

NEXT
THURSDAY :

"TOM MERRY & CO.'S DOWNFALL!"

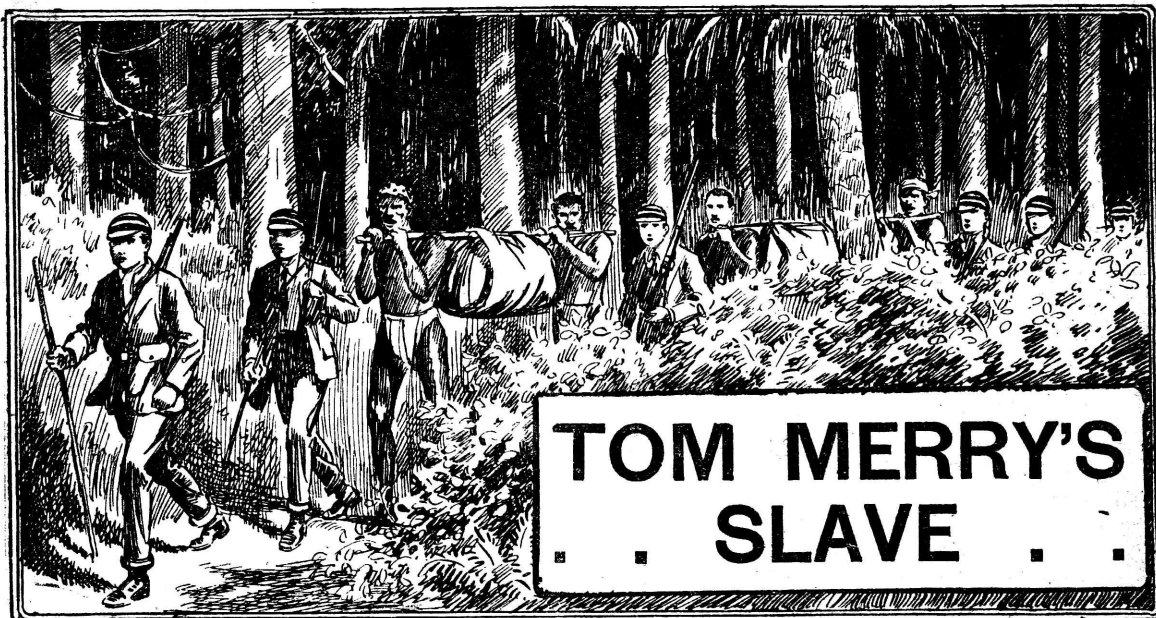
By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Every

Thursday.



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TOM MERRY'S SLAVE

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

In Warm Quarters.

"BAI Jove, it's warm!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark. He did not address anybody in particular—the remark might have been intended for any or none of the eight fellows who were seated round him.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy belonged to the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. But the Fourth Form at St. Jim's would certainly not have known him if they had seen him now. For Arthur Augustus, whose elegant attire and elegant manners had won him the title of the swell of the school, was sadly fallen from his high estate. D'Arcy, whose clothes had been the last word in style, was clad very nearly in tatters, and the silk hat that he still sported would have brought discredit upon any respectable second-hand shop in Petticoat Lane.

D'Arcy had been through some things lately. So had the rest of Tom Merry & Co. As Monty Lowther remarked, they did not make a trip up the Congo every day, and they had to expect to show some signs of wear and tear! And they did.

The juniors of St. Jim's had been some time on the Congo. Now they were returning to school. But in an evil hour they had jumped at the idea of reaching a coast port overland, instead of taking the steamer down the

Congo to the sea. As a matter of fact, they were not specially eager to get back to St. Jim's. They were having a rather good time in West Africa, and the wild life of the coast appealed to their love of adventure.

St. Jim's, with its round of lessons, the regular hours of the Form-rooms and the dormitories, the footer matches on the half-holidays, seemed a long way off—very dear to them, but not enticing enough to make them very anxious to return. And it was very romantic, and very adventurous, to travel through the African forest with native carriers, with M'pong, the black man, for a guide, and with the company of two Belgian officers who were going the same way, and who were glad enough to borrow some of the native carriers for whose services Tom Merry was paying.

Tom Merry & Co. had camped in a glade close by a rippling stream, which ran down to the great Congo. Night was falling upon the African forest; but the heat of the day seemed hardly to abate. There was reason for the remark made by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form. It was warm! The swell of St. Jim's had pushed his silk hat back, and was fanning himself with a plantain leaf. His aristocratic visage was burnt brown by the sun, and the other fellows at St. Jim's would have stared blankly if they had seen him then. They would not have recognised the easy and graceful Arthur Augustus in the tattered, sun-

Next Thursday:

"TOM MERRY & CO'S DOWNFALL," AND "DEEP SEA GOLD."

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browned, perspiring young ruffian who was sitting on the fallen log and fanning himself.

"It's vewy warm," said D'Arcy once more.

"In fact, hot!" said Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We are in the torrid zone," said Monty Lowther, the humorist of the Shell Form at St. Jim's. "Don't you think it torrid?"

"Think it 'orrid?" said D'Arcy. "Do you mean howwid, Lowthah, deah boy?"

"Ass! That was a pun!"

"Bai Jove! It's weally too thick, Lowthah, to make wotten puns in this awfully hot weathah!" said Arthur Augustus reproachfully. "I wegard it as cwuety to animals. Pway wing off, deah boy!"

"The torrid zone," said Lowther deliberately, "has its zone drawbacks—"

"Its own drawbacks!" groaned Manners. "Oh, dear! The heat is affecting the poor fellow's brain!"

"Rats!" said Digby. "It's perfectly well known that heat does not affect a vacuum!"

"Look here—" began Lowther warmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You utter ass—"

"Well, it is warm, any way," said Tom Merry pacifically.

"Too warm to jaw! I wonder what they're doing at St. Jim's now?"

"Prep.!" said Monty Lowther.

"Well, there's no prep. of an evening in Africa, that's one comfort," said Manners, yawning. "Not that I shall be sorry to get back to St. Jim's. I've used nearly all my films, and I'm rather anxious to get home and develop them."

"Oh, blow your old camera!"

Tom Merry sat upright suddenly.

"Hark! What's that?"

"What's what?"

"Listen!"

The juniors, startled by Tom Merry's tone, listened intently.

Round them was the deep, dense African forest—overhead sailed the full, round moon, reflected in the stream by the side of which the juniors had camped.

Faintly, from the deep woods, came a strange, distant sound—a sound the St. Jim's fellows had learned to know during their sojourn on the Congo.

Woof!

Woo-o-oof!

"My hat!" muttered Jack Blake. "It's a lion!"

"My hat!" repeated Monty Lowther. "It's time we bunked!"

Tom Merry jumped up and ran for his rifle. Arthur Augustus did the same. The swell of St. Jim's was very anxious to take a lion skin home with him. D'Arcy's ambition was to shoot big game. But he had not had an opportunity yet. More than once, when he had wished to get on the track of a lion, his chums had stopped him. Monty Lowther had explained to him patiently that he wasn't going to be put to the trouble of collecting up the fragments of D'Arcy and his silk hat.

"Bai Jove! This is wippin'!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "It's a lion at last!"

"Keep close," said Tom Merry, "if he comes here—"

"He's coming," said Digby.

Woof! Woof!

The sound was nearer now. It was evident that the lion had been attracted by the camp-fire, and was coming towards the spot. A thrill ran through the juniors. A lion at close quarters would be an experience for them—but upon the whole it was an experience they would rather have been without.

"My word!" murmured Digby. "I'd rather be doing my prep. in Study No. 6 in the old School House, when I come to think of it!"

"Same here!" murmured Blake.

"Bai Jove, I wegard it as a stwoke of luck! Think how wippin' it will be to have a lion-skin wug in the studay, deah boys!"

"The lion isn't coming here to provide us with a rug, but himself with a supper!" said Monty Lowther.

"Better wake up the Belgians," said Tom Merry, and he ran towards a tent pitched close to the stream.

The two Belgian officers were asleep in the tent. Tom Merry put his hand in at the opening, and called to the two men.

"Wake up! A lion!"

"Ma foi!"

The two officers came out with a bound. They were dapper, dark-skinned little men, not much taller than the juniors, in frayed and seedy uniforms. They carried swords and revolvers; but to judge by their looks, as they bounded

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out of the tent, their deadly weapons were not likely to be of much use to them, or much harm to the lion.

"Mon dieu! It is really a lion!" muttered one of them.

"Parbleu!" said the other.

Woof!

"Better stand together, gentlemen," Tom Merry suggested, "then we can give him a volley if he comes out of the trees—"

Woof!

"Ma foi! Yes; but—"

"But—parbleu—"

"Bai Jove! What does parbleu mean, Lowthah, deah boy?"

"It means that they're in a blue funk," grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A deep-throated, resounding roar woke every echo of the forest. There was a crash in the underwoods, and a magnificent African lion bounded into view in the glade.

"Bai Jove! Fiah, deah boys!"

D'Arcy threw up his rifle and pulled the trigger. There was a click, but no other result. The swell of St. Jim's had forgotten to load it.

"Stand back!" shouted Tom Merry.

Another terrible roar. The lion, standing clear in the moonlight, was lashing his ribs with his tail. There was a howl of terror from the native carriers, and they streamed off into the forest at top speed. Tom Merry turned to speak to the two Belgians—he was just in time to see them vanish with the natives. The juniors of St. Jim's remained alone in the glade, with the huge beast, his eyes flaming fury, advancing upon them.

CHAPTER 2.

A Fight with a Lion.

TOM MERRY was pale as death. But his nerves were steady and true. His rifle was to his shoulder, and he was facing the huge animal with steady eyes.

His eye, unfaltering, glanced along the level barrel.

Crack!

A deep roar from the lion answered the shot. The bullet struck upon the hard ribs like a hailstone upon glass, and there was a spurt of blood.

Crack!

Tom Merry's rifle was a magazine, and he was firing without a pause. By this time the other juniors had their fire-arms ready. Some of them, in a twitter of wild excitement, but they fired steadily enough.

Crack, crack, crack!"

The lion was seen to stagger.

"Fiah, deah boys!" yelled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Fiah! Huwway!"

Crack, crack, crack!"

The lion was crouching for a spring.

Several bullets struck him as he crouched, and he roared again; but he sprang, and there was a wild cry from Blake as he was hurled to the ground under the heavy beast.

"Oh, help!"

The lion, desperately wounded, waking the forest with his roaring, lay half across the fallen junior. Blake, almost fainting with horror, lay still. Had he moved, he would have been torn to pieces on the instant.

D'Arcy had loaded his rifle, and he was raising it.

"Stop!" muttered Tom Merry hoarsely. "Stop, you may hit Blake!"

"Bai Jove!"

"We—we must do something!" muttered Lowther. "For goodness' sake—"

"Fire!" muttered Blake, in a strangled voice. "Never mind me—fire!"

Tom Merry seized an axe and dashed forward. The lion turned upon him, as he meant that it should. The great jaws opened as Tom Merry struck with all the force of his strong arm.

There was a terrible roar from the lion as the axe crashed upon the huge head. The great beast, trailing blood as he moved, charged at Tom Merry. Blake crawled away, and Tom Merry sprang behind a tree. Had the lion been unwounded, the junior would have been struck down instantly by the great claws; but, as it was, the lion moved slowly and painfully.

Crack, crack, crack!"

The juniors were firing together now. A shower of bullets struck the sinuous body, and the lion staggered, and rolled over upon its side.

"Bai Jove! Another volla and he's done for, deah boys!"

Crack, crack!"



Fatty Wynn's face was the colour of chalk and his chest heaved spasmodically. "It was the tinned beef!" he moaned. "I—I had a suspicion at the time that it was from Chicago! It was the tinned-beef! Ow! O-o-o-oh! I'm not seasick—it was that American tinned beef! O-o-o-h" "I—I—I wish somebody would dwp me into the sea," moaned Arthur Augustus, "I should vewy much like to have a watewy gwave! O-oh!"
(See Chapter 9.)

"Bai Jove, he's wunnin'!"

"Let him run!" muttered Lowther.

The lion was retreating into the bushes, leaving a trail of blood behind him. From the crashing underwoods came his faint roaring.

Tom Merry ran to Blake.

"Blake, old man—"

Blake leaned against a tree, panting for breath. His face was white as chalk, and his breath came in low, quick, painful gasps.

"Oh!" he muttered. "Oh, it was horrible!"

"Are you hurt?"

"No; only a bump or two—but—"

Blake broke off. The horror of what he had been through could not be expressed in words. His lips were dry, his throat seemed parched. He was safe now, but it seemed to him that he could still see the red jaws of the lion gaping over him.

Faintly, from the thickets, sounded the more distant roaring of the wounded lion. The king of beasts had evidently had enough, and did not wish to prolong the conflict. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed fresh cartridges into his rifle, and made a step towards the wood. Monty Lowther swung him back just in time.

"Stop, you ass!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Stop!" roared Figgins. "Where are you going, you chump?"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Stay where you are, Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"But I am goin' to finish that bwute—"

"More likely he would finish you," said Manners.

"Don't play the giddy goat! Stay where you are!"

"Weally Mannahs—"

The roaring of the lion died away in the distance. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed the chums of St Jim's with considerable indignation.

"You uttah asses!" he exclaimed. "You have pwevented me fwom shootin' big game, and this is my first chance! I wegard you as a set of wottahs!"

"Fathead!" said Jack Blake, who was recovering now. "If you run into danger, I'll punch your silly head. We shall be jolly lucky if the brute doesn't come back."

The juniors waited and listened for some time.

But the lion did not return.

His reception at the camp had sickened him, evidently, and he did not care to venture near the spot again.

Glad enough were the juniors to be rid of him, with the exception of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's was still regretting the lion-skin rug he had intended to take home to Study No. 6 at St. Jim's.

"Thank goodness he's gone," said Monty Lowther at last.

"But our carriers are gone, too," said Tom Merry, in dismay; "and those two blessed Belgian officers—"

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"They're a good distance by now," he remarked, "and I rather fancy they won't come back again, either!"

"Then we haven't a guide!"

"M'pong here," said a quiet voice. "Me guide Massa Merry. M'pong no lib for run away."

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Order Early.

Tom Merry turned round.

M'pong, the big black man who accompanied the juniors up the Congo, was standing by his side. He had not run with the rest.

"Good!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I thought you were gone with the others, M'pong."

"Me no run, Massa Merry!"

"I beg your pardon, M'pong."

"M'pong lib to stick to Massa Merry," said the black man. "Nebber leabe Massa Merry! Massa Merry save M'pong from crocudmle, and M'pong nebber leabe Massa Merry."

"Good old Pongo!" said Blake

Tom Merry smiled. M'pong, the Congo cannibal, had formed a deep attachment for him during their adventurous journey together. In the first place, M'pong and a gang of Congo blacks had attempted to rob the juniors, robbery—being accompanied by murder—being considered quite a small incident on the Congo. They had been defeated, and Tom Merry, returning good for evil, had saved M'pong from the jaws of a crocodile. Since then, M'pong had been his slave. He could never do enough for Tom Merry, and more than once he had announced his intention of never leaving him. Tom Merry took that to mean that the black man wanted to serve him until he returned to the coast. But M'pong meant more than that, as the hero of the Shell was to discover.

The night passed. Neither the native carriers nor the Belgian officers returned. They might have lost their way in the forest, or they might not have cared to return after their ignominious flight. Morning flushed up in the east, and then Tom Merry & Co. held a council.

"It's no good waiting for them," said Tom Merry. "They don't mean to come back. After all, we're not far from the coast, and we can do without the carriers. We shall have to leave here all the things we can't carry—and march!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And that was decided upon; and in the cool of the early morning, Tom Merry & Co. set out.

CHAPTER 3.

Arthur Augustus is too Kind.

M'PONG, the Congo cannibal, strode on ahead, guiding the way, when the juniors marched. M'pong was an interesting character to the juniors. That he was, or had been, a cannibal, was certain—he had admitted as much himself. After his savage days in the forest he had been a boatman at Boma, the Belgian capital on the Congo, and the seat of Government of the Congo Free State. It was there that Tom Merry & Co. had fallen in with him. He spoke the peculiar English of the coast, and he had told the juniors many stories, round the campfire, of the wild life of the Congo and the Cameroons. The horror the juniors had expressed when the details of his histories grew too horrible, had made some impression on the black man. He could not understand that eating his own fellow-men was wrong, but he understood that Tom Merry disapproved of it strongly, and that was enough to make him turn over a new leaf, in that respect, at least. He had promised Tom Merry solemnly that he would never be guilty of the fearful practice again, and that he would never participate in any ju-ju rites. And Tom Merry was satisfied that he would keep his word. Tom, in the leisure hours of travelling in the forest and camping at noon and at night, had begun to teach the savage some of the rudimentary ideas of Christianity; and, although M'pong was slow to understand, the lessons were beginning to make some impression upon his mind.

Whatever Tom Merry told him, he received as gospel, and that made him an apt pupil. He already called himself a Christian, though he was far enough off, as yet, from being one. But he was trying hard, and there was no doubt that he was faithful and true, which was a great deal.

With M'pong in the lead, the juniors tramped on over the forest tracks, while the sun rose higher in the heavens.

In the heat of the day it was impossible to travel, and the journeys were made in two stages, before and after noon.

As the sun rose higher, the heat became more oppressive; but more troublesome than the heat were the swarms of mosquitoes.

The juniors slapped at them continually, and killed them in dozens and scores; but their number was incalculable.

"It's no good, bai Jove, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at last. "The more you kill of the howwid beasts, you know, the more there seem to be left. I wegard them as howwid!"

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Jack Blake snorted.

"Bai Jove! What's the matter with you, Blake?"

Snort, snort!

"Bai Jove—"

"Groo-ho-hoooh!"

"Gweat Scott, he's thwottlin'! Pat him on the back—"

Snort!

"It's all right," gurgled Blake. "Lemme alone! It was one got in my nose, that's all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake snorted again.

"Howwid!" said D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! There's one on your nose again, Blake, deah boy! Hold still a minute, and I'll squash him!"

Smack!

Jack Blake staggered back, and sat down in the thicket.

"Got him!" exclaimed D'Arcy triumphantly.

Blake sat and stared at the swell of St. Jim's. The other juniors stood round and yelled with laughter.

"You—you frabjous ass!" gasped Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You burbling jabberwock—"

"Weally—"

"You frightful chump—"

"I wufese to listen to these oppwobwious expressions!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I do not expect gwatitude fwom you, Blake, but you might at least be civil."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "He doesn't expect gwatitude for biffing a fellow on the boko! Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake scrambled up.

"What did you do it for, you dangerous ass?" he roared.

"Weally, Blake, the next time I see a mosquito on your nose, I will leave it there—"

"You frabjous chump! You've nearly smashed my boko!"

"Bai Jove, I never thought of that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows, there's no cause for diswespectful mewwiment. It was wathah wuff on Blake's nose, I suppose; but, anyway, I've killed the mosquito!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was, vewy unfortunate about Blake's nose, but as I've smashed the mosquito—"

"And I'll jolly well smash you!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake—keep off, you ass— Oh! Ow!"

Blake was rushing upon his too good-natured chum, hitting out with right and left.

Arthur Augustus staggered back, and tripped over a trailing root, and sat down suddenly. He reclined gracefully on the ground for about the thousandth part of a second, and then leaped up yelling, and clapping his hands to his trousers.

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Tom Merry. "What is it—a snake?"

"Yow! No; I have sat on a pwickly bwanch—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yawooh!"

The juniors roared with laughter. Blake joined in, forgetting that he was angry. The swell of St. Jim's was dancing with pain.

"Ow, ow, ow! You uttah asses, there is nothin' whatever to cackle at! Yow! Gwooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, come on!" said Monty Lowther. "We can't stand here all day while D'Arcy does a breakdown. Come on!"

"Yawooh! Ow!"

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"We've heard that before," said Digby. "Come on!"

"You uttah ass! Ow!"

"I say, isn't it time to stop for lunch?" inquired Fatty Wynn anxiously.

"No, it isn't!" said Figgins. "March!"

The juniors marched on. Arthur Augustus brought up the rear, complaining audibly, and shifting most uncomfortably in his clothes. Several of the thorns remained in his trousers, and they caused the swell of St. Jim's exceeding discomfort until he succeeded in getting rid of them.

Fatty Wynn, pouring with perspiration, and red as a beetroot, kept an anxious eye upon the sun. When it reached a certain point it was time to halt. Fatty Wynn, who had a great deal of flesh to carry, felt the heat very much. He also felt the mosquitoes more than the others, for those gay insects sought him out for special attention. Fatty Wynn's broad surface of plump flesh had a great attraction for them. They hung about the fat Fourth-Former as if they loved him; as probably they did.

But more than the heat, and more than the mosquitoes, Fatty Wynn felt the pangs of hunger. He liked regular meals; he never denied that. But at St. Jim's, besides regular meals, he generally contrived to have a good many irregular ones, and he missed them now. And the provisions of the African coast, though ample, did not satisfy Fatty Wynn.

"What would you give for a real good English beef-steak and onions now, Figgy?" he asked in a thrilling whisper.

Figgins chuckled.

"With fried potatoes," added Fatty Wynn dreamily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And there are benighted people in this part of the world who've never tasted 'em," said Fatty Wynn. "I understand now what the Head used to mean when he preached on a Sunday about feeling compassion for the benighted heathen in Darkest Africa."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It must be time to halt," said Fatty Wynn. "Curious thing that some people lose their appetite in a hot country, and mine only grows bigger. I——"

"Halt!" sang out Tom Merry.

"Thank goodness!"

And Fatty Wynn threw his load to the ground, and sat upon it and mopped his forehead with a handkerchief, wiping away streams of perspiration, and killing about two score of mosquitoes in the process.

CHAPTER 4.

D'Arcy's Topper has a Narrow Escape.

ALTHOUGH mounted the tropical sun, and a blaze of heat poured down upon the forest paths.

The very air seemed to swim in the heat.

The juniors, panting, lay down to rest under the shade of the trees, which were burnt brown in the scorching rays.

"My hat!" gasped Monty Lowther. "Who was that johnny who went down into the infernal regions on a cheap excursion?"

"Dante, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

"That's the chap," said Lowther. "I think he must have felt something like this. And to think that it's the football season in England now! Groo!"

"Wouldn't I like a nice whiff of a good December wind!" sighed Blake. "Just to put one's head under the pump at St. Jim's——"

"Oh, don't talk of it!" said Tom Merry. "Take a swig at the water-bottle, and shut up!"

"Ugh! The water's warm!"

"Pway don't gwumble, Blake, deah boy. It's useless to gwumble, and it's wotten, too, you know. Bai Jove! How these mosquitoes torment a chap! I weally don't know how I can stand this, you know! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr. "Don't grumble."

"Weally, Kerr, I was not gwumblin'; I was passin' a wemark——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

M'pong, the black man, rose to his feet. His keen eyes were peering into the forest. Tom Merry followed his glance.

"Another lion?" he asked breathlessly.

M'pong shook his head.

"Me tink gorilla," he said.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, reaching for his rifle. "A gowilla! I dare say a gowilla-skin wug would be quite wippin' for Study No. 6——"

"Stop it, you ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"The beast would tear you to pieces if you hurt him, and they're harder to kill than any other animals," said

Tom Merry. "He mayn't interfere with us if we don't touch him."

"Lib for run!" exclaimed M'pong.

Out of a forest glade came a huge, strangely human form, but larger than that of a man—a gigantic gorilla, loping along on his hind legs, with a huge club grasped in one of the fore paws. The juniors gazed at him in alarm. It was an enemy more terrible than the lion of the previous night. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was polishing his silk hat; it required a great deal of polishing. He jumped up and jammed the hat on his head. M'pong was waving his arms excitedly.

"Lib for run!" he shouted. "Gorilla no hurt if no shoot! Lib for run!"

And the juniors scattered as the huge monkey came loping into the camp.

The gorilla stared after them, but did not offer to pursue. The juniors promptly placed trees between them and their dangerous visitor.

"Lib for run!" gasped M'pong.

But as the juniors ran no farther, he stopped, too, crouching behind a bush, and watching the gorilla with eyes full of fear.

The juniors watched the animal, too, with painful interest. So long as it did not attack them they were content to leave it alone. It was only too probable that in the event of a fight one or two of their number would fall victims to the rage of the terrible beast.

The gorilla plunged into the tent, and reappeared, dragging all sorts of articles after him. He tore out bedding and blankets and hammocks and cooking utensils, and scattered them up and down the clearing.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy.

D'Arcy had put his hand up to his head. In the hasty run for cover a trailing branch had knocked D'Arcy's topper off, and the swell of St. Jim's had only just discovered his loss.

"What's the matter?" asked Tom Merry, who was behind the same tree.

"My toppah!"

"Where is it?"

"I've dwopped it!"

"Never mind——"

"Never mind! Weally, Tom Mewwy, I am surprisid at you! That is the only toppah I have with me, and, undah the circs——"

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "Look! He's found Gussy's topper!"

"Bai Jove!"

The gorilla had pounced upon Arthur Augustus's silk hat. He picked it up and turned it over, examining it with great interest.

The swell of St. Jim's uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"The howwid beast will wuin it!"

"Never mind——"

"You uttah ass! It's the only toppah I've got in Afwich!" shrieked D'Arcy. "I am goin' to save it, or pewish in the attempt!"

Tom Merry and Blake grasped him together as he would have rushed from behind the tree.

"No, you don't!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Keep still!"

"Welease me, you uttah ass! The howwid beast will wuin my toppah!"

"Let him!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"My only chapeau!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "He's trying it on."

"He's seen Gussy doing it, and he's doing the same!" gasped Manners. "They say monkeys always imitate what they see human beings do——"

"Or other monkeys," said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors watched the gorilla. The huge animal, after turning the silk hat over in his hands several times, had placed it on his head, as he had doubtless seen D'Arcy do, as he approached the camp.

The gorilla did not take the same size in hats evidently as the swell of St. Jim's, for he did not get the topper to fit to his satisfaction.

He tried it on the right way, and then turned it round, and tried it on backwards, and then put it on upside down; but he did not seem satisfied.

"My word! You might take him for Gussy's big brother trying on a new topper!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass——"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wrenched himself loose from the juniors, and grasped his rifle. Before Tom Merry could stop him he flung up the rifle to his shoulder and fired.

Crack!

The topper, struck by the bullet, spun round, and fell off the gorilla's head. Before D'Arcy could fire again he was pinioned by the juniors, and the rifle was wrenched away from him.

"You utter ass!" said Tom Merry angrily. "If you had wounded him it might have been the death of one of us!"

"Weally, you know—"

The gorilla seemed amazed at the fall of the hat. He gazed at it in surprise, and then felt over the top of his head with one hand. Then he backed away from the hat, as if he thought that it was something alive, which had moved of its own volition. He backed away as far as a belt of thickets, and then made a sudden dive for the wood, and disappeared from view among the trees.

Tom Merry drew a breath of relief.

"He's gone!"

"Bai Jove! And my toppah's all wight, aftah all!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed forward and rescued his topper. There was a bullet-hole right through it fore and aft, as Blake put it; but D'Arcy was only too glad that matters were no worse. He polished it with his sleeve, and put it on his head, and surveyed the result in a pocket-mirror with a great deal of satisfaction.

"Thank goodness it's not weally injahed, deah boys!" he exclaimed. "I might have been left to get home to St. Jim's without a toppah at all, you know."

And the juniors solemnly agreed that that would have been awful!

CHAPTER 5.

A Narrow Shave for D'Arcy.

"HURRAH!"

It was a couple of days later, and the juniors were at the end of a tiring afternoon's march, when Tom Merry suddenly burst into that shout.

Tom Merry was a little ahead, and the other fellows, in Indian file, were tramping on under their packs, tired and dusty from the march. M'pong was a little behind Tom Merry. Tom Merry suddenly halted, and waved his hand to the others to come up, and shouted:

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah, deah boy?" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"Come and see."

"Some jolly good fruit?" asked Fatty Wynn eagerly.

"By Jove—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors ran on eagerly, and joined Tom Merry in the opening of the forest where he stood. Then they saw what he had seen—a gentle slope downwards, and beyond it a sheet of shining blue. And they burst into a shout together:

"The sea!"

It was like seeing an old friend again. Bright and blue, the broad Atlantic rolled there, still many miles away, but rolling blue and welcoming in the glow of the sunset. That same wide blue sea washed the shores of their native country. It was like a glimpse of home again.

"Bai Jove! I've nevah seen the sea look quite so wippin'!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, adjusting his eyeglass, and looking at the wide waters with great satisfaction.

"Aftah all, deah boys, there's nothin' like the sea. A country without a sea-coast isn't a country at all. How jolly it looks!"

"Rippin'!" said Blake. "Wouldn't I like a bathe in it now!"

"And a shark to nip you by the leg," grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ugh!"

"Bai Jove! Let's wun like anythin', and weach it before dark!" suggested D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for wude laughtah, Tom Mewwy!"

"Well, you see, it's ten miles away at least, and it will be dark in two minutes," said Tom Merry. "It gets dark very suddenly here. You ought to have noticed that, after the time you have spent on the Congo—to say nothing of the fact that you get the information in the Second Form books at St. Jim's!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We shall have to hurry to get to the place M'pong told us about for camping."

"Yes; buck up!" said Blake.

The juniors marched on.

They had been on rather short commons the last day or two, owing to the flight of the native carriers, which had compelled them to abandon a considerable part of their baggage. They were all keen to reach the sea, and get on the deck of a ship again.

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DON'T MISS "FOOTBALL FOES."

The Splendid, Long, Complete School Story appearing in this week's number of the

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They were thinking a great deal of St. Jim's now. D'Arcy said that he preferred even Herries' bulldog to the mosquitoes in the African swamps, and D'Arcy must have felt home-sick indeed when he thought that he could put up with Towser.

The sun dipped below the wide sea, and shadows crept over the waters—darkness blotted out the forest and the shore. Like a veil suddenly descending, night came down upon the African coast.

But M'pong was a trusty guide. He led the juniors on without a pause in the darkness, and they halted at last in a clearing, where, amid clumps of wild rhododendrons, several wooden buildings stood. They were in a ruinous state, and had evidently long been abandoned. The place had probably been some post of the Belgian soldiers, in the early days of the Congo Free State.

The juniors camped.

They ate their evening meal, blessed the mosquitoes, and turned in, in their blankets. The night was warm, and they slept in the open air with perfect comfort, taking turns to watch. M'pong did most of the watching; the Congo black man seemed tireless.

Morning dawned upon the African forest.

Tom Merry opened his eyes in the early sunlight. But he was not the first awake. M'pong was building a fire to cook the breakfast, and he turned a cheerful grin upon the hero of the Shell.

"Me lib for cook brekker, Master Merry," he said.

"Right-o, M'pong! Hallo! There's the sea!"

Tom Merry ran upon a knoll, and looked towards the sea. Out upon the wide waters he thought he could discern a vessel riding at anchor. It was probably the steamer that was to convey the juniors to England.

Tom glanced down towards the encampment. Most of the juniors were awake now, yawning or rubbing their eyes. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was still asleep outside the wooden building.

Tom Merry's glance was suddenly arrested as it fell upon D'Arcy. There was a mass of brushwood near the swell of St. Jim's, and in the midst of it Tom Merry's eyes had suddenly caught a curious gleam.

He ran down towards the camp.

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther. "Been looking at the sea? I suppose it's still there? Why, what—" He broke off as he caught sight of the deadly paleness in Tom Merry's face. "In Heaven's name, Tom, what's the matter?"

"Quiet!" muttered Tom Merry.

He pointed towards Arthur Augustus.

The junior lay asleep, and from the brushwood a snake had crawled. The reptile was coiling close to the swell of St. Jim's, and if D'Arcy had moved, he must have noticed it.

Lowther turned sick with horror.

"Oh, good heavens!"

"Quiet!"

"Oh!" muttered Blake, reaching for a rifle. "Oh!"

"Don't shoot, Blake!"

"But—"

"Quiet! It may crawl away!"

The juniors stood with tense, drawn faces.

The horrible reptile was so close to D'Arcy that a shot would not have saved the swell of St. Jim's, if the snake had chosen to strike. And it was extremely unlikely that a single shot would kill the fearful creature. The juniors watched, fascinated with horror, and praying that D'Arcy would not awake.

For a single movement on his part might attract the reptile, and provoke it into striking.

And the juniors knew that that would be death!

"Oh, Heaven!" muttered Tom Merry.

There was a light touch on his arm. He turned his head, and saw M'pong. The Congo black held a bowl of milk in his hand.

"Lib for gib him milk, Massa Tom," muttered M'pong.

"Snake like milk—he leave Massa D'Arcy—cut off him head!"

Tom Merry's eyes flashed with hope. He remembered now having heard that snakes were fond of milk. He took the gourd from M'pong's hand.

"Me lib for gib him milk," murmured M'pong. "Massa Tom keep back!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"You have your axe ready, M'pong!"

"Yes, sah!"

Tom Merry held the bowl of milk firmly in his hand, and crept towards the cobra.

At that moment D'Arcy awoke.

"Oh!" muttered Blake, gripping his rifle. "It's all up!"

But it was not all up.

For Arthur Augustus D'Arcy saw the reptile, and with wonderful presence of mind he kept perfectly still, affecting to be still asleep.

A single movement might have drawn the deadly fang upon him, but he did not make a single movement.

He lay quite still, breathing steadily, only the half-closed eyes and the changing colour in his cheek showing that he was awake.

Tom Merry crept nearer.

The reptile was preparing to strike—it seemed that D'Arcy's doom was sealed. But as the bowl of milk was brought nearer, the head swayed towards it. The reptile seemed undecided, and the juniors watched in fascinated horror. Manners and Digby turned away their heads, unable to endure the sight.

The reptile coiled away from D'Arcy, and approached the bowl of milk. Tom Merry breathed deeply with relief. He was in terrible danger himself now, for the hand that held the bowl was within easy striking distance of the snake. But the reptile was thinking only of the milk.

Tom Merry drew the bowl gently back. The reptile writhed after it. Inch by inch the hero of the Shell drew the horrible creature further from D'Arcy.

"Now lib for run, Mass' Tom!" came a murmur from behind.

Tom Merry set the bowl down, drew his hand away from it, and backed away from the reptile.

There was a whiz in the air, a sudden glitter of steel turning in the sun, and a wild hiss from the snake. M'pong's axe had hurtled forward with a deadly aim, and the keen edge of the blade struck the snake full in the neck.

With wild, fierce hissing, the wounded reptile writhed and thrashed the ground with its coils, darting out its forked tongue in wild fury. The juniors crowded back. M'pong darted forward and recovered his axe.

"Look out, M'pong!" gasped Tom Merry.

"All right, sah!"

M'pong was looking out. With the heavy axe, he dealt the snake a second blow on the back of the neck, and a severed head rolled in the herbage. Still the sinuous body writhed and writhed, the principle of life still strong within it, though conscious life was gone.

Tom Merry covered his face with his hands for a moment.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice was shaking. "Bai Jove! That was a nawwow escape! Tom Mewwy, old man, you saved my life!"

Tom Merry shivered.

"The sooner we get out of these forests the better I shall like it!" he muttered. "I've had enough of the Congo!"

And Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the snake, nodded and said with fervour:

"Yaas, wathah!"

CHAPTER 6.

M'Pong's Farewell.

"WONDER—" said Manners.

"So do I," said Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas; and I was just wonderin'—"

"You seem to be in a wonderful state altogether," said Monty Lowther. "I wonder whether you are wondering on the same subject?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors of St. Jim's were in a cheerful mood. They were on the deck of a steamer, lying at anchor on the blue waters. Half a mile away was the sandy shore of Africa, with a white-walled town sweltering there in the blazing heat. Behind it was the forest—the dark, mysterious forest of Africa, through which the juniors had tramped for many scorching days before they reached the sea.

The steamer rolled on the swell of the Atlantic. The very motion was welcome to the juniors; it hinted of swift rushing through mounting waves, and of the white cliffs of England rising into view.

The juniors sprawled lazily in deck-chairs. They had a right to slack, after what they had been through. M'pong, the black man, was sitting on the bare deck, his black skin glistening in the sun. There was a very thoughtful expression upon M'pong's face. A native boat was rocking beside the steamer.

"I wonder—" went on Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Manners first," said Monty Lowther. "Now, what are you wondering about, Manners?"

"Whether there are any facilities on this steamer for developing films," said the amateur photographer of St. Jim's. "I suppose a decent sort of skipper would be bound to have at least a daylight developing tank, even if he hadn't a dark-room."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—"

"He might," said Tom Merry, laughing, "if he were a camera maniac, otherwise I'm afraid you'll have to wait till we get to St. Jim's, old son."

"Fatty Wynn's turn now," said Figgins. "What were you wondering about, Fatty?"

"Not rotten old films!" grunted the fat Fourth-Former. "I was wondering what kind of grub we're going to get on this voyage, and whether it's better than the stuff we had to put up with on shore!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that's rather a serious matter. You can't make a good voyage without laying a solid foundation—"

"You're likely to have the solidest foundation upset if there's a gale," grinned Monty Lowther. "You remember how you were the time we went to sea last?"

"Oh, rats! The best way to prevent seasickness is to have good, square meals—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy's turn!" exclaimed Blake. "What were you wondering about, Gussy?"

"I was wonderin' whethah the captain could lend me an iron to iron my silk hat," said Arthur Augustus. "I suppose a skipper of a decent steamer like this wouldn't be likely to sail without at least one silk hat. And, in that case, it would want ironin' sometimes. And in that case—"

"That topper does seem to be losing its gloss," assented Lowther. "But you could get one of the deck-hands to tar it over for you!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Or the cook would give it a coating of grease, if you take it down into the galley, and that would protect the nap, you know!"

"You uttah ass—"

"Hallo! Here's the skipper!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The captain came on board. He nodded kindly to the juniors, and went into the chart-room. Tom Merry rose from his chair.

"That means that we're going to sail," he remarked. "It's time to say good-bye to M'pong. I shall be sorry to part with him."

"Yaas, wathah! He's a decent chap, black as he is," said Arthur Augustus. "I have a great respect for M'pong, though I weally wish that he had nevah eaten any of his welations!"

"Oh, that's only a local custom! And it must save a lot of expense in family vaults," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Pway don't be a beast, Lowthah. I wegard your jokes on that subject as howwid."

"Go hon!"

"We ought to give M'pong something to remember us by," said Kerr. "I suppose he'll forget us all in a week; but he cught to have something for what he's done. He made our acquaintance by trying to murder us; but that's only a little way they have on the Congo, and doesn't really mean unfriendliness."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As a matter of fact, I'm feeling rather rotten at parting with him," said Tom Merry. "But I suppose it's no good taking him to England—we couldn't think of it. There's nothing to do with him there."

"The climate would kill him," said Figgins. "And cannibalism has been out of fashion there for hundreds of years. We couldn't take him to St. Jim's."

"Wathah not! But I feel wathah wotten, too, leaving him! However, I don't suppose he will mind. Only I've noticed he's been lookin' wathah sewious lately."

"Let's have a whip-round for him, anyway."

"Good!"

Tom Merry held out his hat, and the juniors threw their coins into it. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had had a remittance from home at Boma, made the biggest contribution, putting in five sovereigns.

The whole sum amounted to ten pounds, and as M'pong's wages had already been settled it was a handsome enough testimonial. Tom Merry put the money into a little canvas bag and crossed over to the Congo black.

M'pong looked up at him.

"The anchor will be up soon, M'pong," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, Mass' Tom."

"It's time to say good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mass' Tom!"

"Yes. We're sailing for England, you know. You don't want to go to England, M'pong."

A strangely pathetic look came over the black face.

"Me lib for follow Mass' Tom."

"To England?"

"Yes, sah!"

"But it's cold in England, M'pong—jolly cold!"

"All right, sah!"

"And there're no forests, no swamps, no—no mosquitoes," said Tom Merry. "And you would have to wear clothes, M'pong."

"M'pong Christian now," said the black. "Me wear clothes."

CHAPTER 7.

From the Jaws of the Shark.

"And—and, my dear old chap," said Tom Merry kindly, "England isn't the place for you. You'd mope your head off till you got back to Africa."

"Me all right with Mass' Tom."

Tom Merry ran his fingers through his curly hair.

M'pong was impossible for England, and England was impossible for M'pong. But the Congo black man, who had never been off his own coast, had not a sufficiently enlightened mind to imagine a country different from his own. He only wanted to follow Tom Merry.

"Mass' Tom no want M'pong," said the black suddenly.

"It's not that, M'pong, old man! I'm jolly sorry to part with you," said Tom Merry. "I shall miss you very much. So shall we all."

"Den M'pong lib for come to England?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It's impossible, M'pong. You don't understand, but you couldn't live there. Besides, I could not put you anywhere. I go to school, you know—I'm going back to school as soon as I get to England."

M'pong evidently did not understand. School was a new thing to the black man; he had never heard of one, and did not know what it meant.

"Mass' Tom has a house in England?"

Tom Merry thought of his old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, and her house at Huckleberry Heath. He could imagine what an eagle in a dovecote M'pong would be if he were planted at Laurel Villa.

"I have a home, M'pong. But—but you don't understand. Look here, we've subscribed a little gift for you, old son. Take it. And we're all grateful to you for what you've done to help us."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "And I should like to have the privilege of shakin' hands with you."

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther.

M'pong looked at the canvas bag in Tom Merry's hand. He caught the chink of money, and drew back. He waved the bag away with a gesture of the hand that was almost stately.

"M'pong no take," he said.

"But it's for you, old man——"

"No take."

"Well, as you like," said Tom Merry, tossing the bag upon a deck-chair. "But we'd like to do something to show you that we like you, M'pong, and are grateful for your services."

"Yaas, wathah! I would give the deah boy a silk hat, only I have only one, and I weally could not part with that. I have not the faintest ideah what you are gwinnin' at, Lowthah."

The captain looked down from the bridge.

"It's time for your native friend to go ashore," he called out. "We're just going to have the anchor up."

"Very well, sir!"

The juniors gathered round M'pong. They shook hands with him in turn. The black man went through it dully. The expression upon his face was like that of a dog that has been punished and does not know what it is punished for. It went straight to the hearts of the juniors, and even Monty Lowther was serious. Tom Merry shook hands with M'pong the last.

"Good-bye, M'pong!"

"Good-bye, Mass' Tom!"

The black man dropped down into the native boat. The cable clanked, and the anchor came up, and the steamer throbbled on the blue waters. The juniors crowded to the side and watched the native boat as it rocked upon the waters, M'pong standing up in it.

"Why doesn't he paddle ashore?" muttered Manners.

"Poor old chap!" said Tom Merry. "He feels it more than a chap would think. Blessed if I quite understand him either!"

"Look at him!" said Blake. "What is he going to do?"

The juniors watched the black man, their looks growing anxious.

M'pong had turned towards the shore and made a gesture towards the distant Congo. Then he looked at the sky, bright in the blazing sun. It seemed as if he was taking farewell of land and sea.

Tom Merry caught his breath. He hardly understood the strange nature of the children of the South—half-devil and half-child.

What was M'pong going to do?

He soon saw!

The black man cast a last look towards the steamer, gliding away from him and leaving a track of white foam behind. Then he made a sudden leap and disappeared into the sea.

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TOM MERRY uttered a hoarse cry.

He understood now!

M'pong, deserted, had thrown himself into the sea—and he did not mean to come up again. The black man had hurled himself to death!

"Oh, bai Jove!" muttered D'Arcy, in a trembling voice.

"Bai Jove! Oh deah!"

"He's going to drown himself——"

"Poor old M'pong——"

"Tom Merry," shrieked Lowther, "stop! What are you going to do?"

But Tom Merry did not stop, and he did not answer. He had thrown off his hat and jacket and kicked off his boots. He leaped upon the rail and threw his hands together and dived into the sea.

"Tom Merry!"

"Oh!"

"The sharks!" muttered Lowther, with a ghastly face. "Oh!"

Blake ran towards the bridge.

"Stop!" he shrieked. "Man overboard! Stop!"

But the captain had seen already, and his face was pale, too. His hand was on the bridge telegraph at once.

Tom Merry struck the sea like an arrow and went deep under, and came up to the surface again with vigorous strokes. His head shot up into the blazing sunlight; he shaded his eyes with one hand and looked round for M'pong.

A black object rose on the waves close by him. He knew that it was the negro. But there was no motion in the body; it floated with the head under.

With sick horror at his heart, Tom Merry swam for the floating black. His conscience was heavy with remorse. If M'pong died there, he felt that he had killed him.

He reached M'pong, and dragged his head up above the water.

M'pong moved; he had resigned himself to death, but he was not dead. His eyes stared at Tom Merry; he would have pushed his rescuer away, but he recognised him, and stared blankly.

"M'pong!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Thank Heaven you are alive!"

"Go back, Mass' Tom! You lib for dem ship!"

"Not without you, M'pong!"

"M'pong lib for die," said the black simply. "M'pong no lib if not follow Mass' Tom. Mass' Tom no want M'pong now. M'pong lib for die!"

Tom Merry felt the tears start to his eyes.

"M'pong, old man, you shall come with me to England if you like. We'll manage it somehow!"

M'pong's eyes glistened.

"Oh, sah!"

"Swim now. You shall come."

"Yes, sah!"

In an instant there was a change in M'pong. He struck out stoutly, and swam on the curling waves.

There was a shout from the steamer. A boat had plumed into the water, and four seamen were pulling for the swimmers.

Tom Merry waved one hand above the water, and then swam again. But from the steamer came a wild and thrilling cry:

"Look out! The shark!"

Tom Merry's very blood turned to ice.

He knew that the coast was alive with sharks; but he had not thought of that when he sprang into the sea to the rescue of M'pong. It would not have stopped him if he had thought of it. But now——

"The shark! Look out!"

Tom Merry set his teeth hard. A grey look came for a moment over the black face of M'pong. The two swimmers stared round them, and they saw a fin glide over the wave, within a dozen yards.

M'pong's hand went down to his girdle. It came up again with a long knife in it, and his eyes were gleaming now with fierce and savage resolve.

"You lib for dem boat, Mass' Tom!" he muttered. "Me kill him!"

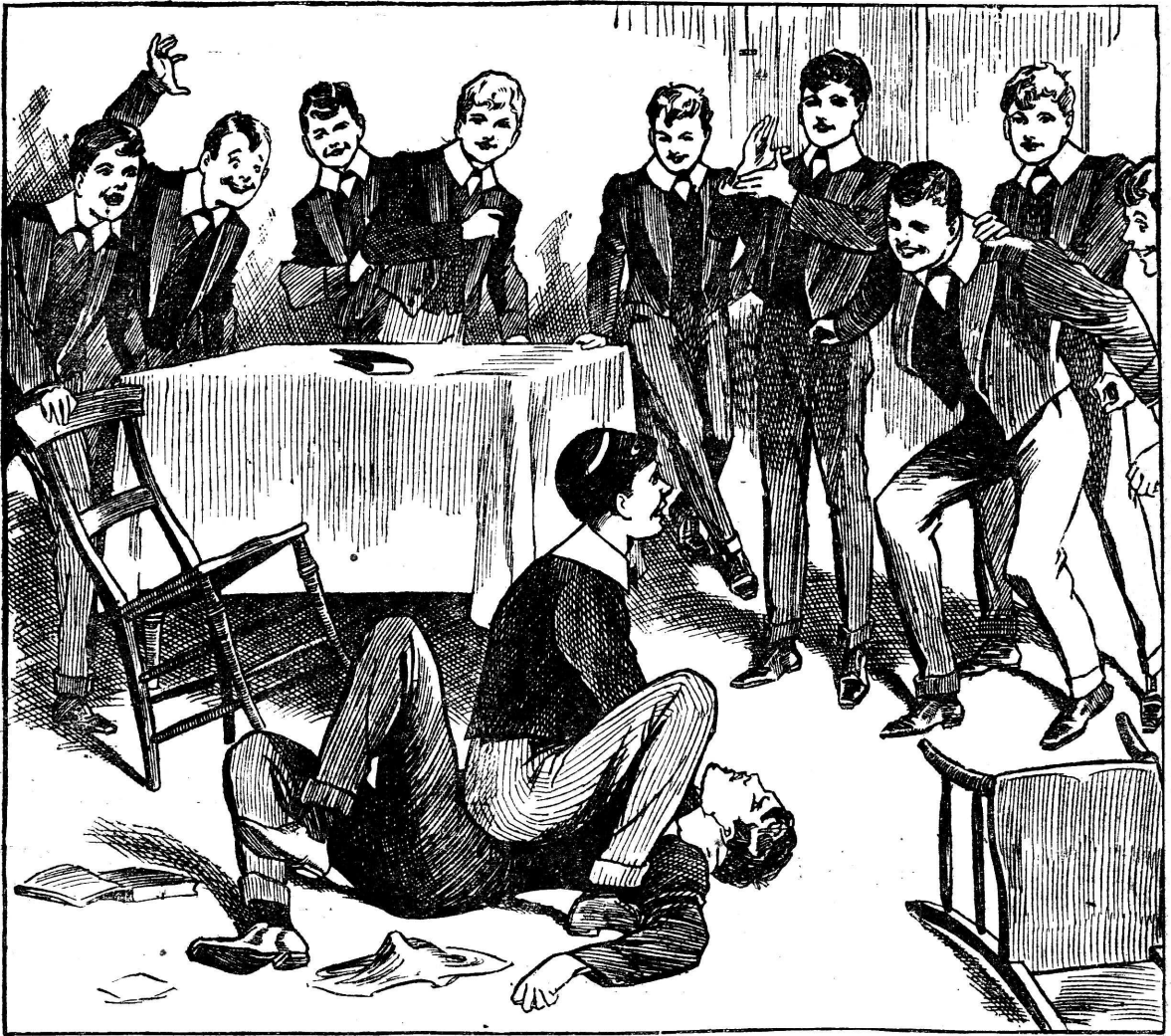
"I won't leave you alone, M'pong."

"Me all right! Me lib for kill shark before, Mass' Tom! You lib for dem boat!" said the black, in a voice of agony.

"You lib—quick, sharp!"

There was a gleam of white in the sun. The shark was turning over to seize his prey, and the white belly gleamed as he turned. There was a cry from the steamer—a cry from hoarse throats, of despair and horror. The seamen in the boat rested upon their oars for a moment. They were too late to save!

Tom Merry instinctively dived. He knew that that was



"Let's bump him till he says yes," exclaimed John Bull. "Now, Wharton, you're going to be bumped!"
 "Good egg!" roared the Removites.

(A lively incident from "FOOTBALL FOES!" the splendid, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co., by Frank Richards, contained in this week's "MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.)

his only chance—and, fortunately, long practice had made him perfectly at home in the water. Down, down, down—deep down—clearing the water, with every nerve twitching and thrilling in the momentary expectation of feeling the shearing jaws of the shark. A lifetime of horror was crammed into those few seconds.

From the steamer the juniors of St. Jim's were watching with straining eyeballs. They saw Tom Merry disappear; but M'pong remained on the surface. The knife was gripped between the negro's shining teeth now, and his eyes gleamed over it. He swam slowly, and the juniors knew that he was seeking to attract the attack of the shark, to leave Tom Merry unassailed.

The white belly of the great fish gleamed as it rushed like an arrow upon the black man.

The juniors groaned. M'pong was lost!

But at the last moment, as it seemed, M'pong dived. The shark passed over him. And then there was a sudden stream of red in the blue water.

The shark turned over, and the white disappeared, and the huge fish thrashed the water in mad contortions.

"By all, that's plucky!" yelled Blake. "M'pong has stabbed him!"

The great fish thrashed and thrashed. But the contortions were growing feebler every moment. M'pong's head came up into the blaze of the sun, and he looked round, anxiously for Tom Merry. Tom Merry had stayed below

the water as long as he could endure it, till his lungs seemed to be bursting, and his brain swimming. Then he shot up to the surface, and M'pong's grasp was upon him.

"Lib for dem boat, sah!"

M'pong dragged Tom Merry through the lashing, foaming water. The death struggles of the shark churned up the blue into white. On the white foam were streaks and streams of red, the blood of the monster of the deep.

Hands reached out from the boat and dragged them in. Tom Merry sank down exhausted, almost fainting. He was passed up the side of the steamer, and the juniors gathered round him and M'pong, almost crying with relief.

Tom Merry staggered to his feet.

He looked out over the sea. The struggles of the shark had ceased, the huge brute was floating belly upwards, the white gleaming in the sun, and in the throat showed the handle of M'pong's knife, buried there to the hilt.

Tom Merry turned to the black with outstretched hand.

"Give me your fist, M'pong!"

"Oh, Mass' Tom!"

"You want to come to England? So you shall, and we won't part again, unless you want to, M'pong."

"Oh, Mass' Tom!"

Tom Merry said it, and he meant it. The steamer throbbled on over the blue waters, and M'pong, the black man of the Congo, was a passenger on board, bound for England and for St. Jim's.

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
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NEXT
WEEK:

"TOM MERRY & CO.'S DOWNFALL!"

CHAPTER 8.

Waiting for Tom Merry.

HERRIES, of the Fourth, came dancing into the junior common-room in the School House at St. Jim's. Herries's eyes were dancing, too. As a rule, Herries was a rather serious fellow, and his chief interest was Towser, the bulldog. But Herries had been shaken out of his sedateness for once, and for the moment he had forgotten even Towser. His aspect showed that he had news, and the fellows gathered round eagerly.

"News!" shouted Herries.

"Good!" said Kangaroo, of the Shell. "What's the news?"

"The Head's had a telegram from Madeira," said Herries. "A cable, I mean, you know. It's from Tom Merry. He's coming home!"

"Hurrah!"

"I guess that's good news," said Lumley-Lumley, of the Fourth. "But is it true? We heard that he was coming home before, and he didn't come!"

"No; the bounders went up the Congo instead," said Herries. "But they're coming this time; they had got, as far as Madeira when the cable was sent. It's honest injun this time!"

"Hurrah!"

The juniors cheered with all their hearts.

Tom Merry & Co. had been a long time absent on their journey to the West Coast of Africa, and there was no doubt that they had been missed.

The Terrible Three were the backbone of the junior football team in the School House, and junior football had suffered very much during their absence. Figgins & Co. were of the same value to the New House football team, and they had been missed sorely. As a matter of fact, St. Jim's juniors had met the Rylcombe Grammar School juniors in a footer match during the absence of Tom Merry & Co., and had been hopelessly licked, with four goals to one. That alone was enough to make the fellows miss the absent juniors.

But they missed them for more reasons than that. Herries found Study No. 6 desolate without Blake and Digby and D'Arcy. He would have been glad even to hear Arthur Augustus grumbling at Towser, for the sake of hearing the familiar voice again. Herries was chummy up with Jerrold Lumley-Lumley of late; they agreed upon one thing, at all events—in missing the absent party and wishing that they were back. Kangaroo and Clifton Dane, and Glyn, of the Shell, missed the Terrible Three, and so in fact did everybody. Even Levison and Mellish, the cads of the School House, admitted that the place was not quite the same without Tom Merry's sunny face.

The news that Tom Merry & Co. were really coming back was glad news to all! Herries was in very high spirits. After imparting the glad news to the juniors, he went round to the kennels to give Towser an extra biscuit in honour of the occasion.

"Tom Merry and the fellows are coming home, Towsy, old boy," said Herries, as if his favourite could understand him.

"Gr-r-r-r!" said Towsy, old boy.

Wally, of the Fourth, met Herries as he came back. Wally—otherwise Walter Adolphus D'Arcy, the minor of the great Arthur Augustus—gave Herries a dig in the ribs. Herries gasped, and clenched his hand. Such familiarity from a fag in the Third Form was not to Herries's taste.

"Keep your whiskers on, sonny," said Wally, dodging back. "I hear there's news! The fellows are coming home—hey?"

"Yes," said Herries, his brow clearing. "There's a cable from Madeira!"

"Gussy's all serene, I suppose?"

"The Head showed me the message. It said all were well."

"Good!" said Wally. "Gussy's not much use, but I should like him to come home safe and sound! My only Aunt Jane! I wonder what he's been doing for neckties and silk hats all this time?"

And Wally departed chuckling, to spread the news in the Third Form. All the Lower School at St. Jim's meant to make a celebration of it when Tom Merry & Co. returned. Kildare, of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, met Herries at the door of the School House.

"So it's all right—eh?" said Kildare, in his genial way.

Herries nodded.

"Yes. He ate the biscuit, and he's simply ripping now." Kildare stared at him.

"Eh?" he ejaculated. "What—?"

"He has been seedy, but he's all right now," Herries explained.

"Tom Merry's been seedy?"

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"Tom Merry? No; Towser!"

"Towser?" repeated Kildare.

"Yes. You were asking about Towser, weren't you?" said Herries innocently. "He was sick, you know, and that's why I didn't go away with Blake and the rest. But he's all right again now—got his appetite back splendidly."

"Ha, ha, ha! I was asking you about Tom Merry."

"Oh, Tom Merry?" said Herries. "Yes, he's all right—he's at Madeira now, and he's coming back. It's all serene."

"Good!" said Kildare. "I shall be glad to see the cheeky young beggars again. The School House has been very quiet since they went away!"

"Yes," said Herries. "I've thought once or twice that I'd almost like to hear Gussy singing one of his tenor solos in the study again. I don't know, though," he added, in a meditative sort of way.

The telegraph boy was coming up the drive. He took a telegram to the Head's study. Dr. Holmes opened it and sighed. It was from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom Merry's old governess and guardian. As a rule, one telegram came every day from Miss Fawcett, sometimes two. The old lady wanted to know whether there was news of her ward.

But this time the Head was able to send good news. His wire in reply brought happiness to Laurel Villa, and Miss Fawcett made her preparations for going down to Southampton to meet Tom Merry when he landed. At St. Jim's, too, they were preparing to meet Tom Merry, and a feed was being planned which would have delighted the heart of Fatty Wynn if he had known of it.

CHAPTER 9.

In the Bay of Biscay-oh!

"BAI Jove! We're goin' to have wuff weathah!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, standing on the deck of the steamer, with his legs wide apart, and his monocle jammed into his eye, regarded the sky as he pronounced that opinion.

Everybody else on board the vessel knew that there was going to be rough weather, before the obvious fact dawned upon the swell of St. Jim's. But D'Arcy made the announcement as if it were a wonderful discovery.

"Go hon!" said Monty Lowther.

"It's a fact, Lowtah! I can tell the signs in the sky."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You ought to set up as a weather prophet, my son," said Blake. "There are not many fellows who could tell the weather as you do. When the sky's turning black, and the sea's rolling, and the wind going at top speed, it takes a very deep fellow to guess that we're going to have rough weather."

"Wats! As a mattah of fact—"

"As a matter of fact, Gussy," said Lowther solemnly,

"I think you ought to warn the skipper. It might be dangerous if he were taken by surprise."

"Bai Jove, you're wight!"

"Go it! Go and tell him before it's too late," urged the humorist of the Shell.

"I will, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus ran off towards the bridge, keeping his feet with difficulty on the sliding deck.

"Pway, sir—"

The captain glanced down at him from the bridge.

"What! What?"

"Pway, sir, have you observed that we are goin' to have a blow—"

The captain grinned.

"Yes; half an hour ago!" he said.

"Oh!"

"Perhaps you would like to come up on the bridge and sail the ship instead of me?" the skipper suggested, with crushing irony.

"Weally, my deah sir—"

"Get off that ladder!"

"Weally—"

"Come back, you ass!" shouted Blake. "Lowther was only pulling your silly leg. Come here!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy retreated. He gave the grinning Lowther a withering look. Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Why don't you accept the skipper's offer, and sail the steamer instead of him?" he demanded.

"I wefuse to entah into a discush with you, you uttah wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther turned to Fatty Wynn. The fat Fourth-Former of St. Jim's was sitting in a deck-chair,

and his face was very pale. Fatty Wynn had eaten a remarkably solid breakfast only an hour before, and the rolling of the ship was making him feel very strange inwardly.

"Got it?" asked Lowther sympathetically.
 "Got what?" demanded Fatty Wynn snappishly.
 "Mal-de-mer!"
 "No, I haven't! I'm never sea-sick!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Don't you remember yourself the last time we went to sea, Fatty?"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "I haven't been sick on this voyage so far," growled Fatty Wynn, "and I'm jolly well not going to begin now!"
 "We've had calm weather so far," said Lowther. "But when the blow comes on—"
 "Oh, shut up!"
 "I cautioned you to leave your tenth helping—"
 "I didn't have ten," snorted Fatty Wynn; "only nine in all!"

"Better have been satisfied with eight," said Digby, with a shake of the head. "It's too big a cargo, Fatty. Still, I dare say you'll unload soon, if the sea gets any rougher."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Groo! Beast! Shut up!"
 The sea was growing decidedly rougher. Monty Lowther watched Fatty Wynn with a grin; but, all of a sudden his grinning face became very serious. His complexion turned to a sickly white, and then was changed into art shades of yellow and green. He made a rush for the rail.

"My hat!" ejaculated Figgins. "Lowther's the first to go!"
 "Serve him right!" groaned Fatty Wynn. "I say, Lowther, you beast, does it seem so funny now? Ha, ha—groo—hoo—hoo!"

Fatty Wynn stopped laughing all of a sudden. He, too, was in the grip of the terrible mal-de-mer.

The juniors were all very grave now. There was no danger to the steamer, and the seamen were going about their work as if nothing uncommon were happening. But the rolling of the ship was deadly to less experienced sailors. One by one they joined Monty Lowther and Fatty Wynn.

M'pong retreated below, and shut himself up in a cabin, and groaned in solitude. But the juniors preferred to remain on deck.

There they had the open air, at least. Tom Merry was the last to succumb. But he did succumb, and he joined Monty Lowther at the rail.

Lowther turned a ghastly face towards him.
 "Ow! You got it, too?"
 "Yes. Ow!"
 "Groo!"
 "Oh!"

"This—this—this is worse than the lions and the snakes!" groaned Blake. "I'd change it for a cannibal any time."

"Groo!"
 "It's worse than ju-ju and malaria boiled down together!" groaned Digby. "Ow! Yow! Why couldn't we have sense enough to stay on shore? Ow!"

"Groo—ooh!"
 "Bai Jove, I am feelin' decidedly wotten! Bai Jove, there's a beastly sailah gwinnin'. I would give him a feahful thwashin', only I can't move! Ow!"

"Groo!"
 Fatty Wynn groaned with anguish. Bitterly did he regret the ninth helping.

"Ow! Oh! I—I don't think I can stand this!" he murmured feebly. "I—I'd rather jump overboard, I think."

"Ow!"
 "Groo!"
 "Bai J-J-J-Jove!"

The sea was running high now, and the ship was rocking and rolling. The engines throbbed without cessation, and the steamer plunged on through rolling seas. The endless pulsation of the engines, the odour of oil that came from them, added to the sickness of the juniors. They would have given worlds or whole solar systems, to be able to jump on any shore, however bleak and inhospitable.

But there was no shore to jump on. Round them rolled the wild sea—the stormy waters of the Bay of Biscay. Spain had been left to the south, and the steamer was heading for home; but the deadly Bay had to be crossed.

Fatty Wynn staggered to the side, and leaned over the rail. His face was the colour of chalk; his chest heaved spasmodically.

"It was the tinned beef!" he moaned. "I had a suspicion at the time that it was from Chicago. It was the tinned beef. Ow! Oh! I'm not seasick—it was that American tinned beef! Oh!"

"I—I wish somebody would—would dwop me into the sea!" moaned Arthur Augustus. "I should vevy much like to have a watey wave! Ow!"

"Oh!"
 "Groo!"

The steamer ploughed on. For hours the wind blew hard, and the sea rolled and billowed round the ploughing steamer. Tom Merry rose at last from his deck-chair. His face was very white, but the sickness was over. He had remembered M'pong. If the juniors, who had crossed the sea many times felt like this, what must the Congo black be feeling like? Tom Merry went below to look for the black man.

A deep groan guided him to where the Congo black lay, his eyes gleaming wildly out from the shadows.

"M'pong! How do you feel?"
 "Me lib for die, sah!" groaned M'pong. "Me nebber see England, Mas' Tom! Oh, me lib for die!"

Tom Merry smiled faintly.
 "It's not so bad as that, M'pong! It's only seasickness—you'll get on your sea-legs in time!"

"Oh!" groaned the black man. "Me lib for die!"
 And that was all that M'pong had to say. He seemed to be fully convinced that his last hour was near. Tom Merry brought him water, but the black man pushed the glass away.

"Me lib for die!" he repeated.
 And long after the juniors had recovered, M'pong was still moaning in the grip of the mal-de-mer.

Fatty Wynn signalled his recovery by a raid upon the dining-saloon. He explained that the real reason for his sickness was that he had not laid a sufficiently solid foundation. And he proceeded to supply the deficiency at once—with the result that an hour later he was again hanging over the rail.

CHAPTER 10.

Home Again.

"HOME again!" exclaimed Tom Merry.
 The steamer glided into her berth in the dock. A crowd of people on shore waved hands to the ship. Among them the juniors recognised a form in an early Victorian bonnet, with a remarkable umbrella. It was Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom Merry's old governess. The kind old lady could hardly wait till the gangway was put down before she ran on board to greet her darling boy. The juniors smiled as Tom Merry was locked in the embrace of his affectionate old governess.

"My darling boy! My dearest Tommy!"
 "Well, here I am!" said Tom Merry, generously allowing himself to be hugged and kissed without demur.

"My dearest boy! How are you in health, my darling?"
 "Ripping!"
 "Dear me! Your cheeks are very red!"
 "That's the sun, dear!"

"And you're sure it is not a malarial fever, my dear boy?" asked Miss Priscilla anxiously.

Tom Merry laughed—his cheerful, ringing laugh, that was good to hear.

"If it were malarial fever, I shouldn't be walking around now," he remarked. "I should be in my bunk. I'm in splendid form."

"And were you always careful to keep your feet dry when you were on that dreadful Congo?" asked Miss Fawcett.

"Well, I did my best."
 "And were you always careful to have a nightcap?"
 Tom Merry stared.

"A what?" he demanded.
 "A nightcap, my darling boy. You remember, Mr. Guzzlerum, who lives at Huckleberry Heath. I have heard him say that the only way he avoided fever, when he was on the West Coast, was by never missing his nightcap."

Tom Merry grinned.
 "I don't think that kind of nightcap would suit me, dear," he replied. "Look here, I'm in splendid health—and all I want is a game of footer. You haven't spoken to the other chaps yet."

Thus, reminded, the kind old lady greeted the juniors of St. Jim's. Then Tom Merry brought M'pong forward. Miss Fawcett stared at him in great wonder.

"A friend of mine," said Tom Merry.
 "My dear Tommy!"

"His name is M'pong," said Tom. "He saved my life, dear—stuck a shark that was going to make a breakfast off me—"

"The dear, good, brave man!" said Miss Fawcett, eyeing M'pong somewhat nervously, however. "How brave and noble of him!"

M'pong grinned, showing all his white teeth.

"Does he speak English?" asked Miss Priscilla.

"Me lib for speak him!" said M'pong.

"Thank you so much for saving my dear boy's life!" said Miss Fawcett. "B-b-but what is he going to do in England, Tommy?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom. "I'm going to take him to St. Jim's. You see, he has a queer idea that he doesn't want to part with me."

"I am quite able to understand that," said Miss Fawcett, with a fond glance at her favourite. "And I think the feeling does the good man credit. But—but what is to become of him?"

"Oh, I dare say something will turn up!"

"Dear me!"

The juniors went ashore with Miss Fawcett. They took the train together as far as the nearest station to Huckleberry Heath, and there the kind old soul left them, perfectly happy now that she had seen her darling safe and in good health once more. The juniors remained in the express, as it rolled on towards Wayland, the station for St. Jim's.

The juniors had crowded into one carriage, and M'pong was in it with them. M'pong was rigged out in a suit of clothes belonging to a sailor on board the steamer. They did not fit him, and the black was extremely uncomfortable in them. He had made most of the voyage in the light and airy loin-cloth and a necklace of beads. That costume, however, was not suitable for England, especially in the late autumn. The keen, cool air that the juniors were glad to breathe, seemed deadly to the native of blazing sandy deserts and sickly swamps.

M'pong was glad of the clothes for the protection they afforded from the cold, but he found them very irksome. But the good fellow was very patient. He was prepared to follow Mass' Tom even into an English winter. Further than that heroism could not go.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the black man as he sat in the carriage. The railway was very wonderful to M'pong, and he listened in fear and trembling to the rattling of the wheels.

"I wathah think that M'pong had bettah have some new clothes before we take him to St. Jim's," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked meditatively. "I wathah considah that a new wig would be the pwopah capah."

Monty Lowther shook his head.

"What's the matter with his wool?" he asked.

"Eh?"

"You don't want the poor chap to have his wool cut off, now that the weather's turning so cold, do you?" asked Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I do not wemembah makin' any wewefence whatevah is his hair."

"You said he ought to have a new wig."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, you know perfectly well that when I said a new wig, I meant a new wig, not a new wig," said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Very lucid, I must say," agreed Lowther.

"I fail to see any cause for wibald laughah. M'pong ought to have a new wig-out fwom head to foot."

"Oh, a new rig!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah; a new wig. We cannot take him to the coll. wiggid out in old sailah's clothes. We have to change twains in Wayland, and I think we had bettah get him an entirely new wig."

Tom Merry nodded.

"It wouldn't be a bad wheeze," he remarked. "We ought to make him look as nice as possible, to impress the Head favourably."

The juniors looked very grave. What the Head would say when they brought the Congo black man to St. Jim's they hardly dared to think.

But it was certainly a good idea to get him the best clothes possible, and when the express stopped at Wayland Junction, and the juniors alighted, they walked out into the town with M'pong in search of a ready-made clothier's.

Ready-made clothing, true, was a horror of horror to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, but M'pong had not the elegant junior's fastidious taste in clothes, and he was likely to be more easily satisfied.

Besides, time pressed. The juniors were expected at St. Jim's, and they certainly could not go to London, and wait several days while D'Arcy's tailor rigged the black man out in fashionable garb.

They stopped at a clothier's, and poured into the shop in a crowd. They were followed to the shop door by a crowd of curious urchins. Black men were not common in Wayland town, and the cheerful youth of the place regarded M'pong with great interest.

Mr. Baggs, the clothier, came forward to greet the juniors with great politeness. He knew the St. Jim's fellows, and would have been very glad to supply them with a special

line in trousers at eleven-and-six, or Eton jackets, latest cut, at sixteen shillings.

"Glad to see you, young gentlemen!" said Mr. Baggs, rubbing his hands. "Dear me! How brown you look! Been to Africa, I 'ear."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "And we've brought a fwiend home with us, Mr. Baggs. We want you to wig him out."

"I shall be most happy, Master D'Arcy. A fashionable lounge-suit, I suppose?"

"Ya-a-as," said D'Arcy, a little dubiously.

"I have a splendid line in lounge-suits from two guineas—"

"Wats!"

"Eh?"

"I don't want to teach any man his own business," said Arthur Augustus, "but it's uttaly imposs. to make a suit of clothes for two guineas."

The clothier coughed.

"I said from two guineas," he remarked. "Of course, you would want something superior, sir. My lounge-suit at four guineas is a marvel—"

"Pway let us have somethin' decent, my deah sir."

"My lounge-suit at six guineas is bound to give satisfaction," said Mr. Baggs. "I will show it to you, Master D'Arcy. Latest Bond Street cut, sir."

"Bai Jove! I dare say the fashion has changed a bit while we've been away," said Arthur Augustus, with some interest. "Pway show me the things, Mr. Baggs."

"Immediately, sir—immediately!"

Mr. Baggs laid out his splendid lounge-suit upon the counter. Arthur Augustus regarded it through his eyeglass with great surprise.

"Bai Jove! If that is the latest thing, there have been considerable changes," he remarked.

The juniors grinned as they looked at the suit. It was in the loudest possible check, and the coat seemed all waist. Monty Lowther tapped it with his forefinger.

"Paw'n to king's fourth," he remarked.

And the juniors chuckled. It certainly seemed that the game of chess could be played upon that lounge-suit.

"Better have something a bit quieter," said Tom Merry, laughing; "something in a dark grey, Mr. Baggs, with—without so many decorations."

"Ahem! Certainly, Master Merry—certainly!"

Mr. Baggs brought out suit after suit. He was going to charge six guineas for a two-guinea suit, and so he could afford to take a little trouble. Waylanders, as a rule, did not go higher than two guineas for their clothes, but Mr. Baggs, like many tradesmen, charged what he could get, and made the good customers pay for the bad ones.

A suit was selected at last, and Mr. Baggs obligingly allowed M'pong to change in his back room. The Congo black looked better in his new clothes, there was no doubt about that, and he was rather proud of them.

"And now there's the question of a hat," said Monty Lowther gravely.

"Bai Jove! Yaas! A silk toppah, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause for mewwiment in that wemark. We want our fwiend to make a good appeawance at St. Jim's, I suppose."

And Mr. Baggs was settled with, and the juniors walked down the street to a hatter's. They fitted M'pong out with a new silk topper, and the black man regarded himself in the glass with pride and something like awe.

D'Arcy surveyed him through his eyeglass with great satisfaction.

"Bai Jove! Doesn't he look wippin'?" he exclaimed.

"Stunning!" said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard this as a twiump'h!" said Arthur Augustus. "Come on, deah boys; we're weady to go to St. Jim's now."

And the juniors quitted the shop. The crowd of country youths had augmented, and there was a cheer for M'pong as he came out in his new silk topper.

"Raise your hat and bow," whispered Monty Lowther.

M'pong obeyed, and the crowd laughed and cheered again. The black man walked proudly down to the station with Tom Merry & Co.

"Me lib for become real Christian now, Mass' Tom," he said.

Tom Merry smiled. The St. Jim's party tumbled into the train, and they were borne away to Rylcombe Station, where a rousing welcome awaited them.

ANSWERS

CHAPTER 11.

At St. Jim's.

"I GUESS the train's coming," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.

"Good!"

"Hurrah!"

There was a crowd of fellows on the platform at the little station in Rylcombe. The Head had given leave to a host of fellows to go down to the station and meet the returning wanderers.

Herries and Reilly and Pratt and a crowd of Fourth-Formers, Kangaroo, and Dane, and Glyn, and Gore, and Skimpole, and other Shell fellows, Wally and a host of fags in the Third Form crowded the platform, ready to greet the home-coming party with ringing cheers.

There was a whistle down the line, and the train from Wayland came rolling in.

Tom Merry & Co. came pouring out, to have their hands shaken and their shoulders slapped by enthusiastic fellows.

"Hallo, Gussy, old cock!" said Wally, digging his elder brother affectionately in the ribs; a proceeding which caused D'Arcy major to gasp painfully. "How are you, my son?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Jolly glad to see your old chivvy again!" said Wally. "It isn't much in the way of ornament, and it's no use; but I'm glad to see it."

"Weally, Wally, chivvy is a shockingly vulgah expwesion—"

"Same old Gussy!" chuckled Wally. "No change. Same old giddy grandfather. What did you do for new neckties on the Congo, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Faith, and it's glad to see ye we are!" said Reilly, slapping D'Arcy on the back. "Sure, and we've missed you intirely!"

"Yaas; but pway don't be so wuff, Weilly, deah boy!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Kangaroo, the Cornstalk. "What have you got there? Where did you pick that up?" He referred to M'pong.

The black man was gazing round him in surprise and awe at the crowd of boys. Railway-stations and boys in Etons were a new sight to M'pong.

"That's a fiwend of mine," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Oh, my hat!"

"I twust, Kangawoo, that you will tweat our coloured fiwend with pwopah respect," said Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for D'Arcy's friend!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Look here; no rotting," Tom Merry exclaimed rather sharply. "M'pong is a friend of ours, and he saved my life on the Coast. No rotting, please."

"Faith, and we'll love him for ever!" exclaimed Reilly, shaking hands with the black man. "How do you do, my son?"

"How do you do, Pongo?"

"Hurrah!"

The juniors greeted M'pong heartily enough. Broad smiles overspread the ebony countenance of the Congo black man. The crowd of fellows formed up in a procession, with Tom Merry & Co. and M'pong in the middle, and marched out of the station.

They marched in a body down the village street, cheering, and many of the Rylcombe folk, who knew and liked Tom Merry, cheered too.

Then down the lane to St. Jim's in high good-humour.

Pratt, of the New House, nudged Fatty Wynn in the ribs.

"Jolly glad to see you back, Fatty!" he said. "We've got a feed on to celebrate the occasion, you know—something really ripping."

Fatty Wynn's eyes glistened.

"Oh, good," he exclaimed—"good, my son! You don't know how jolly anxious I am to taste decent English food again! Any steak-and-kidney pies?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Fresh eggs?"

"Heaps!"

"Jam-tarts?"

"Dozens!"

"Ginger-beer?"

"Gallons!"

Fatty Wynn almost wept.

"Oh, it's ripping!" he said. "There's nothing like home, after all. You never get anything really decent to eat outside England—outside the United Kingdom, at all events. The more a chap travels, the more he realises what a glorious place England is. What-ho!"

And Fatty Wynn's face was wreathed in smiles as he walked on. He forgot the blazing sun of Africa, he forgot the mosquitoes' bites, he forgot the sea-sickness—all was buried in oblivion now that he had a chance of tasting really good British food again. He revelled mentally in the prospect of a steak-and-kidney pie.

"St. Jim's," said Tom Merry, as the gates of the school and the old tower came into view. "Good old St. Jim's!"

And the sunburnt juniors gave a cheer. It was splendid to be back again. Afternoon school was just over, and the old quad was thronged. Kildare, of the Sixth, came up and shook hands with Tom Merry with a genial word of greeting, and stared at the black man. M'pong made quite a sensation.

"My heye," said Taggles, the school porter—"my heye! I'm glad to see you back again, Master Merry—werry glad! But who's that?"

"It's Tom Merry's uncle from India," said Monty Lowther, with perfect gravity.

"My heye! But he's black, Master Lowther!"

"That's only the sun; it's awfully hot in India, you know," explained Lowther. "We should have become that colour if we'd stayed in Africa much longer. Don't you see the resemblance in features between them?"

"My heye! Now you speak of it, I do!" said Taggles.

"Master Merry, I'm sure it must be pleasant for you to bring your uncle 'ome with you—"

"What!" roared Tom Merry.

"You're werry like your nephew, sir, if I may make so bold," said Taggles, taking off his hat to M'pong. "Werry like indeed, sir, if I may say so."

"Me no savvy."

"Eh?"

"You lib for talk rot," said M'pong.

"My heye! I say, Master Merry, your uncle—"

"You frabjous ass!" said Tom Merry. "My uncle! Who told you he was my uncle?"

"Why, Master Lowther said—"

"You ass, Monty!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "But come on. I can see Dr. Holmes at his study window, and he's seen M'pong. We shall have to explain him away somehow."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And it won't be so jolly easy, either!" said Blake.

The juniors marched on to the School House. Figgins & Co. were marched off by a crowd of New House fellows, and Tom Merry and the School House boys entered the School House. M'pong was left in the midst of an admiring crowd in the hall, while the returned juniors went in to see the Head. Dr. Holmes greeted the juniors very cordially.

"I am very glad to see you all home again," he exclaimed, shaking hands with Tom Merry; "but—but who is that black man I saw with you in the quadrangle?"

Tom Merry coloured. As Blake had remarked, it was not very easy to explain M'pong away.

"He's a Congo chap, sir," said Tom Merry hesitatingly.

"Dear me!"

"He saved my life, sir!"

"Ahem!"

"And—and he became attached to me, sir, and—and I couldn't leave him behind," said Tom Merry awkwardly.

"So—so I've brought him home, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

"I—I thought something could be done with him, sir. He's becoming a Christian, sir—I've been teaching him things, and—and he's completely given up cannibalism, sir," said Tom Merry diffidently.

Dr. Holmes jumped.

"He has given up what—what?" he ejaculated.

"Cannibalism, sir!"

"Is it possible, Merry, that you have brought home a cannibal to St. Jim's?" gasped the Head.

"He—he isn't a cannibal now, sir; it's—it's months and months since he's eaten anybody," stammered Tom Merry, "and—and I'm sure he won't do it any more, sir. There's no danger, sir."

Dr. Holmes sank into his chair, and stared blankly at Tom Merry.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated.

CHAPTER 12.

Trouble.

TOM MERRY & CO. stood silent. They had expected the Head to be surprised, and they did not know how he would take it; and they waited for the verdict like criminals before a judge.

The Head did not find his voice for a full minute.

He took off his glasses and wiped them, and put them on again, and looked at Tom Merry, who kept his eyes upon the floor.

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"Merry!" he ejaculated at last.

"Ye-es, sir."

"Is it possible that you have brought a cannibal home to England with you?"

"He isn't a cannibal now, sir."

"But—but he has been one?"

"I—I'm afraid so, sir."

"Merry! It is unheard-of! Outrageous! What—what could you possibly mean by such a proceeding? Where is the man to go?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Did you expect me to allow him to stay at the school?"

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Come, Merry! I suppose you have some explanation to give of this most remarkable action?" the Head exclaimed, somewhat tartly.

"Well, yes, sir."

"I am waiting to hear it," said the Head.

Tom Merry began to explain. He found himself telling the story of M'pong's faithful services on the Congo—of his help in saving D'Arcy from the reptile; of his fight with the shark off the coast. Insensibly his voice deepened, and his face flushed, as he proceeded; and unconsciously he grew eloquent. The Head listened, his expression softening more and more. Tom Merry broke off at last, with a catch in his voice.

"You see, sir, I—I couldn't leave him behind," he said.

"I suppose you could not, under the circumstances, Merry," said the Head; "but now that he is here, what is to become of him?"

"I don't know, sir. I thought you might be able to advise me, sir."

"Ahem!" said the Head.

This was really a brilliant stroke on the part of Tom Merry, as it placed the responsibility upon the shoulders of Dr. Holmes, instead of upon his own.

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" said Arthur Augustus. "We should all be vewy pleased to be guided by your advice, sir."

"Ahem!"

"I'm sure that we couldn't ask anything better, sir," said Blake.

"Ahem! I will consider—bring the man in here, Merry, and let me see him."

"Certainly, sir."

Tom Merry opened the door of the study, and called to M'pong. The black man was surrounded by a curious crowd. He turned immediately at Tom Merry's voice, and pushed his way through the crowd. Knox, the prefect, who was in the way, was pushed aside, and he uttered an angry exclamation.

"Take care whom you're pushing, you black hound!"

"Come here, M'pong!" exclaimed Tom Merry hastily.

He was afraid of what the savage might do. Knox certainly did not understand whom he was provoking, when he wantonly affronted the Congo cannibal. M'pong's eyes had burned for a moment. But he answered quietly at Tom Merry's voice.

"Yes, Mass' Tom! Yes, sah."

"Come in here, M'pong. The Head wishes to see you."

"Yes, Mass' Tom."

M'pong entered the Head's study. Dr. Holmes rose, and regarded him through his spectacles with great interest. Tom Merry whispered to the black man.

"This is the Head—the great Chief, you savvy?—great ju-ju—you lib for obey him, him great chief here."

"Yes, Mass' Tom."

The big black advanced towards Dr. Holmes, fell upon his stomach before him, and struck the floor with his forehead. Dr. Holmes regarded him with astonishment.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed.

"What is he doing?"

"That's his Congo way of paying his respects, sir," said Monty Lowther.

"Bless my soul!"

"My hat!" murmured Manners. "If I had my camera—"

"Lib for get up, M'pong," said Tom Merry.

M'pong rose to his feet.

"Master Merry tells me that you saved his life, and that

you wished to come to England with him, M'pong," said the Head, a little flurried.

"Yes, sah."

"Do you not find it very cold in England?"

M'pong shivered.

"Yes, sah."

"Do you wish to return to your native country?"

M'pong looked puzzled. The precise English of the Head of St. Jim's was a little beyond his attainments in the language. Tom Merry translated.

"You want lib for dem Congo, M'pong."

M'pong shook his head vigorously.

"No, sah. Me no want leave Mass' Tom! Me lib for die with Mass' Tom."

The doctor stroked his chin thoughtfully. He could not help being touched by the simple attachment of the black man. But he could not think that the man from the Congo was a suitable inmate for the old school.

"I suppose he had better remain here for the present, Merry," said the Head, "while we consider what can be done with him. It is a very awkward state of affairs. I hope his temper can be relied upon."

"I—I hope so, sir."

"I suppose he has no deadly weapons about him?" said Dr. Holmes, a little nervously.

Tom Merry smiled.

"Oh, none, sir!"

"I will tell Taggles to prepare a room for him," said the Head. "I think perhaps a room over the stables will be excellent for him—the rooms occupied by my coachman are now vacant, as he is on his holiday. M'pong can occupy them for the present. He will feel more free there than in the house. You—you may go now, Merry."

"Yes, sir; and thank you very much, sir. We're all going to work very hard now we're back, sir, to make up for the time we've lost."

"Yaas, wathah, sir! I intend to swot like anythin'."

"Very well," said the Head, with a smile.

"Come on, M'pong!"

And the juniors quitted the study. M'pong walked beside Tom Merry. The old school seemed to impress M'pong very much. He had seen nothing like St. Jim's in Boma, the largest town he had ever seen before leaving his native land. Juniors appeared round all corners to stare at the black man. Wally and a crowd of the Third met them in the passage.

"Uncle Tom, by Jove!" said Curly Gibson. "Where's his giddy cabin?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wonder if his wool will come off?" remarked Levison, of the Fourth.

"Let him alone!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Oh, rats!" said Levison.

And the cad of the Fourth, with a grin, caught hold of M'pong's long, thick wool, and jerked at it. M'pong uttered an exclamation of pain, and knocked Levison's hand aside.

"Don't touch me, you black hound!" said Levison.

"You'd better keep your beastly niggers out of the School House, Tom Merry, I can tell you. We don't want any dirty cannibals here. I— Oh!"

Levison broke off.

M'pong, with a face convulsed with fury, had seized him in a savage grasp.

Levison struggled; but he was as a baby in the powerful grasp of the Congo savage. M'pong swung him off his feet, and whirled him into the air. The floor and the walls swam round the terrified Levison.

"Help!" he shrieked. "Oh! Help!"

M'pong swung the cad of the Fourth high in the air, and held him poised over his head, evidently considering which wall to hurl him against.

"You lib for die!" he muttered, between his teeth.

"Help!"

Tom Merry sprang forward, his face white as death.

"M'pong! M'pong! Stop!"

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The gorilla did not take the same size in hats, evidently, as the swell of St. Jim's, for he did not get the topper to fit to his satisfaction. He tried it on the right way, and then turned it round and tried it on backwards, and then put it on upside down. But he did not seem satisfied. "My word! you might take him for Gussy's twin brother, trying on a new topper!" murmured Monty Lowther. *(See Chapter 4.)*

CHAPTER 13.

Something Like a Feed!

TOM MERRY'S voice rang out sharp and clear. M'pong stopped.

The voice of Tom Merry exercised a magical effect upon him. He lowered the trembling Levison to the floor, and bowed his woolly head submissively to the hero of the Shell.

"Me lib for stop, Mass' Tom!"

Levison staggered away, and leaned helplessly, exhausted, against the wall. His face was white, his eyes starting from his head. He realised that he had had a fearfully narrow escape from death or terrible injury.

Tom Merry looked sternly at M'pong.

"M'pong! Is this your good behaviour?" he exclaimed.

"M'pong sorry, sah."

"If you had done as you intended, M'pong, do you know

what would have happened? You would have been taken away from here, and put in prison for the rest of your life."

"Oh, Mass' Tom!"

"And I should have got into trouble for bringing you here," said Tom Merry.

"Me sorry, Mass' Tom! If Mass' Tom say so, me lib for die."

"Nothing of the sort," said Tom Merry. "But if you let your temper break out again, you will have to leave this place at once."

"Yes, Mass' Tom."

The contrition in M'pong's face was so great and so genuine, that Tom Merry took compassion upon him. After all, the wild, untutored savage was little to blame. He was acting according to his instincts and his training, and Levison had provoked his rage.

Tom Merry turned towards the cad of the Fourth.

"You've had a pretty narrow escape, Levison," he said.

"It was your own fault—you ought to know better than to insult a man who has never offended you."

Levison gritted his teeth.

"I'll complain to the Head," he said, "I won't go about in danger of my life. The villain may break out into cannibalism at any moment."

"Hold your tongue!" said Blake.

"I'll complain to the Head—"

"Go and complain, then, and shut up!"

Levison stamped away. He was beginning to recover his nerve, but his temper was bitter. The fright he had had left him in a fury. It was not a pleasant experience, and he meant to make both Tom Merry and M'pong suffer for it if he could.

Tom Merry looked and felt considerably worried. M'pong was sorry for his fault now, but there was no telling when his wild temper might break out again. And there were other fellows as bad as Levison at St. Jim's, like Mellish, or Crooke of the Shell, who might provoke him out of wantonness. If any serious accident should happen the blame would be Tom Merry's for bringing a savage to the school. Not that Tom Merry was thinking much about where the blame would fall, but he did not want anything of the sort to happen.

Kangaroo of the Shell clapped him on the shoulder.

"Come on, Tom Merry! The feed's ready."

"Oh, good!"

"We're having it in the gym," said the Cornstalk.

"You see, practically the whole of the Lower School is coming, and a crowd of the seniors, and we want room. We were thinking of the lecture-hall, but we've got permission to use the gym. And the feed is something gorgeous. You should have seen Fatty Wynn's face when he saw it!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Good!" he said. "I'm hungry. You fellows peckish?"

"What-ho!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I feel decidedly peckish, deah boy."

"Hungry, M'pong?"

"Me lib for eat, Mass' Tom."

"Come on, then!"

Tom Merry meant to keep the noble savage under his own eye. Wally of the Third had already named him the Noble Savage. M'pong was very quiet now—very quiet and contrite. But Tom Merry felt a great deal as if he were taking a lion about with him.

The scene in the gym was most imposing.

Tables had been laid and chairs arranged, and the tables were loaded with good things. Chairs and forms had been borrowed from all quarters, and there were seats for all. The Lower School had turned up almost to the last boy, and a great many seniors came dropping in. Lefevre of the Fifth clapped Tom Merry on the shoulder as he walked into the crowded gym, with his chums.

"Jolly glad to see you back, Tom Merry!" said Lefevre. "That's what I say—we're jolly glad! Is that cannibal tame?"

"Yes, a perfect lamb," said Tom Merry. "Ain't you, Pongo?"

M'pong grinned.

"Well, don't let him eat any of the fellows by 'mistake," said Lefevre. "That's what I say! Here's Wynn. I'm sure he'd tempt almost any cannibal."

The fat Fourth-Former turned quite pale.

"Oh, cheese it!" he exclaimed. "You give a fellow quite a turn. M'pong's all right."

Tom Merry marched M'pong hastily on. The black man was given a seat at the table beside Tom Merry, where he excited a great deal of interest. Levison did not turn up at the feed. He had announced that he did not care to sit down to table with a black man, and that he would not go to the feed if M'pong were there, to which Jack Blake had retorted that he could go to Jericho if he pleased.

The feed was a great success, especially from Fatty Wynn's point of view. Fatty's little weakness being well known, the juniors vied with one another in pressing good things upon him from a feeling of curiosity to see how much he would eat. English food was very tempting to Fatty Wynn after his late experiences, and he wired in manfully. Steak and kidneys and cold chickens were his favourites, but he extended an impartial patronage to every kind of comestible.

"More steak and kidneys, Wynn?" said Pratt.

Fatty Wynn shook his head at last. It was very painful to him to have to refuse, but there was a limit even for the Falstaff of the New House at St. Jim's.

"N-n-no, thanks, Pratty!" he said.

"Have a wing of this ripping chick," said Kangaroo.

"Thanks, no!"

"Try the ham and tongue."

"Well, just a little."

"These are splendid eggs, Fatty," said Clifton Dane.

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"Well, I might have a couple."

"Oh, make it half a dozen."

Fatty Wynn hesitated.

"No," he said manfully; "two will be enough. Enough's as good as a feast, you know. I never did believe in a chap over-eating."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Try the jam tarts, Fatty," said Bernard Glyn.

"I have, thanks."

"Have some more, then."

"Well, just one."

"Have some of these cream puffs," said Herries.

"They're prime."

"Well, a couple, then."

"Faith, and these doughnuts are good!" said Reilly.

"You must have some of the doughnuts, Fatty."

Fatty Wynn shook his head.

"I—I can't!" he said. "Thanks awfully, but—but I couldn't eat any more. You fellows, this has been splendid for me! You don't know what it is to pass weeks in a country where you can't get any decent grub. It's terrific! But I've had a good time to-day! Only I won't have any more, thanks all the same."

And Fatty Wynn was firm upon that point, in spite of frequent urging. As a matter of fact, the fat Fourth-Former was afraid of what might happen if he should eat any more. He sat with a glowing and shining face, with a slight feeling inwardly as if he were still on the deck of the steamer upon the rolling sea.

Figgins came along and clapped him on the shoulder, and Fatty Wynn gave a sudden start, and turned pale.

"Enjoying yourself, Fatty?" exclaimed Figgins

"Groo!"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing! I'm enjoying myself—yes."

"I say, you're not seedy, are you?" exclaimed Kerr, coming up. "You were looking ripping an hour ago."

"I'm all right."

"Have some more grub," said Figgins, who had always known that as an infallible method of setting matters right with Fatty Wynn.

"Ow! Don't!"

"Don't what?"

"Don't talk about grub!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Figgins, in unbounded astonishment. "What on earth's the matter with you, Fatty? Why, you always liked talking about grub."

"Ow!"

"Are you ill, old man?"

"N-no; but"—Fatty Wynn's voice sank to a tragic whisper—"I—I— The fact is, Figg, old man, I—I—"

"Well?"

"I—I've overdone it!" murmured Fatty Wynn desperately.

Figgins and Kerr stared at him for a moment, and then burst into a roar. In spite of the signs of suffering in Fatty Wynn's face, they could not help it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn groaned softly.

"Ow! Look here— Oh!"

Figgins and Kerr became serious at once. They were very much attached to their fat chum in spite of his little weaknesses—perhaps because of them.

"Poor old Fatty!" murmured Figgins. "Come on: you'd better lie down for a bit, or sit in the open air. Lend a hand, Kerr."

"Right you are!"

And Fatty Wynn rose from the table, and, leaning upon the supporting arms of his faithful chums, walked out into the quadrangle. He felt better immediately with the cool evening air blowing upon his face. He sank down upon a bench under an elm.

"You can leave me here," he said. "I shall be all right."

"No; we'll stay with you," said Figgins.

"No, no! Go back, or the fellows will notice, and—and they'll fancy I've eaten too much, or something of the sort."

Figgins and Kerr stared, but they obeyed Fatty Wynn, and returned into the gym., leaving him sitting under the elm. Fatty Wynn had wonderful recuperative powers.

From the lighted gym. came the sound of a chorus. Fatty listened to it, and gradually he felt better as the minutes passed. A quarter of an hour after he had been helped out into the quad, he ambled back into the gym. The feed was almost over, and Fatty Wynn dropped into an empty seat at a table before a dish of jam tarts.

Figgins caught sight of him a little later, and he stared.

"My only hat! There's Fatty again! Look at him!"

Kerr looked, and grinned. Fatty Wynn was eating jam-tarts as fast as he could, and the dish was rapidly emptying.

CHAPTER 14.

The Cannibal's Breakfast.

TOM MERRY slept soundly that night in his old bed in the Shell dormitory, in the School House. It was a very comfortable bed, and it felt more comfortable that night than it had ever felt before. It was good to be back at the old school—good to be among his old friends again—good to have clean sheets instead of a rough blanket haunted by ants to sleep in. The Congo was very well for an adventure, but England was the place to live in. Tom Merry thought so dreamily as he fell asleep. The clang of the rising-bell in the morning was positively pleasant to his ears.

Clang—clang!

Tom Merry sat up in bed and yawned. The sun was streaming in at the high windows of the dormitory; it was a fine, cold morning. Tom Merry hurled his pillow at Monty Lowther to awaken him, and Lowther started up.

"Ow! Hallo!"

"Time to get up—"

"You fathead!"

"Hallo! Where's Manners?" asked Tom Merry, as he turned out of bed. "He's up first. Where has he got to?"

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Oh, he's up early to develop his blessed films. He's brought home yards of them from Africa. We shall have the blessed study decorated with photographs of African scenes, like a giddy wall-paper. Palm-trees with fruit—palm-trees without fruit—niggers bathing—niggers who never bathe—crocodiles basking in the sun—river scenes—the Congo seen from the south—the south seen from the Congo—and so on. We shall never hear the end of Manners's photographs. We were asses to let him take his camera!"

Tom Merry laughed.

The chums of the Shell went down, and Tom Merry tried the study door in the Shell passage. It was locked on the inside, and an irritable voice came through.

"Who's that? Go 'way!"

"What are you up to, Manners?"

"I'm developing my films. You can't come in—I've got the frame over the window, and the red lamp going."

"Can we help you?" asked Lowther.

A snort was audible from the study.

"No, you can't!"

"Any of them successful?" asked Lowther, through the keyhole.

A louder snort.

"Yes, ass—all of them! I never had a better set of negatives. I only wish I'd thought of snapping Pongo when he was sticking the shark. I thought of it afterwards."

Tom Merry and Lowther laughed, and went downstairs. It was useless to think of getting into the study when Manners was developing negatives there. When the study was turned into a dark-room it was like a Gibraltar—impossible to capture.

The chums of the Shell strolled out into the quad. It was a fine, fresh morning, and there was a keen breath of winter in the air. It was pleasant and invigorating to the juniors after their experience of the sickly breath of African swamps.

"Oh, this is ripping!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather! I wonder how Pongo is getting on?"

Monty Lowther remarked.

Lowther was referring to M'pong, not to Wally's dog Pongo. Most of the St. Jim's fellows had already shortened M'pong to Pongo.

"Let's go and see him," said Tom Merry.

They made their way to the stables. The apartments attached to the stables, formerly occupied by the coachman, had been assigned to M'pong, and the juniors had seen him bestow there the previous night before going to bed. But M'pong was not there now. In the bed-room the bedclothes were in an untidy heap on the floor, showing that the black had slept there instead of upon the bed. And M'pong was gone.

"I wonder where he is," Tom Merry said, rather uneasily.

"Let's look for him!"

The chums looked round the stables, but M'pong was not to be seen. They strolled up and down, round the kennels and the outbuildings, and looked round the chapel and the gym. But the black man was not to be seen. In the quad, they encountered the chums of the Fourth, who had just come out for a saunter before breakfast.

"Seen anything of M'pong?" asked Tom Merry.

"No," said Blake. "Isn't he in his quarters?"

"No. We've been looking for him. I hope he isn't in any mischief," said Tom Merry anxiously.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'll find him for you if you like," said Herries.

"Eh! How can you find him?"

"Towser—"

"Towsah!"

"Yes," said Herries, with emphasis. "Towser will find him! I'll fetch Towser, and if you show him something belonging to Pongo, he'll track him down in next to no time. You know what a wonderful dog Towser is on a scent."

"Ahem!"

"Look here!"

"Pway leave Towsah where he is, Hewwies, deah boy! That dog has no wespsect whatevah for a fellow's-twousahs."

"Oh, rats!"

"If you say wais to me, Hewwies—"

"More rats!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

The Terrible Three strolled away, leaving the Fourth-formers to argue. They looked into the Head's garden. That was forbidden ground to the juniors, but there was no telling whether the Congo black might not have invaded it. Tom Merry gave a sudden start as he caught sight of a thin column of smoke rising above a thicket of big rhododendrons at the extreme end of the garden.

"Look there!" he muttered.

Monty Lowther nodded, but did not reply. They hurried down the garden. In a little clearing in the midst of the rhododendron bushes, M'pong was squatted upon his haunches beside a fire, made of sticks ruthlessly dragged from the trees about him. A fowl and a rabbit were cooking over the embers, and several cleanly-picked bones showed that the savage had already disposed of part of his repast.

The juniors stared at the black in dismay.

M'pong did not see them for a moment. He picked up the fowl from the embers, half-cooked, and with his fingers and teeth for implements, began to devour it. He had never looked a more complete savage.

Tom Merry watched him in dismay. It had been fully explained to M'pong that he was to take his meals indoors, at a table, with knife and fork. But the nature of the savage was too strong for him. He had been up at dawn, and he had prepared his own breakfast in his own way. Tom Merry wondered where he had obtained the rabbit from, till he saw a white, furry skin on the ground. It was one of the boys' tame rabbits that had fallen a victim to M'pong's voracious appetite.

"M'pong!"

The black started up.

He stood before Tom Merry, and if colour had been able to show in his black face, no doubt, he would have blushed.

He knew that he had been doing wrong, and he stood like a schoolboy found out in a fault, penitent, but more troubled at being found out than at having done wrong.

"Mass' Tom!"

M'pong's new clothes were sadly stained with dirt and dust and grease. But cleanliness is not a virtue of the Congo savage. Tom Merry had had great difficulty in making him understand that it was a good idea to wash, and as for washing every day, even his respect for Tom Merry could not prevent M'pong from regarding that as simply ludicrous.

"You should not have done this, M'pong."

"Me sorry, Mass' Tom!"

"You must not light fires here, M'pong. You must not take your meals out of doors like a savage. You must do as I tell you."

"Yes, Mass' Tom."

Tom Merry sighed. M'pong was ready with promises, and he meant well, but a savage was not to be turned into a civilised man in a few days. M'pong followed Tom Merry back to his quarters, and there dutifully washed and dressed himself, and looked all the better for it; and, indeed, he looked as good as gold now. But it was only until the next time, as Tom Merry knew.

CHAPTER 15.

Levison's Scheme.

THERE was trouble that morning over M'pong's little escapade. Mellish, of the Fourth, was the owner of the white rabbit, and he made an uproar about it that was quite out of proportion to the loss. Mellish bred white rabbits to sell to the other fellows at a profit, and it was not a case of losing a pet. Mellish had never had a pet. But he had a grievance now, and he aired it. Levison and Mellish never lost an opportunity of scoring against Tom Merry, and here was an opportunity. They made the most of it. The whole school echoed with the fact that Mellish's white rabbit had been killed and eaten by the Congo cannibal. Tom Merry offered to pay for it most liberally, but Mellish refused at first with great dignity.

"It's not the value of the animal," he said. "But I was

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fond of it. It was my pet, and I miss it. That's what I feel so deeply."

Then Tom Merry lost his temper.

"Don't tell lies!" he exclaimed, with more directness than politeness. "You weren't fond of it. You're never fond of anything. You don't know what it is to be fond of animals!"

"Look here, Tom Merry!"

"I know you killed one in a temper by throwing a hammer at it when it got out of the cage," said Tom Merry.

"Well, you see—"

"And if I'd seen you do it, I'd have given you a hiding for it," said Tom. "But look here! Don't tell lies on the subject! Say what you'll take for the rabbit, and shut up!"

"Look here—"

"Do you want the money or not?" snapped Tom Merry.

Mellish decided that he did. He named a price that was three times the market value of any white rabbit, and Tom Merry paid it. Mellish was settled with, so far as the money went. But he still complained, and trailed his wounded affection, as it were, before all the school in search of sympathy. And as all St. Jim's did not know Mellish so well as Tom Merry did, he gained a certain amount of sympathy on the subject.

And Mellish was not the only troublesome person. The chicken that M'pong had cooked with the rabbit belonged to Taggles, who kept chickens. M'pong had very vague ideas on the subject of personal belongings. He generally took what he wanted wherever he could get it, in the natural manner of a noble savage. Taggles came inquiring after his missing chicken with a very grim look. Tom Merry settled with him more easily than with Mellish. Taggles, having made a good profit on the transaction, retired satisfied, and, in fact, rather hoping that M'pong would steal another of his chickens.

But more to be dreaded than Mellish or Taggles was the Head. When the Head saw that burnt patch in his garden, and saw the torn branches whence M'pong had obtained his firewood, he seemed to be upon the verge of an apopleptic fit.

Tom Merry was sent for. He came into the Head's study with a very solemn expression upon his face. He knew that he was in for it.

"Merry, you know what that black savage has done?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"You understand, of course, that such outrages are intolerable?" the Head exclaimed warmly.

"I'm awfully sorry, sir."

"I dare say you are," the Head said, somewhat tartly. "Unfortunately, your sorrow will not repair the damage that the man has done."

"I—I suppose not, sir. But—"

"It must be clearly understood, Merry, that if any further outrage occurs here the man must be sent away from the school."

"Oh, sir!"

"There is no alternative. I have had a complaint from Levison that the black man attacked him savagely. Now he has lighted fires in my garden, and stolen rabbits and chickens to cook there. You must see that the thing is impossible. At the next outrage he must go, and you had better warn him of it."

"Very well, sir."

Tom Merry quitted the Head's study with a heavy heart. He realised that St. Jim's was not the place for a reformed cannibal. He wondered whether M'pong was beginning to realise it, too. The sharpness of the weather would probably have some effect in helping the Congo savage to understand that his native land was the proper place for him. Many times already he had been seen crouching over fires, trying to keep warm, and trying in vain.

Tom Merry went in to morning lessons, but during lessons he was haunted by the fear that M'pong might be up to something. Immediately the Shell was dismissed Tom hurried off in search of the noble savage.

He found M'pong in his quarters this time. The Congo black had piled up a great fire, and the room seemed to Tom Merry like an oven. But it was evidently not warm enough for M'pong, for he was crouching over the fire, with an overcoat on, and the blanket from his bed wrapped round him. He turned a pitiful glance upon Tom Merry, as the Shell fellow entered.

"Cold, M'pong?" asked Tom Merry.

M'pong's teeth chattered.

"Yes, sah! Me lib for die with cold, Mass' Tom!"

"Poor old Pong!"

"Always all the time lib for cold like dat, Mass' Tom?"

M'pong asked the question uneasily.

"Well, no," said Tom. "We have warm summers, though not so warm as the Congo. But the winter is coming on now, and it will be a great deal colder than this. We have ice and snow in the winter."

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DON'T MISS "FOOTBALL FOES."

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"What dem, Mass' Tom?"

Tom Merry explained what ice and snow were. At the idea of the cold being so great as to solidify water M'pong shuddered visibly.

"Oh, Mass' Tom! I know you lib for tell troof."

"Of course, M'pong."

"It is drefful, Mass' Tom!"

Tom Merry smiled ruefully.

"I warned you that you wouldn't like the country, my poor old chap," he said.

"Me no savvy it like dis," said the unfortunate cannibal.

"Why you not go to lib on Congo all de time?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"We wouldn't live on the Congo at any price," he said.

"We like this country, and we like the cold. Most Englishmen would almost as soon go to prison as go to the Congo."

M'pong wondered. Evidently to him the blazing sun, the fetid swamps were the paradise of the globe, and a cold country a weary place of exile. It all depended on the point of view, and M'pong's view was very different from Tom Merry's.

"Would you like to go home, Pong?"

"Me no leabe Mass' Tom!"

But M'pong's protest was evidently weaker.

"P'raps Mass' Tom come back to Congo, lib for dem Congo two time?" he asked.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Perhaps, M'pong. But it's not likely."

"Congo better dan dis, Mass' Tom."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Me debblish cold!"

"I'm sorry, Pong. Shove on some more coals, and give yourself a good baking. I think I'll get out; I can't stand the heat; it's suffocating me."

And Tom Merry quitted the room. He left M'pong crouching over the fire. He drew a deep breath of keen, cold air as he went out into the quad., and felt relieved. The sufferings of the Congo savage touched his heart, but he could not share the choking atmosphere of the heated room. There was a call behind him, and he looked back to see M'pong at the window, with the blanket round him.

"Mass' Tom! Mass' Tom!"

"Hallo! Here's Uncle Tom in his cabin!" said Levison, strolling up with Mellish. "Looks a picture, doesn't he?"

"Clear, off!" said Tom Merry angrily. "What is it, M'pong?"

"Me debblish cold, Mass' Tom! Suppose you gimme rum—me lib for get warm!"

Tom Merry's brow darkened.

"You've promised me not to drink rum again, M'pong!"

"Me so cold!"

"Rum wouldn't make you any warmer, old son. It would warm you for a time, and then leave you colder. You can't have it."

"Yes, sah."

And M'pong drew sadly in, and closed the window, and crouched over the fire again. He was realising that it had been a mistake to come to England. Tom Merry walked away with a clouded brow.

If M'pong should at any time find any intoxicant, there would be terrible mischief, he was sure of that. He could hardly get any at the school; but if he went out, it would be easy enough. What would happen then? Tom Merry felt that the responsibility of looking after his protegee was almost too much for him.

Levison stood with his hands in his pockets, watching Tom Merry as he walked away, a cynical smile upon his face.

"My aunt!" he murmured. "What a game!"

Mellish looked at him.

"What do you mean, Levison?" he asked.

Levison chuckled softly.

"There's a way of getting our own back on Tom Merry—and on that black brute, too—to get him kicked out of St. Jim's, and perhaps Tom Merry, too, for bringing him here."

"How?" asked Mellish eagerly.

"Suppose that black brute were given the rum he wants—"

Mellish started.

"Good heavens! Levison! It might make a madman of him. You don't know what he'd do—murder somebody, perhaps."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, he's not likely to do anything so bad as that; I suspect that his savageness is partly humbug, and put on to make the fellows afraid of him, you know. But I've no doubt he'd have a glorious time—smashing things up, and all that. They'd have to shift him out of the school then."

Mellish grinned.

"I suppose so. But if he—"

"Oh, if he tried to do any real harm, there are enough fellows here to down him, I suppose," said Levison carelessly. "What do you think of it, for a lark?"

"Too jolly dangerous!"

"Then you can keep out of it," sneered the cad of the Fourth.

"Thanks, I will!" said Mellish.

"Mum's the word, then."

"Right-ho! But I don't want to know anything about it," said Mellish, and he walked away.

Levison remained alone, thinking out his scheme; and cunning as he was, he did not realise how terrible the consequences of his unscrupulous action might be.

CHAPTER 16.

M'Pong Breaks Out.

THE next day was a half-holiday, and the St. Jim's juniors were playing Rylcombe Grammar School, on the latter's ground. While Tom Merry & Co. were away, was an excellent opportunity for Levison to carry out his scheme. Tom Merry was far from having any suspicion of it. Had the idea crossed his mind, he would never have suspected even Levison of such reckless wickedness. But the idea did not cross his mind. He was a little uneasy at leaving M'Pong alone for the afternoon, but that was all. He did not think of Levison at all in connection with the savage.

"I suppose I shall have to go," he remarked, when the junior footballers were making their preparations to set out.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Though, of course, if you wished to stand out, Tom Mewwy, I should be quite willin' to captain the team."

"The team wouldn't," grinned Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, you must come!" said Kangaroo decidedly. "The Grammarians beat us hollow while you fellows were away—and Gordon Gay & Co. are in ripping form now, too. You must come. We're going to give the Grammar School socks this time, and you've got to help."

"I suppose so," said Tom Merry. "I feel rather uneasy about M'Pong that's all. I'll go and see him before we start."

Tom Merry found M'Pong in his room, shivering over the fire. The savage spent very little time out of doors. He looked pitifully at Tom Merry.

"Would you like to come and watch a footer match, Pongo?" asked Tom Merry.

M'Pong hesitated.

"Big fire dere?" he asked.

"Ha, ha! No! Footer is played in the open air. You stand and look on."

M'Pong shuddered.

"Me lib for stay indoors, Mass' Tom."

"Now, look here, Pongo, if I leave you here, will you promise not to go out of doors until I come back?" asked Tom Merry. "I shall come straight back when the match is over, so I shall be here at half-past four. I'm going to take my bike so as to get back directly. You won't go out of doors?"

"No, Mass' Tom!"

"Good enough! Good-bye, Pongo!"

"G-g-good-bye, Mass' Tom!" shivered M'Pong.

And Tom Merry went in the brake with the rest of the footer team, and other juniors who were going to watch. Levison and Mellish stood in the gateway, looking after the departing brake, crammed with cheerful footballers.

"Well, they're gone," said Mellish.

"Yes," drawled Levison.

"What about your little scheme? Got the rum?"

"Whisky will do."

"Well, have you got the whisky?"

"I'm going to get a bottle out of Taggles's lodge," said Levison coolly. "Then if there are inquiries, it will be supposed that M'Pong stole it. He's stolen chickens and rabbits, so he might steal a bottle of whisky."

Mellish looked at him uneasily. He admired the cunning of his associate, but it made him a little bit afraid of Levison.

"You'll jolly well end up in prison," he said.

"Thanks!" yawned Levison.

He strolled away. Having ascertained that Taggles, the porter, was busy about the stables, Levison coolly entered his lodge, and took the bottle of whisky from the cupboard in the little parlour. Taggles, the porter, was supposed to be a teetotaler, and it was probable that if he missed the bottle of whisky he would say nothing about it.

Mellish saw Levison come out, with the bottle bulging under his jacket. He walked out at the gates. He did not

wish to have a hand in the plot, and he did not wish to be on the scene when M'Pong started his rampage.

Taggles was busy about the stables for a long time, and while he was there Levison did not venture to approach M'Pong's quarters. He loitered about in odd corners, waiting. On the football-field, the Fifth and the Sixth were playing a Form match, and a crowd had gathered round to watch the game. Excepting for Taggles, Levison ran little risk of being observed.

The school clock struck half-past three. Levison was growing savage and impatient. If he did not get the business over soon, Tom Merry's return would nip it in the bud. If Tom Merry returned when M'Pong had drunk the whisky, it did not matter.

Taggles was finished at last, and he went off towards his lodge, leaving Levison a clear field. The cad of the Fourth hurried to M'Pong's door, and knocked at it.

"Lib for come in," said the voice of the negro-inside.

Levison opened the door.

M'Pong was sitting by the fire, the blankets round him. He scowled at the sight of Levison. He had not forgotten his first encounter with the cad of the Fourth.

"You lib for vamoose," he said threateningly.

Levison smiled an agreeable smile.

"It's all right, M'Pong," he said. "I've brought you a present from Tom Merry."

"From Mass' Tom!"

"Yes; look!"

Levison drew the bottle of whisky from under his jacket. The black man's eyes glistened at the sight of it, showing that he was no stranger to the potent fire-water.

"Berry good!" he said. "You sure Mass' Tom sent it?"

"Yes, of course. You see, he said you couldn't have rum, but this is whisky, and it will make you warm," said Levison.

"Me lib for drink him," said M'Pong.

Levison handed him the bottle, and left the room quickly. He closed the door, and stood for a moment listening outside. From within the room he heard a sound of gurgling and gurgling. M'Pong was drinking from the bottle!

Levison chuckled softly, and hurried away. If M'Pong drank the whole of the large bottle of whisky, the results were likely to be sudden and surprising.

Levison concealed himself in a loft at a little distance, from the little window of which he could watch M'Pong's quarters.

Ten minutes passed.

Then a sound was heard from the savage's room. It was the sound of a wild, tuneless chant—low at first, and then rising higher and louder.

No words were distinguishable. If there were any words, they were in a barbarous African dialect which Levison did not comprehend. The chant sounded like a succession of consonants, chanted without time or tune.

Levison grinned.

"He's beginning!" he murmured.

Crash!

Levison started. The glass of a pane in M'Pong's window was smashed to atoms, and a bottle, broken by the shock, came hurtling through, falling in pieces along with the fragments of glass outside.

Levison turned a little pale, and caught his breath. For a moment remorse and fear for his wicked action smote him. The savage had hurled the empty whisky-bottle through the window. He had drunk all the powerful liquor, and evidently it had maddened him.

"My hat!" murmured Levison.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The crashing of furniture smashed up by heavy blows, resounded from M'Pong's quarters. Levison caught a glimpse of him through the broken window. M'Pong seemed like a madman. He had a leg from his table in his hand, and using it as a club, he was smashing everything in the room.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

"Good heavens!" muttered Levison, pale to the lips.

"What will happen next?"

The crashing died away. Taggles, the porter, attracted by the noise, was coming towards the spot. M'Pong came out of his door. He had his silk hat on the back of his woolly head, and his black face was flushed as much as it could flush under its colour. He was showing his teeth, and his eyes rolled wildly.

Taggles started back in alarm.

"My heye!" he ejaculated. "E's mad!"

M'Pong rushed at him. The porter dodged him nimbly, but not nimbly enough. M'Pong grasped him, and tossed him into the stable. Taggles sat down there, almost stupefied, and gasped for breath.

M'Pong ran on.

He was maddened by the vile liquor he had consumed, and was evidently no longer responsible for his actions

Under the influence of drink, all the ferocious nature of the savage came out—as indeed, is sometimes the case with civilised men.

Levison remained in the loft, trembling. Too late the young rascal repented of what he had done. What was to happen now? He hardly dared to think; but the vision of the savage, rushing by with gleaming teeth and rolling eyes, haunted him, and would not leave him.

CHAPTER 17.

The Savage at Large.

"GOAL!"

"Hurrah!"

Kildare, of the Sixth, had just put the ball into the Fifth-Form net, and the crowd were cheering. Kildare, as he walked back to the centre of the field, suddenly stopped. He stared at a wild figure that was dashing towards the football-field.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter with M'pong?"

"Great Scott!"

"My hat!"

"Look at him!"

The players forgot even the game. M'pong, with gleaming teeth and bloodshot eyes, dashed upon the football-field.

Kildare strode towards him sternly.

"M'pong! What's the matter with you?"

The black man glared at him

"Me lib for drink," he muttered. "You gib me rum. You savvy?"

Kildare started.

"You've been drinking!" he exclaimed.

The savage chuckled horribly.

"Me drink him—me warm now," he said. "Hang you—white trash! You dirty Belgian scum! You lib for die."

"What!"

"Golly! Where my knife?"

M'pong felt over his clothes, evidently in search of a knife. The St. Jim's fellows crowded back in alarm.

"He's drunk," muttered Lefevre, of the Fifth. "Mad drunk! That's what I say! He's dangerous!"

"Look out, you fellows! Keep back!"

"Give the brute a wide berth! He's dangerous!" exclaimed Rushden.

Kildare advanced upon the black man. Darrel, of the Sixth, followed him, and then Monteith, the head prefect of the New House. The other fellows held back. Kildare fixed his eyes sternly upon the black man.

"Go back to your room," he said.

"No lib for dem house."

"Go at once."

"Where my knife? You lib for die! Gib me rum!"

And M'pong's eyes rolled horribly.

Kildare set his teeth.

"Stand by me, you fellows!" he exclaimed. "The brute's been drinking, and he's dangerous. He will have to be secured."

"Look out!" shrieked Monteith.

The black man made a rush at Kildare. He seized the captain of the school in his brawny hands

Kildare was an athletic fellow, stronger than many grown men. But he seemed a child in the hands of the powerful black.

He was swung off his feet into the air. Darrel and Monteith sprang desperately at M'pong. They grasped him, and dragged him back, before he could hurl Kildare to the earth, as he evidently intended to do.

Baker and Rushden and Lefevre, and several more of the boldest fellows, piled on. M'pong struggled furiously with numbers. Kildare wrenched himself loose, and lent his aid. A crowd piled on the brawny black man, seeking to secure him.

M'pong struggled to his feet, shaking the fellows off as a stag might shake off the dogs, and bounded free

"You lib for die!" he shrieked. "You lib for die! Where my knife?"

"Run!" yelled Crooke, of the Shell. And he set the example.

M'pong looked round wildly for a weapon. He tore up one of the wooden seats outside the pavilion, and whirled it over his head. Then the fellows ran—the Sixth as fast as the Second.

They crowded into the School House, leaving the black man raging in the quad.

"Shut the door!" said Kildare huskily.

The door was jammed shut.

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Darrel shot the bolt upon it; and only just in time. There was a terrific crash without as M'pong smote with the wooden garden-seat.

Crash, crash, crash!

"My only Aunt Jane!" muttered Wally, of the Third. "There will be murder done! Don't tremble against me, Crooke! You're shaking me!"

Crooke's teeth were chattering. He staggered away to hide himself in the coal-cellar. But Crooke was not the only one who was frightened. The raging of the black savage in the quadrangle was enough to shake anybody's nerves.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, came striding out of his study with a frowning brow. He gazed in astonishment at the crowd of fellows, some of them in football garb, in the hall.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed.

"The cannibal, sir."

"M'pong!"

"Yes, sir! He's broken out," gasped Monteith.

Crash, crash!

The door trembled under the crashing from without. Mr. Railton stepped to the hall window, and looked out into the quad. M'pong had thrown down his weapon now, and was gesticulating frantically on the steps of the School House, with rolling eyes

The Housemaster's lips set.

"The man has been taking drink," he said.

"It looks like it, sir."

"Do you know where he obtained it?"

"No, sir."

"This must be inquired into," said the Housemaster. "I only trust that the man can be secured before he has done damage. I will see."

Kildare caught at the Housemaster's sleeve as Mr. Railton turned to the door.

"Don't go out, sir!" exclaimed the captain of St. Jim's anxiously. "The fellow is as strong as a horse, sir. He picked me up as if I were a kitten!"

"Indeed he did, sir," said Rushden.

"But he must be secured!" said Mr. Railton.

"Hark!"

Crash, crash!

It was a sound of smashing windows. M'pong was raging in the quad, now, and had quitted the School House door. Mr. Railton flung the door open. The black man was hurling stones at the House windows, the rage of destruction strong upon him. M'pong was the wild savage of the Congo again now, with a vengeance. He grinned and chuckled at every succeeding crash.

"What—what—what is the matter, Mr. Railton?" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, coming through the crowd of juniors. "Is it that fearful negro?"

"Yes, sir. He is intoxicated."

"Good heavens! Foolish that I was to allow him to remain here," said the Head anxiously. "He will wreck the place. He must be secured. Dear me, he is coming towards us!"

The black man had just perceived that the School House door was open. He tore a branch from a tree, and, waving it above his head, charged back towards the house.

"Fasten the door!" gasped the Head.

"But, sir—" began Mr. Railton.

"Close the door at once—I command you! That man may commit murder!"

Mr. Railton obeyed. The door was closed again, and fastened; and then there came the crash of the negro's club upon the outside of it, making it tremble.

The Head simply gasped.

"What an utterly unheard-of happening!" he murmured.

"The wretched man shall be sent away from the school immediately. What dreadful calamities may happen before he is secured. Oh, dear!"

"I think, sir, if some of the prefects came out with me—" suggested Mr. Railton.

"No, no! The danger is too great! He might kill some of you!"

Crash, crash!

"You lib for open dem door!" roared M'pong. "Me kill you! You lib for die! Where my knife? Golly, you poor white trash, me kill you!"

"Bless my soul!"

There was the sound of the ringing of a bicycle-bell in the quad. Mr. Railton started and turned pale. He sprang to the window and looked out.

A cyclist had ridden in at the gates. It was Tom Merry, of the Shell.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "He will be attacked—murdered! We must go to his aid, sir!"

He ran to the door.

CHAPTER 18.

The Black Man Goes.

TOM MERRY jumped off his machine in the quad. He had caught sight of the black man, raging at the door of the School House. He did not know what was the matter with him, but he could see that he was on the war-path. He threw his bicycle against a tree, and ran towards M'pong, calling to him.

"M'pong! M'pong!"

The black man heard him call, and swung round. The great club in his hands was raised to strike down the junior as he approached.

His distorted face, his bloodshot eyes, his furious gestures, and the smell of spirits that came from him showed Tom Merry what had happened.

For a moment the junior's heart turned sick within him.

M'pong was intoxicated—mad! Would he listen to the voice he was accustomed to obey? If not—
Tom Merry for a moment felt a shudder of horror run through him. He read death in the furious face of the savage.

But he did not hesitate; his courage did not fail. It was he that had brought the savage to St. Jim's, and he had his duty to do.

He ran towards the negro.

"M'pong!" he shouted.

The negro glared at him.

"Put down that club!" rapped out Tom Merry. "You hear me, M'pong? You lib for put down dem stick! Quick!"

For a moment there was hesitation in the savage's face. The fierce instincts of the savage struggled with the habit of obedience, half broken. In that moment, Tom Merry's life trembled in the balance. If he had shown a sign of fear probably the savage instincts would have triumphed in M'pong's breast. But he did not. There was no fear in his face, no faltering in his voice. His hand rose commandingly, and his eyes flashed.

"You lib for obey me, M'pong!"

The club crashed down on the steps. M'pong, half tamed, stood with hands clenching and unclenching, his eyes still rolling wildly.

"M'pong, you lib for dem room!"

Again the negro hesitated. But Tom Merry's hand pointed imperatively, and the black man slunk away. Once he looked back, to meet a steady, stern gaze, and then he went on, and disappeared into his quarters.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

Now that the strain was over he felt almost sick.

The School House door opened; the Head appeared. There was deep emotion in Dr. Holmes's face.

"You have acted bravely, Merry," he said. "I can forgive you now for having brought that terrible savage here. He must leave at once, of course. But you have probably prevented him from doing terrible harm by your courage. Thank you, Tom Merry."

"I'm sorry this has happened, sir," muttered Tom Merry. "The poor fellow has got drink from somewhere, sir. He is not responsible for what he does then. But I suppose he will have to go. I'll go and stay with him now, sir, till he is better."

"He may hurt you!" the Head exclaimed anxiously.

"He won't hurt me, sir."

Tom Merry joined M'pong in his quarters. The fit of fury was over now; the negro lay upon his bed sleeping heavily.

Tom Merry sat down quietly by the bedside. He did not mean to leave M'pong till he had fully recovered from the effects of the liquor.

Levison stole out of his hiding-place, trembling in every limb. Fear of being found out as the cause of the negro's outbreak lay heavy upon his mind.

Tom Merry sat for hours by the bedside of the sleeping savage. The other footballers returned from Rylcombe. They had beaten the Grammar School, and they returned in high spirits. But they became grave enough when they saw the broken windows and learned what had happened at St. Jim's during their absence. It was pretty clear to all that M'pong must go.

The negro awoke at last.

He stirred and shifted and groaned and opened his wild eyes. He stared at Tom Merry with a guilty look, and pressed both hands to his woolly head.

"Oh, Mass' Tom, me lib for die in dem head!"

M'pong meant that his head was aching terribly. That was not surprising, under the circumstances.

He pressed his great black hands to his temples and groaned. Then he shivered. The cold struck him as he awoke.

Tom Merry looked at him anxiously. He was very angry with M'pong, but he pitied him, too. He could see that

the negro had caught a cold, which would probably turn out to be a severe one.

"It's no good talking, M'pong," said Tom Merry. "You know what you've done! You promised me not to leave this place while I was gone—"

"Me drunk!" pleaded M'pong.

"Where did you get the liquor?"

Tom Merry listened, with a black brow, while M'pong explained. He mentally determined that Levison should be sorry for what he had done.

M'pong was shivering and trembling now with the reaction, and Tom Merry covered him warmly up.

"Stay in bed, Pongo, old chap," he said. "You've got a cold, and you'll have to have a doctor. I'll be back soon."

"Yes, sah! Yes, Mass' Tom!" said poor M'pong submissively.

And M'pong had a cold—with a vengeance. For more than a week he struggled with it—and with the English climate. Rainy weather came on, and M'pong, from his sick-room window, looked out upon glistening rain, and listened to howling winds. He thought of the hot swamps of the Congo, and almost wept.

Tom Merry attended him assiduously. He told M'pong how Levison had been punished for what he had done—having been soundly thrashed in the Fourth Form dormitory, all the fellows lending a hand—but M'pong was too sick to feel revengeful. All M'pong could feel was an intense desire to get back to blazing suns and scorching winds and hot, thick, fetid swamps.

And when he was better he approached the subject himself without waiting for Tom Merry to do so.

"Big white chief with glass eyes tink me berrer lib for Congo?" he asked.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, M'pong, I'm afraid the Head does think so."

"Me tink so, too, Mass' Tom."

"Do you M'pong?"

"Yes, sah! Me lib for die in England," said M'pong piteously. "Me no want leabe Mass' Tom; but me cold—debblish cold! Me lib for dem Congo, or me die, Mass' Tom."

"I think you're right, old chap," said Tom Merry, much relieved. "I shall be very sorry to part with you, but you'll be better in the Congo country."

"Me no like leabe Mass' Tom. P'r'aps Mass' Tom lib for dem Congo some day," said M'pong wistfully. "Den see Mass' Tom again."

"Perhaps, M'pong. Anyway, I shall never forget you. You've been a jolly good friend to us, when we needed one," said Tom Merry, grasping the big black hand.

"M'pong nebber forget," said the black man. "S'pose Mass' Tom lib for dem Congo two time, M'pong serve him all same before. M'pong follow Mass' Tom anywhere—except when Mass' Tom lib for dem cold country."

And when M'pong was well Tom Merry & Co. obtained leave to see him off at Southampton, and M'pong went on board a steamer for the West Coast, and the juniors waved their hats in farewell as the vessel glided out. It was taking M'pong back to the country where he would be healthy and happy, and it was better so.

Tom Merry voiced the sentiments of all when he said:

"He was a splendid chap, with all his faults! And I jolly well hope I shall see him again some day!"

And Arthur Augustus said emphatically:

"Yaas, wathah!"

Out in the blue the steamer disappeared from sight, bearing away over the wide sea to the beloved swamps of his native land Tom Merry's faithful slave.

THE END.

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The Land of the Fishmen.

From about the middle of the strange fish's back ran a narrow fin, which, passing round its short, stumpy tail, terminated immediately under where it commenced.

Despite its size, Dick recognised the monster as an enormous electric eel, undoubtedly the cause of the nerve-racking shocks which were even then running through their frames.

Suddenly, with a spiral-like movement of its ludicrously short tail, the electric eel shot forward like a torpedo from its tube, and plunged into the melee around the remnants of the slain lizards.

In a moment the scramble ceased, for as the huge saurians came in contact with the eel's highly-charged body they were hurled, or hurled themselves, to right and left. Their ferocious bellowings turned to actual whimperings of terror. They fled in all directions, leaving the electric eel to devour at its leisure all that was left of the repulsive feast.

No sooner had the eel passed by the prostrate boys than the shocks which had bowled them over ceased, and feeling as though they had been subjected to a severe pummelling, though otherwise refreshed and invigorated by the electric fluid, the boys, led by Dick Dauntless, resumed their journey, congratulating themselves that they had seen the last of their most dreaded foes, against whose huge forms sword-point and rifle-bullet would alike be unavailing.

Shortly after leaving the scene of their adventure with the giant lizards the boys noticed that they were mounting a fairly precipitous slope.

Soon the tops of the trees, which had before been out of sight, could be easily discerned. Now that they were near the surface they were able to dispense with the light of their headlamps, which was like to attract the attention of the strange beings they had christened fishmen.

Presently Dick called a halt, and pointed immediately above his head to a large barnacle-covered object.

It was the hull of the ill-fated Morning Star.

As with the yacht's keel so close to them that they could have touched it with uplifted hands, Dick was discussing with Tom Allstraw the advisability of climbing up the weed-stalks, and passing the coming night on board the Morning Star, an excited shout attracted their attention to Charlie Steele, who had wandered some fifty yards beyond the bows of the Morning Star.

"What is it, young 'un?" asked Dick, hastening to the boy's side.

"I found this where I was standing. See, it is the captain's own axe—it is marked with his initials," cried Charlie, flourishing an axe similar to those each boy carried at his belt.

Dick examined the weapon.

"Yes, it is Captain Flame's. Knowing that if I escaped I would be sure to come in search of him, he dropped it so as to put us on his trail," he declared, with an air of conviction that impressed his companions.

Swinging the axe lightly in his hand, he looked around in search of signs or further tracks of the lost ones.

Nor had he far to seek.

His keen eyes noticed a mark on the trunk of one of the trees.

It was a clean cut, and could only have been made by some sharp instrument.

Eagerly he pressed higher up the slope.

Cut after cut at regular intervals rewarded his search.

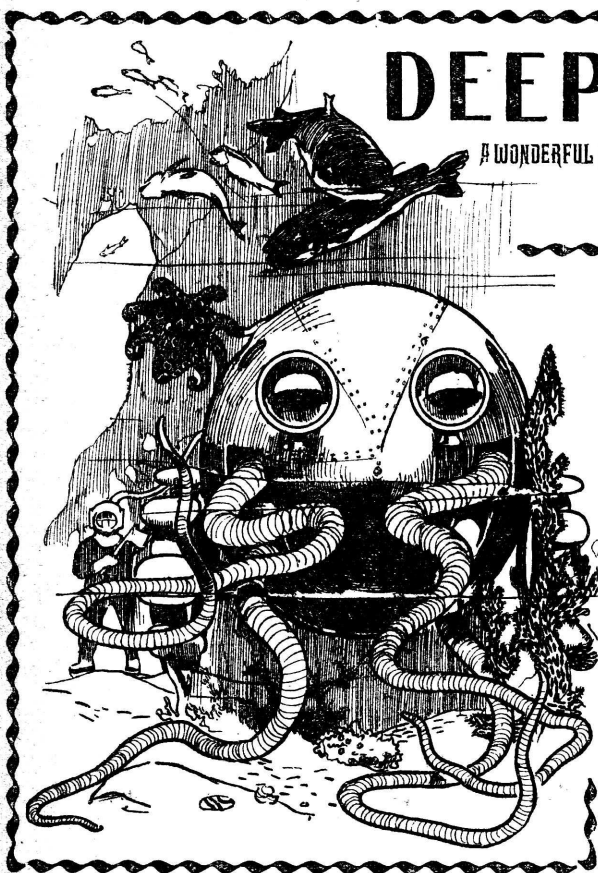
"Come on, lads! Captain Flame has gone, or has been taken in this direction," cried Dick, pointing eagerly the way the marks ran.

There was no question of passing the night on board the yacht now.

All were eager to press on.

Even Karl Munchen did not attempt to draw back, though his sullen brow proclaimed how unwelcome the discovery was.

Hitherto they had marched without much hope of success. Now all was different.



The Opening Chapters of "DEEP SEA GOLD," specially re-written for this number of "THE GEM" LIBRARY.

Dick Dauntless and Jack Orde, chums of Weltsea College, are bathing in the sea early one morning, when they are suddenly seized by enormous octopus-like tentacles and dragged swiftly down beneath the surface of the water. The chums are almost at their last gasp, when a dark trap-door appears before them, and they are pulled aboard a strange submarine craft, the like of which they have never seen before. It is, in fact, a submarine motor-car, and the boys are soon introduced to Captain Flame, the captain of the Octopus, as the strange craft is named.

The crew consists entirely of boys, with whom Dick Dauntless and Jack Orde are soon on good terms. So fascinating does life beneath the waves prove, that when, after a period of thrilling excitement and amazing adventure, Captain Flame offers the two chums their liberty, they decide to remain on board the Octopus and throw in their lot with him.

Their decision is confirmed when the chums learn that Captain Flame is bound for the Pacific with the express intention of searching for Dick Dauntless's millionaire father, who was a friend of his, and whose yacht, the Morning Star, has long been reported missing.

A chance paragraph in a newspaper gives the adventurers a clue, and they make for that dreaded mass of floating weeds known as the Sargasso Sea. There, stuck fast in the midst of the weeds, they find both the Morning Star and a tug which had been sent to aid her.

Captain Flame, with a small party of his boys, set out in a launch to investigate; but Dick Dauntless alone returns to the Octopus. All the rest of the exploring party, including Captain Flame himself, have mysteriously disappeared. Assuming command of the submarine motor-car, Dick leads a band consisting of the remaining boys in search of the missing ones. Donning their wonderful diving dresses, the boys set out along the sea-bed, penetrating the thick forest which forms the Sargasso Sea beneath the water. On every side fearful creatures meet their eyes. Suddenly they experience a series of electric shocks, and little Charlie Steele, the youngest of the boys, points up to a dark, mud-coloured body which is floating above them.

They had a tangible clue to follow, and believed that their quest would be crowned with success.

With the bright beams of the evening sun reflected through the shallow water overhead, they stepped briskly onward.

Presently further progress was checked by a solid wall of tree trunks, similar to that through which they had forced their way in the car.

Dick Dauntless surveyed the thickly-planted trunks with a puzzled frown.

Evidently the trees had been planted by intelligent beings, and were probably intended to keep out the monsters with which the Sargasso Sea abounded.

But there was no time to lose in idle speculation.

A perpendicular slash, a foot long, on one of the trunks showed that Captain Flame had climbed, or had been carried, over the obstruction.

"Here's our path, lads! Follow me!" cried Dick Dauntless, and cutting steps in the yielding trunks of the seaweed trees, he commenced working his way to the top.

It was not a difficult task by any means, especially when the trunks surmounted, they found themselves upon widespread branches.

Looking up, Dick saw the darkening heavens above his head. Signing to his companions to remain where they were, he climbed up, until at length his head emerged from the thick mass of leaf-like seaweed which formed the summit of the submarine forest.

A mile or so ahead a huge mound broke the dead, unbroken level which characterised the surface of the Sargasso Sea, as though the trees were higher at that spot, for the slope up which they had been travelling when they reached the fence terminated in a small island.

Around this mound he fancied he could distinguish a constant commotion, as of numerous creatures passing to and fro, but it was too far off to make sure, and after a final glance behind, which showed him the tapering mast of the Morning Star, he sought the lower branches, on which he had left his companions.

The tree-fence was some fifty yards in thickness, but the limbs grew so close together that the boys experienced little difficulty in clambering over them.

Suddenly Dick held up his hand, and signing Tom Allstraw to his side, pointed through the weeds to the strange sight which had greeted his astonished eyes.

To right and left, as far as the eye could reach, were cultivated fields, in which grew what were evidently carefully-tended crops.

About these fields were numerous figures, all hastening up the side of a huge hill, evidently the same whose mount Dick had seen from the top of the fence.

Now and again, singly or in groups, they would rise to the surface, like tadpoles in a pond, then, returning to the ground, continue on their way.

"What are they?" asked Harry Munston, who had joined the other two.

"Fishmen, I believe," replied Dick. "It seems incredible that any creature so like human beings should live, work, and thrive beneath the waves."

Tom Allstraw was about to speak, but Dick seized him by the arm, enjoining silence, for his quick ears had detected a loud, rushing sound immediately behind them.

A minute later a fishman, his hideous face distorted with terror, dashed past them.

So close did he come, that Charlie Steele, who was on the outside of the little party, could easily have touched him with his hand.

The next moment the boys themselves sprang forward as a long, snake-like neck, ending in a hideous head surmounted by a pair of huge, sharp-pointed horns, burst through the foliage, its cruel jaws closing with a snap within a few inches of Karl Munchen's foot.

So terrified were the boys that they blundered blindly over the twisted limbs until the tapering ends of the coral leaves gave way beneath their weight, and they fell to the bottom of the fence, followed by the angry bellowings of the baffled monster.

Evidently the fishmen had also heard the sonorous cries of rage, for the boys could see them hastening with quickened speed up the slope.

"Forward, lads! These monsters do occasionally break through the fence, or those strange creatures in front of us would not be so frightened. The sooner we find a hiding-place somewhere the better," cried Dick, leading the way into a field of swaying stalks laden with the long pods of a strangely-shaped fruit.

Hidden by the maize-like stalk of this strange submarine vegetable, the boys pressed onward.

From this enclosure they stepped into one filled with regular lines of rock, sown thick with oysters.

But Dick did not remain long amongst these oyster-beds,

for there was no cover, and he feared lest one of the fishmen, looking back, should discern them.

He did not then know that the utmost limit of vision of the strange creatures who inhabit the Sargasso Sea was under a hundred yards.

Under cover of fields rich with various strange fruits and vegetables, the very names of which the boys did not know, they pressed as swiftly as caution would allow up the slope.

At the Gate.

For some time they had been conscious of a strange booming, bellowing ahead.

It came from a spot where several of the fishmen were moving leisurely onward, and they guessed that the sound must come from some animal of whom there need be no fear.

Keeping to where the vegetation was thickest, they passed on until at length they reached a coral fence dividing the luxuriously-growing edible grass from numerous pastures rich with short but exceedingly luxurious growth, such as is always to be found clinging to rocks in the shallow waters of the Pacific.

Dotted about these pastures were a number of dark-grey animals, which Charlie Steele at once pronounced to be seals, but which Dick named as dugongs.

It was from these creatures that the booming sounds had come as they were being driven by the fishmen up the slope.

For some minutes the boys watched the strange sight in silence.

"What on earth are they doing with those strange creatures?" wondered Tom.

"It looks as if they were driving the cows home," laughed Charlie.

"You've about hit it, old chap," agreed Dick. "Depend upon it, those animals are the fishmen's cattle. If we follow they may lead us where our friends are imprisoned—if they are still alive," he added, with a deep sigh, for he dared scarce hope ever to see the four lost ones again.

Careful to avoid discovery, the four boys followed the fishmen and their strange charges.

It was ridiculous to watch the antics of the dugongs as they waddled, with a series of jerky runs, before their drivers, their huge, ungainly bodies rolling from side to side as they jostled against each other, or now and then sitting bolt upright on their broad, flat tails to wave their fins, as though remonstrating with the fishmen, and looking in the gathering gloom much more like human beings than their strange herdsman.

Presently a cavernous opening was reached, into which the dugongs were driven, and huge gates, evidently constructed from the timbers of unfortunate ships lost in the deadly embrace of the Sargasso, swung to behind them.

The boys were about to follow the herdsman along a well-defined path up the slope, when, chancing to look behind him, Dick saw a fishman staggering along under a heavy load of some kind of sea grass.

He was moving as swiftly as his load would allow, and from a cavity by the side of the large gates, into which they had crawled, the boys noted how his breast rose and fell, and that huge air bubbles burst now and again from his tightly-pressed lips.

With a gesture of despair the fishman flung down his burden, and, springing from the ground, sprang to the surface, where he remained several seconds, drawing in deep breaths, ere he sank once more, and, resuming his burden, continued on his way.

"What did he do that for?" asked Tom Allstraw.

"To breathe, of course. The fishmen are evidently unable to remain under the water long at a time, and have to go up to the surface to breathe," replied Dick, adding, as the man's form grew indistinct in the gathering gloom, "Come on, lads! Unless we hasten we will have to find the way ourselves."

Breaking into a run, for the fishman had seemed to be the last of his kind left in the fields, and they were afraid if they lost him they might blunder into some trap in the darkness, the boys soon came within sight of their unconscious guide once more.

He was standing, the upper part of his body out of the water, before a stout pair of tightly-closed doors.

Presently a small wicket in the door opened, and Dick started so violently as almost to betray his presence, when a man stepped from out the wicket, and gazed sternly at the fishman, who, dropping on his knees; raised his hands appealingly to the new-comer.

Eagerly Dick watched the two men.

The gatekeeper turned a deaf ear to the fishman's appeals, and, as the man persisted, drew a many-throated whip from

his belt, and drove him, with blows and loud, angry shouts, back to the water.

To do so the gatekeeper had to step from out the shadow of the gateway, and Dick saw, to his amazement, that he was not one of the fishermen, as he had thought.

Nearly seven feet in height, he was broad in proportion. His skin was of a tawny, copper colour, his strongly-marked features showed him to be of a superior race to the fishermen, whom Dick had regarded as the only inhabitants of the mountain, and who, except for their numbers, he, truth to tell, held in some contempt as foes.

With feeble moans of pain and terror, the fishman disappeared amidst the thick, green weeds which covered the sea around this strange island.

A cruel smile on his thin lips, the guardian of the gate repassed the wicket, closing it to behind him.

Cautiously Dick, who had crept ahead, rejoined his companions.

"Did you see him?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Yes," replied Allstraw, in the same tones. "He is a giant! Who is he? What is he doing here?"

Dick shook his head.

"How can I tell?" he demanded, almost irritably. "If there are many like him our task will be no light one."

Karl Munchen grasped him by the arm.

He was trembling from head to foot.

"Come away!" he whined, in a faltering voice. "What's the good of throwing away our lives against such men as that?"

Dick shook himself free of the other's grasp.

"Where should we go? Back to the Octopus? Never, unless Captain Flame accompanies us," he cried determinedly.

Karl Munchen made no reply, but the look he cast on Dick Dauntless boded good neither to Captain Flame nor Dick Dauntless.

He had not forgotten how Dick had asserted his authority ere they left the Octopus on their perilous quest for her lost captain.

In the Crater.

Unwilling to quarrel when the lives of all hung, as it were, on a single hair, Dick turned to glance along the wall of rock that barred their path, hoping to find some spot up which to climb.

Suddenly he sank down, with an imperative gesture to his comrades to crouch closer within the shadow.

His quick eye had detected a dark form slinking through the weeds beneath the cliff.

Motioning his companion to remain where they were, Dick stole after the dimly-seen form.

Evidently desirous of escaping attention, the figure hugged the precipitous cliff until, at last, it disappeared round a bend in the rock.

Dick Dauntless broke into a run, and when he turned the corner of the jutting rock, he found himself within a dozen yards of the fishman whom he had seen scourged by the gatekeeper.

Barely had he made this discovery, ere an exclamation of amazement rose to his lips.

The man he sought had disappeared.

For nearly a minute Dick Dauntless watched in vain for the fishman's reappearance, then moved cautiously forward.

Ready at every step to retreat, or fight for his life, Dick Dauntless reached the spot where he had last seen the fishman.

Standing perfectly still he listened intently.

A faint, almost inaudible sound, as of rolling rubble reached his ears.

Leaning forward he commenced feeling cautiously amongst the thickly growing seaweed with which the rock was covered.

A noiseless chuckle rose to his lips.

His groping hands met with no resistance.

Kneeling in the tide, which lapped the foot of the rock, he parted the clinging weeds with both hands.

An opening, scarce big enough for him to pass through on his hands and knees, was revealed.

A moment's hesitation, then, determined to prosecute his search alone, and return for his companions when he found whither the opening led, he passed from the outer world to a dark, twisting tunnel, leading, apparently, into the heart of the mountain.

Once well inside the tunnel he paused to listen.

The scraping noise which had first attracted his attention sounded faint and indistinct in the distance.

His fingers stole to a sliding knob on the side of his helmet.

In response to his touch the bright beams of his headlight shone through the confined space.

It showed him that there was now sufficient height to allow him to stand up.

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Slowly he rose to his feet, then moved cautiously, but more swiftly, forward.

A distant splash reached his ears. Rapidly extinguishing his lamp, he listened intently. A silence like that of the tomb surrounded him.

Again he advanced. Presently he came to an abrupt halt. A dark chasm yawned at his feet.

Again he listened. Then, reassured by the continued silence, he cast the rays of his lamp into the forbidding pit before him.

Dick Dauntless started back.

It seemed as though an answering light had flashed a response to his own.

A second glance reassured him.

It was but the beams of his own lamp reflected in water some three feet below the rocky ledge on which he stood.

Closing the glass of his helmet, which he had opened as soon as they had reached the surface of the Sargasso Sea, he sprang into the flood before him.

Barely had the water closed over his head, ere his feet touched the bottom.

Curiously he glanced around him, to find that he was at the end of a broad, low-roofed cavern, or, perhaps, it was only a ledge of rock jutting out beneath the water.

Then he saw his unwitting guide. A sickening shudder shook his frame.

The fishman was enfolded in the sucker-armed tentacles of an enormous octopus.

Fascinated by the awful sight, Dick Dauntless watched the still writhing form carried nearer and nearer the foul monster's parrot-like beak.

He saw the gaping mouth opened to devour its victim. Then the octopus's big, saucer-like eyes were turned upon him, and, realising his own peril, he turned to flee.

Even as he did so, he heard a swishing sound in the water behind him, and something struck him on the back.

A fear-laden glance over his shoulder showed that the extremity of one of the revolting creature's tentacles had fastened on his coat.

For one terrible, fate-laden second Dick felt himself being drawn backwards, then, with a frantic effort, he broke free so suddenly as to be precipitated on to his hands and knees.

Scrambling to his feet, Dick Dauntless was about to continue his flight, when the thought that, so long as the monster octopus lived his retreat would be cut off brought him to an abrupt halt.

Besides, though he scarcely looked upon the fishmen as human beings, the thought of the unfortunate creature in the octopus's maw filled his heart with sudden anger.

Rapidly unslinging his rifle from his back, he dropped on one knee, and, taking careful aim at the root of the parrot-like beak, he pulled the trigger.

It was a splendid shot. Piercing the octopus between the beak and one huge eye, the bullet entered its brain, and the loathsome fish fell, writhing in its death agonies, at Dick Dauntless's feet.

Reloading his rifle, Dick flung it on his shoulders once more, then turned his face towards where a faint light shined through the water proclaimed the surface of the sea or pool—which he could not say—into which he had ventured.

Found!

Extinguishing his light, lest it should attract unwelcome attention, Dick Dauntless left the shadow of the overhanging rock, beneath which lay the dead octopus, and advanced up a shell-encrusted beach, until, at length, he paused, with his eyes just above the surface of the water.

A strange sight greeted his wondering gaze.

He was in a basin of limpid water, surrounded on all sides by a narrow belt of sand, on which basked innumerable seals.

Beyond the sand rose strangely-shaped houses, their backs resting against the sloping inside of the crater, for such undoubtedly was, their fronts on tall poles.

The houses were built of ship's timber, and roofed with canvas, gaily-coloured trade calico, and even richly-flowered silk from the looms of China.

Strolling about between the houses, or playing with the quaint little children amongst the seals, which were perfectly tame, was a number of fishermen and fishwomen.

All seemed peace, happiness, and content. Suddenly a change came over the scene.

A deep, booming sound, as though some mighty drum was being beaten, echoed and re-echoed over the rock-girt sea.

Loud cries, in which Dick fancied he detected unspeakable terror, burst from the fishfolk.

Women snatched up their children, men abandoned their amusement or work on which they were engaged, and all

commenced swarming up ladders rising from the beach to the platforms on which their houses were built.

In less than a minute the place, so lately teeming with life, was deserted, the inhabitants of that strange village in their houses, the doors closely shut.

Again that drumming sound. Just then the sun sank to rest, plunging the whole scene into darkness.

Eager to continue his search, Dick moved towards the shore. But barely had he taken a second step when the same loud drumming sound startled the night air.

As though in response to the signal, what Dick had taken to be a cluster of rocks burst into a blaze of yellow light, and he saw that the rocks were, in reality, a huge castellated building.

Then was heard a number of men's voices, raised in a solemn, weird, and, so it seemed to Dick, unearthly chant.

A minute later huge doors, that pierced the castle walls, were flung open, and a strange procession emerged.

First came eight stalwart warriors, taller by a foot than the man Dick had seen at the gateway.

Helmets of vari-coloured shells decked their heads; cuirasses of the same strange workmanship protected their bodies.

Each grasped a huge, broad-bladed spear inlaid with gold.

In double file they marched, preceding six scarlet-robed figures, evidently priests, behind whom marched a crucifaced, grey-bearded man, carrying a murderous-looking knife, curved and grooved like a scimitar.

He, also, was clad in red, but of a darker, more ominous tint.

Behind him came more soldiers, and Dick's heart almost stood still when he saw in their midst a prisoner in European clothes.

A second glance reassured him.

The prisoner was a stranger.

Surrounding the grim procession, and lighting it on its way, were a number of white-garmented men, evidently servants, bearing torches.

The prisoner's face was deathly pale, yet he marched with head erect, and a proud look of defiance in his eyes.

So gallant was the unfortunate man's bearing, that Dick regretted the gallant comrades he had left waiting for him near the tunnel by which he had entered that strange land, or he would assuredly have struck a blow for the stranger's freedom.

To the deep-throated chant of the priests the procession moved half round the enclosed sea, then disappeared into a cavern, the floor of which was washed by the scarce-moving waters.

For some minutes Dick Dauntless remained gazing at the cavern's mouth through which the weird procession had disappeared, then turned his attention to the castle.

The lights had vanished: the gloomy pile was plunged once more in darkness.

Moving cautiously, Dick Dauntless drew nearer the frowning walls within which, he doubted not, his friends were confined.

Suddenly he grasped the hilt of his sword, and partly drew his ready blade.

A swiftly-moving body had glided past him, brushing his legs as it went.

The next moment he had thrust back his sword, for the round head of a seal appeared above the water by his side.

Dick had heard much of the seal's gentle eyes, but the orbs which looked up to his own were neither round nor gentle. In point of fact, he could scarcely make out their shape, but saw that they sparkled with a mischievous glitter.

But ere he could examine the agile creature closer, it disappeared beneath the waves, and Dick Dauntless resumed his walk shoreward.

Suddenly he came to an abrupt halt, alarmed by a rush of water in his rear.

Turning his head over his shoulder, he was just in time to see the seal rush at him like a miniature torpedo.

The next moment its round head had struck him in the small of the back, and sent him flying headlong shoreward.

"Ugh, the brute!" growled Dick, struggling to his feet. "Playful, isn't the word for it?"

He looked round, but his assailant had disappeared.

It was a bright, starlight night, and realising that he would be safer from observation beneath the houses than in the open water, he was about to hasten on to the sandy beach when he stood rooted to the ground with surprise, as, from somewhere close at hand, he heard his name pronounced in a low voice.

"Who calls?" he demanded, in a cautious whisper.

There was no response.

The next moment something rubbed against the inside of his leg, and he with difficulty repressed a shout of alarm as the round head of the seal popped up between his legs.

The next moment he was sent heavily backwards into deep water.

As he sprawled upon his back on the bottom, he saw the seal jumping round him in a most extraordinary way.

Thinking that the beast was about to attack him, Dick made as though he would draw his sword, but to his amazement the seal wriggled to his side, and laid a flapper on his hand.

The next moment a thrill of terror shook his frame as a brilliant light burst from the seal's eyes and mouth.

To his amazement the animal's skin opened from head to tail, and the familiar face and figure of the little Chinaman stood revealed.

"You, Mopsa?" ejaculated Dick, seizing the other's hand and wringing it so heartily as to turn the Chinaman's grin of delight into one of pain. "Sorry, Mopsa! I was so pleased to see you," he added.

"Mopsa pleased to see big, ugly English boy, but he no smash his fingers to show it," remonstrated the Chinaman.

"No, he played battledore and shuttlecock in the water with him instead," laughed Dick.

Mopsa's yellow face was brightened by his usual cheerful grin.

"Good job I was here to look after you, or you'd be in chockee-chokee by this time," he declared.

"Where do you mean?" asked Dick.

For answer the Chinaman drew him upward, until his head rose above the surface, and pointed to the castle wall, from over the battlemented parapet of which a warrior was eagerly scanning the shore, where, but for Mopsa's interference, Dick would by this time have been standing.

"So, to prevent his seeing us, you thought you'd attract his attention, eh?" cried Dick, half annoyed, half amused, as, following the Chinaman's example, he ducked beneath the waves once more.

Mopsa seated himself on a rock that protruded from the sea-bed, and, resting his chin in his hand, regarded Dick Dauntless with an air of pitying patronage.

"Small body, big brains," he said, tapping his chest, adding, as he pointed a long-nailed finger at Dick: "Big body, small brains."

With a sudden movement of his hand Dick seized the Chinaman by the nape of his neck, lifted him from the rock, seated himself in his place, and, laying the wriggling form across his knee, proceeded to inflict summary punishment upon him.

"There, my Celestial friend; don't cheek your betters again!" he advised, as he let him go.

Rubbing the injured part of his anatomy, Mopsa retired to a safe distance; then, squatting on his heels, occupied himself for the next few minutes by making the most ludicrous faces at the boy.

Dick burst out laughing.

"You're incorrigible, Mopsa!" he cried.

"A big word for a little mouth," retorted the Chinaman. "I don't know what it means, but I aren't. Anyhow, if you hadn't swallowed such a lot of salt water that it has washed out all your brains, you'd see that I saved your life. Down you goes, up pops seal; up pops you, down pops seal; down you goes again, up comes Mopsa. Soldier man grunts, and walks away. See?"

Dick nodded.

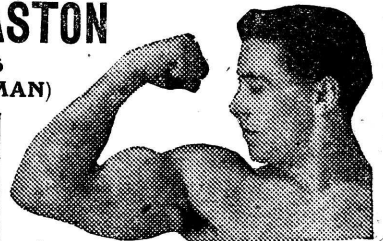
"Sorry, old chap! I didn't understand," he admitted.

With a grunt that might have meant anything, the little Chinaman drew close to his companion.

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"They are over there," he said at last, jerking his thumb in the direction of the castle.

"Who?" cried Dick, his heart beating rapidly, for he guessed what the answer would be.

"Captain Flame, Will Avery, and Jack Orde," replied Mopsa, counting off the names as he pronounced them on his fingers.

"In prison?" asked Dick.

Mopsa nodded his head vigorously.

"Then how is it you are at liberty?" was Dick's not unnatural question.

"Cell window over water. Iron bars, but Captain Flame had removed two bars and put them back before he had been in chokee-chokee a couple of hours," explained Mopsa.

"Why haven't they escaped?" asked Dick; then felt very small indeed as he marked the withering contempt in the little Chinaman's eyes.

"Why escape when nowhere to go to?" he demanded.

"They knew the only one who could get them out of prison was Mopsa, so the captain he sends Mopsa to explore. Mopsa kills a seal, and crawls into its skin. No good. Big gates closed, soldier mans everywhere, no escape. Must stop here, and let the white priests take us into heart of world one by himself," he added despondently. Suddenly he looked up, his face aglow with hope. "You come in; we all go back same way," he declared. "Which path you take?"

Dick pointed in the direction from whence he had come.

Mopsa shuddered.

"No, no! Big octopus that way!" he declared.

A few seconds later he was capering about with delight when Dick told him that the octopus was dead.

Snatching up the discarded seal's skin, the little Chinaman slipped swiftly into it; then, bidding Dick follow, led the way towards the castle.

Presently he motioned Dick to remain where he was, rose to the surface, and swam slowly away.

Presently he returned, saying:

"Come, quick! All serene!"

His heart beating wildly at the prospect of seeing his friends once more, Dick followed the quaintly-disguised little Chinaman.

"No noise, clumsy!" warned Mopsa, when further progress was stopped by a stout stone wall rising from the solid rock beneath the waves.

Cautiously Dick rose to the surface, and saw, almost within reach of his hand, a barred window.

At that moment the barking of a seal arose, so lifelike that Dick could scarce believe that it came from Mopsa.

The next moment he pressed close to the wall, crying, in low, excited tones, a thrill with delight:

"Captain Flame, it is I, Dick Dauntless!" For the pale, stern face of the captain had appeared behind the bars, and beyond it Dick could see the delighted faces of his chums.

His quest was ended, his comrades found.

The Return to the Octopus.

Forgetting everything save his delight at seeing his friends again, Dick would have continued speaking had not Mopsa effectually silenced him by tripping him up, then, as he sprawled face downwards at the bottom of the sea, he seated himself on his head the better to hold him down.

"Let me up, you little wretch! This is no time for practical jokes!" gasped Dick, trying to shake the seal-clad form off his shoulders.

"Not muchee!" retorted Mopsa. "You safe here. If you get up you bring soldier mans down on us."

"Sorry, Mopsa! I was so delighted at seeing Captain Flame and my chums once more that I forgot where I was," apologetically Dick.

"Well, you know where you are now," retorted Mopsa calmly; "so you'd better stop here until the captain comes."

Dick strongly objected to remaining in so humiliating a position, but Mopsa had him at a disadvantage, and he was obliged to remain with the little Chinaman calmly seated on his waist, whilst he held his shoulders down with both hands, until Captain Flame, Jack Orde, and Will Avery rejoined them.

Hearty indeed was the greeting of the four thus strangely reunited in that unknown, unmapped sea, in the heart of the Sargasso.

Little time was to be lost.

At any moment their escape might be discovered, and though they did not fear the Tankas, as their captors were called, following them, they would be sure to guard every possible exit from the crater, and thus render eventual escape impossible.

Surrendering his gun to Captain Flame, his axe to Will

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DON'T MISS

"FOOTBALL FOES."

The Splendid, Long, Complete School Story appearing in this week's number of the

"MACNET" LIBRARY

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Avery, Dick Dauntless led the way past the body of the dead octopus.

The repulsive brute was already being torn to pieces by innumerable fish.

Soon the five reached the bottom of the pit, down which Dick had jumped.

Nimble as a cat, Mopsa, who had discarded his now useless sealskin, clambered to the tunnel above, then, reaching down, grasped Captain Flame by the hand and hauled him up.

Ere long the little party had reassembled in the tunnel, and Dick, taking the lead, they had soon reached the hidden mouth of the tunnel.

Great was the delight of Tom Allstraw and his companions to see Dick, whose prolonged absence had caused them no little alarm, accompanied by those they had risked so much to rescue.

A silent grip of the hand was the only greeting in which they dare indulge, and shortly afterwards they were creeping cautiously through the fishermen's strange fields.

On the way Captain Flame related his adventures.

There was little to tell.

The experiences of all were alike.

A rope passed swiftly round their throats, their limbs seized by innumerable hands, a fleeting vista of fishermen crowding around them, then unconsciousness, from which they awoke to find themselves in the dungeon by the sea from which they had recently escaped.

At first other unfortunates had shared their captivity. Each night the drum which Dick had heard had boomed forth its dread summons, the grey-bearded, red-clad priest, followed by a guard of soldiers, had entered, and, selecting sometimes one, sometimes two, prisoners, marched them away.

The men who had been in the prison when Captain Flame and his companions were first captured, were some of the crew of the ill-fated tug who had been spirited away from their vessel exactly as Captain Flame and his companions had been from the launch and the Morning Star.

When the men from the tug arrived at Crater Island, as Captain Flame had named the mysterious land, there had been other prisoners, who told them that they were part of the crew of the Morning Star, and that the owner had, shortly before, been led away by the red-clad priest.

"It was evidently your father, my lad, and once we are on board the Octopus, we will return and demand his surrender," said Captain Flame.

Dick Dauntless bowed his head in assent.

He longed to ask the rescued ones whether the priest's prisoners were taken, but he dreaded to put the question, lest the answer should serve to turn the fears for his father's safety, which cast a load of misery on his heart, to certainty.

"Courage, Dick; at least we know that Mr. Dauntless was alive, and presumably well, a short time back," said Captain Flame, who, with his strange gift of reading the thoughts of those with whom he came in contact, knew what was passing in Dick's mind. "With Heaven's help, we'll rescue him yet."

Then, as much to keep the boy from dwelling on his father's fate as to satisfy his own curiosity, he asked how it was that they had ventured upon their perilous march beneath the sea instead of coming in the Octopus.

As Dick explained what had befallen the submarine motor-car, Captain Flame's face grew grave.

"You did it for my sake, lad, I know; but you should not have left MacIntyre alone in the car. Think what would be our fate if aught befell him!" he cried, as he quickened his steps.

It was not until the fence protecting the fishman's cultivated lands had been surmounted, that the little party realised the dangers that surrounded them on every side.

During the daytime the monsters who haunted the Sargasso Sea sleep in the pathless tracks of the forest, in caves, or beneath overhanging rocks in the valleys; but at night-time they roam abroad, and again and again the little party had to crouch amongst the thick undergrowth of seaweed that grew between the trees, as a wandering lizard, or other fearful monster, glided by in search of prey.

They were ill-provided for battle with the denizens of the deep.

The Tankas had robbed their prisoners of their arms, and it was only by a distribution of the swords and axes which the rescue party were provided with, that each could be provided with a weapon of defence.

However, it was not until the Octopus itself was reached that they were compelled to defend themselves, or to attack their awful foes.

Then, indeed, was the necessity great.

Long before they reached the spot where the boys had left the submarine car, they had been disturbed by hearing



A shudder shook Dick Dauntless' frame as he saw his unwitting guide, the fish-man, enfolded in the sucker-armed tentacles of an enormous octopus. (See page 24.)

strange sounds, as of some hard substance striking against a hollow vessel.

Again and again the mysterious hollow sounds reached their ears.

At length, after passing over a slight rise in the ground, they paused aghast before the fearful spectacle presented to their view.

Stripped of the covering of fallen trees beneath which the rescuers had left her, was the Octopus, her wheels motionless, her steel tentacles torn, twisted, and useless, as she swayed and trembled beneath the repeated assaults of a number of fearsome creatures by which she was surrounded.

At least a dozen weird monsters were doing their utmost, with teeth, claws, and horn-armed heads, to burst asunder the stout plates which protected the car.

Already several enormous dents were visible in her hull. It was evident she could not long resist so fearful an onslaught.

Even as they looked aghast at the appalling sight, an enormous creature on short, stumpy legs, with a jagged, saw-edged spine, running from its head to the tip of its long tail, lowered its upturned nose to the ground, and charged fiercely at the car.

The spectators held their breath.

It seemed impossible that any contrivance made by human hands could withstand that charging mass of flesh and bone.

Uttering cries of horror, they saw the Octopus raised from the ocean bed, and hurled against the body of a horrible, long-necked lizard, which tore at the car's huge wheels, denting the solid rims with its fearful teeth, and twisting the stout iron spokes as though they had been made of wire.

Even Captain Flame had been held spellbound by the fearful sight; but as the saw-backed monster prepared to charge again, Dick saw a fearful change come over his face.

The inventor's usual impressive calm had vanished.

His eyes seemed to flash fire, his face was contorted with fury.

Careless of the danger into which he was plunging, he dashed madly forward, and rushed, with reckless courage along the monster's side, and thrust the muzzle of his rifle into the brute, and pulled the trigger.

(Another grand, long, exciting instalment of this thrilling tale of adventure beneath the sea next week. Also a splendid story of the juniors of St. Jim's, entitled "TOM MERRY & CO.'S DOWNFALL." Order your copy of "The Gem" Library now, price 1d.)

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
Order Early.

NEXT

"TOM MERRY & CO.'S DOWNFALL!"

OUR NEW WEEKLY FEATURE

Next Week's Story.

The captain of the Shell Form at St. Jim's and his chums of the School House receive a surprise next week, as the title of the grand complete story,

"TOM MERRY & CO.'S DOWNFALL"

plainly hints at. The pride of the usually invincible School House Co. has a fall, and the star of Figgins & Co. is in the ascendant. A rollicking schoolboy tale of House rows, "rags," and various other alarms and excursions—that is the description of

"TOM MERRY & CO.'S DOWNFALL."For and Against.

Since "Harry S." of Balham, first made the suggestion of having two complete stories in THE GEM Library, I have been positively deluged with letters on the subject, in which readers have expressed a variety of opinions with considerable feeling. Printed below are four typical letters, two selected from each camp. Let us take first those that are in agreement with "Harry S.":

"Dear Editor,—Being a constant reader of your fine book, THE GEM, I could not fail to notice the suggestion of 'Harry S.' in his letter published this week. As you asked the opinion of readers on the subject, I should like to inform you that I think it is a splendid proposition, and hope you will endeavour to carry it out.—Yours truly,

"GORDON S."

"Dear Editor,—I was never more pleased than when it was announced in THE GEM that a weekly Chat would commence solely for the benefit of your readers. I really think it is an excellent idea, for it brings together all the old Gemites, and, furthermore, attracts new ones.

"I quite like the idea of your reader from Balham, and agree that two stories in each number of THE GEM and 'Magnet' would be a success. If it is not asking too much, please could you help me, through this Chat, to get a Canadian correspondent, who is also a reader of THE GEM? If you could I should be greatly obliged.—Your loyal reader,

ARTHUR B. (aged 15)."

Now for the opposite opinions:

"Dear Editor,—I was rather surprised to find you classing 'Harry S.'s' as a 'good suggestion.' I think that the present form of THE GEM could not be improved—i.e., a Tom Merry yarn, a good serial, and the Chat. I have read every number of my favourite paper, and think these in that order are best. I should like to say I think a Chat page in 'The Magnet' would be grand. One more thing: I should very much like to see more of the theatrical societies in both THE GEM and 'The Magnet,' the two best boys' papers.—Your interested reader,

ACTOR."

"Birkenhead.

"Dear Editor,—I think the idea of two complete stories in THE GEM each week is ridiculous. The story of Tom Merry & Co. is all too short as it is, without further curtailing it. You first shortened it by bringing in a serial, then you introduced half a page of short stories and a page of Chat. If you want to make a magazine of the paper, why not do so at once, and call it such?

"My three friends, for whom I get THE GEM, and myself will all give it up if the Tom Merry tale is made any shorter. If Martin Clifford is getting short of material for his stories, a few new characters might be introduced instead of giving us less of Tom Merry & Co. Girls are interested in the present stories, but I don't think they would enter into stories of cricket, football, etc.—Yours, etc.,

"A VERY OLD READER."

As will be seen by the foregoing, the "Ayes" and "Noes" are both emphatic in their opinions, especially "A Very Old Reader," who is perhaps a little more emphatic than polite, and who appears to draw quite mistaken conclusions from the fact that a change is proposed at all. I do not think it needs any assurance from me to convince regular readers of our popular little story-paper that Martin Clifford is by no means getting "short of material for his stories." Neither do I intend to "make a magazine" of our good old GEM. But what I do intend is to give my readers on this page an opportunity of discussing any question of interest that may be raised.

Threepenny Books Wanted.

Master E. Phillips, 124, Bothwell Street, Glasgow, would like to know of any reader who is willing to dispose of a copy of No. 153 of "The Boys' Friend" 3d. Complete Library, as he was unfortunately unable to obtain this. Will any reader willing to oblige Master Phillips kindly write to him direct?

Replies in Brief.

"Stanley B.," Leicester.—Thanks for your letter. Both the questions you ask me have already been answered on this page. Hope you enjoyed your holidays in Wales.

"Constant Reader."—Thanks for your suggestion. You and all the other regular readers of "The Boys' Friend" 3d. Complete Library need not be surprised to see a tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appear in this popular form one fine day.

"Charles P.," Euston Square.—I must offer you my very best thanks for your long letter, in which you say so many nice things of the complete stories and the serials in "The Magnet" and THE GEM. I note that you are in thorough agreement with a certain Liverpool reader's suggestion published some weeks back. You will be pleased to hear that my postbag proves to me that very many more of my chums are of the same mind, and that I have therefore decided—but more of this subject anon!

"Stella R."—Thanks for your letter and suggestion. I have no doubt your friend in Arizona very much appreciates your kindness in sending her your favourite papers, THE GEM and "The Magnet" every week. Hope your arm is better by now.

A Couple of Health Hints.**How to Obtain Fresh Air.**

Many are the ways of ventilating the room, but the following is the simplest, safest, and least expensive:

A board four inches wide, and as long as the lower window-sash, is to be fitted so perfectly to the bottom of the lower sash as to be a part of it. Thus, through the opening between the upper and lower windows at the centre, no draught is felt, but there is a constant current of outgoing (impure) air and incoming (pure) air both day and night.

Do not be afraid of the night air. It is always better to breathe the change of air created by a proper current than it is to breathe over and over again the foul and poisonous air of a closed room.

A Cure for Sleeplessness.

Many boys and girls suffer from sleeplessness. The following simple remedy will invariably effect a cure, no matter from what cause the sleeplessness may arise:

Before you retire to rest, go through the subjoined exercise: Stand erect, hands by the side, and rise slowly from the heels. Then descend slowly. Repeat forty or fifty times, until the muscles of the legs become tired. This will induce sleep almost instantly.