Comes from somewhere out to the north-west."

"And not many miles off," added Carfax. "Didn't I hear the sound of guns then? We'll go and see."

The Condor shaped her course swiftly northwards, away from all land. The boys certainly thought they heard the matter of a distant shot or two.

"And yet, what German ship could be in action out there," said Carfax, "when all Germany's ports are blockaded? By George!" he exclaimed. "Could it be the Kaiser Wilhelm? No, we can't hope for such luck!"

"The what?" cried Stephen.

"The Kaiser Wilhelm—the great German fast liner, that's been armed and turned into a commerce destroyer. For six weeks she's been sinking British merchantmen all over the world. Our cruisers have been sent to catch her; but it's like looking for a needle in a haystack. One week she's in the Atlantic, and the next off the Cape."

"She captures our steamers?"

"Sinks them, my lad, and lets the crews get away in the boats as best they can."

"But not now, surely? There's a truce!"

"She's at it all the time," said Carfax, with a dry laugh. "The Germans say they can't get at her to stop her, but in truth, they don't want to. She's doing terrific damage to British shipping, truce or no truce!"

"I can make out a couple of vessels yonder," said the keen-eyed Stephen, pointing.

All on the Condor gazed with knitted brows at the two black dots far away over the sea. Larger and larger they became, and the airship swooped downwards as well as ahead. John Carfax gave a cry of fierce joy.

"It is the Kaiser Wilhelm, as I live! Load the tubes, Hugh!"

It was a strange sight that lay below them under the dawn. A huge liner, flying the German colours and equipped for war, carrying over a score of guns, was lying hove-to, while at a short distance from her a British cargo-steamer, with the Red Ensign flying at her poop-staff, was sinking bows-first, crippled and riddled by the Kaiser Wilhelm's guns. The cargo-steamer's boats, hurriedly launched, were pulling away from her in all directions, laden with the crew.

Down dropped the Condor, till she hung in mid-air, no great height above the giant liner. The Germans on board could be seen staring up at the airship in consternation and terror. Then, as if in a sudden panic, the Kaiser Wilhelm dashed ahead at full speed, to try and escape from under the airship.

The Condor followed as remorselessly as Fate. There was a click in the tube-opening through the deck-platform, and the next moment a bomb struck the liner with an explosion that shook the whole great ship from stem to stern.

The Surrender of the Kaiser Wilhelm.

Used as they were to war, and the terrors of scientific fighting machines, the two young scouts were amazed at the effect of the explosion. The shell, or bomb, or whatever it was, that they had seen placed in the Condor's tube, was

not bigger than a man's fist. Yet the shock, when it struck the liner, travelled upwards through the air, and made the airship tremble.

The Kaiser Wilhelm, in a dire state of confusion, reeled and staggered. A great, gaping rent could be seen in her decks as the smoke cleared away, and her crew were scurrying about blindly.

"Great Scott! It must have blown her in half!" exclaimed Stephen.

"No; only wrecked the after part of her," said Carfax quietly. "It hasn't affected her hull or engines. Signals out, there, Kenneth!"

The stricken liner made another wild effort to escape, and swerved aside so as to bring her batteries to bear, but in vain. The Condor followed, keeping straight over her.

"Can't she plug shells into us? We're no great height!" exclaimed Sam.

"She can't fire straight up in the air," said Carfax. "Her guns can only shoot at forty-five degrees, if that. Load the middle tube again, Hugh. Show 'em that signal."

The Condor's signalling masts were two light spars that could be fixed or unfixed at will. They projected horizontally from her platform, not upright, or the flags could not have been seen.

The coloured pennons were soon fluttering in the breeze, and the Kaiser Wilhelm's captain read them plainly.

"Strike your colours, or be sent to the bottom!" ran the signal.

The consternation on board the armed liner was easily seen, even at that distance. Her crew wondered if they were dreaming, and, but for the fearful rent in the decks, they would have doubted their eyesight. Every German's gaze was riveted on the huge airship, that was gently coming lower and lower.

For six long weeks the Kaiser Wilhelm had had it all her own way on the high seas. She was one of the fastest vessels in the world, only a few of the Royal Navy cruisers were swift enough to overhaul her, and so cunningly had she dodged over the wide ocean, coaling from vessels she stopped at sea, that none of those cruisers had yet set eyes on her.

A week before she had sunk her twelfth victim off the Azores, and here she was wrecking her thirteenth at the top of the North Sea. An unlucky number it proved for the Kaiser Wilhelm, and an unlucky day.

Her crew were in a panic, nor was it to be wondered at. Her captain raged and stamped, as he realised his helplessness. He hesitated as he read the signal.

"I give them five seconds more," said Carfax impatiently. "I've no time to waste on her; she must strike, or be blown to pieces. Stand by to let her have it at the word, Hugh. One—two—three—"

The German flag on the Kaiser Wilhelm's poop-staff fluttered down hastily. Carfax snapped his watch back into his pocket.

"Just in time!" he said. "Down with her, Kenneth! Stand by that tube yet, Hugh. I don't trust this chap. He's little better than a pirate."

The Condor floated down like a feather, till she was only a hundred feet or so above the funnels of the liner, which had shut off steam, and was lying motionless. Her crew, with pale, amazed faces, were gazing up at the aeroplane. A quarter of a mile away lay the boats of the sunken steamer, the crew resting on their oars, and looking at the strange scene with no less surprise than the Germans.

"What in heaven are you, and what's the meaning of this?" cried the Kaiser Wilhelm's captain hoarsely, from his bridge.

Carfax leaned over the rails and looked down at him composedly.

"You are the prisoner of the British aeroplane Condor, owned and commanded by John Carfax of Hampshire!" he said.

"Am I!" stormed the captain, breaking out into a rage. "This ship can be taken only by a superior force of enemy's ships, properly authorised by a hostile government!"

"If you stick to that," said Carfax, "I'll convince you of your mistake in five seconds by blowing you clean out of the water. Do you surrender or not?"

The German clenched his hands in impotent fury; but there was no help for it.

"Ja, I suppose so," he said, in a hoarse growl.

"Then call your crews away from the guns. Quick! Do you hear me? You've done mischief enough, but that ship of yours will go some way to make up for the cargo-tramps you've sunk. First of all, you'll take aboard those men in the boats yonder, and make them comfortable."

The German had to obey. He carried out all Carfax's orders, and the Condor signalled to the boats to close. The unlucky steamer had already taken her last plunge, and now lay upon the sea bottom. The boats came dashing up, their crews almost forgetting their own troubles in their eagerness

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A Grand Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY ABROAD."

to learn what was in the wind. The long-boat, with the British skipper in the stern, was the first to arrive.

"Boat ahoy!" hailed Carfax. "Go aboard, captain, and take your crew with you!"

"What? aboard the Dutchman?" cried the skipper.

"Certainly. I'll see you come to no harm."

"Harm! If I get within arm's length of her old man, I'll bet I spoil his figure-head for him! D'ye see what he did to my ship yonder? But this is a great go, sir, isn't it? Where did you spring from, and what d'ye call that thing? It looks like a box-kite with the jim-jams! Is it an airship?"

"Of course! Can't you see?" said Carfax, laughing.

"I began to think I'd got 'em again when I saw you come sailin' down out of the sky," said the skipper. "Well, sir, it was just Al, the way you blew up his quarter-deck! You're a Britisher, of course?"

"Just as much as yourself, captain. Hurry up and get aboard! I'm going to hand this ship over as soon as possible. As soon as you're on deck, run up the British colours on her staff, with the German beneath them, for signal that she's a prize. Look alive! I've more work on hand!"

"If it's going ahead to knock dust out of the Dutchmen, I'm sure I wish you luck!" said the merchant skipper, nimbly boarding the great liner by her gangway. He and his crew were soon on her decks. There were only a score of them to a muster of over 300 Germans; but the latter dared make no protest when the quartermaster of the lately-sunken vessel hoisted the British colours on the Kaiser Wilhelm's staff.

"There, you bung-eyed beggars," said the British skipper, "you didn't reckon on that happening, half an hour ago! And as for you," he added, calling up to the scowling German naval captain on the lofty bridge, "if you'll come down here and take your coat off you shall have all the satisfaction you want, my bucko, and I'll show you what I think of a wall-eyed pirate, who goes about sinking merchant ships in time of a truce! That's a fair offer!"

"You'll have to put that off to some other time," said Carfax abruptly. "I'm sorry to spoil sport, but I'm going to take the captain aboard here. I want him."

The German captain's jaw dropped, and he turned pale.

"Ach nein!" he said. "I stay here aboard my sheep! I cannot—"

He was interrupted by the Condor daffly sailing down till her platform was just over his bridge. He seemed horrified at the idea of a voyage on the aeroplane, feeling much more at home on salt water.

"Now, then, sir," said Carfax sharply, "come along, if you please! I'm waiting!"

The German protested violently; but Kenneth, leaning over the rail, stuck a boat-hook through his coat-collar.

"All aboard!" said Kenneth, hauling the German on to the Condor's platform. "Change here for the North Pole. Shove off again, sir."

The aeroplane soared upwards in a circle, while Carfax hailed the British skipper below.

"Mount her bridge, and take charge of her, captain! Head her E.N.E., and ring for full speed. I'll soon relieve you, and I'll see you have no trouble with her crew."

"Ay, ay!" returned the skipper joyfully; and in a few minutes more the great liner was forging swiftly ahead on the course indicated. The Condor accompanied her, keeping right overhead about eighty feet above the funnels.

"My word," said Stephen aside to Kenneth, "you landed that fish precious neatly!"

"Like gaffing a pike, wasn't it?" chuckled the assistant.

"But isn't it risky, letting a German aboard her?"

"You trust us to see he doesn't do any harm. And as to discovering her secrets—why, he's welcome to find out whatever he likes about her. He won't be any wiser when it's done. The chief's got a reason for bringing him, you bet!"

Carfax, having put the Condor on her course, turned to the frowning and bewildered German.

"I'm sorry to put you to any inconvenience," said John dryly; "but, as a matter of fact, you'll be better off here than sent to England as a prisoner. I want you presently to take a message for me."

"I shall do nothing to benefit you, or help your plans, be sure!" growled the captain.

"No; it'll be for your own advantage; or, rather, for Germany's, if she takes it. You will do as I desire you, when the time comes," said Carfax quietly. "Meanwhile, you are my guest aboard here, if you will give me your parole. I don't want the trouble of guarding you."

The German hesitated, and then agreed to give his parole. It occurred to him that if he gave it, he would be more likely to hear something about the airship than if he were under guard. Carfax saw what was passing in his mind, and smiled dryly.

"I sha'n't have need of you for very long," he said. "By this evening, all going well, you will be a free man again."

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY ABROAD."

A Grand Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

You may get wiped out afterwards, by chance, but that's your look-out."

"Land, right ahead, sir!" sang out Stephen presently, as the faint line of a low-lying coast came into view. Soon it became more visible—a town and church-spires could be seen showing beyond a line of sea-embankments, and a wide entrance of a bay, or estuary, was visible. Some distance off this lay four or five vessels, which were soon seen to be warships, and several torpedo-craft.

"The Texel," said Carfax, "and those are British iron-clads, blockading the port so that nothing can come or go."

The wide Dutch harbour—now, like the rest of Holland, in German hands—was rapidly neared, and one of the smart grey cruisers came steaming out to meet the Kaiser Wilhelm.

"I'll bet we're astonishing the squadron," chuckled Kenneth; "and I don't reckon this precious guest of ours thought he was so near to them when he ventured up this way, and stopped that freight-steamer. That's the Achilles comin' to check us."

"I'll bet her gun-crews are ready for us if we turned nasty," said Sam.

"We shouldn't be meetin' her like this if she was an enemy. We'd be a mile or two up, till we were straight over her, of course. But she can see the colours flying from the liner's poop-staff. Shouldn't wonder if she's a bit sick about it—the Navy's been hunting this prize of ours, you know."

But there was nothing envious about the Achilles' commander. The smart warship slowed down as the Kaiser Wilhelm and her strange escort stopped, and the aeroplane came down between the two, poising herself level with both.

"I've got a prize for you, commander!" hailed the airship's owner.

"By Jove, I should think you have!" said the naval officer. "Are you Mr. Carfax?"

"Yes! This is the Condor."

"I've heard about you and this wonderful craft of yours," said the Achilles' commander, taking her in with all his eyes. "A destroyer out from the Thames this morning brought us the news. She's a nailing fine machine, by Jove! Makes one doubt one's eyesight. And you've actually picked up the Kaiser Wilhelm with her?"

"Yes! She's not much damaged, either. Can you spare a ship to escort her to England? She's worth it, I think. Cost over a million. She'll pay for most of the ships she's sunk."

"Worth it? I should think so! I'll send the Arrogant with her."

The naval officer caused signals to be made at once, and a trim, second-class cruiser came dashing up in response.

"The skipper and crew of a British ship the liner sunk are aboard her," said Carfax. "I shall take it as a favour if your prize crew will see they're done well, and made comfortable. They've had a rough time of it, and ought to have first claim on her."

"It shall be done," said the Achilles' commander.

"I've got her captain aboard here," added Carfax, "and I'm going to stick to him, as he'll be useful later on in the day. We're bound overland shortly. Good-bye, commander!"

"What! Are you going for Germany single-handed?" exclaimed the naval officer in astonishment.

"You'll probably hear the news later—a good deal of it, too," said Carfax, with one of his dry smiles. "The less I say about it just now, the better."

"Of course, the War Office have given you a commission, have they?" said the commander. "By Jove, I'd give something to be adrift in a machine like that, with a free hand to use it! Well, good luck to you and the Condor!"

Farewells were shouted from the Kaiser Wilhelm's decks by the steamer's crew, and as the Condor mounted in great swinging circles her people saw the giant liner steam away towards England, with the Arrogant in charge.

"That's over," said Carfax, as he increased the airship's pace to its utmost, and headed her north-east; "and now to tackle the German Empire at home."

John Carfax Sends an Ultimatum.

John chuckled grimly to himself ever and again as he directed the Condor on her way, and presently Stephen asked the cause of so much mirth.

"It was the Achilles' commander blandly supposing I had a commission from the War Office," said Carfax with a laugh. "The War Office! I think I can see the Condor under the orders of that home of gas and muddle. What do we owe Britain's invasion and defeat to, but the War Office! No; we're on our own—it's Carfax against the Germans, and no meddling. I'd as lief drop one of my shells atop of the War Office as not. It would be a rare good thing for the

country! More speed! High! Whack her up, and let's be doing!" Sam and Stephen walked forward, the younger scout grinning, but Sam looked rather dubious.

"He's a bit of a trouble-maker, you know, this chap," said Sam to his brother as they leaned over the fore-rail, out of earshot of the bridge. "A grand fellow, and certainly a genius, and all that. It's all very well to curse the War Office, but everybody's got to be under some sort of discipline. You an' I have campaigned a good bit, and we know that. I'm wondering what he'll do."

"If he goes for Germany baldheaded, what more do you want?" said Stephen.

"He may carry it too far. It seems to me a man with such power as this might set the whole world by the ears, and raise fearful ructions in twenty-four hours."

"I don't see it," said Stephen. "It seems to me people exaggerate what he can do. How is one airship to defeat Germany, let alone raisin' Cain everywhere else? One thing's sure, he'll do as he likes. Carfax isn't a man to be stopped."

"I don't want to stop him. But I'm beginnin' to wish there was some sort of a check on him," said Sam, with a shrug. "However, we shall soon see."

"British transports!" cried Carfax in his clear voice, pointing far away to seaward.

The Condor was at such a height that an enormous range of vision lay below her. A fleet of ten large ships, looking no bigger than dots, and escorted by what a pair of powerful glasses showed to be ironclads, could be seen heading towards Denmark.

"Then our Army's going to tackle Germany after all!" cried Stephen.

"Looks like it! Those must have started before we did. I shouldn't be surprised if a British force hasn't landed in Schleswig already," said Carfax. "They can make themselves a strong position there, and be ready. But even that doesn't necessarily mean we shall hold out against German demands. We've command of the sea, and can always take the troops off again, and scuttle home," added Carfax bitterly, "if Parliament talks long enough."

"I wonder what troops they are?" said Stephen, looking longingly at the transport fleet as it faded out of sight.

"Are we likely to come across them after they've landed, d'ye think? What are all those islands down there?"

"The Frisian Islands," said Carfax, "lying just off the coast, like a barrier. They're Dutch up to the fourth one, counting from here, and that's German. The mainland behind it is German, too."

"We're there at last, then!" cried Stephen, gazing eagerly at the long, low line of shore, with the flat fens and marshland behind it. "It looks like Foulness, in Essex, or the Blackwater shores. We're over the enemy's country now—eh?"

"Yes! That's the Hanover coast. That big opening's the mouth of the Weser. You can see the Eibe estuary beyond from up here, and the British ironclads blockading it, and barring the way to Hamburg."

The boys took it all in eagerly. They knew some parts of North Germany well, having had two years at school there; but the Hanover coast was new to them. A strong squadron of British ships, several of them powerful battleships, lay off the Elbe's mouth, and with a telescope their officers and crews could be seen even from that height staring up at the Condor in wonder.

"How is it we haven't made straight overland to Germany?" said Sam. "Don't this take much longer, skirting the coast?"

"Yes; but I wish to see how our fleet is placed, and where the German forces are disposed," said Carfax, who had given the steering of the aeroplane to Kenneth, and was scanning the country below keenly through his glasses.

While he was looking, a tiny feather of white smoke, as it appeared to be, spouted out of a low mound a long way off, and to the left, on the east shore of the Elbe. Something invisible came humming and tearing through the sky, and burst with a thudding explosion a long way below and to the southward. Carfax smiled scornfully.

"That's one of their big guns from the Elbe forts," he said; "and a rotten poor shot, too. Well, they'll fire many a hundred shells before they learn to hit an aeroplane, three miles high, and going at forty miles an hour. There's Brunsbittel, and the entrance of the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal. We'll slow down a bit here, Kenneth."

"To let them pot at us? They evidently know who we are," remarked Sam.

"You can bet they do! But we'll spare five minutes or so to do a good piece of work. That canal was made for purposes of war, d'ye see?"

The boys looked down, and saw the long, straight, artificial cut, one of the finest canals in the world, looking like a mere ribbon of water from where they were.

"The Kaiser had it made years ago, didn't he?" said Stephen.

"Yes! It goes right through the neck of land that cuts off the Baltic from the North Sea," said Carfax. "Before it was made ships used to have to go hundreds of miles round the north of Denmark to get from one sea to the other. Now the Kaiser can send his warships and troop-transports through the canal, and cut off all that journey. It's tremendously important to Germany; and so, as the less she can move her troops and ships about the better for Britain just now, we'll spend a minute or two in blocking it up. Hugh, load up the single tube with one of the big picric-acid shells."

"There's a big ship going through the canal now!" cried Sam.

"Just so—a war transport-vessel, flying the German Government flag," said Carfax, gazing down at her through his telescope; "she'll answer our purpose nicely. Let her have it, Hugh, and then drop a petrol-bomb on the coal depot on the bank there."

Stephen saw the big steamer below, her bulk nearly filling up the canal, slowly steaming along. There was a click from the Condor's tube, a pause, and then a tremendous flash was seen upon the ship far below. It was a far greater explosion than the Kaiser Wilhelm liner had suffered, and the echoes of it rumbling upwards, seemed to shake the very sky.

The big vessel began to fill and sink with surprising rapidity, being nearly blown in two. There was another click, and shortly afterwards a sheet of yellow flame was seen leaping upwards in the very thick of the great mass of coal-sheds and stores that stood in an open space near the canal's bank. The petrol-bomb had done its work well. A second was despatched to make sure, with a still more destructive result.

"Not bad for two shots," said Carfax calmly, turning the Condor's head south again. "We have blocked up the canal that connects Germany's two seas—for nothing can pass that sunken steamer till she's removed—and we've destroyed one of her chief military and naval coal stores. They'll never get that fire under now the petrol's well among the coal. We'll leave them to it, and get on."

"It's an eye-opener, the way those tubes work," said Sam, staring back at the now fast-spreading flames, that looked like a little patch of burning oil on the ground, so far away were they. "How do you manage to shoot so straight?"

"Simple enough," said Kenneth. "We've range-finders and distance-calculators fixed to the tubes, that make it almost impossible to miss. They're the chief's invention. It isn't like naval gunnery, you know. My word," he added, looking over the rail, "but I'd like to try a few of our picric-acid shells on Hamburg there! I say, sir, couldn't we spare another five minutes?"

"No," said Carfax, as the huge city and port of Hamburg, at the head of the Elbe estuary, was passed over at top speed, and at a great height; "we're not here to spread destruction round haphazard. We're going to the heart of things. If they refuse my terms," he added grimly, "then there is no limit to what we may do. But we must keep our weapons and ammunition for what is most important." He glanced at the chronometer clock, in its case on the bridge.

"Past one! We took longer over the Kaiser Wilhelm than I supposed. It is no matter," he added, after a thoughtful pause. "I do not wish to begin operations till dark. It will be better so."

"Himmel!" gasped the prisoner, who was standing by the deck-house, and had watched the destruction of the coal depot with growing consternation. "What is he going to do with this infernal machine?"

"You'll know soon enough. You shall be the first to take the news," replied Carfax, and said no more.

Slackening speed slightly, the Condor made her way through the upper air, passing at a leisurely pace over the great plain of Northern Germany. The boys watched with the keenest interest as the journey continued.

Lauenburg was passed, seeming no bigger than a hamlet; and presently, for reasons of his own, Carfax steered away eastwards over the duchy of Mecklenburg, so as to come upon his goal from the north when he turned. Speed was lessened still more, and the twilight was falling over the world below when John pointed to a blur of smoke and a huge grey city just coming into view.

"Berlin!" he said.

The brothers felt a thrill as they saw the German Empire's capital, lying as they believed, at Carfax's mercy. What might not a discharge of those petrol-bombs and terrible shells achieve, fired from such a height and with absolute accuracy?

Soon the great town was right below them, and Carfax quietly brought the aeroplane to a standstill, poised far above the city's centre, and looked down.

The Castle, the rounded steeple of the New Church, and the Royal Theatre in the Gensdarmenmarkt were all plain to see, and the vast suburbs of Charlottenburg stretched away towards the lakes beyond.

Through glasses, the swarming German population could be seen, every street thronged with people, and not one but had his face turned skywards, and staring at the Condor. In several streets panics were in progress and the populace was running to and fro distractedly.

"Ay, they're worse scared than our folk were when Von Krantz's batteries appeared on the heights outside London," said Stephen bitterly; "and no wonder!"

"But you're not going to start smashing up Berlin now, are you, sir?" said Sam, rather apprehensively, for the thought of what might happen to the teeming thousands of citizens down below made him shudder, used though he was to war.

"No," said Carfax grimly, "not yet, at least. I am going to strike my blow at the very heart of things. Berlin is the capital, but it is Potsdam, close by, that's the real centre of the country."

"That's true," said Sam, as the Condor swung round slightly and dashed off south-westwards; "yonder it comes in sight already," he added, as the tall buildings of a handsome city came in sight, visible easily from that height, though seventeen miles to the south of Berlin. "The Kaiser's headquarters are at the palace here, and there's an enormous garrison of troops. Of course, we've got the Kaiser in England."

"He does not count, being absent and a prisoner," said Carfax, "but the Crown Prince is occupying his place here, and is in charge." John glanced at the clock on the bridge. "In half an hour, or thereabouts, he will be sitting to-night in consultation with the leaders of his Government, at the Palace, as I happen to know. Well, he will have more to decide than he reckons upon," added the inventor.

"You're goin' to communicate with him, sir?" asked Stephen.

"I am going to send him my ultimatum," said Carfax grimly, and giving the steering-gear into Hugh's charge, he went into the deck-house. There, with a writing-block and a fountain-pen, he wrote a despatch, which presently he brought out.

"I am going to read you this," he said, "as you will shortly witness the result."

The despatch ran as follows:

"To the Crown Prince of Germany and the leaders of German Imperial Government.

"The British Aeroplane Condor has arrived above your City of Potsdam, and holds its fate and the fate of the neighbouring military cantonments in her hands.

"I have the honour to lay before you the following demands:

"I. That Germany shall withdraw immediately the terms she has offered to the British Government, which are now considered to be cancelled.

"II. Germany to yield her African colonies, including German East Africa, to Britain forthwith.

"III. Germany to withdraw her troops at once from Holland, and abandon formally all claim to that country.

"IV. Germany to pay to the British Government, in recompense for the cost of the late war, the sum of £300,000,000.

"For sign of the acceptance of these terms, which cannot be altered or discussed, two white lights must be shown from the

top of the signalling-tower at the north of the town, by ten o'clock, German time.

"If when ten o'clock strikes the signal is not made, I shall destroy the Palace of Potsdam, and after it the whole of the cantonments and the troops that occupy them, without further notice.

"In case of refusal, I hereby warn you to remove all non-combatants, women, and children, from the threatened area in good time.

"No proposals or offers, nor anything short of complete submission to these demands will be considered. Signals, except the one indicated above, will be ignored.

"If, after the destruction of Potsdam, my terms are still unaccepted, I shall proceed to deal with Berlin, and the other chief German cities in their order.

"If you wish to avert this disaster, come to an agreement before ten.

"(Signed) JOHN CARFAX."

The effect of this despatch, which Carfax read out in a cold, clear voice, showed itself plainly in the ex-captain of the Kaiser Wilhelm. He had remained in a state of sullen lethargy since Hamburg was passed, but now, after hearing the words of the ultimatum, he was deadly white.

He turned to Carfax, gave a hoarse cry, and, whipping a revolver from his hip-pocket, fired point-blank at John.

Had he been an instant quicker, there would have been an end of the great inventor. But Sam, who had been watching the German keenly, and was standing close by, struck his wrist up, and the bullet flew through the framework of the aeroplane, overhead. The next moment the man was seized in a strong grip, and the revolver wrenched from him.

The German, disarmed, stood white and rigid before his captors. John, who had not moved a muscle, looked at him coolly.

"I don't care what you do to me. You may throw me over the side, and welcome," muttered the ex-captain.

"Not at all. You are a brave man to attempt what you did, even though it was not honourable. I don't propose to execute you by any means. You will be the bearer of this despatch to the Crown Prince," said Carfax, closing and sealing it.

He handed it to the German, who took it with nerveless fingers, seeming scarcely to know what he was doing.

Carfax stepped to the side, looked over, and took a quick, keen survey of the country below. Then, with unusual speed, he sent the Condor ringing downwards in great circles, till, a minute later, she hung motionless within a foot of the ground, on a lonely open heath not far out of Potsdam.

"You may go," said Carfax, to the German; "take that message straight to the Palace and deliver it to the Crown Prince. And remember," he added sternly, "if you fail to do so, you will be a traitor to your country! Germany's ruin will be upon your head!"

The ex-captain, holding the despatch tightly, stepped off the aeroplane on to the short turf below, like one in a dream. He stared upwards for a few moments as the great machine soared away and left him standing there. Then the airship's crew saw him turn and run towards Potsdam like a man possessed.

Up and up soared the Condor till she hung far above the brilliantly-lit city, like a speck in the dark sky.

And there she waited, watching for the signal in silence—like a pistol held at the head of the German Empire. Would it be surrender or defiance?

(Another long instalment of this thrilling serial next week.)

How Do You Do?



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