

"TOM MERRY'S CHRISTMAS NUMBER!"

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LONG
COMPLETE-
TALE

No. 98

BY
MARTIN
CLIFFORD

Vol. 4



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A ragged newsboy did a quick double-shuffle on the greasy pavement in front of the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle and surveyed the youngster in silence.



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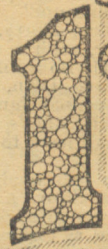
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TOM MERRY'S CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

A Grand, Long, Complete Tale
of the Juniors of St. Jim's
By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER I. The Terrible Three.

S NOW! Mother Goose was shedding the whitest, the downiest of her feathers, and a filmy blanket of snow covered the old quad. of St. Jim's.

From the New House to the School House the ground was hidden beneath a mantle of untrodden snowflakes, and the silence of a winter evening was unbroken, save by the sound of boyish voices coming from a certain study window facing the great iron gates.

Occasionally there was but a subdued hum, but more often the voices were high-pitched, and now and again one could have recognised the ringing, care-free laughter of Tom Merry.

As leader of the famous and well-known Terrible Three, Tom Merry usually found a point of view that admitted of a humorous interpretation, and in consequence of this happy way of looking at things, it was seldom that dull care or worry invaded the sanctum which now shed from its window a bright ray of light that turned the half-frozen crystals that floated down from the leaden sky to scintillating, air-born jewels.

On this particular winter evening the interior of the Terrible Three's study presented a more than usually cheerful and cosy aspect. The crackling fire, the kettle singing on the hob, no doubt contributed to the general effect of comfort, but the real secret of the charm was to be found in that the surroundings but reflected and expressed the identities of the three juniors.

Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners were not given to self-analysis, so that if they were upright in their dealings, sportsmanlike, and British to the backbone, they were all this as naturally as a duck takes to water, and quite un-

conscious of the fact that they represented the healthy-minded, mischief-loving boys who become great and noble-minded men.

"You're a pair of fat-headed owls!"

Tom Merry got up from his chair, seized the poker, and stirred the fire to a brighter blaze.

An animated discussion was on the boards, and by way of driving home his argument, the leader of the Terrible Three sought the relief of hammering at a hard block of coal.

"I don't see that at all," remonstrated Lowther.

"Neither do I!" ejaculated Manners. "Shall we—"

Manners paused significantly, and Monty Lowther nodded his head solemnly and concluded:

"Bump him!"

Tom Merry threw the poker down with a clatter.

"No, you don't!" he said, with a grin. "I am not going to be bumped!"

"But you said—" commenced Lowther.

"Never mind what I said," interrupted Tom Merry.

"That's not the point. I said you are a pair of fatheaded owls, and, since you can't help it, then there's not the least bit of good in trying to cover up your shortcomings by an act of violence and brutality!"

"My eye!" muttered Monty Lowther. "You're a prize ass—that's what you are! Poor old Skimmy will have to take a back seat after this!"

"Talk about a gasbag!" added Manners. "Why, you're a beastly what-you-may-call-it—a gasometer!"

"And you!" said Tom Merry darkly. "Well, we'll leave that for the moment. The question is, are we going to bring out a special number of the old rag, or not?"

"Not, I should say," echoed Manners.

"You know very well we're stumped!" snapped Lowther. "So how the dickens can we?"

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 98 (New Series).

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"Charge the kids something," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, we might do that," agreed Manners. "But you see, we have to fork out the dubs for the printing first, and I don't think you'll get them to dub up."

"Some of them would," said Tom Merry.

"Some!" cried Monty Lowther, with a sniff. "Yes, I desay! Old Blake and his crowd! So would Figgy and his little lot, and so would Clifton Dane, Glyn, and Noble; but the others——" Monty Lowther paused significantly.

"That's about a bob's worth, that's all," muttered Manners; "and I suppose we shall have to rake in at least a couple of pounds!"

Tom Merry gazed into the fire reflectively. The financial side of the St. Jim's weekly was always a bit of a puzzle. Long practice had made him well-fitted for his post of editor, but when it came to acting as cashier, publisher, and controller, all in one, then his brow took on a perpendicular wrinkle that showed the triple position required some effort to tackle.

"Well?" inquired Monty Lowther at last. "Well?"

The editor sighed.

"It's no good doing that!" muttered Manners. "We've either got to drop the idea straight away, or—or we'll think of something!"

Tom Merry's mouth took an obstinate curve.

"We're not going to chuck the idea," he said. "Something must be done."

"I believe you've made that remark upon some previous occasion," observed Lowther, in the vein sarcastic. "Can't you vary it a bit?"

Again Tom Merry lapsed into silence. The three stared into the fire.

"I wish——" said Monty Lowther; then he broke off suddenly.

"Well, what d'you wish, old son?" replied Tom Merry.

"Oh, I dunno—I wish we could manage it somehow! It's a jolly good idea!"

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry. "I thought you would come round to a reasonable point of view!"

"I said," said Monty Lowther, "that it is a jolly good idea, but a fatheaded suggestion since we can't carry it out."

"A bit mixed that," replied the editor. "What do you think about it, Manners?"

"Oh, rats!" muttered Manners crossly. "Let's have tea."

This was a welcome suggestion.

"Good!" said Monty Lowther.

"Right-ho!" agreed Tom Merry. "With the cup that cheers but not—and so on—we may hit on something."

Manners made a remark that sounded suspiciously like "hitting somebody on the head," but the rattle of teacups and saucers drowned the rest of his sentence, and within the next five minutes the study table was cleared of the litter of matter for the weekly, and drawn up to the fire.

"Jolly comfy!" mumbled Manners, with his mouth full of buttered toast.

"Don't speak with your mouth full," admonished Tom Merry.

Manners glared at his chum, and gave a sniff of indignation.

"I suppose you think that's funny?" he snapped.

"Not at all!" retorted Tom Merry, with a grin. "It's rude!"

Manners grew red in the face, and laid his hand suggestively on the jam-spoon.

Just at that moment the study door flew open, and Manners' arm went up with a jerk.

"Whoa, you fathead!" shrieked Monty Lowther. "What the policeman there! Keep that beastly sticky thing out of my way!"

"What did you want to stick your eye in the way for?" demanded Manners, with an injured air. "Waste of good stuff, I call it! Hallo! What do you want?"

"Pway excuse me, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Pway—bai Jove!"

The swell of St. Jim's stepped back a pace, and regarded Lowther with a look of blank astonishment.

"Bai Jove!" he repeated. "Your eye, Lowthah! Been fightin'?"

"No, image!" snorted Monty Lowther, wiping away the sticky mass of black currant jam on his left eye. "Can't you see this is the abode of peace? I always like to have a little jam on my eye—it's good for the nerves!"

"Wot! Wubbish!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, closing the door. "I wogard that as a wiculous wemark! I——"

Manners flourished the jam-spoon, and Arthur Augustus retreated in horror.

"Pway put that howwid thing down, Mannahs!" he cried. "I shall immediately quit your pwesence if you do not desist at once! I absolutely wefuse to have that thing neah me!"

"Oh, don't go, Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You're

as welcome as the flowers in spring! Sit down, old chap, and make yourself at home! No, not there—I think Lowther spilt some ink on that chair!"

The swell of St. Jim's adjusted his monocle and eyed the leader of the Terrible Three with a freezing glance.

"Pway, an' where am I to sit?"

"Oh, anywhere!" said Lowther.

"Here you are!" cried Manners, lifting the coal-scuttle to the centre of the room.

"I considah you most wude!"

"He considers us most rude!" said Manners, turning to Lowther.

"He considers us most rude!" repeated Lowther to Tom Merry.

"As one gentleman to anothah——" commenced D'Arcy.

"You're another!" muttered Manners, with a grin.

Arthur Augustus looked puzzled.

"I fail to appwehend! I——"

"Oh, all right, don't, then!" said Manners cheerfully. "You must be careful, Gussy! You might strain something—and what would St. Jim's do then, poor thing?"

The swell of St. Jim's made a stride forward, and, in his desire to achieve vengeance, literally put his foot in it.

The coal-scuttle received an unaccustomed burden.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three laughed uproariously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Take your face out of our scuttle!" said Manners. "I'm surprised at you, Gussy—at your time of life, too! I really am!"

There was not much damage done, but the swell of St. Jim's arose from his position of indignity in great wrath.

"I shall administah a feahful thwashin'!"

"Oh, let me finish tea first, Gussy!" pleaded Manners.

"Yes, couldn't you put it off for a while?" added Tom Merry seriously. "Say until the middle of the week! It's Manners' turn to clear up the study, and if you reduce him to a mangled corpse we shall have to straighten up ourselves! Do—there's a good chap!"

"I considah you an outwageous boundah!"

"Oh, Gussy!"

Monty Lowther got up from the table, and stared fixedly at the swell of St. Jim's. Then he sighed deeply, and shook his head.

CHAPTER 2.

A Rise out of D'Arcy.

"WHAT a shame!" he muttered.

Arthur Augustus stood petrified with astonishment.

Tom Merry rose, and also fixed his eyes somewhere in the region of the swell of St. Jim's neck.

"What a pity!" he murmured.

Manners joined the two, and the three stood in a row in front of the now dumbfounded D'Arcy. An expression of sorrow was on all their faces, and now and again they sighed in unison.

At last the swell of St. Jim's found his voice.

"What are you staving at?"

The Terrible Three heaved a great sigh.

"I can't tell him!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Neither can I!" muttered Manners.

"Nor I!" added Monty Lowther. "It's too dreadful for words!"

"Awful!"

"Frightful!"

"Too terrible for words!"

"P'r'aps we'd better write to him?"

"Break it gently."

"Yes, that's it!"

"Wottahs!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Wottahs!"

Tom Merry made a sound that he imagined might pass for a sob, but it much more nearly resembled what Jack Blake would describe as a cackle.

"Gussy, old friend," he said, laying his hand on the swell of St. Jim's shoulder, "there is——"

Tom Merry broke off, and Arthur Augustus stared at him open-mouthed.

"Prepare yourself for a terrible shock, Gussy!"

"Yes, do be calm!" urged Manners.

"Better sit down!" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Wubbish!"

"Are you quite prepared to learn the terrible truth?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I——"

Bang!

Gussy!

Arthur Augustus was standing with his back to the door, and he half-turned as he heard Jack Blake's voice.

"Don't!" shrieked Manners. "Don't move, Gussy!"



"Read it!" roared the Sixth-Former. "Read it! Read that namby-pamby little rag! Not much!"

Monty Lowther and Tom Merry seized the swell of St. Jim's firmly by the arms.

"Stay perfectly still!" said Tom Merry. "Don't move, or—or something dreadful will happen. Come in!"

The door opened, and three juniors strolled in. They represented the members of Study No. 6—Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries.

"Hal-lo!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "So here you are, Gus! We've been looking for you—eh?"

Manners executed a rear movement, and whispered a few words to the new-comers. Arthur Augustus was struggling violently to free himself from the grip of Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, and Manners' move escaped his notice.

"I twig!" whispered Jack Blake. "Serve the image right. Dodging away from us without saying a word. Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus stopped contorting himself, and faced the head of Study No. 6 with an air of forced dignity.

"Welease me, deah boy!"

Jack Blake shook his head with great seriousness.

"You must promise not to move," he said.

"Why! I shall wefuse. I—"

"Very well, then, we shall have to tie you up."

"I—"

"Do you promise?"

"I—"

"Very well, then, we must proceed to—"

"I pwromise!"

"Good."

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther released their prisoner, and the six juniors arranged themselves in a row in front of him.

They all shared fixedly at his neck.

"What an awful thing," whispered Jack Blake, in a shocked tone of voice.

"Frightful."

"Who would have thought it?"

The swell of St. Jim's wriggled uncomfortably.

"Now, then," said Jack Blake, wagging a warning finger.

"Remember your promise."

"But I wefuse to be tweated in this widiculous mannah!"

Jack Blake gave a hollow groan.

Digby, Herries, and the others did their best to show their feeling of grief.

Arthur Augustus began to feel alarmed.

"I say, deah boys, I—I think I shall wetiah. There must be somethin' the mattah with your uppah stowies. I—"

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"It is not with us that the matter is—I mean, that are suffering," observed Jack Blake. "What shall we do, chaps? Shall we lock him up in the dorm, or shall we warn him of his terrible fault? What shall we do?"

Tom Merry shook his head in great perplexity.

"Better tell him and get it over," he said at last. "I'll sit on his head if he gets violent."

"Silence, Gussy!" said Jack Blake severely. "What do you others think? Shall we risk telling him?"

With varying degrees of emotion, the juniors gave their consent.

"Shall I tell him, or will you, Tom Merry?" asked Jack Blake.

"Oh, you tell him," muttered Tom Merry; "he knows you better, I believe he used to feed out of your hand, so—"

"This is not a joking matter," interrupted Jack Blake. "I'm surprised at your lack of good feeling, Tom Merry. Now!"

The leader of Study No. 6 drew himself up and took a deep breath.

Arthur Augustus watched him intently.

"Arthur!" said Jack Blake solemnly. "Arthur!"

The swell of St. Jim's adjusted his eyeglass.

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked off a minute of profound silence.

"Arthur," repeated Jack Blake, "put your tie straight!"

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy's Brilliant Idea!

"WOTTAH!"

With a shriek of rage, Arthur Augustus flung himself at the howling juniors.

"Wottahs! I am woused. I will thrash ewery one of you I—"

In the space of six seconds, the swell of St. Jim's put in some good work. Too shaken with laughter to defend themselves, the juniors scattered in various directions, and presently Arthur Augustus found himself occupying a position of some eminence on the back of Manners, and he enlivened the proceedings by trying to make a hole in the carpet by a vigorous application of the Fourth-Former's nose.

"Wow!" howled Manners. "Pull him off, somebody."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared with unfeeling laughter, and Arthur Augustus continued his performance with painful energy.

"Gerroff!" spluttered Manners, pounding with his feet on the floor. "Gerroff! You shrieking maniac! Yow, yow! Wow!"

With a final dab of Manners' unfortunate nose, Arthur Augustus rose to his feet and brushed the dust from his clothes.

Jack Blake edged behind the table.

"Er—have you quite satisfied your taste for slaughter?" he inquired meekly. "Because if—"

"I am going to aministah a feahful thrashing all wound!" declared D'Arcy. "I shall now pwoceed to chastise Tom Merry!"

"Hold on a minute!" cried Tom Merry. "I object. As one gentleman to another, I object; besides, that carpet cost us one pound seventeen and sixpence, and we can't afford to have you taking the pattern off."

"Personally," observed Jack Blake, "I consider you've had quite enough vengeance, Gussy. If I were you, I should consider it rather mean to try and slay the lot of us. What d'you say about it, Manners?"

Manners stopped, tenderly feeling his damaged nose, and grunted.

"Blessed maniac! I'll go up and squash every topper you've got, D'Arcy! The very idea of a gentleman behaving as you did!"

The swell of St. Jim's first looked alarmed, and then, as the imputation of his being ungentlemanly dawned upon him, he got indignant.

"You see, Mannahs," he said, in frigid tones, "I wegard you as a boundah, and, therefoah—"

"Oh, I say, Gussy, that's a bit under your usual style, isn't it?" cried Jack Blake.

Arthur Augustus turned rather red.

"Bai Jove! Mannahs, that's not exactly what I wequiahed to say. I beg you to weconsidah my pwahse. Undah the circs., I withdraw the oppwobious wemark."

"All right, old son!" said Manners, with a grin. "Withdraw as much as you like, but don't use my nose to wipe the floor with, or I shall be under the painful necessity of—well, never mind that now. I say, what did you come in for?"

"Yes, that's what I want to know!" declared Jack Blake. "So say all of us," added Tom Merry. "Coming in in the middle of tea and creating a disturbance."

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"We shall have to hold Blake responsible in the future," said Monty Lowther.

"Upsetting our scuttle and coals, so dear!" muttered Manners. "Still, we'll forgive him for that if he'll only make a clean breast of it."

"A clean bweast of what, deah boy?"

Jack Blake thoughtfully helped himself to jam and biscuits, while the cross-examination went on.

"You were full of it when you first came in," said Tom Merry, carelessly removing the jam-pot to the other side of the table.

"Yaas, bai Jove!"

The swell of St. Jim's stopped abruptly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What was it?" shouted Tom Merry.

"A mattah of bis," said Arthur Augustus slowly, and with an air of portentous gravity.

"What bis?" cried Jack Blake. "What the dickens have you been doing now? Been getting into some trouble, I bet."

"I object to your method of addressing me," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I desiah to address Tom Mewwy."

"Right-ho! Fire ahead, then!" cried the latter. "We're all ears! Out with it!"

"Speak for yourself, Tom Merry!" cried Jack Blake.

"For goodness sake, stop it, Blake! Let's hear what terrible secret Gussy has to divulge."

"I have been distwibuting the 'Weekly,'" announced Arthur Augustus.

"Distributing the 'Weekly'?" cried Tom Merry. "What d'you mean?"

"Gettin' new weadahs, deah boy."

"Oh!"

The juniors regarded the swell of St. Jim's with interest.

"New readers, eh?" murmured Tom Merry. "Well, that's not a bad idea at all, Gussy, though I'm blessed if I can see where you got 'em from."

The swell of St. Jim's smiled enigmatically.

"There's not a kid in the Fourth that is not already down on the list," observed Jack Blake.

"Perhaps he's been persuading Taggles to become a subscriber," suggested Herries.

Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"Or the Grammar cads?"

"Or the Head?"

"Wubbish!"

"Who then?" shouted Tom Merry.

"I approached—"

"Yes!" exclaimed the juniors in chorus—"yes!"

"I approached the Sixth Formahs."

"What!" shrieked Jack Blake. "You went to Kildare and the others?"

"Precisely!"

The six gasped.

"Of all the nerve."

"My eye!"

"Blessed cheek!"

"Fool's step in, etcetera!" murmured Digby.

"I wefuse to be designated as a fool!" cried D'Arcy indignantly. "I considah my ideah most bwiliant!"

"Quite dazzling, in fact," said Jack Blake, with a grin.

"You always were a prize—"

"Half a tick, Blake," interrupted Tom Merry. "How did you get on, Gussy. Get any subscribers? What did Kildare say?"

"Well, bai Jove, you see—"

"What did Kildare say?" repeated Tom Merry.

"Ask him what he did rather!" cried Jack Blake.

This chance shot seemed to disconcert Arthur Augustus, and he fumbled with his watch chain.

The juniors eyed him in silence.

"Well?" said Tom Merry, at last. "Well?"

"Get on with it!" cried Jack Blake. "What did Kildare say or do?"

"He was most wuff!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly. "I placed the mattah befoah him as one gentleman to anothah, and—"

"He was wuff, was he!" shouted Jack Blake. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!"

The juniors shrieked with laughter.

"What—what did he do?" inquired Tom Merry, at last.

The swell of St. Jim's preserved a dignified silence.

"Did he fall on your neck and weep tears of thankfulness?" said Jack Blake, "or did he— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Such wibaldy is wiculous!" cried the swell of St. Jim's.

"I am as surprised at you fellahs, as I wegwet the wuffness of Kildare and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall wetiah!"

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"No you won't!" shouted Tom Merry. "You don't leave this study until we get to the bottom of the matter."

"No fear!" cried Jack Blake.

"I will explain, but I wefuse to be tweated in this outrageous mannah!"

"All right, then, Gus!" cried Manners. "We'll be as serious as stuffed owls. What did Kildare do?"

This question nearly brought about a fresh outburst of laughter; but the juniors managed to restrain their mirth.

"I weceived an inspiwation," said the swell of St. Jim's.

"A what?" interrupted Manners.

"An inspiwation!" repeated D'Arcy severely. "I was woused last night, and the bwiliant ideah of waising the circ of the 'Weekly' came into my head, and this aftahnoon I pwoceeded to cawwy out my pwogwamme."

Jack Blake went purple, and Tom Merry bit his lip hard. The others blew their noses vigorously. Herries developed a bad attack of the hiccoughs.

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "And then what happened?"

"I went to Kildare's study and——"

"Hic, hic!"

The swell of St. Jim's looked at Herries indignantly.

"I wish you would not make that wude noise, Hewwies."

"Sorry, Gus, hic, hic! I, oh, hang, how can a fellow—hic, hic!—help—help it! Hic, hic, hic! you're enough to make a—hic!—laugh—a ca-cat laugh! Hic!"

"I fail to appwehend the meaning of youah wemark, Herries. I wefuse to be compahed to a widious animal. I wewquest you to westwain your wudeness."

"Hic, hic!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's preserved an air of suffering dignity, and at last the juniors got control of themselves, and Herries stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth.

"Awfully sorry, Gus," said Tom Merry, knowing full well that Arthur Augustus would remain obdurate without an apology. "We were laughing at Herries. He's so funny, you know."

Herries glared, but a warning glance from Jack Blake kept him from protesting.

"I accept youah expressions of wegwet, Mewwyy."

"Good! What did——"

"I am coming to that," said D'Arcy. "I awwived at Kildare's woom and wewquested him to wead my contwibution on how to dwess pwopahly and——"

Jack Blake doubled up suddenly.

Arthur Augustus eyed him intently.

"It's—it's nothing, Gussy," said Tom Merry, with a curious catch in his voice. "I expect Blake's got a pain. He—he—he'll get over it presently. Don't take any no-notice of him. We—we—we—we're frightfully interested."

"Ra—rather!" jerked out Lowther and Manners.

"Jolly plucky of you," said Digby.

The swell of St. Jim's beamed, and Tom Merry gave the member of Study No. 6 a look of gratitude. Digby's happy remark had saved the situation.

"I woused his attention," went on the swell of St. Jim's, "and wewquested him aftah weading my contwibution to subscribe to the 'Weekly' for three months. Then, for some weason or anothah, he got watty, and was awfully wude. I shall wite a slashin' column about it. I was gwreatly surprised. I wewcollect that he wose fwom his seat and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"And you went out on your neck, you image!" roared Jack Blake. "You—you shrieking ass! Ho, ho, ho!"

"I did nothin' of the kind!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's. "I wetiathed with dig. to the doah. Undah the circs., I considahed it would be unwise to wile Kildare by we-mainin' any longah. I believe somethin' must have made him wathah angwy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And that ended your endeavours to rope in subscribers?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"No, deah boy!" replied the swell of St. Jim's, with a triumphant air. "After I wetiathed fwom Kildare, I pwoceeded to the othah fellahs' studays, and placed a copy of the 'Weekly' undah their doahs. They will wead them, and——"

"You, you!" Tom Merry gasped. "Look here," he went on, "the next time you get a beastly inspiration you choke, or boil it, or anything you like. Why, we shall be invaded by the Sixth-Formers after this. Now, you chaps, you'd better clear, and give us a chance to polish off our work."

"Right-ho!" said Jack Black cheerfully. "Come along, my children. The Ed. says go, and we went. Besides, I want my tea. So long!"

The members of Study No. 6 trooped out, and the Terribl Three started to clear up.

CHAPTER 4.

A Visit from the Sixth

"THAT'S better!"

The last piece of crockery was placed in the cupboard, and for some little time after the departure of Jack Blake & Co. there was silence in the study, except for the scratching of three pens racing over paper.

Presently a heavy step sounded in the passage, and a bang came at the door.

Tom Merry looked at his chums with an I-told-you-so look.

"Come in!" he shouted.

Almost before the words were out of his mouth, the door flew open.

Adams, of the Sixth, glared at the three.

"Who placed this wretched thing—this—this rag in my room?" he roared.

"May I see it, please?" replied Tom Merry politely.

Adams flung the paper down on the table.

"What d'you mean by it?" he demanded.

"Mean! What?"

"What d'you mean by sending or leaving that wretched rag?"

Tom Merry leaned back in his chair, and smiled.

Adams frowned.

"Don't sit there grinning at me!" he shouted.

The chief of the Terrible Three promptly looked serious. The Sixth-Former seemed to get angrier.

"How dare you?" he spluttered.

"Dare what?" asked Tom Merry meekly.

"You know what I mean."

"Scarcely. I am not a thought-reader, Adams. Shall I send for Clifton Dane? Perhaps he'll throw you into a trance or something. It must be bad to get so wild. Have you come to subscribe?"

"Don't you cheek me!"

"No, Adams; certainly not. D'you mind shutting the door after you?"

"You cheeky little brat!" shouted Adams. "I'll wring your wretched little neck. I'll—— The very idea of leaving that rag in my room! I suppose you think I might present you with a donation?"

"Your mistake, Adams," replied Tom Merry. "Receive our thanks for so kindly returning the 'Weekly.' I suppose you've read it?"

Manners and Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Read it!" roared the Sixth-Former. "Read it! What, read that namby-pamby little rag! Not much! Why, it's as stale as dish-water, and about as interesting as a cookery-book! Why——"

"You seem to know a good deal!" interrupted the editor.

"Shut up!" shouted Adams rudely. "Why, that rag of yours is not a patch on the Grammar School mag. Why, if I ever reached a stage of imbecility, I'd rather have their mag. any day. Look at it!"

The juniors affected not to see the paper the senior took from his pocket and banged down on top of their own "Weekly."

"Shall we frogmarch the bounder?" muttered Manners.

Monty Lowther nodded his head energetically, and the pair turned to their editor and leader. They gasped.

Tom Merry was sitting back in his chair, smiling, and as he caught sight of his chums' astounded expressions, he burst into a ringing laugh.

Adams, of the Sixth, made a stride forward, thought better of it when Tom Merry suddenly stopped laughing and the three sturdy youngsters half rose in attitudes suggestive of warfare. Then Adams retreated.

Adams was a burly sort of chap, but he knew the Terrible Three of old, so with a still redder face and a snort of anger, he vanished, emphasising his anger and annoyance by a loud slam of the door.

Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners sat down in silence. A silence placid enough on the part of the editor, but fraught with suppressed indignation by Monty Lowther and Manners. Tom Merry picked up the Grammarians' paper, and examined it carefully. A curious expression stole over his face. Unnoticed, he put the paper in his pocket.

"Pah!" muttered Manners. "This is the result of Gussy's beastly inspiration."

"Pish!" added Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry's hearty laugh rang out again, and he looked at his chums with a look of mystery and mischief in his eyes.

"Toothache, or—or a pain in your little too, Monty?"

"Neither!" grunted the junior.

"That's funny. Thought there must be something or

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other the matter; and you, Manners, you're suffering, too. Do you feel very bad?"

"Yes, I do!" snapped Manners.

Tom Merry leaned over the little table, and peered at Manners with an air of anxious inquiry.

"It must be the ink," he observed. "Yes, that's what it is. You've been sucking your nib during the last half-hour. Better swallow a piece of blotting-paper, that will

"Swallow my hat!" growled Manners. "You——"

"Oh, very well!" interrupted the editor. "Just as you like, only I should start on one of Gussy's old toppers first if I were you. He's got a regular stock."

"Here, chuck it!" interposed Monty Lowther. "We've had quite enough of your funny little ways. Suppose you ring off for a bit. What the dickens did you mean by letting that mouldy Adams slang the paper like that for? Fine editor you are to let a chap talk to you like that. Why, for two pins I'd——"

The junior paused, and gulped.

"What?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Oh, well, you know! I'd have given him what for!" declared Lowther, with delightful vagueness.

"What for?" commented Tom Merry, with irritating calmness. "Yes, and a very good idea. I do wish I had thought of it at the time. By the way, how d'you do it?"

The light of battle gleamed in Monty Lowther's eyes.

"You on, Manners?" he inquired.

"Right!"

Tom Merry got up rather hastily, and grabbed his fountain pen filler. He took careful aim at Manners's left eyebrow.

"Is it pax?" he demanded sweetly.

"Don't be an ass!" shouted Manners, edging behind Lowther. "Put that beastly thing down."

"Is it pax?"

"Ow!"

A tiny spurt of ink shot past Monty Lowther's ear, and he gave a howl of alarm.

"Yes, yes! Pax it is!"

Under the conditions there was no knowing when hostilities might break forth again, so with deliberate care Tom Merry laid the filler down within reach of his hand, and resumed his seat at the editorial table.

"Better get on now," he said. "We've got to get this stuff to the printers to-night, or we sha'n't have the 'Weekly' printed in time."

"Anyhow," said Lowther, "we can do without old Adams, and we don't care a fig for the Grammar School mag."

"Hear, hear!" cried Manners. "And so say all of us!"

"No, we don't, old son," said Tom Merry. "We don't say anything of the kind. This is a serious matter."

"Myes," said Monty Lowther. "So I should think judging by your face and the language you've been slinging at us. I should say there's more in this than meets the eye!"

"Jolly serious!" said Manners. "Anybody would think the old 'Weekly' was going broke, and all the rest of it! There's one thing, poor old Tom will have to stand the racket, and he won't be merry any more. My—— Ha, ha, ha!"

A sad expression came over Tom Merry's face, and for the first time during the last quarter of an hour he was in sympathy with at least one of the Co. He and Monty Lowther groaned in unison, and Tom Merry fingered the filler.

"You do!" howled Manners, leaping to his feet. "You leave that thing alone; besides, it was not what you would call a rotten pun. Jolly good, I call it. Now tell us why you sat there like a dummy and let that silly Sixth-Former rag you."

The leader of Study No. 10 laid down his weapon of offence, and ran his inky fingers through his curly hair.

"Because——" Tom Merry paused, and eyed his chums quizzically.

"Get on with it!" exclaimed Manners.

Monty Lowther stifled a yawn.

"Because," went on the editor slowly, "part of what he said was true!"

"What!"

"What!"

The two juniors stared at Tom Merry in open-mouthed amazement.

"True!" muttered Monty Lowther.

"Off your rocker?" inquired Manners politely.

"What's true?" demanded Lowther.

"Nearly all of it."

"What? That it's namby-pamby? Rot!"

"Rubbish!" cried Manners indignantly.

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"I said that part of what he said was true," cried Tom Merry, with what was meant to be a severely judicial air.

"Then it's not namby-pamby. You admit that!" shouted Monty Lowther, waxing sarcastic.

"Yes; I didn't agree with that, but——"

"Well, that's something for the editor to admit, anyhow," interrupted Manners, with a good imitation of Monty Lowther's tone of voice. "That's exceedingly kind of you, Tom Merry. That eases our mind a lot. What about calling it a little rag?"

"Well, that's merely a colloquial term," explained Tom Merry, in a patient voice. "I don't mind that. Of course, one might take exception to the way in which it was said, but the mere words—well——"

"Oh-h, botheration!" ejaculated Manners. "You're off your chump, or rotting, or suffering from nervous breakdown. Not subject to insomnia, are you?"

"No; but I know someone that'll be suffering from a fat, thick ear!" retorted Tom Merry.

"What about stale as dishwater and the cookery-book part?" howled Lowther. "Is that true?"

"Yes!"

Tom Merry's simple, little, one word answer descended on the two chums like a wet blanket. There was no mistaking that ring of truth in his voice, and they both felt that he meant what he said.

"And not a patch on the Grammar cads' mag.," muttered Manners. "Surely you're not going to admit that!"

"I am, and so will you," said Tom Merry sharply.

"Look here!"

Tom Merry pulled out of his pocket the copy of the Grammar School's production, and laid it on the table, and three heads bent over it together.

In the surprise of the moment, Monty Lowther and Manners forgot their righteous indignation.

"Why, they've got a new design on the cover!" cried Manners.

"They have!" said Tom Merry drily.

"And illustrated!" howled Monty Lowther, as he turned the pages of their rivals' paper.

"My aunt!" said Manners softly.

Monty Lowther gave something like a groan as further investigation revealed a new serial story, a column on football, and an article on boxing.

"My word!" muttered the junior, gazing at Tom Merry with a look of despair. "They've done us in the eye this time. Fancy!"

"Wish it was!" growled Manners, flinging himself into the armchair. "What the dickens are we to do?"

The two stared fixedly at Tom Merry.

"You're the editor, you know," said Manners pointedly, after a long silence.

Monty Lowther gave a sigh of relief. It was not often that he felt himself incapable of tackling a difficult proposition, but in the present circumstances he could not help but feel a sense of irresponsibility when he reflected that Tom Merry and Tom Merry alone was—— But here the junior's selfish little thought came to an end.

"Well, we're all in this," he said aloud. "We'll share the bad as well as the good. It's jolly rough on you, Tom Merry. The kids are sure to blame you."

"Jolly rough!" echoed Manners.

The editor of the "Weekly" smiled gratefully.

"That's all right, you chaps; we'll get through this somehow. We've had a smack in the eye, so I must stand the racket and the chipping. I ought to have kept a sharper eye on the old rag. We'll put our back into it."

"We will!" said Manners and Lowther fervently.

"Right!" said Tom Merry simply. "Now we'll get to work at once, and polish off this number. Once this is off our hands we'll have a confab."

"Better call in the others—eh?" inquired Manners.

"Yes, of course. When we're finished, I expect there'll be a rumpus. So we'll get it over quick," replied Tom Merry, with a laugh. "Still," he went on, "I believe we shall have to get that special number on the go now."

CHAPTER 5

Thirteen in Council.

"THAT'S done!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as he crammed the last sheet of "copy" for the "Weekly" in the envelope for the Rycombe printer. "We've done our best, but it's got to be better next week. What's the time? Can we get the others here now?"

"Just an hour," said Manners, looking at his watch.

"Quite long enough," rejoined Tom Merry. "Let's see, how many are there?"

"Well, there's Blake and his crowd, Digby, Herries, and

D'Arcy," said Monty Lowther, ticking them off on his fingers. "Don't believe I shall have enough fingers. That's four."

"You'll have to take your boots off," said Tom Merry.

Lowther stared in mystification.

"Take what!" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right, you needn't trouble," cried Tom Merry.

"You can borrow one of Manners' paws to do your counting on—that is, if you can tell one finger from another through the ink."

Monty Lowther sniffed, and Manners snorted indignantly.

"Think that's funny, I s'pose?" grunted the former.

"Not at all, old chap; wouldn't do you out of your job," retorted Tom Merry, all his good-humour returned after the shock of the Grammar School's achievement. "You're the only funny merchant."

Lowther glared, and sought vainly for some fitting retort, but nothing would come into his mind. So he resumed his list.

"Blake & Co., four, the New House bounders, Figgy, Fatty, and Kerr, seven. Kangaroo, Glyn, and Dane, ten. Any more?"

"We, us!" exclaimed Manners.

"That's thirteen."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "You two take the Blake and New House crowds, and I'll rake out the oddments. I dare say they're anywhere but in their own study."

The Terrible Three made up the fire, straightened the cosy little study after their editorial labours, and departed to summon the meeting.

The thirteen juniors practically made up the staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly." Although Skimpole, the amateur Socialist, availed himself pretty regularly of the pages that were open to outside contributors, he was not counted as one of the assistant editors.

Herbert Skimpole was regarded as the brainy man, and his forte lay in anything that finished with an "ism," but his ponderous intellect did not commend itself to the juniors of St. Jim's, and, privately, most of his industrious manuscripts were greeted with the remark, "Oh, it's only some more of Skimmy's rot!"

Tom Merry's thoughts were far from Skimpole and his learned disquisitions as he swung down the corridor, but the amateur Socialist intruded his person rather abruptly as Tom Merry turned the corner.

A big volume caught the chief of the Terrible Three under the chin, and fell to the ground with a thump, then the bony, bumpy forehead of Skimpole completed the disaster by catching Tom Merry in the chest.

"Wow!"

"Dear me!"

"I'm exceedingly sorry!"

"You shrieking worm!" shouted Tom Merry, feeling his chin. "What the dickens d'you mean by prowling along like that for? You ought to have a bell slung round your neck. Couldn't you wait till you got to your study before poking your nose into that book?"

The amateur Socialist was groping on the floor for his spectacles, and by the time he had recovered the perpendicular, the junior had gone. Skimpole blinked reflectively, and then, as if nothing out of the way had happened, picked up his book, and with a muttered "How careless of Tom Merry!" proceeded on to his study with the book held close to his nose.

It was some time before he discovered that the glass had disappeared from one side of his spectacles, and then he only realised it when he got a black in his eye.

Tom Merry found the three in their study, busily engaged. The snow had turned to sleet, or the Kangaroo and Dane would have been anywhere but indoors.

Glyn was tinkering about with some electrical apparatus. Dane was reading, and Noble, the Australian boy, was carefully oiling one of his cricket-bats.

They all looked up when Tom Merry appeared.

"Oh, you're all here!" he exclaimed.

"Looks like it," observed Kangaroo. "Are you?"

"Yes, thank you," replied the chief of the Terrible Three. "I'm all here, as you put it, and if you want to know anything more, ask me."

"No, we don't want any to-day, thank you," chimed in Clifton Dane. "You might shut the door as you go out. Thank you!"

"Yes, do," said Glyn, with a grin.

"That will be very kind of you," observed Harry Noble.

"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry, "I came—"

"So we noticed," interrupted Dane. "Yes, this is very interesting."

"He came, he saw, he conquered," quoted Glyn.

"What happened after that?"

"You'll see in a minute," said Tom Merry darkly.

"Shut up, and listen! I want you chaps to come to our study for—"

"Tea!" howled Glyn. "Oh, this is so sudden!"

The amateur inventor sprang forward and grasped Tom Merry's hand.

"Why didn't you say so before?" protested Clifton Dane, jumping up and grabbing the astounded junior's left.

"Give us your flipper, old son. It's awfully good of you!"

"You howling maniacs!" cried Tom Merry, wrenching his hands free. "It's not tea. It's—"

"Not tea!" shouted Noble. "I call that a fraud!"

"Why, he's here on false pretences!" cried Glyn. "Out upon ye, Thomas Merry, for a sorry knave; me dagger trembles in its sheath! We will—"

"It's about the 'Weekly,'" shouted Tom Merry.

"The 'Weekly!'"

"Yes; we're going to have a meeting."

"What for?"

"You'll see!"

"Serious?"

"Rather! Jolly serious! We've had a biff in the eye."

"Who's 'we'?" demanded Harry Noble. "If anybody's biffed it's you. You're the editor. I suppose you've been to sleep, and Fatty or Figgy's started a rival rag. Is that it?"

Tom Merry sniffed contemptuously.

"Fatty, indeed! I wish it was. I'm not going to waste any more time; if you chaps want to know more you'll have to look sharp. I'm off!"

Tom Merry sprinted down the passage, and the others clattered after him. They reached the sanctum all in a bunch, and the door burst open.

Blake and Figgins & Co. were already there, and the late-comers had a job to squeeze through.

Fatty Wynn groaned as he was wedged between the bookcase and the wall, and an ominous creak was heard above the chatter and insistent inquiries of the assembly.

"Hang on a minute!" howled Manners, careful for the study furniture. "Lug that fat worm out of the corner, or he'll bust the side of our bookcase in."

Purple and hot, Fatty was hauled out, and he sank into the armchair.

"Ow! Wow! Gerroof my—my ch-chest!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Digby, unfortunately for him, had appropriated the chair first, and he squirmed helplessly beneath the Falstaff of St. Jim's weight.

Fatty Wynn made no attempt to get up.

"Where's the feed?" he inquired anxiously. "This cold weather always makes me feel hun— Wow, wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty bounded from his seat, and tenderly rubbed his leg.

"You—you stuck a pin in me!" he shouted.

"Did I?" inquired Digby innocently. "Fancy! Shouldn't have thought you'd take any notice of a thing like that. It's only a little one."

Fatty Wynn's Welsh blood began to rise, and he made a step forward.

A long arm shot out, and, despite his avoidupois, Figgins hauled him back.

"Shut up, Fatty, or—or we'll eat all the sausages!"

This dire threat had its effect, and the Welsh partner choked back his wrath, and leaned heavily against the wall.

The mention of sausages brought a look of expectancy to the faces of all but the Terrible Three.

"It's not a bit of good you chaps expecting a feed," shouted Tom Merry; "cos tea will be remarkable by its absence. We're here on business. Besides, we've had ours."

"Boo!"

"Chuck him out!"

"Let's rag them!"

"It's a fraud!"

"Boo-oh!"

Ten hungry juniors made a ring round the Terrible Three, and twenty arms were brandished in the air. The study window began to rattle with the cries of disappointed, hungry Fourth-Formers.

Tom Merry made a bold bid for silence, if not for peace. He struggled free of the horde of yelling juniors, and springing on to a chair, waved the copy of the Grammarians' magazine in the air.

Already the paper had indirectly caused much disturbance in this same study, but now its sudden appearance produced the reverse effect, and one could have heard a mouse sneeze in the instant quietude that followed.

"Order!" cried Manners rather unnecessarily.

"Shut up!" retorted Herries.

"Order! Speech!" cried Jack Blake. "Buck up, Tom Merry! You're on the chair; get it over, quick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Jack Blake's admonition had been followed by the unexpected, and after a frantic struggle to retain his equilibrium, Tom Merry crashed to the ground, chair and all.

Pandemonium broke loose again, and the actual cause of the editor's downfall remained uninquied into.

Jack Blake secured the copy of the rival paper, and it did not take him long to discover the real cause for the meeting.

"Just look here!" he shouted, thrusting the book close to the aristocratic nose of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Look at it, image, and weep! And you talk about your blessed inspiration!"

The swell of St. Jim's edged off with a fastidious wave of his hand.

"I wefuse Blake—I uttably wefuse to look or to weep! Wemove that wag!"

Arthur Augustus retired to the edge of the circle of excited juniors.

Tom Merry told the tale of Adams' visit.

"So, after all," he concluded, "Gussy's inspiration did some good. If he hadn't riled old Adams, we shouldn't have found out his little game for goodness knows how long."

Jack Blake waved the paper over his head.

"Look at it!" he roared. "Just look at it!"

Every hand was outstretched to seize the paper, but Tom Merry got there first.

"Silly asses!" he shouted. "Don't tear the beastly thing to bits; that won't do any good! As chairman of the meeting and editor of the St. Jim's mag., I call for silence."

"You're a jolly fine editor, you are," sniffed Digby.

"Fancy letting the Grammar cads steal a march on us like that!" shouted Jack Blake. "I shall have to take over the editorship myself."

"You take, indeed!" retorted Manners, up in arms at once. "It would take five—a dozen like you! And if you did, you'd make a beastly mess of things. I suppose you'd fill the paper with your antiquated old serial, and make everybody ill!"

Jack Blake turned very red. Reference to his pet serial, especially of the derogatory order, touched him on a very tender spot. "Sir Fathead and his Fayre Ladye," was his one weakness, and he looked inclined to relinquish words for action.

Manners glared defiance.

The others grinned.

This little passage at arms served a useful purpose; things quieted down, and Tom Merry seized the opportunity in a flash, but he did not stand on the chair again.

The attention of the juniors was diverted from Manners and Jack Blake, and hostilities were off.

Tom Merry tapped the cover of the offending rival paper, and glanced round. There was a good deal of the perceptive faculty beneath his curly nob, and as he scanned the now intent faces he decided on a bold and decisive move. He fixed his eyes on Clifton Dane. There seemed to be more understanding in the now flashing, now sombre eyes of the Anglo-Indian. Some understanding of the real disappointment and hurt that Tom Merry hid under an air of light unconcern.

"Chaps," said the editor, "before going any further into this biff in the eye—this score of the Grammarians—I want to put it to the vote whether I retain the position of editor, or whether you wish me to resign."

The juniors were flabbergasted for a second, but only for a second. The next instant a howl rent the air.

"Rats!"

"Rats!"

"Rubbish!"

"Don't be an ass!"

"Shut up!"

"Show hands for Tom Merry!" yelled Jack Blake. "Show hands, and the bouncer who doesn't will have to come round to the gym. with me!"

A forest of hands went up.

Tom Merry flushed and bit his lip. Very little of the bitterness of life had come his way, but all the same he felt a queer sensation in his throat as he looked from one to another, and knew that every hand upheld meant a friend—a trusting friend.

"Thanks!" he muttered.

There was an awkward pause.

"We'll all be editors!" cried Jack Blake, quick to relieve the tension. "No beastly sub-editors for us. We'll all put our backs into it, under Tom Merry—the editor-in-chief!"

"Hooray!"

"Hip-pip, hooray!"

"We'll lick the Grammar cads!"

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THERE IS A £48 MOTOR-CYCLE TO BE GIVEN AWAY IN "PLUCK."

"Time's short!" cried Clifton Dane. "I move for order for the editor-in-chief."

"Right! We'll get to bis," cried Jack Blake.

"What's the first move?" inquired Herries. "I wish you'd buck up; I want to go and feed Towser!"

"I considah," exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, "that the first part of the pwogwamme should be a whip wound. We must uphold the dig. of the old coll., and wout those wotten Gwammah boundahs. I have gwreat pleasuah in handin' Tom Mewwy my contribution, as a mark of my esteem an' confidence, and towards pwovidin' the—the sinews of walfare."

Arthur Augustus placed a gold coin in Tom Merry's hand and retired.

"Bravo, Gussy!" shouted Jack Blake. "You're a brick, and a credit to Study No. 6! Come on, you chaps. Look out! We can't all afford to splash like old Gus, but I dessay I can manage fourpence."

Jack Blake planted down all his available cash, which amounted to eight-and-sevenpence. It was for a good cause, and he did not give a thought to the football he had intended to buy.

One by one, the others added their share, and if the amounts varied in hard cash, the good feeling did not; it was the same all round. Each gave all he had. Even Fatty Wynn parted up, and, let it be remembered, did not even think of his tea and sausages.

"All in?" cried Tom Merry.

"Yes!"

"Good! Let's count up our wealth!"

The chief of the Terrible Three scooped up the collection of coins and started to separate them.

"Gussy's quid," he announced, laying a sovereign down. "Hallo! Here's another bit of gold. Whose half-a-sovereign's this?"

The juniors looked at one another.

"Another giddy millionaire!" cried Jack Blake. "Why, it's raining 'em!"

"He's jolly shy, whoever he is," said Tom Merry. "Well, I suppose it's no business of ours who came down so handsomely. Although, I dare say, I could make a guess."

Tom Merry shot a quick glance at Clifton Dane, but no one observed the slight change in that worthy's expression.

The chief of the Terrible Three grinned as he resumed his count. There was quite a respectable pile of silver.

"One ten in gold, eighty-nine shillings silver, and twelve-and-fourpence-halfpenny in coppers. How much is that?"

"Six pounds, eleven-and-fourpence-halfpenny!" exclaimed Herries.

"Good!" exclaimed Tom Merry, putting the money in a drawer and locking it. "Good! With six pounds eleven-and-fourpence-halfpenny we ought to be able to do something."

"Rather!"

"Why, we could buy up the 'Rylcombe News.'"

"Or start a comic paper."

"Or build a Dreadnought."

"Who wants to build or buy anything?" demanded Tom Merry. "Chuck fooling, and come to bis. Now then!"

"Bai Jove! I've a bwiliant inspiwation, deah boy!"

Tom Merry looked at the swell of St. Jim's rather doubtfully.

"A bwiliant ideah!" repeated D'Arcy, extending his arm and catching Figgins in the eye. "Sowwy!"

"Sorry, indeed!"

"I expwess wegwet, Figgay!"

"All right, then," replied the long-legged member of the New House. "Only mind you don't do it again."

"Trot out that wheeze, Gussy!" cried Blake. "Come on!"

"I wefuse to be huwried and hawessed. I—"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, spare us!" groaned Jack Blake.

"Cut it short, Gussy, there's a good chap; we're dying to hear your suggestion."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pondered for a moment.

"Lum tum diddle de day!" Tom Merry hummed, and drummed his fingers impatiently on the table. "Lum tum—"

"Undah the cires, deah boys, and considewin' mannah in which those wotten boundahs have taken a out of us, we must wally togethah and, wegwardless of own pleasuah, we must wout them."

"In other words," commented Jack Blake, "we must them one in the eye."

"Pway do not intewwupt, Blake. I depwecate the use of personal violence, and we must westwain that de' h. This is a mattah of bwain powah!"

"That counts you out, then, Gussy," said Digby, in serious tone.

The swell of St. Jim's swung round on his heel and surveyed his chum in astonishment.

"Did I heah awight, Digby?" he said, in freezing tones.

"Do you wefah to me?"



The leader of Study No. 6 drew himself up and took a deep breath. "Arthur," he said solemnly, "put your tie straight."

Before Digby could reply, Jack Blake thrust his way in front of Arthur Augustus. "Don't take any notice, Gussy. We can't afford to have any personalities now. Let's have your idea!"

"I ppropose——"

There was a stir of anticipation. Arthur Augustus placed his monocle in his eye, and glanced round.

"I ppropose a colouahed covah!"

"Good idea!"

"Ripping!"

"Jolly good, Gussy!"

"What d'you think about it, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, it's all right," replied Tom Merry. "Bit expensive, I expect."

"I will w'ite to my gov'nah," declared the swell of St. Jim's. "I am suah he will send me a fivah in ordah to take a wise out of the Gwammawians."

"Umph! Dunno about that, Gus!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Anyhow, we can think it over. Now what about the stuff inside? It's no good going in for a swagger cover if we're not going to do anything inside. Let's settle that question first. How about pictures? It would be fine to have a proper illustrated number."

CHAPTER 6.

The Discussion.

"ILLUSTRATED!" cried Jack Blake.

"My eye!"

"Talks like a giddy billionaire!"

"Better give away something," suggested Jack Blake. "All the up-to-date papers give something or other to their readers."

"Yes, that's not a bad idea of yours, Jack Blake!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We'll have a competition, and the winner can have your bike!"

"Oh, he can, can he?" retorted Blake. "Oh, yes, certainly! Anything else you'd like in a small way?"

"And the second prize-winner could have Lowther's new camera," went on the editor serenely.

Monty Lowther gave a howl.

"Not if I know it!" he shouted. "You give your own things away, Tom Merry. I'm off competitions."

"It's all for the good of the cause," said Tom Merry, with a twinkle in his eye. "Besides, how can I give away what I haven't got? My bike's old and decrepit, and cameras I have none."

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"KING OF THE CASTLE"

IN NEXT THURSDAY'S

"GEM" LIBRARY.

"No; and you're not going to have none, neither!" retorted the amateur photographer hotly. "You can have my old footer boots if you like!"

"None neither!" ejaculated Manners. "That's a little bit out of the common. Better make a note of that, Blake, for your serial. I like the flavour. Sounds high."

The author of the famous serial favoured Manners with a look of disdain.

"I'm not in the habit," he said stiffly, "of making use of common schoolboy slang. I prefer to use words that people can understand."

"Tut, tut!" muttered Manners. "It pleaseth my lord to raise his voice in scorn and anger. Begone, base varlet, lest thy head pay the price of thy impertinence!"

The leader of Study 6 glared at Manners, and the latter put on an air of woebegone humility.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"That reminds me, Blake," he said. "What are you going to do about that story of yours? Lemme see, it's been running now for—"

"Forty years," suggested Figgins mildly.

"No, it hasn't!" declared Jack Blake, without thinking.

At this remark there was a general laugh, and the author endeavoured to cover his tracks.

"What I mean to say is that it hasn't been running so very long; besides, look at the mouldy little bit you've been putting in since D'Arcy started his rotten old column on the art of dressing like a silly ass. I'm sure no one wants to read that rubbish; they'd much rather have another whack of my story."

"Yes, I quite agree with you," said Tom Merry, in a slow voice. "Come to think of it, it is a mouldy little bit."

One or two of the juniors chuckled at this, and Jack Blake eyed Tom Merry suspiciously.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"Mean?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Yes; do you think you're funny?"

"Not at all, Blake. We're talking about your story."

"Oh," ejaculated Blake, "that's it, is it? Well, I wasn't aware that my story was intended to be funny."

"It isn't!" cried Manners gleefully. "It's a jolly serious matter, and I don't see how anyone can laugh at a thing like that. Tell you what, Blake; I've got some jolly good ideas—original, you know, and if you like, I'll give you a hand with it. I think I could buck things up a bit, and you must be rather tired of it by now."

Jack Blake positively gasped. This was going a little bit too far.

"See here, Manners," he said slowly, "I've had about enough of your confounded cheek. If you don't look out, you'll find my hand round that ear of yours, and then you can have the pleasure of describing what it feels like to be biffed by Blake."

Jack Blake looked most decidedly warlike, and Tom Merry, knowing what the result would be if hostilities were not prevented, hastily interposed.

"Pax!" he cried. "Chuck squabbling, and come to biz!"

"Serpently!" agreed Manners. "Only too pleased! I hate wrangling! I hate chaps that wrangle!"

"Who's wrangling?" demanded Jack Blake. "I—"

"Stop it!" shouted Tom Merry, bringing down his ruler with a bang on the desk. "Look here, Jack Blake, you've got to start a new serial."

"A new serial!"

"Yes, of course. Something slap up. Suppose you try your hand at a detective story?"

"But—"

"No buts; you've got to do it."

"But I don't think I can."

"I'll take it on!" shouted Manners. "I've got a jolly good idea. I've read a lot of ripping detective yarns."

"I dessay you have," replied Tom Merry, "and that's the very reason why you won't write a detective serial for the Weekly."

"Why not?" demanded Manners.

"Because we want something original, old son!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners reddened.

"What the dickens are you chaps cackling about?" he demanded hotly.

"Never mind, Manners," said Tom Merry soothingly. "You can write an article on something or other."

"I want to write a story," grumbled Manners.

"All right, then, write; but—"

"I'll get on with it at once, Tom Merry!" shouted the junior eagerly.

"All right; but remember there's only room for one serial, and that's already booked. I can't stop your writing another. P'raps it will be a good idea—something to keep your mind busy; and you can read it to yourself on winter evenings."

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THERE IS A £48 MOTOR-CYCLE TO BE GIVEN AWAY IN "PLUCK."

Manners snorted indignantly.

"It's not fair!" he shouted. "Why can't we have a shot as well as Jack Blake?"

The faces of Digby, Herries, and Kerr lighted up.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Tom Merry. "Very well, then, we'll have a sort of competition."

"Bravo!"

Jack Blake laughed.

"Not a bad idea," he said loftily. "I don't mind in the least. I'm bound to manage all right. I've had more experience."

"You wait and see," said Manners darkly. "Don't you be so mighty certain. When have we got to turn the first chapter in?"

"To-morrow evening," replied Tom Merry promptly. "Six sharp."

"I think I shall also entah, Tom Mewwy," observed the swell of St. Jim's.

"Right-ho, Gussy!" agreed Tom Merry. "Just as you like. But, remember, it must be a detective story."

"I weward that as quite a simple mattah, deah boy. You can wely on me."

"That's settled, then," said Tom Merry. "Now, suppose instead of wasting time gassing, we agree to write out a sort of plan for the special number? Each to present his paper to-morrow evening."

"Good!"

"It will give us time to work things out a bit, and, besides, Gussy may wake up in the middle of the night again, and be struck with another brilliant idea."

The assembled Co.s chuckled at this remark.

"He'll get struck with my boot if he does," muttered Jack Blake softly.

This passed unheard by the swell of St. Jim's, and the meeting broke up in good order.

There was no hanging about the corridors.

Blake & Co. made straight for Study 6.

Figgins & Co. reached the New House in record time.

Cornstalk & Co. repaired to their own particular little den.

The staff of the "Weekly" were on the warpath.

CHAPTER 7.

Study No. 6.

"STOP! You boundah!" Directly Jack Blake & Co. entered their study, the leader made a dash for the best seat at the table.

Arthur Augustus started at the same time, but Jack Blake's hard shoulder caught him amidstships, and the swell of St. Jim's went reeling into Digby and Herries.

"Wottah!"

Jack Blake settled himself in his chair, and grinned cheerfully. "Can't help it, old son. I'm busy. Please be quiet."

The swell of St. Jim's sniffed.

"I pwesume you do not wemembah, Jack Blake, that I have to w'ite a detective stowry for Tom Mewwy? I w'quest you to move."

"Can't be did, old chap!"

"I pwotest! Undah the circs, we agweed to wally wound."

"All right, Gus, you rally round yourself, and don't bother me. I'm busy."

Jack Blake bent over the paper in front of him, and glared at it, seeking to find an opening for his new detective story.

"I considah you most wude!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, after standing a moment in indecision. "Undah the circs., howevah, I w'estwain my desiah to administah a feahful thwashin', and w'quest you to wemove' youah elbow. I will w'ite heah!"

The swell of St. Jim's seated himself on Jack Blake's left, and proceeded to fill his gold-mounted fountain-pen.

Digby and Herries stood with their hands in their pockets, and regarded the amateur authors with dissatisfaction.

"I think I shall go and feed Towser," muttered Herries, after a while. "This is too jolly slow for me."

"I'll come with you," exclaimed Digby eagerly. "I can think better outside than in this stuffy little hole. I've got an idea for a ripping article for the 'Weekly,' but I can knock that off presently, when this pair of silly asses have finished. Come on!"

"Do you w'efuse to—"

Arthur Augustus spoke indignantly, but Digby and Herries marched out of the study, and the swell of St. Jim's was left to consume his own smoke.

Jack Blake sat with head between his hands. So far as an idea for a detective story went, his mind remained a blank.

Arthur Augustus was in the same unhappy plight, and he fidgeted uncomfortably.

"Blake!" he said, after two minutes of silence. "Blake!"

"Well, what is it?" grunted Jack Blake.

"Undah the circs., deah boy—"

The swell of St. Jim's voice trailed off, and he lapsed into silence again.

Jack Blake's attitude did not encourage confidences.

"Got it!" yelled the junior suddenly, after a long silence.

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Bai Jove! Got what?"

"Oh, shut up!" cried Jack Blake, beginning to write furiously.

"I absolutely wefuse. I—"

"Look here," roared Jack Blake, "if you don't shut up I'll spifficate you. I've hit on a grand idea. Shut up, there's a good chap!"

The latter part of Jack Blake's sentence mollified the swell of St. Jim's, and he watched his chum's pen racing along. He took up his fountain-pen, and after a moment laid it down with a sigh. He could not woo the muse, so he determined to try Blake again.

This latter had by now written about four lines, and was staring in front of him, frowning heavily.

"Blake!"

Jack Blake might have been carved out of a lump of wood, for all the notice he took.

"Blake!"

No answer

The swell of St. Jim's got up from his chair.

"Jack Blake," he said, standing in front of the abstracted junior, "I desiah to consult you upon a mattah of gweat importance."

"Ugh!" grunted Blake.

"I wepeat that—"

"Oh, get on with the job, for goodness' sake!" cried Jack Blake, suddenly returning to life. "What is it?"

"As a sportsman, I pwesume you will not wefuse to answah my inquiry?"

"How do I know? Get it off your chest. How the dickens can I answer a question till I know what it is?"

"Bai Jove, you compwehend my meanin', Blake! Will you answah?"

"Yes," replied Blake desperately, "I'll answer."

"I desiah youah opinion on a detective stowy."

"Jingo! You don't want me to write it for you, do you?" inquired Jack Blake sarcastically.

"Widiculous! Don't wot! I desiah to know if you considah that a detective stowy should be twagic."

"Tragic!" gasped Blake. "Ha, ha, ha! I should say it will be decidedly so when you start."

"Pway do not misundahstand my meanin', Blake. I—"

Jack Blake chuckled.

"Not a bit of it, Gussy. Besides," he went on seriously, "you could hardly write a comic detective story, could you?"

Again Jack Blake chuckled, and this time Arthur Augustus frowned.

"I wefuse to have my leg pulled, Blake. This is a sewious mattah."

"Not for all the gold in the world, Gussy, would I pull your leg. My firm opinion is that a slap-up detective story should be tragic. You'll see what I mean when you read my yarn in the 'Weekly.'"

"I don't want to wead youah wotten stowy," exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, with a lofty air. "I am goin' to w'ite that stowy."

"Which?"

"Why, the' new detective stowy, bai Jove! I considah you are a wank outsidah. As one wintah to anothah, I desiahed to consult you on a mattah of gweat impoahntance, and you treat it with wibaldy, and wegardless of the w'ee-masonry of lettahs."

Jack pondered over this, and something else that was in his mind.

"Look here, Gussy," he exclaimed, "suppose we what-you-may-call-it—collaborate over this yarn—eh?"

The swell of St. Jim's adjusted his monocle.

"I pwesume you wequiah my assistance."

"Well—or—yes, that's it, old son!" replied Jack Blake, with a curious expression. "You've hit the nail on the head."

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"I shall be vewy pleased, deah boy. We will commence w'ight away."

"Right you are, Gussy!" replied Jack Blake promptly. "We will. You shall provide the ideas, and I will do the hack work—lick them into shape, you know. It's easy enough once you get into it."

The swell of St. Jim's looked rather doubtful.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "I shall not have to w'ite the stowy at all, then."

"Of course not!" said Jack Blake decisively. "All you have to do is to think out some jolly brilliant ideas. You're good at those, you know, and—and—well, as I said, I carry them out. See?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked rather puzzled.

"How do we commence, Blake?"

It was now Jack Blake's turn to think hard.

"Oh, it's simple enough for a chap of your imagination," he replied seriously. "You see, we talk over the main idea of the plot, and then when one of the characters gets into a hole, you've got to get him out of it. Easy as pie. I don't think!" he added to himself.

The swell of St. Jim's stood with his back to the fire, and regarded the top of Jack Blake's bent head.

Jack Blake was glad enough for the interval of peace, and his pen scratched away industriously; but his brief spell of work came to a quick end. The study door opened, and Kildare looked in.

"Now then, you kids!" he cried. "Time to go to roost. Come on!"

The captain's "Come on!" was not to be played with, so Jack Blake blotted his paper with a regretful sigh and rose from his seat.

"Buck up, Gussy! P'r'aps you'll dream a dream, and you can tell me about it in the morning."

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He wore a worried look, and to the surprise of Kildare, who was waiting in the passage to see the pair off the premises, he passed by without his customary word of good-night.

At the end of the corridor Arthur Augustus remembered his act of impoliteness, and raced back.

The senior was just going upstairs.

"Kildare!"

The captain stopped.

"Well?" he inquired. "What is it?"

"I must offah an apology, deah boy—Kildare, I mean."

Kildare looked at the swell of St. Jim's with a serious eye.

"What for?" he demanded.

"I wegwet that owin' to cares I slipped my memoy—I mean I did not say—"

"That's all right, D'Arcy!" interrupted the senior. "It would have done in the morning, you know."

"But—"

"I haven't time to enter into a long discussion," said the captain, well aware of the swell of St. Jim's little ways.

"I accept your apology. Now, good-night!"

"Good-night, Kildare!"

His duty performed, Arthur Augustus retraced his steps, and found Jack Blake waiting for him outside the dormitory.

"What did you go after Kildare for?" demanded the leader of Study 6.

"A mattah of dig., deah boy," replied the swell of St. Jim's placidly.

"A matter of dig.? What in the world are you gassing about?"

"I forgot to say good-night, deah boy."

"You forgot to say good-night, ass?"

"An' I w'etured to offah an apology."

Jack Blake gasped.

"You take the blessed biscuit, Gussy. You're as bad as the Chinaman. Ha, ha, ha!"

"What Chinaman?" demanded the swell of St. Jim's.

"Oh, never mind what Chinaman," said Blake. "It doesn't matter in the least. He was a silly ass like you. He may have been a Hindu, for all I know."

"But you said he was a Chinaman," persisted Arthur Augustus, as they entered the dormitory. "You perfectly wemembah that."

"Yes, yes, yes," shouted Jack Blake; "I do. Now shut up."

"But—"

"Shut up!"

"I wefuse!"

Jack Blake sat on his bed and groaned.

"I wequiah an explanation," said the swell of St. Jim's, in a determined voice. "I wefuse to w'etiah without you stating how I wesemble a heathen Chinaman."

"I never said you did," cried Jack Blake. "I never said anything at all about a heathen Chinaman. I said you were as bad as the Chinaman. It's a funny story, ass. Don't you see? A funny story about a Chinaman."

"A funnay stowy?"

"Yes. I'll write it out for you one of these days, and then you can work it off on someone else."

"It's not funnay at all!" declared D'Arcy. "I absolutely wefuse to be compahed to a wotten Chinaman. I—"

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At this moment Digby and Herries came in.

"What's the fun?" demanded Digby.

"Oh, nothing; only Gussy's gone off again," said Jack Blake wearily.

"Nothin' of the kind, Hewwies!" cried Arthur Augustus.

"Jack Blake was most wude; he called me a wotten—"

"Now, Gussy," exclaimed Jack Blake, "be careful; I did not."

"Vewy well, I wetwact that," cried the swell of St. Jim's excitedly. "But you said I was like a Chinaman."

Digby and Herries put on very serious expressions.

"That was certainly very rude indeed," observed the latter gravely. "I should apologise if I were in your place, Blake."

Jack Blake glared. This barefaced siding with D'Arcy was too much.

"All right, you beauties!" he muttered, dropping his boots on the floor with a bump. "I'll remember that."

"I am waitin'," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"What for?" asked Jack Blake.

"The weason why you wefahed to me as wesemblin' a Chinaman."

"Oh, rats!"

Jack Blake got into bed.

Digby and Herries chuckled as the swell of St. Jim's advanced with a severe countenance.

"Gussy's on the warpath," whispered Herries. "Blessed if I can make out what it's all about, though, can you? We seem to have done the right thing, though, in backing him up. Hallo!"

Arthur Augustus had laid hold of Jack Blake's bedclothes.

"Silly ass!" shouted Jack Blake. "You do! You let those clothes alone, now, or— Wow!"

The swell of St. Jim's whisked off with the clothes, but he did not get far, for an end of the blanket got under his feet, and down he came with a crash. There was another bump, as Jack Blake, close on his heels, piled on top of him.

There was a rare scramble.

Arthur Augustus still had his boots on, and Jack Blake discovered the fact with his shin-bone.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In the middle of the uproar the door was flung open, and Kildare strode in.

"What's this?" he demanded, looking at the strange bundle of legs, arms, and bedclothes on the floor.

There was a scramble for bed by the spectators.

Arthur Augustus and Jack Blake, however, rolled over and over on the bare boards.

The pair reached the feet of the astounded captain and then woke up.

"Wow—wow!" yelled Jack Blake as a very supple cane made play on his back. "What's that? Oh!"

Arthur Augustus got a cut over his knuckles and scrambled to his feet.

Jack Blake grabbed his bedclothes and darted for his cot.

The swell of St. Jim's was a good second, but not being ready for bed he sat down on it and nursed his knuckles.

"This is a kind of thing one expects to find in a Third Form dormitory," observed Kildare sarcastically.

"Sorry, Kildare!" cried Jack Blake, poking his head over his disordered sheets and blankets. "It was only a bit of a lark, you know; it sha'n't happen again, you know."

The captain laughed good-temperedly.

"No, and it had better not," he said drily, "or I shall join in the lark, as you call it, and you may find it rather painful!"

"I did," muttered Jack Blake.

There was a general titter at this, and Kildare looked round severely.

"Now, then, you kids, get to sleep. No nonsense, mind. You ready, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, scrambling into bed without waiting to fold up his clothes. "Wathah!"

The captain of St. Jim's took a long look at the still row of beds and went out.

The dormitory was plunged in darkness, and for a good two minutes nothing could be heard but the breathing of the juniors.

Presently Arthur Augustus raised himself on his elbow.

"Blake!"

No reply.

"Blake! Jack Blake! D'you heah me?"

Snore! And a chuckle from Digby's direction.

"You wottah! Listen to me!"

"G-r-r-r!"

"Oh, wats!"

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The swell of St. Jim's lapsed into silence, and with quietude came sleep; and let it not be said in Gath, that if awake, Arthur Augustus was an aristocrat of aristocrats, that asleep, he was as plebeian as a ploughboy in one particular alone. Arthur Augustus forgot his "dig" and snored in chorus with the others.

CHAPTER 8.

Figgins Sends a Telegram.

LANG, clang, clang!

The leader of Study No. 6 jumped out of bed.

"More sleet!"

Jack Blake pattered across the dormitory, over to the window and back to the beds, then regarded the unconscious form of the swell of St. Jim's with a contemplative eye. Arthur Augustus had one bare arm flung gracefully behind his head, while the other dangled out of bed.

"How's that for the order of the boot?" muttered the leader of Study No. 6, as he gently tied the laces of a pair of boots round that pendant wrist.

Herries sat up in bed and cackled feebly.

"B-r-r-r-ha, it's cold!" he stuttered.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Jack Blake briskly. "Cold? Not a bit of it! Hallo, there's Gussy on the move!"

The swell of St. Jim's turned over sleepily and yawned. He raised his arm in the air and the boots hovered over his face.

The juniors watched with suppressed glee.

Arthur Augustus opened one eye and gave a startled yell.

"Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's sat up in bed and stared at the boots tied to his wrist.

"Bai Jove! You wotten boundahs! Who committed this outrage? I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buck up, Gussy! Don't sit there like a frozen image! Get up!" cried Jack Blake.

Arthur Augustus flung the boots on the floor.

"I have a bone to pick with you, Jack Blake," he said severely. "I pwesume this is one of youah wotten twicks."

"Oh, Gussy, how can you be so vulgar!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "I'm surprised at you! A bone to pick, indeed!"

"Don't wot! I wefah to the mattah of the Chinaman," returned the swell of St. Jim's.

"Oh!" Jack Blake groaned. "D'you mean to say you're going to rake that up again? Look here, Gussy, I promise to tell you the yarn if you'll shut up. In the meantime, I'll apologise. There!"

"Vewy well, I agwee."

"Good!"

No further mention for the moment was made of the matter, and the juniors trooped down to hall.

After breakfast the thirteen formed an impromptu meeting in the hall.

"How goes the story, Blake?" inquired Tom Merry.

"First rate!" replied the leader of Study No. 6 promptly.

"Yaas, we are w'iting it in co.," exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry looked rather doubtful. He did not appear to think much of the combination.

"I'm writing the story," said Blake quickly. "Gussy is going to provide the wheezes."

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I see. M'yes, very good idea, but you—"

"Why is Arthur like a Chinaman?" inquired Digby, coming up grinning. "Can anybody tell me?"

"Rats!" snapped Jack Blake. "Shut up, can't you?"

"Wottah!" cried the swell of St. Jim's. "I shall administah a feahful thwashin'."

Just at this critical moment Figgins joined the little group.

He held a telegraph-form in his hand.

"Hallo, what's this?" inquired Tom Merry. "Hope you're not going in for betting, or anything rash, Figgy?"

The long-legged member of the New House wore an air of mystery.

"This is to my uncle," he answered.

"Your uncle?" cried Jack Blake. "Go on!"

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Manners.

"What's it for," said Tom Merry, "tin?"

"No, it's not for tin," retorted Figgins; "it's on a most important matter."

"Must be!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "Fancy blowing a whole sixpence on a telegram in these hard times!"

"Well, I suppose it's nothing to do with us," said Tom Merry.

"But that's just what it is," cried Figgins. "It's about the 'Weekly.'"

"The 'Weekly'!"

"What the dickens has your uncle to do with the 'Weekly'?" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"He's an editor in London!" explained Figgins.

"Fancy Figgys having an editor for an uncle, and not telling us!" cried Manners. "Naughty boy, how dare you!"

"Of course, I know that Tom Merry is all that he—he should be," explained Figgins rather awkwardly, "but I thought that perhaps my uncle might give us a leg up."

"Jolly good idea!" cried Tom Merry heartily. "There's no knowing what these chaps can do. Is he in Fleet Street?"

There was an anxious note in the junior's voice. He had heard that Fleet Street was the Mecca of journalism, and if Figgins's uncle was in Fleet Street or thereabouts, it was quite sufficient.

"Bouverie Street," replied Figgins, "that's just off Fleet Street, you know."

"Let's have a look at the telegram," said Jack Blake.

"Hum! You have got a nerve!"

The leader of Study No. 6 read the message aloud:

and at Taggles' rate of progression we shall get it some time after dinner."

"Better send out a relief expedition," suggested Manners. "Old Taggy will lose his way in a minute."

"T-a-g-g-les!" yelled Figgins.

The school porter stopped short, and, what was worse, stopped with an obstinate glare in his eye.

"Wot?" he shouted.

"Not what! Buck up!"

"Hurry up!"

"You'll get stuck!"

Taggles took little notice of the impatient cries of the juniors. He was not to be hurried, and to the agony of the Fourth-Formers, who expected the bell for return to class to go every minute, he made a careful circle of a puddle, and came slowly, very slowly, towards them.

"Come on, Taggles!"

"You're not a Marathonite, you know!"

"You'll get beaten on the post if you don't look out."

Taggles merely grunted, and, if anything, came on a little slower.

THE 1st PRIZE

IN THE

"PLUCK"

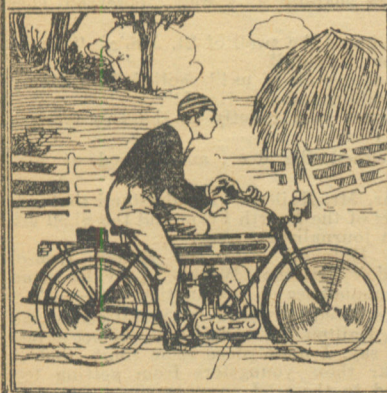
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PICTURE PUZZLE COMPETITION IS A

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ONE
PENNY.

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"Can you help us with school mag?—FIGGINS."

"I think it's jolly good," cried Tom Merry. "Send it off at once, old son. Quick, bell for class will go in a tick!"

The long-legged junior grabbed his telegram and raced off to give it to Taggles.

Just as he returned the bell went, and further confabs were cut short.

CHAPTER 9.

A Proposed Excursion.

"T'S come!"

"What?"

"Why, the telegram, of course!"

During the 11.30 interval, the juniors of the Shell and Fourth congregated on the steps of the main entrance to the School House.

Tom Merry, the centre of a little group, pointed at the figure of Taggles coming across the quad., and picking his way through the half-frozen snow.

"It's come, I tell you!" repeated the chief of the Terrible Three. "Bless me, old Taggy's like a cat on hot bricks!"

"Say, rather," observed Jack Blake, "that it's coming,

"Blessed himps!" he muttered to himself. "I wonder wot boys 'is coming to, 'aving telegrafts and all."

By this time the juniors could see that the porter carried a buff-coloured envelope, and Tom Merry, Arthur Augustus, and Jack Blake ran to meet him.

"Hand over, Taggy!" cried Tom Merry, holding out his hand.

"Not for you, Master Merry," grunted Taggles.

"Oh, rats!"

The three juniors followed the porter like terriers, but Taggles plodded on slowly until he got to the bottom of the steps.

"Master Figgins!" he growled.

"Here!" shouted the long-legged member of the New House, who was standing about six inches away from the porter. "Here, ass!"

Taggles snorted as he handed over the telegram, then he drew the back of his hand across his mouth, and waited.

Figgins tore the envelope open.

The juniors crowded round.

"This licks a scrum!" cried Kerr.

"Hooray!" shouted Figgins.

"Is he coming down?" inquired Jack Blake.

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"KING OF THE CASTLE"

IN NEXT
THURSDAY'S

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"No. Coming down, indeed; of course not. I've to go and see him. Listen!"

Figgins read the precious message aloud:

"Will do what I can. Come and see me. Bring copy.—ADAMSON."

"Isn't that ripping?" cried the member of the New House.

"Not 'alf!" exclaimed Lowther tersely.

"Al!"

"Jolly good of him!"

"Master Figgins!"

The porter's voice broke in on the chorus of congratulations.

"Hallo! Not gone home yet!" cried Tom Merry.

Taggles grunted, and fixed his eye on Figgins.

"Well?" inquired the latter, with a look of mischief on his homely face. "What d'you want, Taggy?"

"I brought the telegraph," growled the porter.

"To be sure you did!" said Figgins sweetly. "I've done with it now, thanks. You can have it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared with laughter at the expression on the porter's face. He was flabbergasted.

"Pon my word, Figgy, you're coming on!" exclaimed Manners, in delight.

Taggles gave Manners a look of scorn, or what he intended to convey as such, but it only made the juniors laugh the louder.

The porter stuck his lower lip out, and turned to go.

"Half a tick!" cried Figgins. "If you won't have the telegram, take this, and put it in the bank for your old age."

Taggles received the sixpence tendered with a gracious air, touched his hat, and promptly shambled off.

"It's cheap at a tanner," said Jack Blake. "I'll bet he's not a tariff reformer. What was it? Oh, I know. Your beer will cost you more."

"I'll back Taggy to chuck out the House of Commons and Lords, and all the rest of them, if they dare to tax his beer," cried Tom Merry. "I don't know anything about it, but—"

"No, we are quite aware of that," retorted Jack Blake. "We don't want any beastly politics. Who's going with Figgins, that's what's more important."

"The telegram didn't mention—"

"No, of course it didn't, Tom Merry; but you don't suppose we can let Figgy go by himself, do you?"

"I can manage all right!" exclaimed Figgins.

Jack Blake looked at the member of the New House severely.

"You're not going by yourself," he said; "that's settled."

"Oh, is it?"

"Most decidedly. Didn't your uncle say bring copy?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, Tom Merry must go, for one."

"I never thought of that."

"And I think I shall make the third," went on Jack Blake.

"You keep on thinking, then," said Manners. "I'm going!"

Jack Blake held up his fist.

"See that!"

"Yes."

"Smell it, then!"

"Wow!"

Manners had promptly emphasised his remark, and the leader of Study 6 rubbed his nose ruefully.

"Rotter!" he growled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners rapidly disappeared in the direction of the class-rooms, and a general rush began as the bell clanged forth its summons to durance vile.

During the dinner hour an animated discussion was held, but the question of who was to go with Figgins and Tom Merry remained undecided.

Manners and Jack Blake tried to settle the matter by clutching one another round the neck, but they were pulled apart without any result beyond ruffled tempers and rumpled collars.

"Tell you what," said Tom Merry, "we'd better decide the matter by what you call it."

"Ballot?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"That's it! Something like it. We'll stick a lot of names in a hat, and the first one drawn goes. How's that?"

The proposal met with approval.

"We meet at six-thirty, then," said Tom Merry, "and —"

"Bai Jovel!"

"What's the matter with you, image?"

Arthur Augustus was too excited to notice the insult.

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"We must ask permish of the dootah first," he cried.

This important point had been quite overlooked, and the meeting gazed at one another blankly.

"I'll go now!" shouted Tom Merry.

The chief of the Terrible Three sprinted off.

The swell of St. Jim's started to follow, but Jack Blake promptly collared him.

"Stop here, Gussy. You do what your uncle tells you, or there'll be trouble."

"I—"

"Shut up! Here's Tom Merry!"

"I think it's all right," shouted the junior before he joined the little group. "The Head's going to see Mr. Railton about it."

"Hooray!"

"Good old Railton!"

"He's a brick!"

"He won't mind!"

"What's that, may I ask?" said a quiet voice.

Everybody jumped.

The master of the School House smiled rather grimly.

"I'm glad you have such a good opinion of me," he said. Jack Blake flushed.

Tom Merry stepped forward.

Arthur Augustus also made an attempt, but was promptly hauled back.

"May I explain, sir?" asked the chief of the Terrible Three.

Mr. Railton smiled.

"I hardly think you need, Tom Merry. I happen to know a good deal of what goes on, and I could not help hearing what you have been saying, so I conclude that the head-master is going to ask me if you are to be trusted—"

"Oh, sir!"

"To take care of yourselves," concluded the master. "You should not interrupt."

"I'm sorry, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I—"

"Well, we'll let it pass now, Merry. I will let you know what Dr. Holmes has to say."

A chorus of "Thank you, sir!" followed the favourite master as he went down the corridor.

"Things seem to be shaping jolly well," observed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed the swell of St. Jim's. "Gweat cweedit is weflected on Figgins."

"Hear, hear, and so say all of us!" replied Tom Merry heartily. "Hallo, Railton and the Head!"

The juniors went past very quietly as the two masters entered the doctor's room.

The head-master closed the door, and looked at Mr. Railton quizzically.

"What's this I hear, Mr. Railton? I understand that certain brilliant members of the Fourth Form and the Shell are launching out upon a journalistic career."

"Well—or—Doctor Holmes," said the School House-master, "I really think that the 'Weekly' provides some outlet for their superabundance of imagination, and—"

"Yes, exactly," interposed the Head. "You'll excuse me interrupting you, Mr. Railton, but while I'm in perfect agreement with what you say, I must place some limit—that is to say, I must debar these youngsters from getting too many favours allowed to them. I suppose you know that Master Merry interviewed me just now with the request that I might allow himself and two others to accompany him to London?"

"Yes, I have heard something about the matter," replied Mr. Railton. "And really, doctor, if I may state my view of the case, I think that you will be justified upon this occasion in allowing Merry to go. You see, the Grammar School boys have also started a school magazine, and—"

The House-master paused significantly.

"Quite so," said the Head. "Rivalry—eh?"

Mr. Railton laughed.

"Well," went on the Head, "I suppose a little healthy competition won't do my boys any harm; at the same time, you know, we must guard against this sort of thing developing too far. In the case of Tom Merry and—I believe they call themselves the Terrible Three—there is little danger of the rivalry going beyond a certain point, but—"

here the doctor paused, and glanced at the House-master over his glasses—"what about the others?"

"Oh, I think I can safely say that there is no ill feeling whatever," replied Mr. Railton. "The thing is quite a—well, a sporting sort of affair, you know."

A faint smile played for an instant round the corners of the Head's firm-set mouth.

"Very well, then, Railton," he said genially; "I leave the matter entirely in your hands."



The owner of Towser shook his fist at the roaring juniors. "You're a set of howling, shrieking asses!" he shouted, "I'll go and fetch Towser!"

CHAPTER 10. Herries, Poet!

AFTER class that evening the Terrible Three made straight for their study.

There was work to be done.

The same atmosphere of industry prevailed in Study 6, and over at the New House.

The juniors of St. Jim's were putting their backs into the campaign for the honour of "Tom Merry's Weekly."

The only lazy member of the associated Co.'s was Clifton Dane, and he sat in Skimpole's study toasting his toes.

The amateur Socialist sat at his desk and nibbled his pen-holder. His mind was divided between an essay on Socialism and a treatise on Determinism.

"Which would you think is the better, Dane?" he inquired, blinking through his huge spectacles at the dark-faced junior.

Clifton Dane laid down his book and smiled.

"Best of what?" he inquired.

"Why, you see, I'm in rather a difficulty," said Skimpole.

"I fear that the fellows in this college do not take a serious view of things, and I feel it my duty to enlighten them. The question is, whether my new series of articles for 'Tom Merry's Weekly' should deal with the wrongs of the down-

trodden classes or whether I should put them through a course of Determinism. Hitherto, I must confess that my efforts to improve the minds of the unthinking have not met with the success I should wish. I think, perhaps, I must devote my brain to some simpler subject."

"That wouldn't be a bad idea, Skimmy," replied Clifton Dane. "I really think your brain-power is a sort of sixty horse-power business, and a bit above the heads of ordinary thinking chaps—like myself, for instance."

"Quite so!" agreed the amateur Socialist. "But I should be only too pleased to explain to you anything you wish."

"Oh, don't trouble to do that!" replied Dane rather quickly. "I couldn't think of wasting your valuable time."

"But it's not waste of time!" exclaimed the amateur Socialist eagerly. "I feel so sorry for you. Your state of ignorance, you know, and your lack of knowledge of the vast realms of learning—although, of course, it's not your fault—and being half an Indian places you at a great disadvantage."

Clifton Dane opened his dark eyes a trifle wider at this string of remarks, but he was accustomed to Skimpole's little ways, and as he knew him to be a good-natured little fanatic, he smiled genially at the earnest student's face.

"I think, if you don't mind, Skimmy, I'll read your article

when it's finished. You see," he went on artfully, "I think I could understand better, and I've got rather a bad memory, you know. By the way, when did Merry commission you to write those articles?"

"Oh—er—oh—er—I—I haven't exactly received a commission," replied the amateur Socialist; "but I've no doubt that when Tom Merry receives my manuscript he'll be only too glad to put it in the 'Weekly.' I shall expect to have at least three full pages."

Bang!

"Dear me!" exclaimed Skimpole. "Dear me!" he repeated, as the door opened, and Tom Merry came in. "You startled me!"

"You don't say so! Sorry!" replied the chief of the Terrible Three, with a very businesslike air. "I want to see you, Dane. I want you to write a special article for the Special Number. Must have it to-night."

"What about?"

Skimpole looked up eagerly.

"Hypnotism."

The amateur Socialist went out of the room. Such frivolous subjects did not interest him just now.

Clifton Dane looked rather serious.

"Of course," he said, "I'll do all I can to assist, but I'm afraid that I can't write much about hypnotism."

"Oh, nonsense!" replied Tom Merry. "Surely you can make up something. I don't mean make up, you know, but, anyhow, write something that'll be interesting, and take the wind out of those Grammar School cads."

Clifton Dane shook his head rather doubtfully.

"Do what you can, old chap," said Tom Merry persuasively. "I'm sure it's a thing likely to catch on; and, besides," he went on, with the fine instinct of an editor catering for a large public, "if you wrote an article and split it up into two or three parts, and they liked the first one, you see all the kids would have to get the second number. See?"

"Yes, I see," replied Clifton Dane, with a little smile. "Of course, it's all right from your point of view. The fact of the matter is, in the first place, I don't think I could write an article on hypnotism, and in the second, even if I did so, I don't believe it would prove half as popular as you imagine."

"Look here!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Are you the editor of the 'Weekly' or am I?"

"Well, you are, of course."

"Quite so! Very well, then. Since you admit that, then, you're not called upon to express an opinion as to what should go into the paper. The fact of the matter is, it's only your beastly modesty that stands in the way. Just write that article, and let me have it as soon as you can, and you'll have done something towards scoring off the Frank Monk crowd."

Dane grinned appreciatively.

"All right!" he said. "I'll do what you want, and—"

Before the junior could finish his remark Tom Merry, having achieved his object, with a brief "Thanks, old chap!" had bolted for the door, and Clifton Dane was left to waste his words on the air.

In less than ten seconds the editor was down the stairs and back again in Study No. 1.

A row of juniors were sitting on a form in front of the fire, and Tom Merry's desk was piled with manuscripts.

Tom Merry rubbed his hands.

"Good! Done your new serial, Blake?"

"Yes!"

"Right! I'll read that to-night. Must get through the whole lot of copy by the morning. Railton—"

"Yes!" cried Figgins. "Mr. Railton said we could go—three of us; and while you were chasing round after Dane we drew lots."

"Ah! Who's coming?"

"Gussy!"

"Bravo! You can carry the parcel of copy."

"I shall do nothin' of the kind!" replied the swell of St. Jim's. "I wefuse, and I wegard Jack Blake as a wotten boundah!"

Tom Merry looked puzzled.

"Jack Blake!" he muttered. "What the dickens has Blake got to do with it?"

"He's a wottah! He wefuses to altah his sewial accordin' to my instrucs."

"Well, I suppose Jack Blake knows best," exclaimed Tom Merry, with a laugh. "Don't be peevish, Gussy!"

"I'm not peevish!" protested Arthur Augustus. "I wefuse to be called peevish. I demand an apology ffrom Jack Blake for bweaking our contwact."

"Blake, apologise at once!" said Tom Merry. "I don't know what it's all about, but it's all the same to me."

Jack Blake looked like refusing, but changed his mind when he saw Tom Merry pick up the pages of his new story.

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"Anything for peace!" he said. "I apologise, Gus. Now shut up while Tom Merry reads my yarn."

"I'm not going to read it now," replied the editor. "Hallo! What's this? 'The—The Lonely Knight of—'"

"That's mine!" shouted Herries, taking up the sheets of foolscap. "Let me read it to you."

"Chuck him out!" shouted Manners. "We don't want to hear any more stuff about bulldogs. I suppose it's an ode to Towser."

"It's nothing of the kind!" cried Herries indignantly. "It's a—it's a poem!"

"A what?" repeated the juniors.

"A poem!" snapped Herries. "I think it's jolly good!"

Without waiting for any reply the junior cleared his throat.

"Have a coughdrop, old chap!" suggested Jack Blake.

"They're good for poems—sorry! Coughs, I mean. My aunt, he's going to start!"

With a flushed face Herries commenced to read.

"The Lonely Knight of Labascon," he announced.

"What's that?" inquired Tom Merry, as a titter of laughter arose.

Herries rustled his manuscript, and glared at the smiling editor.

"Look here!" he said. "You might give a chap a fair hearing—"

"Give him a fair hiding!" muttered Jack Blake.

Herries sniffed, cleared his throat, and fixing his eyes on Tom Merry, started again.

"The Lonely Knight of Labascon. Ahem!"

"Half a tick, Herrie!" said Digby. "Awfully sorry to interrupt, old chap, but is it spelt with a 'K'?"

"Of course!" snapped Herries.

"I thought so, somehow," replied Digby. "I didn't quite see if it had been an 'N' how it could be lonely. Get on with it!"

Herries gulped something down, and made another start.

"The Lonely Kn—"

"Here!" cried Tom Merry. "For goodness' sake go on where you left off! We've had that about six times already! Suppose you make a start in the middle. We sha'n't get finished by midnight at this rate."

"Look here!" shouted Herries. "Are you going to let me read this thing or not? You agreed that—"

"All right, then!" interrupted Tom Merry, leaning back in his chair, and putting on an air of patient resignation. "Get it over!"

Herries wiped his brow and glared round the study.

Jack Blake was bending down, with his handkerchief stuffed into his mouth, and making queer little jerky movements with his shoulders, and all the others, with the exception of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, seemed to be holding their breath and careful of avoiding the indignant junior's glance. In the midst of a deep and almost painful silence Herries made a fourth attempt.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle and kept a fixed and expressionless eye upon the Fourth-Former. Sang-froid was the swell of St. Jim's great point, and he never failed to retain his self-possession when it became a question of "dig."

"Astride his mighty charger rode

Sir Thomas Montgomery de Clancy,

His trusty sword was by his side,

His steed was fleeced with mome—

Fleeced with foam, I mean."

Herries stopped, and wiped his brow again, and his glance sought the editor.

Tom Merry was looking as serious as a judge.

"I didn't quite understand that part," he said. "Did you say fleeced or—"

"Fleeced with foam, I said," replied Herries.

"Ha! I see!"

A sigh passed the round, and somebody made a curious choking sort of noise.

Herries hastily glanced at his paper.

"Lemme see! Where was I? Oh! I've got it!"

"The sun was setting in the west,

And the road was hard and toilsome,

Sir Thomas spurred his trusty steed,

And galloped hard ahead.

Then came a crash—"

Herries raised his hand dramatically, and paused.

"Hold me up!" gasped Jack Blake, his eyes streaming with tears. "Ho, ho, ho! Ha, ha, ha!"

This was the signal for a general outburst, and the study shook with long-suppressed laughter.

Herries let his arm fall in a series of jerks, and turned round and round with a red and angry face.

"I sha'n't read any more!" he spluttered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

This announcement only made matters worse, and the howls of laughter redoubled.

Jack Blake got up from his chair wiping his eyes, and grasped his chum by the hand.

"T-thanks awfully!" he said. "I—we—enjoyed that immensely. You're quite sure—"

Jack Blake's voice broke, and he turned away abruptly.

The expression on Herries' face had been too much for him, and he sat back in his chair and buried his face in his handkerchief.

The owner of Towser slammed down his poem, and shook his fist at the roaring juniors.

"You're a set of howling, shrieking asses!" he shouted.

"I'll go and fetch Towser!"

"Stop him!" cried Tom Merry; but it was too late.

Herries had fled.

"Going?" inquired Tom Merry, as Figgins and Kerr also made for the door.

"Yes; we'll leave you to it now," replied the members of the New House. "Fatty's got a special tea on the way."

"We must be off, too," said Jack Blake. "Ta, ta! See you in the morning. I think Gus is going to start dressing now."

The Terrible Three looked at one another in astonishment. "I wonder if Herries' bulldog had anything to do with it?" said Manners.

"By Jove! Shut the door!" yelled Tom Merry. "We don't want him in here. Shut the door and lock it!"

"It's just as well p'r'aps that they have gone," said Monty Lowther, sitting down in front of the fire. "We can have a quiet game of chess while you're raking over the copy."

"Right-ho!" agreed Tom Merry cheerfully. "I don't mind. I like work; besides, to-morrow's a half, and we shall have to catch the two o'clock to London town!"

CHAPTER 11.

The Journey to Town.

"BUCK up!"

The following afternoon a laughing crowd of juniors escorted Tom Merry, Figgins, and Arthur Augustus to Ryecombe Station.

"There's five minutes yet!"

The crowd of St. Jim's juniors invaded the little platform.

"Now, you will be careful, boys, won't you?" said Jack Blake, with mock seriousness.

"Don't go and lose yourselves, for goodness' sake!" exclaimed Manners. "We can't do without the three prize—"

Manners broke off suddenly, and dodged away as Figgins stretched out a long arm.

"Never mind about losing your blessed selves," said Jack Blake. "Look after the copy for the 'Weekly,' that's all you've got to do, and"—he went on in a whisper—"keep an eye on Gussy!"

"Blake," exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly, "I considah that womark in vewy bad taste. I shall have to weconsidah my posish when I return fwom town. I—"

"Here she comes!" shouted Tom Merry.

With a grinding of brakes the train pulled up.

"Here you are!" cried Jack Blake, opening a carriage door.

"Here!" yelled Lowther. "Get out of the way, Fatty!"

"Sha'n't!" cried Fatty. "Get out yourself. Here you are, Figgins!"

Figgins emerged from the crowd and clambered into the carriage.

Fatty shut the door on him with a professional bang.

"Here!" yelled Figgins, lowering the window. "Where's Tom Merry? Where's that ass Gussy?"

"Here I am!" shouted Tom Merry from the next carriage. "Get in here! Ha, ha, ha! Look at Gus!"

The swell of St. Jim's had been hustled by the energetic juniors into another carriage, and, to make his indignation worse, it turned out to be a third-class compartment. An empty smoker reeking with stale shag, and very dirty.

The three juniors were in three separate compartments!

"Wottahs!" howled Arthur Augustus. "Welease me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd of juniors howled with laughter. The joke had been quite unpremeditated, but it was worth following up.

Arthur Augustus shrieked and hurled scathing phrases at his tormentors, but they hung on to the handle of the carriage door for all they were worth.

The guard blew his whistle.

The fast disappearing swell of St. Jim's waggled his arms about, but his voice was lost to the juniors.

They trooped out of the station in high good humour. The swell of St. Jim's spent the journey to town fuming and freezing. He had both windows down, and when the train drew near London a dense fog invaded the carriage.

At last the journey came to an end, and when the train pulled up at Paddington, Arthur Augustus leaped out. He was coughing, and crimson with indignation.

Tom Merry and Figgins leisurely descended from their first-class carriages.

"Hallo, Gus!" exclaimed the former, with a wicked twinkle in his eye. "It's been a clipping journey. How did you get on, Figg?"

"First rate!" replied the member of the New House, with a grin. "Warm as toast, an' comfy as—as a cat!"

Tom Merry succeeded in effecting an escape, but as Figgins' door was surrounded, he had to return to his own compartment.

The train started to move.

Three pairs of eyes glared at the crowd on the platform as the train steamed out.

"Wottahs!" yelled D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The contingent of juniors left on the platform danced with joy.

"By-by, Gus!" howled Jack Blake. "Mind you don't get lost!"

The fast disappearing swell of St. Jim's waggled his arms about, but his voice was lost to the juniors.

They trooped out of the station in high good humour.

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"Hallo, Gus!" exclaimed the former, with a wicked twinkle in his eye. "It's been a clipping journey. How did you get on, Figg?"

"First rate!" replied the member of the New House, with a grin. "Warm as toast, an' comfy as—as a cat!"

The swell of St. Jim's gave a sniff of indignation, and stalked on ahead.

Tom Merry and Figgins exchanged a look of comprehension.

"Better not rag him too much!" said Tom Merry. "Poor old Gus! Ha, ha, ha! Fancy him being tied up in a dirty old smoker! My eye!"

The pair caught Arthur Augustus up at the gate, and Figgins slipped his arm through the swell of St. Jim's.

"Never mind, Gussy!" he said, without the ghost of a smile. "It's not our fault, you know. Better come and have a cup of coffee before we go to Fleet Street."

To this proposal, the swell of St. Jim's was glad enough to fall in with, and the steaming hot coffee soon put him into a good humour again, and he forgot his terrible journey.

From Paddington, the juniors made the journey by Tube to Charing Cross, and when they came out by Trafalgar Square, the fog had fallen in a dense pall.

"This is wippin'!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, as the three stood at the top of the steps leading underground.

"Bai Jove! This is most extwaordinawy!"

"Just so!" commented Tom Merry drily. "It'll be more extraordinary still if you get lost. For goodness' sake remember we are going to B-o-u-v-e-r-i-e Street!"

Tom Merry pronounced the word very distinctly.

"All wight!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, rather indignant at the suggestion that he might get lost. "I simply wewel in this weathah. It's wippin'!"

"Come on, then; we cross here," said Tom Merry. "Let's carve our way through. That's the way to Fleet Street."

The leader of the Terrible Three and Figgins started off. Arthur Augustus was left peering up at the Nelson Column.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "I can't see the— Bai Jove!"

He was alone!

His comrades had disappeared into the mist!

The swell of St. Jim's darted across the road.

"Mewwy!" he shouted.

As was only to be expected, there was no reply.

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"KING OF THE CASTLE"

Arthur darted back again—at least, he thought he did—but in reality made a bee line for St. Martin's Church.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry and Figgins had returned to where they had left him.

"He's gone!" gasped Figgins.

"Looks like it!" muttered Tom Merry. "The silly blessed ass. We can't do anything. Can we?"

Figgins shook his head.

"No," he said slowly. "The best thing we can do is to get to Bouverie Street as quick as we can. He'll surely make for that."

"Hope so!" said Tom Merry fervently.

The two went off again, and two minutes later passed within ten paces of their chum.

The swell of St. Jim's had wandered round by the church and past the hospital, back into the Strand.

A bright glare through the fog caught his eye, and he stepped out into the road.

CHAPTER 12.

Lost in the Fog.

"P ARP! P ARP!"

The swell of St. Jim's jumped back hastily, and regained the comparative safety of the slippery kerbstone. He mopped his brow as a motor-bus, looking more clumsy and gigantic than ever in the fog, rattled and rumbled past.

"Bai Jove, that was a nawwow escape! Bai Jove!"

The next instant Arthur Augustus stopped mopping his brow, and darted into the road again.

A woman, laden with a huge basket, was attempting the dangerous crossing!

The sight was sufficient for the chivalrous D'Arcy. He rushed up and grabbed the astounded woman by the arm.

She was very fat, and slow of movement.

"Wun!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Wun like anythin'!"

The flower-seller stopped short in the middle of the traffic. The swell of St. Jim's looked round in despair.

"Ere, young feller-me-lad," exclaimed the old woman, in a voice that was wheezy with fog, and a spirit that was strange to Arthur Augustus, "you'll get runned over if you don't mind where you're a-goin'! 'Ere's a nice bunch of v'lets—penny! Tuppence a markit bunch!"

The swell of St. Jim's was bewildered. The idea of purchasing a bunch of violets in the middle of the road, surrounded by throbbing motors, the clash of horses' hoofs, and the inextricable mass of traffic, was beyond him. He stared at the flower-seller blankly.

"I—I thought you were in dangah!" he exclaimed.

The woman gave a hoarse chuckle.

She was not pretty to look at, but her purple face and bleary eyes did not prevent her from summing Arthur Augustus up according to her standard.

"He, he!" she wheezed. "You're a toff, you are, straight! Fancy thinkin' I was in danger of me life! Why, I know this 'ere road as well as me own blessed 'and! 'Ere, come on!"

A taxicab shot out of the line of traffic going eastward, and bore down upon the pair.

Arthur Augustus started, and promptly stood in front of the woman.

"Wun!" he yelled. "Ow!"

The next instant the swell of St. Jim's was swung off his feet. The flower-woman had dropped her basket, and, with one brawny arm grabbing the astounded Arthur Augustus round the middle, she scuttled with astonishing agility across the road.

The swell of St. Jim's was crimson with mortification.

"Sared yer bacon that time, sonny!" exclaimed the rescuer, as she plumped Arthur Augustus down.

The swell of St. Jim's was torn between a sense of outraged dignity and gratitude.

He fumbled in his pocket.

"Youah flowahs!" he murmured. "I am vewy much obliged to you!"

The flower-woman looked at the swell of St. Jim's with a kindly eye.

"T'ain't nothin'!" she wheezed. "You'd 'ave done the same for me if so be as I weren't so 'eavy! Wot? Them flowers?"

"Pway allow me to defway the damage!" said Arthur Augustus, with his accustomed air of lordly command. "Do you considah half-a-sov. would wecompense you for youah loss? Of course," he went on, "I cannot possibly pwetend to wecompense you for youah—youah pwompt action and bwavevwy!"

"I ain't going to 'ave no half-sovereign!" protested the flower-seller. "Five bob'll cover the lot!"

"You will pway accept this," replied Arthur Augustus. "I am extremely obliged to you."

Before the woman could protest any further, the swell of THE GEN LIBRARY—No. 98.

THE
IS A

£48 MOTOR-CYCLE

TO BE GIVEN
AWAY

IN "PLUCK."

St. Jim's had placed a coin in her hand, raised his hat, and was gone in the fog.

For a moment the flower-seller stood on the edge of the pavement, staring in front of her.

"Well," she muttered at last, "if this ain't a blessed adventure my name ain't Sally! 'Tain't no good standing 'ere, so 'ere's off 'ome! The kids'll 'ave a feed ter night!"

After his hurried retreat, the swell of St. Jim's was worse off than ever. For a little while he walked with the crowd and endeavoured to locate his position, but he was hopelessly lost.

"I hope Tom Mewwy and Figgay are all wight!" he murmured. "I've a gweat mind to go to my gov'nah's!"

Arthur Augustus looked about him in worse bewilderment than ever. His various excursions to town had been chiefly confined to the West End, and he would have had little difficulty in locating his whereabouts had he been stranded anywhere in the region of Bond Street.

He stood on the edge of the pavement, and peered across the street. If anything, the fog—a regular London pea-soup fog—was thicker than ever, and the swell of St. Jim's coughed, and his eyes began to smart.

"Piper!"

Arthur Augustus jumped, and, as he turned round, a grimy paw stretched out to catch his eyeglass.

A ragged little urchin stared with an impudent grin into the swell of St. Jim's astonished face, and a shrill voice repeated:

"Piper!"

"I don't wequiah such a thing, my good fellah!" observed Arthur Augustus severely.

"All right, me lord duke, keep yer 'air on! I nearly saved yer blessed winder-pane, didn't I? My heye, ain't it foggy? 'Ow long 'ave yer bin out? If yer won't buy a piper, there's a cove over the road as sells maps of London, all ighly coloured, for a tanner! Come on; I don't bear no malice, I don't—I ain't one of yer ikey ones, I ain't—an' I'll hescoot yer across the road!"

The newsboy did a quick double-shuffle on the greasy pavement, and cocked his head on one side.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle, and surveyed the youngster in silence.

To tell the truth, the little cockney's rapid and unquenchable flow of language had somehow upset his "dig"; but if the swell of St. Jim's at first felt inclined to administer a thrashing to the free-spoken youngster, he changed his mind as he gazed and saw that if the grin on the wizened face was impudent, its owner looked half-starved, and his cheerfulness did not hide the fact that his tattered coat had very little else beneath it as a protection against the chilling damp and cold.

For the moment the swell of St. Jim's forgot that he was lost in London, and his right hand jingled the coins in his pocket.

With the quickness of his race, the newsboy slipped out an evening-paper. He had been about to resent D'Arcy's scrutiny, but he meant to do business if he could before he gave himself the pleasure of expressing his opinions.

"I don't wequiah a papah," said Arthur Augustus.

"I—"

"Garn! Who're yer coddin'?" demanded the newsboy indignantly.

"I beg your pardon," said D'Arcy, in a severe tone of voice. "I am not in the habit of perfoahmin' actions of that wepwehensible ordah. I merely desiah you to accept this coin and diwect me to Bouwewie Street."

"You're a toff, guv'nor!" exclaimed the newsboy. "A tanner!" Then, as the boy, with the suspicion natural to one leading his hard life, placed the coin between his teeth, he saw that the coin gave off a yellow glitter, and he uttered a startled exclamation: "Crikey, guv'nor, it's 'alf a quid!"

The boy thrust the coin into the middle of D'Arcy's waist-coat, and the swell of St. Jim's retreated precipitately.

"Pway westwain youahself," he observed. "I am perfectly aware that it is half-a-sov., and, undah the circe, I shall be extremely obliged if you will tweat the mattah in a pwopah spiwit, an' conduct me to Bouwewie Street."

The newsboy gazed at the swell of St. Jim's with a solemn look, spat on the coin, hitched up his papers, and, with thoughts too disorganised for words, darted across the road.

On the other side of the street he stopped and looked back—there was no sign of his generous patron.

"E's a rum cove, an' no error!" muttered the boy, as he took a flying leap in front of a taxi-cab, tacked three steps between a motor-bus and a news-cart, and arrived back at the side of Arthur Augustus. "Fought you was behind me, me lord!" he said.

A momentary stoppage in the traffic left the road clear, and the swell of St. Jim's was saved any explanation.

The oddly-assorted companions crossed without any trouble, and the newsboy elbowed his way against the crowd.



The terrified maidservant clung round Colonel Wharton's neck, and gasped "Oh! Oh!"
 "Dear me!" exclaimed the Colonel. "What can be the matter?"

This picture illustrates an amusing incident in the long, complete school tale contained in the number of THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY now on sale. Price One Hal penny.

More polite, and careful of his clothes, the swell of St. Jim's had some difficulty in keeping up with his conductor.

After five minutes of a bewildering scramble at the tail of the small urchin, they stopped.

"This 'ere's Bouverie Street," said the newsboy.

Arthur Augustus looked surprised. He had expected to find a broad street, with palatial buildings. Instead, he found what looked like a narrow lane, barricaded with carts loaded with huge reels of paper.

"Which office d'you want?" inquired the paper-boy. "I knows all!"

For the life of him, Arthur Augustus could not remember, and he peered about in perplexity.

Two forms loomed up in the fog. The swell of St. Jim's gave a shout of joy.

"Well, I'm blessed!" shouted Tom Merry. "Here, Figgy, catch hold of him, and don't leave go till we're back at the old coll., or he'll get lost again!"

"Bai Jove!" cried Arthur Augustus indignantly. "You fellahs got lost! You lost me! I didn't lose you!"

"Well, it don't matter either way," replied Tom Merry, with a laugh. "We've got our prize-ass back, and that's all we want! I'll take jolly good care not to let you out of my sight again! Anyhow, you had sense enough to find your way machinerie Street! How did you get on? Why didn't you

On one of paper

go straight to the office? We've been hanging about this corner for half an hour!"

"I got on vevy well," said the swell of St. Jim's quickly.

"Only I forgot the name of the papah!"

"Jingo, it's lucky we waited for you!" cried Figgins.

"Let's get on!"
 Arthur Augustus looked round for the newsboy, but the latter had disappeared, and it was with a feeling of relief that D'Arcy turned and walked down Bouverie Street between his two chums. He was glad he would not have to explain that he had lost himself, and he found his face grow painfully hot and red as he thought of his inglorious adventure with the flower-seller.

Figgins pulled up before a pair of swing-doors.
 "Here we are," he explained. "This is uncle's place."

The trio mounted the steps.
 A grizzled commissaire, with a row of medals on his chest, came out of a sort of little glass box directly the three juniors passed the doors.

"Who d'you want to see?" he demanded gruffly, standing in front of the stone stairway, as if he thought the juniors might make a bolt for it.

"Mr. Adamson, please," said Figgins.

"He's busy," replied the commissaire briefly.
 For a moment the three juniors were nonplussed. The place

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NG OF THE CASTLE"

IN NEXT THURSDAY'S

"GEM" LIBRARY.

"KI.

was one continual roar of machinery, and messenger-boys and men raced up and down the stairs.

The place seemed to be a regular hive for business.

The three looked at one another.

"Better write and state your business," said the commissioner.

Figgins's jaw dropped.

Tom Merry grinned cheerfully.

Arthur Augustus stared at the man through his monocle.

The commissioner made a step to the door.

"My—my good man!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's.

"I—we—"

"We have an appointment!" cried Figgins suddenly.

The commissioner stopped abruptly.

"Why didn't you say so, then? What name?"

"Figgins, Tom Merry, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy," replied the member of the New House.

"One's enough," said the man. "Fill in that form there, and I'll send it up. Mr. Adamson is very busy, though," he volunteered as he returned to his glass box.

Figgins filled up the slip of paper. He got on all right for the first two lines, then he came to one against which was printed "Nature of business."

"What shall I put here, Tom Merry?"

The chief of the Terrible Three examined the paper.

"Editorial!" he exclaimed promptly.

Figgins obediently carried out instructions, and handed the slip to the commissioner through a little sliding door in the glass box.

The latter glanced at the slip, and then pressed a button in the wall.

A boy in livery came tumbling down the stairs, and looked impudently at the waiting juniors.

"Take that to Mr. Adamson. Gentleman waiting—three of them," said the commissioner.

The hall boy read the paper, glanced at the three again, grinned, and bounded up the stairs.

"Cheeky little monkey that," said Tom Merry. "He wants a thump—"

"Gentlemen to see Mr. Adamson!" shouted a shrill voice.

The hall boy was grinning round the corner of the first bend in the staircase.

"Will you go up?" said the commissioner.

Figgins led the way.

At the top of two flights of not particularly clean stone steps the three were marshalled by their grinning conductor down a long corridor.

The boy pulled up outside a door marked private, knocked, and, without waiting for an answer, led the way in.

With a smile the boy backed out, and the three juniors looked round with interest.

There was no one in the room, but the sound of voices came from an adjoining apartment.

Figgins's uncle came to the communicating door, and smiled pleasantly at the trio.

"Make yourself at home," he said. "I sha'n't be a minute."

He vanished as quickly as he had come, and the rapid click of a typewriter was resumed.

"I suppose uncle is dictating," whispered Figgins. "Sit down," he went on, doing the honours. "Jolly comfy room, isn't it?"

Tom Merry nodded, and looked about him with glowing eyes.

A huge desk occupied the centre of the room, and piles of manuscripts almost buried the telephone standing by the blotting-pad. The walls were covered with posters and rows of long slips of printed matter. Books and papers littered the floor and chairs, and the whole room was eloquent of orderly disorder.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, in a low voice. "This looks like the weal thing!"

"It is!" replied Figgins. "There's no doubt about that. Don't you think you'd better open your parcel, Tom Merry?"

The editor of the St. Jim's Weekly wore a very subdued expression, and he cut the string without a word, and laid the little heap of manuscripts down on a vacant corner of the desk.

The contributions of the St. Jim's junior looked very insignificant on the big desk, and Tom Merry sighed nervously. His own little world seemed to have suddenly become very small, and he almost dreaded the coming interview.

The juniors sat very silent and listened to the incessant click and recurrent ting of the typewriter bell.

At last the voice stopped abruptly, and with a quick step, Figgins's uncle came in and closed the door.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," he said, as he shook hands all round. "How are you, my boy? This is the editor of the Weekly?"

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MOTOR-CYCLE

TO BE GIVEN AWAY

IN "PLU

Tom Merry blushed under the scrutiny of the keen, pleasant eyes.

"And who is this?"

"Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, uncle."

The swell of St. Jim's bowed in his best style.

"What, Lord Eastwood's son?" exclaimed the editor. "Pleased to meet you, D'Arcy. And what position do you occupy on the 'Weekly'?"

"Gussy contributes a weekly article on dress," replied Tom Merry. "Jolly funny—jolly good, I mean—it is, too."

Mr. Adamson smiled under his moustache, but preserved an air of becoming gravity.

"Very useful, too!" he said. "If I remember rightly, such a thing was greatly needed when I was at St. Jim's."

"You're an old boy, then, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Why didn't you tell us, Figgy?"

Mr. Adamson laughed.

"I don't expect Figgins knew," he said. "You see, it was rather before his time. You don't smoke, I suppose? No, of course not. Well, I'll have a pipe while we go into business."

The editor lit a well-worn old briar, and settled himself at his desk.

"Now," he said briskly, "what do you want me to do? We'll soon lick things into shape, Merry."

Tom Merry handed the editor a copy of the "Weekly."

Mr. Adamson examined it with professional interest.

"Printed!" he exclaimed. "Well, that something. How d'you manage it?"

"We have it printed at Rylcombe," explained Tom Merry. "The chap there's awfully decent, and we sub round for the exes."

"You seem to work well together," observed Mr. Adamson. "That's capital. Now, I don't see anything the matter with this," he went on. "I should have been proud of it in my time. Our school mag? Oh, yes, we had one, but it was a very amateurish affair—was written and copied on single sheets. Hallo, what's this? Another!"

Tom Merry passed the copy of the "Grammarians' Magazine."

"My word!"

Mr. Adamson looked through the production quickly.

"I think I can guess what's the matter," he said quickly. "This cannot be allowed. They stole a march on you, eh?"

"That's it, sir!" cried Tom Merry. "The bound—the boggars kept it jolly dark, too!"

"That's often the case," said the editor drily. "You don't often find a rival shouting his ideas from the housetops before they're done. Hum!"

"Wotten boundahs!" muttered the swell of St. Jim's, half aloud.

"I quite agree with you, D'Arcy," said Mr. Adamson. "We can't possibly allow this kind of thing."

The editor laughed like a boy, and the three juniors felt as if he were one of themselves.

"We must wally wound!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

For a moment Mr. Adamson looked puzzled. He was not used to the swell of St. Jim's peculiar form of speech.

"Rally round!" said Tom Merry, with a grin.

"Oh, yes, certainly! There's nothing like hanging together against the common foe!" exclaimed Mr. Adamson. "What do you propose to do, Merry? Have you thought of anything special?"

"Well, no, not exactly," replied Tom Merry. "We mean to put our backs into it. We've got a new serial, and if we can manage it, we want to have a coloured cover, and—some pictures."

"A new serial! You seem to be pretty enterprising. What is it?"

"A detective story, sir. The manuscript is here."

Mr. Adamson turned over the little pile of MSS.

"So this is what you wish to go in. As editor of the 'Weekly,' of course, all the contents are your affairs. I'll see what we can do in the way of presenting what you've got in a more effective way. Something to please the eye is what you want. Curiously enough, I have some designs here that I think would do for the cover."

Mr. Adamson, puffing away at his pipe with great enjoyment, crossed the room and opened a portfolio. He brought out half a dozen sheets of cardboard.

"How d'you think this would do?" he said, selecting a design drawn in black and white. "You see, there's a space left for title and sub-title, and the idea's not bad."

"Wippin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Great!" cried Tom Merry. "Why, that's the very thing!"

Figgins gave a grunt of approval.

ANSWERS

TO BE GIVEN AWAY

IN "PLU

"Well, that's settled!" said Mr. Adamson. "I'll get the title put in right away, and we'll have a block made in a couple of hours. Let me see, what's the size of your magazine?"

Tom Merry looked rather taken aback. He had never had occasion to notice the actual size of the St. Jim's "Weekly."

"Never mind. We'll soon fix that," said the editor, taking up the telephone.

"Hallo!"

"This is Mr. Adamson speaking."

"Yes."

"Will you tell Mr. Andrews I should like to see him?"

"Thanks."

"The chief of the process department will be here in a minute, and we'll explain what we want to him," said the editor, turning to the juniors.

Figgins coughed.

"I say, uncle," he said, with a very red face, "we can't afford to run up a big bill for printing, you know. I—we—"

"We had a whip wound!" explained the swell of St. Jim's.

Mr. Adamson looked rather surprised, but he said nothing. Tom Merry laid a little packet on the desk.

"We can't think of imposing too much on your kindness, sir," he said, with quaint, boyish dignity. "As Gussy said, we had a whip round, and we don't want to exceed the limit of—"

"Your finances!" interrupted Mr. Adamson. "Quite right, too. But we needn't bother about that now. I'll see that you are not made bankrupt. Come in!"

A little man, wearing glasses, bustled in.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes, Andrews; I want you to fix this for a cover. This is the size."

"A new magazine, sir?"

"Well, no, not exactly," said Mr. Adamson. "These young gentlemen are the controllers of a school magazine, and I am giving them a helping hand. Think you can manage it by the morning?"

The little manager of the process department glanced curiously at the three juniors, ran a rule rapidly over the cover, and compared it with the new design.

"Yes, sir. Do you want type inset?"

"Oh, yes! 'Tom Merry's Weekly' set across the top, and in the lower corner, 'The St. James's College Magazine.' That's right, isn't it, Merry?"

"Yes, sir."

No more words were wasted, and the little man rushed off.

No sooner had he gone than Mr. Adamson turned to the telephone again.

A big man, with a very red face, entered almost before the editor had replaced the receiver.

"This is our head printer," explained Mr. Adamson, collecting the copy for the St. Jim's "Weekly." "Oh, Duke, will you take this to Mr. Grieve, and ask him to mark it up? He will give you spaces for blocks and set for single column, three inches."

The three juniors gasped. Matters were rushing along with a vengeance.

"And," went on Mr. Adamson, "will you get this through as soon as you can? Andrews has the cover in hand. I'll see you later, about seven. Now, you chaps, we'll get some tea."

Tom Merry's little packet was soon whisked into a drawer, and Mr. Adamson struggled into his greatcoat.

"We'll go down the street a little way," he said, as they walked downstairs. "I know a place where we can get a sort of high tea. Oh, by the way, would you like to see the machine-room?"

The four were now standing in the entrance-hall, and the commissionaire looked much impressed with the juniors' importance. It was seldom that the chief editor conducted anybody to the printing-room.

"Yes, if you can spare the time, sir?"

"Wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Come along, then."

The editor opened a heavy oak door, and the rumble of heavy machinery burst on the juniors' ears with a roar and a clatter.

Down a few steps the little party came to a little opening in the wall, and, stepping through one behind the other, they came on to a small iron gallery.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "This is wippin'!"

Tom Merry nodded his head vigorously. He saw D'Arcy's lips move, but the noise was too great to hear his voice.

The juniors looked down on to two huge whirling masses of machinery.

On one side of the printing-machine was fixed a thick roll of paper, about eight feet long, and nine or ten feet in cir-

cumference, and so rapidly was this revolving that it did not seem to be moving at all.

In and out, over rollers, under rollers, rushed the paper. Underneath the machine was a sort of iron mouth, and this was disgorging the copies of the paper. Printed, folded, and wired.

It was a sight of fascinating interest, and even Arthur Augustus was silent as they came out.

"We sha'n't print the 'Weekly' on such a big machine as that," said Mr. Adamson, with a laugh; "but you shall have a complete edition by to-morrow morning."

"So soon as that!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Oh, yes, we can't afford to waste time in these matters," said the editor. "We mustn't lose a minute before getting a whack in at the rival firm, you know. The Grammarians, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. By Jove! that's fine. It's awfully good of you."

"Nonsense! Jump in here."

At the top of Bouverie Street was an empty taxicab.

"Stop just before you get to Charing Cross Station!" shouted Mr. Adamson, as he climbed in after the trio.

The driver nodded, and put down his little red flag, and a second or two later the cab was threading its way between the slower moving traffic of Fleet Street.

The journey was a series of short dashes. Now at a snail's pace, now at a good twelve or fourteen to the hour.

In less than ten minutes the taxi pulled up.

"Here we are," said Mr. Adamson. "Now for something to eat. I'm famished, and this fog is a bit too much even for a Londoner."

The editor led the way into a brilliantly lighted restaurant, and at a cosy little table the juniors forgot the roar and rush and gloom of the fog-laden streets.

Half an hour later, the three shook hands with the genial editor.

"Sorry to have to leave you," he exclaimed. "I must get back. You'll be able to find your way all right, though."

"Oh, yes, and thank you so much," said Tom Merry. "It's been awfully good of you."

"Not a bit of it, old chap," replied Mr. Adamson. "Besides, we editors are always glad to lend one another a helping hand, you know."

Tom Merry appreciated the delicate little compliment, and he smiled gratefully.

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, sir!"

CHAPTER 13.

The Christmas Number.

"NOW, then, Gussy, no larks, you know!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as they left the steps of the restaurant.

"You watch him from the left, Figgy, and I'll keep an eye all over him. We can't afford the time to lose him again. Hallo! What the—"

A roughly dressed man had suddenly lurched into the swell of St. Jim's, and he reeled into Tom Merry's arms.

"The clumsy beggar!" shouted the leader of the Terrible Three. "Hallo! What's the matter?"

"My tickah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Your watch! By Jove!"

"There he goes!" shouted Figgins.

The man was making for a side turning. Another instant he would be gone in the fog.

Figgins started forward. His long legs covered the ground in a twinkling, but already another had given chase to the thief, and just as the three juniors turned the corner of Rupert Street, they saw a small figure dart in front of the man.

There was an oath and a crash, and something glittering shot from the pickpocket's hand into the gutter.

It was the stolen watch.

"Got it!" yelled Figgins.

"Collar him, Gussy!" shouted Tom Merry.

Too late, however, for the man was up and off like a scared rabbit.

"Well, I'm blessed!"

"Bai Jove!"

The swell of St. Jim's stared in astonishment.

"I twigged him wathin' yer when yer come out of the restaurant with the other gents!" cried a shrill voice.

"Why, it's the chap we saw you with this afternoon!" cried Tom Merry.

The newsboy grinned.

"That's me," he said. "Didn't he come down a treat, eh? Just laid down in front of 'im, and down he comes, wallop! Well, so-long!"

Arthur Augustus plunged his hand into his pocket.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "I must wewahd you."

The paper-boy shook his head vigorously.

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"I reckon you and me's square," he said.

"Lend me half a sov.—a sov.—deah boy," whispered Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry put his hand in his pocket.

"I ain't going to 'ave no half-a-quad!" cried the paper-boy.

"Him and me's square! So long!"

In a flash he was gone, and the juniors heard his shrill voice as he ran down the Strand.

"Piper!"

"Well, this licks everything!" cried Tom Merry. "Come on. We must buck up, or we shall lose our train. How's your ticker? All right?"

The three hurried off, and examination showed that the swell of St. Jim's watch had escaped with no more serious damage than a dent in the back and a broken glass.

Without further adventure, the three landed in the Tube station, and caught their train.

"Say, Gussy," exclaimed Tom Merry, "what have you been doing with your tin? You had two half-quids when we left you."

"I—I—"

"Come on. Out with it?"

"I gave one to the boy this afternoon," replied the swell of St. Jim's.

"Yes?"

There was no reply.

"What about the other?"

Tom Merry and Figgins fixed their eyes on D'Arcy.

The latter polished his eyeglass, and went hot all over as he thought of his "lift" across the Strand.

"I wufuse to be cwoos-examined!" he said desperately.

"Rats!" said Figgins.

"Out with it!" cried Tom Merry.

"I—I gave it to a flower-woman."

"My eye!"

"You do chuck your money about!"

The juniors were so surprised that for the moment they forgot to ask the reason for such generosity.

The swell of St. Jim's changed the subject.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "We've only got six minutes."

"Jingo!" cried Tom Merry. "We shall have to run for it. This our station? Yes! Come on!"

The three pelted up the platform and into the lift.

"I feah we shall not do it!"

Exactly five minutes later they reached Paddington. They raced for their platform.

The train had gone.

"Well, I'm blessed!" panted Tom Merry, mopping his head. "I'm blessed—well blessed!"

"We shall get into an awful row over this!" muttered Figgins. "The Head will be awfully ratty."

"It's all your fault, Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

The swell of St. Jim's stared indignantly.

"Going and getting your beastly watch pinched!"

"Bai Jove! I—"

"Don't try to get out of it now."

"I wufuse. I—"

"Arthur!"

The swell of St. Jim's looked round in amazement. A big motor-car had come close up to where the juniors were standing, and at the window stood a young girl.

"Bai Jove! Ethel!"

"Cousin Ethel!"

Figgins went very red.

"And who is with you, Ethel?" inquired the swell of St. Jim's.

"Can't you guess, Arthur? Why, I'm surprised at you. Look at the car!"

"Bai Jove!" The swell of St. Jim's recognised his own monogram. "The patah!"

"Why, of course. And here he comes!"

Lord Eastwood came hurrying out of the booking-office, and father and son eyed one another through their monocles.

"I will explain the mattah," said Arthur Augustus.

"It would be as well," replied Lord Eastwood.

With great dignity, the swell of St. Jim's told their story—that is, in the main facts. The detail of the flower-seller he omitted.

"And now you have lost your train."

Lord Eastwood looked perplexed.

"Well," he went on, after a moment, "the only thing is to send you all down by car. Ethel is going to Huckleberry Heath, so you can all go together."

Figgins tried not to look pleased.

Lord Eastwood consulted his watch.

"In you get, then," he said. "I must leave you at the House, and Thomas can call for me after he has delivered you."

Under the quick guidance of Thomas, the chauffeur, the

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big Daimler made short work of the run across London to the Houses of Parliament, where Lord Eastwood alighted, and soon after the headlights gleamed on hedge and cottage.

London, and its mantle of fog, was left further behind with every second.

True, it was late when the three juniors, sleepy and tired, descended at the gates of St. Jim's, but Thomas had a message from Lord Eastwood that saved them a wiggling.

There was no talking that night, but the next morning Tom Merry, Figgins, and Arthur Augustus were beset by a swarm of juniors, hungry for news.

The day's adventures were gone over in detail. The sceptical were convinced of the wonderful powers of Figgins's uncle, when a big parcel arrived after breakfast, and was dumped on the Terrible Three's study table by Taggles.

Tom Merry ripped up the string.

"There you are!" he cried triumphantly.

There was a scramble for the pile of papers.

A distinct odour of printing-ink came from the newly-opened parcel.

"My aunt!" exclaimed Jack Blake, gazing admiringly at the pale-blue cover of the "Weekly." "That uncle of yours, Figgy, is a tip-top, out-and-out brick! That's what he is. We must get up a testimonial and send it to him. My eye! Where are the Grammar cads now, eh?"

"Nowhere!" yelled Manners excitedly.

"Lost! Done absolutely!" shouted Digby. "Let's have a look."

Everyone of the juniors held a copy of the St. Jim's "Weekly," and every one of them glanced surreptitiously to see that his own contribution had not been forgotten.

Jack Blake's face literally shone with delight when he discovered that his detective story looked the real thing. "The Mystery of the School" was decorated with a picture at the top of the page, and an illustration to the incident where the detective holds the villain powerless with a wrist of iron.

Tom Merry's leading article was surrounded by a border of holly, and Arthur Augustus polished his eyeglass vigorously when he discovered his column was tastefully decorated with some blocks of the latest productions in neck-ware from Bond Street.

"Bai Jove! Wippin'!" he murmured. "Wippin'!"

"Spiffing!"

"Quite as good as a real mag."

"Better!" declared Tom Merry loyally.

"Isn't that just like old Towser?" shouted Herries, pointing to a small head of a bulldog at the top of his column on "Dogs and Their Intelligence."

The enthusiastic owner of Towser did not know that Blake's uncle had borrowed the portrait of a prize bulldog from the editor of a sporting paper, so it made no difference.

Everyone was delighted.

Suddenly, Tom Merry, who was glancing down his editorial column, gave a yell of astonishment.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he cried. "Listen to this! 'The editor has pleasure in announcing that the sum of six pounds eleven-and-fourpence-halfpenny has been collected from the staff and contributors of this paper, and forwarded to the Rylcombe Cottage Hospital.'"

There was a moment of astounded silence.

"That uncle of yours, Figgy, is qualifying for a knighthood. How jolly decent of him!"

The juniors read the notice at the foot of Tom Merry's column for themselves, and a vote of thanks was instantly passed amid great enthusiasm, and a letter of thanks signed by the whole thirteen went off that night.

There was not the slightest doubt that Tom Merry's "Christmas Number" had proved a great success. Even the lordly Sixth, with the exception of Adams and one or two others, admitted that it was a creditable school magazine. But the crowning touch came when that evening the Terrible Three passed the Head in the entrance hall.

"Very good indeed, Merry!" said the doctor, as the three stood aside to let him pass. "You will be editor of a leading newspaper one of these days."

That evening the Co.'s assembled in full force to celebrate their triumph, and a copy of the Christmas Number was carefully addressed and posted, with the compliments of the editor, to Frank Monk.

"That'll make Monkey sit up!" said Jack Blake, with unholly glee.

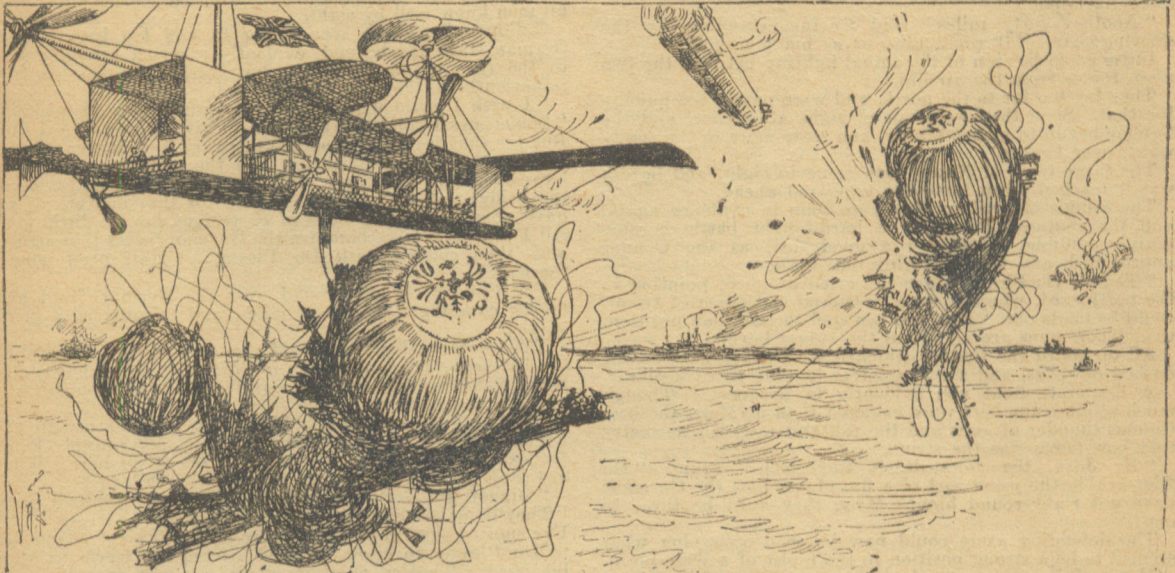
And it did.

THE END.

Another splendid long complete tale next Thursday, entitled "King of the Castle," by Martin Clifford. Order your "Gem Library" in advance.—Price One Penny.

Please tell your Friends about this Story.

A Powerful War Story—By JOHN TREGELLIS.



BRITAIN'S REVENGE

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.

The two boys are on their way to Luneville, in France, in a wonderful airship, the Condor, invented by John Carfax, a friend of theirs. The combined British and French forces are cornered at Luneville by the Germans, and there are rumours of a great disaster to the allies.

The Condor sets out to see if she can be of any assistance.

(Now go on with the story.)

En Route for France.

"I'm told our troops and the French have got on splendidly together," said Carfax. "The British force isn't very big, but the West Riding Regiment is there, besides the Gordons and Borderers. There are two field-batteries as well."

"But who commands? D'you mean to say they're under this French chap, Du Plessay?" said Stephen.

"In a way. Stuart-Ogilvie is bound to be junior to him, because it's a much bigger French force than a British one," said Carfax. "I don't know about being under him. They're combined, that's all. But Du Plessay's a splendid general, and it's his own country. He knows it thoroughly, and his men would go anywhere with him."

"He seems to have got 'em into a nice hash," growled Stephen.

"It may not be any blunder of his. The fortune of war. But we shall soon know, and I shall be very surprised if there isn't work for the Condor. There's the Channel ahead."

Dover was quickly passed, a little to the right, and the sea was soon beneath, white-capped and raging in the gale. The airship, flying straight and steadily as an arrow, was a far more comfortable conveyance than the ships that could be seen tossing and labouring over the heavy Channel seas. Her course took her just clear of Cape Blanc Nez on the French side, and she held straight on along the coast of Picardy, leaving Calais and Gravelines, with their long, straight harbour piers, behind.

"Those look like warships," said Stephen, pointing ahead, where two big grey vessels were seen, steaming up to their anchors as they rode.

"Yes; large French cruisers, sheltering in Dunkirk Roads," said Sam. "Some of their fleet is helping ours to blockade the Holland harbours further along, and others are cruisin' about picking up German merchantmen for prizes."

Carfax, when first the French ships were sighted on the horizon, ran out a string of signals on his horizontal signalling-masts. The wind nearly tore them to pieces, but the French vessels read them and answered smartly as the Condor sped overhead and across the land.

"They're lying there for orders," said Carfax. "I told them the news, and that we were bound to Luneville. They wish us luck, and say they're blessed sorry we can't tow them overland to Du Plessay."

"Wish we could," said Sam. "Their guns'd make the Germans sit up if the ships got 'em all to bear. However, it'd take a couple of hundred years or so to dig a canal from here to Luneville, and in the meantime the fight might be over."

He felt very little in a jesting mood, however; nor did any of the Condor's crew. They were too apprehensive of being about to witness a big disaster and a German triumph. The sea was left behind, and Northern France was before them. The mountains of the Ardennes were passed, and the speed of the Condor never slackened. On and on she went as the day drew out, and it was yet early when a corner of Belgium was cut off, France sighted again, and at last the Plain of Luxembourg was in full view.

Three to One.

"Germany at last!" said Kenneth. "Look, there's a battery of French guns pushing along the high-road from the southward! There'll be outposts about here somewhere."

Still the airship sped on her way, till Stephen, who was looking ahead intently, saw what seemed to be a great ant-heap moving far in front, and heard the sound of musketry.

"There they are," he cried, "hard at it still! We're in time, then!"

"No," said Sam; "that's the main French army of the

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"KING OF THE CASTLE"

IN NEXT THURSDAY'S

"GEM" LIBRARY.

North. Yonder is Metz. Look, you can see the German troops, and the cavalry squadrons beyond! It's the two great forces holdin' each other in check. Hear the guns on the left there?"

"The French have got their hands full, and if Von Ritter gets round on their rear it'll be a case with 'em," said Stephen. "How far have we got to go, sir, before we reach the danger-spot?"

"Another forty miles," said Carfax, standing by the steering-gear. "It won't take us as many minutes."

Little could be seen of the actual fighting between the two main forces from the airship.

They lay too far to the north, and were passed too quickly for that. Soon they were out of sight altogether, and the Condor began to mount higher, and steer more to the southward, over France.

The large town of Nancy soon came in sight, and hardly was it reached when Luneville appeared ahead.

The sounds of artillery fire were soon in evidence again, and the confused sounds of a hard-fought battle became plainly audible, slackening a good deal as the Condor approached, and then breaking out again.

"There's Du Plessay's army!" cried Stephen, pointing to the northward, where a wide, scattered concourse of troops could be made out. "See, you can spot the German position, too. Their guns are all round the ridges beyond."

All on board the Condor watched with eager gaze as she dashed onwards, and the two forces became more visible.

A desperate fight was evidently in progress. Though much smaller numbers were engaged than at Metz, the continuous thunder of guns and the roll and rattle of musketry told how fierce was the struggle.

"By Jove, the news didn't lie!" cried Sam. "Du Plessay's in the worst sort of a fix. Look how the Germans have got right round him! Why, they must be three to one!"

The defending army could now be seen occupying what seemed to be a strong position in the midst of a wide plain.

Many of its regiments of riflemen were entrenched, and the trenches were sputtering and crackling with long lines of rifle-firing.

Other battalions were lying out in the open, with whatever cover they could get. There were six field batteries, and a squadron of light cavalry were in reserve behind the shelter of a small wood.

On the heights all round, a perfect ring of fire from German batteries was pouring forth, spouting shells at the defenders wherever the range allowed it.

"It's worse even than we reckoned!" exclaimed Stephen, in consternation. "Why doesn't Du Plessay fall back southwards, if he can't hold out?"

"Perhaps because the German guns command his only way of retreat," said Sam, his field-glasses to his eyes; "or maybe it is that he doesn't want to fall back on the town of Luneville. That must be Clunard village behind him. The troops are filling the houses. Yes, it looks like a knock-out."

The blue and drab and green of the Prussian and Württemberg troops could be seen in overwhelming numbers; while on Du Plessay's side the deeper blue jackets and red trousers of the French regiments of the line were most in evidence, and a gallant fight they were making of it.

Besides these, the trim, workmanlike khaki of the British troops could be seen, and foremost of all were the Welsh Borderers, in the most exposed position, lined out to protect Du Plessay's right flank.

The Gordon Highlanders were on the other side, firing coolly and quietly into the advancing Prussian battalions, the tall Scottish officers standing erect in the trenches, and directing the fire as they watched the enemy through their field-glasses.

Lying out in the open was the West Riding Regiment, engaged in pumping lead into some German machine-guns that had advanced nearer than was good for them.

Calling in at the Crown Gun Works, 66, Great Charles Street, Birmingham, recently, we were pleased to notice an air of activity about the place which, unfortunately, is rather a rare thing at the present time among the bulk of Birmingham trades.

Here we saw the well-known "Dreadnought" sporting guns in course of manufacture, and although Mr. Frank Clark, the proprietor, employs none but the very highest skilled workmen, yet he insists upon personally finishing off every gun that his works turn out. Apart from these very high-class sporting guns, Mr. Clark is able to fulfil every possible want in the way of saloon guns, air-rifles, ammunition, etc., at prices to suit all. A copy of his catalogue (which is sent free on request) is not only interesting, but equally instructive, comprising as it does such a vast range of lines so dear to the heart of the sportsman.

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THERE IS A **£48 MOTOR-CYCLE** TO BE GIVEN AWAY IN "PLUCK."

"Good heavens! The losses are awful!" said Stephen. "See them carrying the wounded out? Our side must have lost half their men!"

"Bad enough!" said Sam gloomily. "What's to be done, sir? It's now or never!"

A sound of distant cheering came up from below. The French and British troops were welcoming the Condor, which all men knew well by sight.

Gallopers could be seen flying to and fro between the German staffs far beyond, evidently carrying urgent orders to the troops and batteries; but Carfax tapped his foot impatiently on the deck and frowned.

"I wish I could wipe those troops out," he said moodily. "Sometimes I think I was a fool to give the promise I did. But for that we should see two-thirds of Von Ritter's Army Corps swept out of existence, and the rest flying for their lives back into Germany. But it's done," he said, striking the bridge-rail with his fist; "and, for that matter, all we have aboard is a few belts of cartridges for the little gun. All I can do is to reconnoitre the German forces thoroughly, and then consult with Du Plessay. Half-speed ahead there!"

The Condor circled around over the German front and flanks, covering a couple of miles, and keeping at a great height.

The consternation she caused was easy to see. Several of the batteries, as usual, began to fire futile shots at her, and Sam, watching keenly, took careful stock of Von Ritter's position and reserves.

"Note all you can; it will be the greatest use to the French general," said Carfax. "He cannot possibly know the exact state of things as we can see it up here. What are those yonder, coming up through the valley?"

"Bigger guns—Prussian Horse Artillery," replied Sam.

"They'll make things worse still when they arrive. Yes, I've spotted several points already that will be of advantage to Du Plessay to know. You've stirred the Germans up a bit, sir! They're checking their advance for the time being."

"It's about all I can do," said Carfax, with a shrug. "I don't see what help the Condor can give here, beyond scouting. Regiments and batteries are what Du Plessay wants. Stand by, Kenneth! Drop her just south of the wood there."

Swiftly the aeroplane sped back, lowered, and settled lightly behind the thick grove of trees near the waiting French cavalry. A great outburst of cheering greeted her all along the line as she descended.

"Vive la Condor!" came the shout from a thousand throats.

"Good old Carfax!" roared the gunners of a British field battery close by; and far beyond, above the rattle of the rifles, the cheers of the Gordons and Yorkshiremen could be heard.

Among the very first to greet the aeroplane's crew as she touched the ground was Major-General Stuart-Ogilvie, who galloped up on a big bay charger—a fine-looking, sunburnt man of about fifty.

"I was never more glad to see anyone, Mr. Carfax," he said, "though it's the first I've seen of your wonderful machine. You find us in the deuce of a hole, sir. It's no use denying that."

"I'm afraid the help I can give will be very small. My hands are tied," said Carfax, stepping down from the airship.

"You've put fresh heart into the troops, anyhow, and the Germans are in a rare stew over your arrival, I'll warrant," said the general. "Yes, the infernal Prussians are in heavy odds against us, and it's an ugly trap. Not Du Plessay's fault, though," he added. "Fine fellow, Du Plessay, and his men are capital fighters. We've all lost very heavily. Here he comes."

Brigadier-General du Plessay, an erect, bold-looking Frenchman, with a weather-tanned face, which showed signs of the grim anxiety of his situation, saluted the aeronaut with much warmth.

"Welcome, Monsieur Carfax!" he said, in good English. "It is most gallant of you to come. We shall trounce these cursed Germans yet, morbleu! Have you any news?"

"We have taken a thorough survey of the German position, hoping it would be of use," said Carfax. "Lieutenant Villiers here will report it to you."

"I have heard of Lieutenant Villiers and his brother," said the brigadier, with a salute and a look of welcome towards the boys. "Who has not? Your report, Monsieur le Lieutenant?"

Sam gave him briefly and concisely the military details about the German position and the batteries, and handed the brigadier a diagram he had roughly sketched. Du Plessay was astonished at the clearness of the report and the intimate knowledge Sam showed.

"Excellent!" he cried. "This is the very information I wanted. We shall make the most of it. Pardon, while I give orders." He called up a galloper and an aide-de-camp, and despatched them instantly with fresh commands for the troops and staff. "I will express my gratitude when we have more leisure, Lieutenant Villiers. You have done me a service. Now I must get away to the flank. Monsieur Carfax, are you going to mount again?"

"Whenever I am needed," said Carfax, going with the brigadier, "the Condor is at your service, though she is not at her best in a fight like this, now that I carry no explosives. Boys, if the brigadier has any use for you, the airship can spare you."

The din of the battle was now tremendous, and shells were bursting freely when the shelter of the grove was left. The batteries on the hills were doing heavy execution, in spite of the French entrenchments.

"My Chasseurs are losing the most heavily," said Du Plessay, biting his lips as he looked through his glasses, one side of which was chipped by a bullet, "and the Guides and Carabineers with them."

"Look!" exclaimed Stephen to his brother, pointing to a group of small gun-carriages and single horses that were mustering hurriedly behind a hillock. "Something in your line, Sam. Galloping Maxims!"

Sam's eyes lit up as he saw the handy little weapons, built so as to be hauled at a fast pace by a ridden horse, instead of by hand, and wonderfully useful in modern warfare to those who know how to handle them, owing to the speed with which they can be moved.

"Yes," said Stuart-Ogilvie, glancing at the boy, "a great responsibility rests on that small battery now. Two squadrons of Prussian cavalry are threatening my Guides and Carabineers, who are badly shaken, and the galloping Maxims are ordered out to take up a position and stop the charge, if possible."

From where they were the boys had a full view of the shell-torn plain, and the general's words needed no explaining. If the two squadrons of Prussian Hussars that were now in sight managed to cut up the badly-punished French Carabineers, who had suffered very heavily, it would not only mean the loss of those troops, but would affect the whole French position, and give an opening to the Germans which might well turn the scale in their favour, and give them the victory.

Du Plessay had met the move in every way he could, but the position was one of peril. The boys had seen enough of war to realise at a glance how serious it was.

"My word, we've arrived in time to see the turning-point of the fight, anyway!" muttered Stephen. "If they do cut up those two regiments, there won't be much to hope for."

"Yes; it depends on the Maxims, now," said Stuart-Ogilvie, half to himself. "Worst of it is, we've lost so many men, that all the Maxims can't be properly manned—at least, by gunners who are used to them. Those galloping machine-guns need men who have been trained to them specially. We've lost four to-day, and they will have to send field-battery men, who are not used to the work. Even then, all the Maxims can't go. Some will be shot down, too, before they get placed."

"Are they short of gunners, sir?" cried Sam. "I can handle a galloping Maxim—I've done it in three actions. What wouldn't I give to ride one of those yonder! But I suppose—"

"What's that?" exclaimed Du Plessay, overhearing, and turning sharply. "You can handle a galloper, Lieutenant Villiers?"

"I can answer for that," said General Stuart-Ogilvie quickly. "He brought one across the water, and helped defend Blackfriars Bridge during the siege of London, and I never saw anything smarter."

"Indeed! Then take one at once, and ride! Here, Beaupre," cried the brigadier to his aide-de-camp, "call out No. 4, and let Lieutenant Villiers have it! Be ready at the sound of the bugle, lieutenant. Yonder hillock is where you have to make for when the battery starts. Unlimber behind the wood-piles, and let the Prussians have it hot!"

Sam saluted, and dashed off jubilantly as fast as he could run, hanging to the aide-de-camp's stirrup, to the spot where the battery of gallopers had mustered.

"By gum, I wish I were good enough with a Maxim at long range!" exclaimed Stephen enviously. "But let me go sniping on my own, sir, and my carbine will account for a man or two. Good luck to you, Sam!"

Sam was already among the battery, and the cheery French gunners, not in the least jealous of a British competitor, greeted him with cheers and a volley of light-hearted chaff. They were happy as schoolboys, despite the grim game they were playing, and the grave position.

The young scout's horse was a huge, raking, iron-grey

gelding of Flemish breed, built for strength and speed—just the one he would have picked had he his choice. Sam saw to the traces, and jumped into the saddle. The gun was of the Vickers pattern, such as he was used to, and he felt quite at home.

"All ready, my hearties!" he cried. "Hope they'll soon let us go!"

"Vive le rosbill!" shouted somebody amid general laughter. "En voila un petit artilleur! Vive l'anglais!"

The bugle suddenly broke in upon their merriment, with its fierce, clear call, and away went the battery of Maxims.

In one solid phalanx the little guns swept round the base of the slope, and thundered away across the open. Sam felt the magnificent loins and quarters of the iron-grey buck and spring under him as the big horse stretched itself out. Next moment they were all in the thick of the firing. With a splendid, circling rush the gallant little one-horse guns crossed the plain, stopping neither for shell-fire nor bullets.

"Great Cæsar!" exclaimed Sam, gripping his horse with his knees, and drawing out past the guns ahead of him. "Airships are fine things, but this is the game for me!"

The exhilaration of the rush was glorious. Right in front, still half a mile away, the glittering squadrons of Prussian Hussars were closing in fast upon the two French regiments which had now lost so heavily that they were unfit to withstand a cavalry charge.

Away to the right was the knoll which the Maxims were making for. It was a long ridge jutting from a little wood, and piles of cut timber lay all along its crest, making a capital natural breastwork.

"En avant!" roared the leader of the French battery as they swept out across the plain. "Honours to the first gun that unlimbers!" he cried, in his own tongue.

This was a surprise to Sam, who had usually seen batteries go into action in single file, keeping their proper stations. But the wild dash of the French method with these smaller guns had all the more excitement in it.

"A race, by Jove, and under fire, too!" said Sam to himself. "Well, hang me if I'll be last!"

Making the utmost of his mount, Sam sat down to ride as if the honour of Britain depended on it—and he quite considered it did. The eyes of both armies were upon the flying guns.

All the Maxims opened widely out from one another at the commander's word, that they might have room to swing round and unlimber when they reached their goal. There was hardly anything to choose between them, the gun on Sam's right, drawn by a great chestnut horse with a blazed forehead, being slightly in front, and going like the wind.

"Come up, Jupiter!" said Sam, urging the iron-grey onward. "If you let that big camel beat you, I'll give you to the Germans for sausages!"

He need not have feared for his mount. The iron-grey had plenty of strength in reserve, and Sam, besides being a lighter weight than the other gunners, rode with splendid judgment. Gradually he drew up abreast the big chestnut, and passed it by a neck.

The rider of the latter, a huge-moustached Frenchman, who rode as if he had a neck to spare, glanced at Sam and grinned.

Now they were in the thick of the firing, the Germans doing their utmost to stop the Maxims' rush. A hail of lead swept around. A bullet grazed Sam's bridle-hand, and another went clean through the iron-grey's ear, but only made him gallop the faster. The rider of No. 5—two away from Sam—rolled out of his saddle with a coughing grunt, shot through the lungs, and a six-pounder shell struck the left-outside gun fairly, leaving horse, gun, and man a heap of blood-stained wreckage on the plain.

"The Germans are charging!" cried a voice above the din.

It was true. A bugle was heard in front, and the two squadrons of German Hussars, with loose reins and flashing sabres, came thundering over the turf—not at the Maxims, but at the shaken French regiments, who lay out to the left. It was now touch and go whether the former could arrive in time.

Suddenly Sam drew out with the lead six clear lengths ahead of the rest, riding like a Derby finish, the light gun bumping and thundering along behind him.

Right ahead was the ridge. Dashing up the slope, and slackening speed only at the last, Sam swung his gun round, dismounted with a bound, and cast the traces off. The horse, well-trained, lay swiftly down twenty paces in the rear of the gun, and Sam, jumping forward, seized the levers.

"Allons, tireurs! Let them have it!" shouted the French leader.

Sam was easily first, but the other guns dashed up and unlimbered a few seconds later, and soon eight Maxims were alongside each other behind the piles of timber, their muzzles thrusting over the breastwork of logs.

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On swept the Prussian Hussars, with a mighty thunder of hoofs and shouts of "Hoch!" from the troopers. For the moment the fate of the two French regiments and the whole of Du Plessay's position hung in the balance.

But the Maxims were just in the nick of time. Sam's led the defence, and with one savage, rattling crash, they opened fire. The Prussian cavalry, meeting the storm of lead, were checked in their advance.

Their front crumpled like paper, and horses and men were mowed down in swathes. Then, with wild notes, a bugle rang out, and both squadrons, wheeling to the right, closed up their ranks, and came thundering down towards the Maxims in one long avalanche of drumming hoofs and flashing sabres.

Du Plessay's Dilemma.

"Ah, the canaille! We have them now!" cried the captain of the battery, as in a momentary lull in the firing, he saw the Prussian cavalry turn and come straight at the guns.

"Have you, though!" thought Sam, swinging the pinton of his Maxim. "Shouldn't wonder if they'd got us. Now for it!"

For a minute it looked as if Sam were right. The Prussian squadrons had only a little ground to cover, and it was quite likely they would be right among the guns, and cutting the gunners down, before they would be stopped. The Hussar squadron commander had chosen the moment well, as the only chance of saving his force.

On came the Prussians, a magnificent sight in one medley of blue and silver and flashing sword-blades, thundering over the ground with a force that made the earth tremble. Either they must wipe out the French battery, or the Maxims would annihilate them. There was no turning back possible.

Crash! R-r-r-r-r! roared the machine-guns, every muzzle spouting a whirlwind of death. The front rank of the Hussars went down like dry grass before a prairie fire; but so many horsemen remained in the troop, and so near were they, that it was touch and go whether the cavalry would leap the low breastwork, and be among the gunners in time. During the desperate thirty seconds the oldest general in the Army could not have told which way the fight would go.

Sam handled his gun as coolly as if he were shooting in a Greyfriar's review, and with as deadly accuracy as when he won Lord Roberts's prize. The water-jackets of the Maxims were puffing off in jets of steam as the barrels grew hotter under the continued strain of the firing.

Now, the Prussians looked like a great wave of men, and horses and steel, about to break over the little knoll where the battery stood. But it was a ragged and broken wave, leaving a wake of dead and dying behind at every spring the horses gave. The Maxims made one steady, pitiless whirr.

The Prussians crumpled up, broke, and scattered. They were fairly stopped by the wall of flying lead that met them.

One big Hussar corporal, on an enormous roan horse, escaping the hail of bullets by some miracle, came flying over the breastwork just to the right of Sam's gun, shouting wildly, his square, bronzed face mad with excitement, and made a tremendous cut at Sam's head as the horse leaped. The young gunner ducked like a flash, and the sabre struck the gun's jacket with a blade that bit deep into the solid metal. The end of the blade flew off, and the horse, on landing, fell over the gun's traces, and went head-over-heels, like a shot rabbit, the big Hussar coming down with a force that stumped him.

There was no time to pay any attention to details such as that, for the man was the only one who reached the battery at all. The rest—what was left of them—turned and scuttled off to the left as hard as they could go, the Maxims still mowing them down.

"We've done 'em, by George!" cried Sam, clapping a fresh belt of cartridges to his gun, and opening fire again with hardly a few seconds loss of time. "But it was a precious near thing. Hallo! Look there!"

"Cease fire!" rang the bugle.

The Maxims stopped instantly, for the flying squadron had dashed so far to the right that it soon came in a line with the French rifle regiments, and the latter would have suffered from their comrades' fire had the battery not ceased.

For the moment the Prussians were safe from either side; but so complete had been the rout that a curious thing happened. The last troop of the Hussars, which had suffered less than the rest, was leading the retreat; but in such medley and confusion were the Hussars that they dashed right into two full troops of cavalry that had been

sent to support the attack, and were coming along as fast as they could gallop.

It did not take ten seconds for the retreating party and the new-comers to fall into worse confusion than ever. Smart troops though they were, the shock of the collision broke them up, and split their ranks badly. A shout from Sam's battery captain, and a laugh from the gunners, made the young scout look round, with his hand on the Maxim's lever.

"The Lancers!" cried the captain. "See there they come, mes braves! Now we shall show these Prussian dogtrot what cavalry should be!"

A ringing cheer went all down Du Plessay's lines. Right w through the gap between the Carabnier regiment and the Chasseurs came a squadron of French Lancers, straight into the mixed-up Hussars.

The moment could not have been better chosen. Like arrows from the bow sped the Lancers, their beautiful bay horses carrying them at terrific speed. Before the Prussian could form up in order again the French were upon them, the wind whistling in their lance-pennons as they came. "My word!" exclaimed Sam. "How the fellows came on ride!"

It was like a flotilla of swift torpedo vessels attacking a mob of gunboats. The heavy Prussian cavalry, of which the Kaiser is so proud, made little show against those lightning swift Lancers, who dashed into the clubbed Hussar ranks like angels of death. Down went horses and men before the long spears. There was a wild upheaval, and the French riders came clean through on the other side, leaving the mere wreckage of a German squadron behind them. Round they wheeled again, and rode at the remnant, and in less than a minute all that remained of the Prussian Hussars were thirty or forty scattered horsemen, riding for their lives towards Von Ritter's lines.

Clear and sharp blew the bugles from the French side, and at once three of Du Plessay's regiments poured along the path the Lancers had taken, and quickly took up new positions nearer the Germans. Two field-batteries came along at a gallop, one unlimbering and taking its place behind the riflemen, over whom it began to fire at once into Von Ritter's guns. The second battery swung towards the knoll where Sam was, and the Maxims were ordered to limber up and make way for them. Sam was in the saddle in ten seconds, and, speaking cheerily to the gallant iron grey, galloped out at the head of the others.

The little guns had served their turn. Indeed, the whole change of position was due to them, and they were swiftly led back to be in reserve until they were wanted for another desperate dash. In high spirits, the gunners swung away, and Brigadier du Plessay, galloping past on his charger, waved his white gauntlet to them.

"Bravo, Maxims!" he cried. "You have done your work gallantly. Lieutenant Villiers, you were first. My thanks to you!"

Sam, being relieved of his gun, said au revoir to the iron-grey, and at once joined Carfax near the front. The battle was now waxing hotter than ever, the roar of the artillery never ceasing. Stephen came hurrying to the spot, as a sharpshooter squad, to which he had attached himself, went by.

"Well done, Sam!" he cried. "I saw your little job rippingly from where I was. By gum, you showed 'em all the way!"

"Knew he would," said Carfax coolly. "Sometimes I wonder if you are not wasted on board the Condor, Villiers!"

"Don't say that, sir! Haven't I made myself useful then?" said Sam, laughing.

"By Jove, yes! Don't know what I should have done without you, or Stephen either. The youngster's been on on his own, and those sharpshooters welcomed him like a brother."

"They can shoot," said Stephen. "I didn't do much good; but the old carbine accounted for a couple of Wurtemberg artillerymen. I say, isn't it rippin' the way the position's been changed? We're twice as well off now, in better shelter, and able to hammer them much harder. Here's the general!"

Stuart-Ogilvie, who had shifted the position of his Highlanders, and outflanked the German riflemen, moved up and watched the result closely through his field-glasses. The fight was now at its height, and the defenders were pegging away with redoubled zeal.

"What do you think of it, Villiers?" he said. "You've seen fighting in all three countries."

"And never anything much smarter than that, sir," replied Sam. "The troops were beautifully handled, and the way they came up just then, and made the utmost of the chance, was simply great."

"Yes, Du Plessay's a bit of a genius," said the general, "and it's no discredit to him that he's in so tight a hole. I'd swear it's not, after what I've seen him do," said the

ing scout. "I've seen as good work in England, but not fast as this."

"They've given him a job for which he ought to have and twice as many men," the British general replied. "All the same, it was solely due to those galloping Maxims that he seized the opportunity just now. But for them we shouldn't have been where we are. You did better than any of them, by gad, admiral! And I gave a cheer for the old country when I saw in 'em how you rode and shot. You should have heard my men shouting."

"How do they get on with the French soldiers, sir?" said dog Stephen.

"Like a house on fire. Capital chaps, the French. Pity they were enemies of them so long. They're hand-in-glove with my men, and they do each other good. Those Carabiniers are like big schoolboys; they laugh and joke like Irishmen, and fight like fiends!"

"Nearly got wiped out before the Maxims came up, but they didn't seem to mind," put in Sam.

"They admire our men immensely for their coolness and unbulldogginess, and our men like 'em for their jolliness. So on all sides are pleased, and those heavy Germans are finding the contract bigger than they thought. By Jove," added the general, turning his field-glasses on the slope behind the German outposts, "those guns you saw are there at last! I only hope they won't be able to handle 'em much, now the twilight's falling."

"With good glasses it was possible to make out a fresh German battery, a small one, but evidently with heavier artillery, coming up well behind the others, and pitching itself a long way back."

"Are they longer range guns, sir?" said Sam, whose field-glasses were hardly powerful enough.

"Yes," said Stuart-Ogilvie, with a frown. "We've none like that the ordinary field-pieces here, and we can't reach them. It's a poor look-out. Here's your chief."

Carfax, who had left them a little while ago, returned; and Brigadier du Plessay stood close by, watching the new guns, and looking very thoughtful.

"Is that you, Monsieur Carfax?" he said, without taking the glasses from his eyes. "We are in for a bad time of it if those gentlemen yonder have any more such guns on the way."

"Shall I reconnoitre aloft and see, sir?" suggested Carfax.

"I shall be most grateful if you will," said the French general.

The Condor was mounting skywards five minutes later, with the boys aboard her, on a short scouting tour, for the daylight was failing fast. She rose to a considerable height before steering over the German lines, and the two big guns on the heights beyond each tried a shot at her.

The heavy shells, though wide of their mark, roared away skywards past the Condor with immense velocity.

"It'll be no joke when those start playing on Du Plessay's position," said Stephen.

"Those are the guns we saw coming up when we arrived," said Sam. "And look there—yonder are more of them!"

Another battery of the larger guns—only two of them—could be seen coming slowly up a ravine. The Condor's powerful telescopes soon proved what they were. And further to the north-west was yet a third pair. Sam whistled in consternation.

"Three batteries!" he said. "This won't do. It's the worst of news for Du Plessay and for our side. Looks like a knock-out!"

"I see no help for it," said Carfax, with a frown. "Take a quick note of all you see, and then we'd better let Du Plessay know at once."

The Guns from Dunkirk.

The aeroplane, ending her rapid tour of inspection, sailed back to the French lines, and came to earth just as the dusk was deepening into night. As she did so the first of the heavier Prussian batteries opened with a sighting-shot, and then began, slowly and with fatal accuracy, to fire heavy loads of shrapnel over the French and English trenches. The havoc done was very serious, and anybody could see that the whole state of affairs was changed, and much worse for the allies. Carfax found Brigadier du Plessay biting his moustache impatiently.

"This is just what I feared," he said. "Are there any more of those guns?"

"Three batteries altogether, sir," said Sam, and added the details of his brief report.

"Three!" exclaimed the brigadier, and his frown deepened. "Then those infernal Germans can do what they like with us now, and retreat is impossible, even if I wished for it!"

"How long can the defenders hold out?" asked Carfax anxiously.

"For to-night we are safe. The darkness is closing down fast, and they are slackening fire already. We shall keep them busy during the night, with rifle skirmishing and side attacks, but they are too huge a force for us to really upset in that manner. When the daylight comes again—"

The brigadier broke off and shrugged his shoulders.

"All three batteries will then tackle us, sir?"

"Yes—wipe out our field-guns with heavy shell, and then cut us to pieces with shrapnel. We shall entrench all night, but they will still have the better of it. A black look-out—a black look-out," muttered Du Plessay, under his breath,

"and no amount of courage and staying-power, such as both ourselves and those fine British troops possess, can help us against guns that can over-shoot ours by half a mile."

"Is there no hope of reinforcements from France, sir?" asked Sam.

"A big levy of cavalry and mounted infantry may arrive to-morrow—raw troops, but good," said the brigadier, "only they will be quite useless unless we have shaken the Germans to pieces first; and what chance is there of that? It will be the other way about. No," growled Du Plessay, "what we need is heavy guns to beat those German ones. And where are they to come from? I might as well cry for the moon. None can come from the rear, nor can Marshal St. Croix at Metz spare me a single one. There is a solitary thing that might help us."

"What's that, sir?" asked Stephen.

"An ironclad, with 7.5 guns," replied the brigadier, with a bitter laugh, "if she could be put on wheels and brought over land. That would settle the Prussians."

Carfax turned to him suddenly.

"Well, why not?" said the aeronaut. "We passed two first-class French cruisers in Dunkirk Roads, and I'll be sworn they're there now. If it would save you, I'll bring you two of their biggest guns."

Du Plessay stared at him in amazement.

"How, and when?" he cried.

"In the Condor. I will travel all night, and be here with them by morning. Those cruisers carry 9.2 guns. I could only bring two. Would that be enough?"

"Morbleu! With a pair of such guns I would make an omelette of all Von Ritter's batteries!" exclaimed the brigadier. "But you are jesting, Monsieur Carfax! Such guns weigh thirty tons apiece. How can your light airship carry them?"

"I do not deny there is a risk," said Carfax shortly. "It may even cause the loss of my vessel yonder. But the stake is so great that I will make the attempt, and you may rely on me at least to bring the guns here by dawn."

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"My eternal gratitude to you if you can do it!" cried Du Plessay. "You will save my brigades and the British troops if you succeed—and perhaps all France!"

"There is no time to be lost," said Carfax, turning to go. "If your engineer corps and artillerymen can make emplacements and mount such guns—"

"I will answer for it. All that shall be ready by morning. My corps knows just what will be required!" cried the brigadier.

"Then au revoir to you, and expect me at daybreak. We will serve up a hot dish to Von Ritter," replied Carfax. "Come, boys!"

Sam and Stephen were nearly as astonished as the brigadier, but they said nothing until the Condor had mounted into the air, leaving the Army far below, and was whizzing north-westward at her top speed. Carfax was strangely silent and thoughtful.

"Will the Condor really lift two huge thirty-ton guns, sir?" said Stephen in astonishment, for he could not believe his ears. "Sixty tons of dead weight?"

"I should have thought a twentieth part of it would have rent her to bits," murmured Sam; but he knew Carfax would never have made the promise if it could not be done.

"The Condor is not a gas-balloon, which is helpless if a few pounds over her power are added on," said Carfax contemptuously. "I can answer for her lifting eighty tons with ease. She is built to do it. But ninety, for we must bring at least thirty tons of ammunition. I won't deny there's a risk of ruining her completely," he added gloomily, "all the same, I shall put her to the test. Our honour is at stake, and the safety of the allies at Luneville. After all, we have a fair chance of bringing her through it unhurt."

"I think she may do it, sir," said Kenneth. "Of course, it means completely changing the speed gear, and we must make her frame ready for it as we go. Whether she breaks down afterwards, no one can say."

"I think she may do it, sir," said Kenneth. "Of course, half to himself. There's Metz ahead, and we must raise her another thousand feet."

"Why not take only one gun, sir?" suggested Stephen. "She'll be safe then."

"We can't do that. The guns must lie along our side alley-ways, and the weight must be evenly balanced. One gun would throw us out of poise completely; besides, it would not be enough to save Du Plessay. It's all or nothing. Look out, there! Confound it, those fellows are barmy to shoot!"

They were passing right over the great German Army north of Metz, and though the earth was nearly in darkness, the Condor herself showed plain against the red glow left by the sunken sun. A great shell came booming up with a long whirr, passing so close that the crew of the aeroplane could feel the wind of it, and burst far beyond.

Up went the Condor, whizzing right into the clouds, and to the surprise of the boys a second shell came closer yet—so near that the passage of it made the Condor vibrate visibly. A few anxious moments were passed until the airship was fairly out of range.

"Those German swabs have contrived some sort of a new rangefinder, so that they can shoot accurately at anything in the sky—that's what it is," said Carfax, as surprised as anybody. "They're no fools at science. When they've improved it a bit, whatever it is, they'll be able to make things hot even for airships."

"It was too near to be an accident—an' twice running, too," said Stephen. "But they weren't able to do it at Luneville, sir."

"No; they'd start it with the main Army. I thought they'd want something of the sort sooner or later," said Carfax. "All their gunners will have it soon, but I didn't expect them to be so quick. However, it'll be some time before they manage to catch the Condor. Shove her along there, Hugh! I must keep my word to Du Plessay. Barring accidents, we must be back at Luneville at dawn."

Of that long run through the night skies over France neither Sam nor Stephen remembered much. Both of them turned in to sleep soon after the frontier was left behind and Kenneth also took the opportunity to rest, it being no duty on the homeward journey.

The Condor needed little attention on a long voyage as she was set going. Carfax had, from time to time, trained both Sam and Stephen to handle and work the various parts of the airship's gear, and they knew enough to keep her running level after she was started, though they did not understand all her principles.

It was close on nine o'clock when Sam awoke and stepped out of the deck-house to see where they were. The lights of a town were visible some way ahead, and a very tall light-house was throwing its revolving beams far over the sky.

"What place is that?" exclaimed Sam.

"Dunkirk," Carfax replied. "Yonder is the sea."

"Already! Why, the night's quite young!"

"It needs to be," said the aeronaut drily. "We shall not go back at the pace we came. See the cruisers below! Glad they're there still; we sha'n't have to hunt for them. Start the searchlight, Hugh, and speak 'em!"

The riding-lights of the two big French warships could be seen in the roads, and as the Condor slowed down on a approaching, her searchlight began to blink and wink in the Morse signal code.

Men-of-war keep good look-out, and the signals were recognised and responded to almost at once. The Condor circled down towards the ship, till she hung motionless abreast the larger one.

"Welcome, Condor!" hailed the cruiser's captain, who had mounted to her bridge. "What news?"

"The allies are in serious trouble at Luneville, and need of heavy guns!" hailed Carfax, in French. "I want to borrow your two 9.2s for Brigadier Du Plessay, who sent me to fetch them!"

There was a pause of astonishment on the French captain's part.

"My two biggest guns!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, to save the brigade from destruction, and to defeat Von Ritter! You can part with them, can you not? There will be no objection made by your Admiralty in such an urgent case?"

"No. I will send a Marconigram for leave to leave quarters, and have no doubt they will agree. There is no fighting to be done here. But how in the world do you propose to take the guns?"

"It is high-water now," replied Carfax; "if you can make the harbour at once and lay your vessel against the Naval Quay, the guns can be transferred from your batteries to my alley-ways by means of the great crane there, and I can start on my journey back within an hour."

"It shall be done!" exclaimed the French captain. "The reply to my message can come in the meantime. My compliments, Monsieur Carfax!"

With a smartness and speed second only to that of Britain's Fleet, the big cruiser broke out her anchors and made for the entrance between the harbour piers, sending her wireless messages to the French Admiralty as she went.

No time was wasted in waiting for the reply. All the dock-yard staff was set to work, and the Condor had placed herself in the handiest position on the quay. Hugh had made her ready for receiving the guns; her roof was hinged back from the alley-ways, and with great care the first of the mighty 9.2 guns was lifted out of the cruiser by the big crane, and placed very carefully aboard the Condor, where it was chocked into place.

The Admiralty's answer came by the time this was done. It said:

"Let the Condor have the guns, and give every assistance in your power."

The French needed no urging in that direction, and in half an hour the second gun was laid on the opposite side.

(Another instalment next week.)

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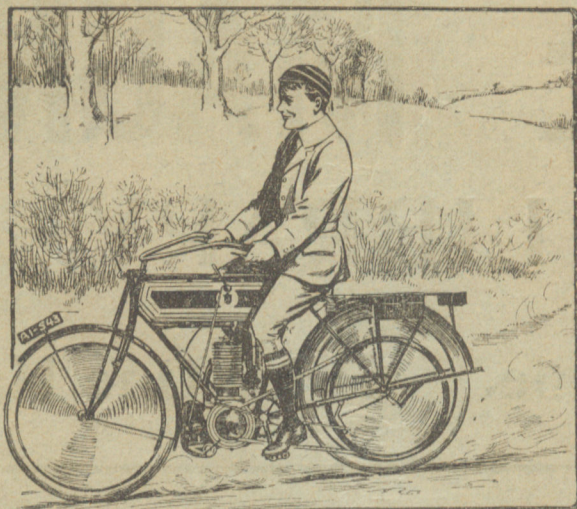
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