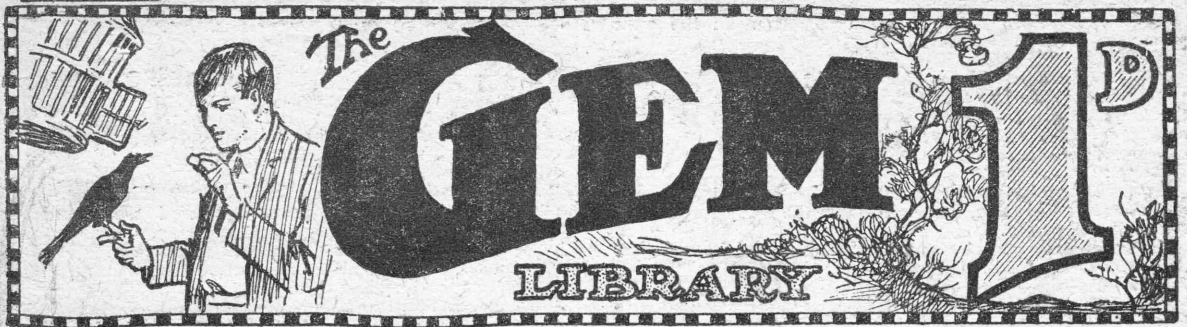


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of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER 1.

Arthur Augustus Learns Shorthand.

"P, B, T, D, chay, jay!"
"Eh?"
"P, B, T, D, chay jay!"
"What!"
"Kay, gay, ef, vee, ith—"
Those peculiar pronouncements were proceeding from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's, in a kind of chant.

He was standing in Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage in the School House. There was a vacant expression upon his aristocratic face, a fixed look in his eyes. He did not appear to see Blake and Digby looking in at the doorway, with amazement and alarm in their faces. He had a little book in his hand, which he was consulting at intervals, and when he was not consulting the little book, he was chanting softly to himself in weird monosyllables.

"P, B, T, D, chay, jay, kay, gay—"
"My only hat!" exclaimed Jack Blake.
"My word!" murmured Digby.
"P, B, T, D, chay, jay, gay, ef—"
Blake sighed.
"Clean off his rocker," he said. "I've seen this coming on for a long time. Gussy, old man, hadn't you better go and lie down?"
"Kay, gay, ef, vee," chanted Arthur Augustus, unheeding.
"Look here, Gussy—"
"Ef, vee, ith, thee, ess, zee—"
"Stop it!" roared Blake. "Do you hear? I'm not going to have an old friend going dotty under my eyes without stopping him."
"Zee, ish, zhee, em, en—"

Jack Blake rushed into the study, and seized the swell of St. Jim's by the shoulders, and shook him forcibly. The little

book fell from D'Arcy's hand upon the floor, and his eyeglass jerked out of his eye and hung at the end of its cord. He uttered an exclamation of annoyance.

"Ow! You uttah ass! Don't intewwupt me."
"You fathead!" roared Blake. "What are you up to? What do you mean by standing there and muttering like a giddy lunatic in an asylum?"

"He'll begin to babble of green fields soon," said Digby. "I suppose it's the hot weather. It's muzzling time, you know."

"Ow! Welease me!" gasped Arthur Augustus, wriggling in the grasp of his muscular chum. "I ordah you to welease me at once, Blake, you feahful ass! You are intewwuptin' me and wumplin' my jacket!"

"You frabjous ass!" said Blake, in measured tones. "What are you doing? What have you got to say before we bung you into a strait-jacket?"

"I should uttably wefuse to be bunged into a strait-jacket," said D'Arcy, jerking himself away from his chum. "I wegard you as an ass. You have intewwupted me, and stopped the thweed of my thoughts. I shall have to begin again now."

"Look here—"
"P, B, T, D, chay—chap—kap—wap—no, that's w'ong! Where's my book?"

"You blithering babbler—"
"Ef, vee, ish, bish, wash, kosh—"

"It must be some sort of an incantation," said Digby, in wonder. "He'll begin to dance round the table soon."

"Ish, bish, squish—no, that's not wight. 'Tsh, bosh, bash—no, that doesn't sound wight, eithah. You uttah asses, you have put me out!"

"Gussy—"
"I shall have to begin again at the beginnin'. P, B, T, D, chay, jay, bay, wip, pip—no, I can't wemembah it now. Ah, here's the book!"

Next Thursday: **"TOM MERRY'S CONCERT PARTY!"** AND **"THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!"**
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Arthur Augustus caught up the little book, and opened it again, and started.

"First and third place vowels are written in the same posish, as their cowwespondin' long vowels—"

"What!"

"That's the wrong place. At, et, it, ot, ut, oot. That isn't what I was doin'—oh, that's the vowels. I haven't come to the vowels yet. Ah, this is the wight place! P, B, T, D, chay, jay, kay, gay, ef, vee, ith, thee, ess, zee, ish, zhee, em, en, el— Yawooh!"

Bump!

Arthur Augustus, suddenly grasped by Blake and Digby, and whirled off his feet, descended upon the study carpet with a violent concussion.

From the study carpet rose a cloud of dust, and from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy a terrific yell.

"Ow—ow—ow—yow—woop!"

"You ass!" roared Blake. "If you haven't gone quite balmy in the silly crumplet, tell us what that babbling is about."

"Yow!"

"What silly game are you playing? Is it a voice exercise?"

"Ow! You ass! No! Oh!"

"Then what is it?" shrieked Blake.

"Ow!"

Arthur Augustus groped wildly for his eyeglass, and rose to his feet. He made a dive for a cricket-stump in the corner of the study.

"You fwightful asses!" he roared. "You have intewwupted me and wasted my time. Get out of the study at once, or I shall stwike you."

"Look here—"

"Buzz off, you wottahs! I wefuse to be bothahed when I am studyin'."

"Studying!" hooted Blake. "Do you call it studying to be hooting like an owl, and gasping like a codfish? Studying what? Are you learning Chinese?"

"No, you ass!"

"Sanskrit?" suggested Digby.

"You fwightful ass, no! Pway leave me in peace!"

"I'll leave you in pieces if you don't explain!" roared Blake. "It's my duty as your chum to see that you don't go dotty if I can prevent it."

"P, B, T, D, chay, jay, kay, gay—"

"There he goes again!" yelled Digby. "He's like a gidly gramophone that won't run down. Better bump him!"

Arthur Augustus retreated round the study table and brandished the cricket-stump.

"Keep off, you wottahs! I wefuse to be bumped! I wefuse to be intewwupted when I am studyin' shorthand."

"Shorthand!" yelled Blake and Digby together.

"Yaas, you asses! If you had any knowledge of the gweat science of shorthand, you would have recognised the consonants," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "It is a gweat mistake not to have shorthand as a subject at public schools. That's where those chaps who go to evenin' classes and things get the advantage. It's vewy wuff on me to have to learn up the subject all of a sudden when I've got some weportin' to do."

"Reporting!" said Blake faintly.

"Yaas, wathah! I'm goin' to weport the mayor's speech in Wayland this aftahnoon, for 'Tom Mewwy's Weekly.' There's a meeting in favah of somethin', or against somethin', I forget which, and I'm goin' to weport the mayor's speech. I've bowwowed this book fwom young Bwooke for the purpose."

Blake and Digby looked dazedly at him. D'Arcy was consulting the book again, and already beginning to mutter wildly.

"You—you're learning shorthand!" gasped Blake at last.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"When did you begin?"

"About a quartah of an hour ago."

"You—you've started learning shorthand this afternoon, to report a speech that's going to be made to-day?"

"Certainly! P, B, T, D, chay, gay—pay—stay—wop—pop—"

Blake shrieked.

"Do you know how long it takes to learn shorthand, you unspeakable duffer?" he raved.

"How should I know?" said D'Arcy, in surprise. "I've nevah learned shorthand before, of course, or I shouldn't want to learn it now. P, B, D, T, chay, jay—"

Blake collapsed into a chair.

"He's started learning shorthand, to use this afternoon!" he murmured. "Oh, carry me away to die! Oh, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—chay, jay, kay, gay, ray, shay—no, that isn't wight. You are puttin' me out fwightfully. If I lese much time I shan't mastah this before four o'clock, and I have to start for Wayland then."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause whatevah for wibald laughtah. Shorthand is a jolly valuable thing to know, and if I learn it this aftahnoon it may come in useful lots of times latah in life," said D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Blake.

"I wegard you as an ass, Blake. Shorthand saves lots of time when a chap knows it. When I'm quite pwoficient pwesently, I shall be able to take down things at a vewy wapid wate; a hundwed words a minute, or a thousand, or somethin' like that—I forget which. I wegard it as a jolly valuable thing."

"And you think you can learn it in a couple of hours!" bellowed Blake.

"I've nevah twied before; but I suppose so."

"It takes months, you frabjous jabberwock."

"I wefuse to be called a fwabjous jabberwock. And I should decline to spend months in learnin' a simple thing like this. You simply have to learn new names for the consonants, which is quite simple, and then you just pick up where to stick in the vowels. Then you learn to w'ite the signs. That's pwactically all there is in it. Latah on, when you get weally pwoficient, you can do without the vowels altogether, which will save time; but I may not get so fah as that this aftahnoon."

Blake gasped.

"No; I rather think you won't!" said Digby, with a yell.

"Pway don't cackle at nothin' in that way, Dig. I don't know whethah that is all there is to learn; but I know that latah on you can dispense with the vowels—and pewwaps, afaht that, it may be possible to do without usin' the consonants eithah. That would save a lot of time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows, I wish you'd go and cackle somewhere else, you know. You are intewwuptin' my studies fwightfully. P, B, T, D, chay, jay, gay, ef, vee—"

Blake rose breathless.

"Are you coming out to play cricket?" he demanded.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Quite imposs., deah boy. I'm too busay. You see, two hours isn't weally vewy long to devote to masterin' thowoughly a thing like shorthand—"

"No, I suppose it isn't vewy long—you may need another five or ten minutes," said Blake, with crushing sarcasm.

"Yaas, I shouldn't wondah. I shall take the book in the twain with me, and have anothah look at it," said D'Arcy.

"Pway, wun away and play, deah boys, and let me get on. Ef, vee, ith, thee, ess, zee, ish, zhee, em, en, ing, el, ar-ray, way, yay, hay—"

Blake stopped his ears.

"Come on Dig," he gasped. "Gussy can stay here and qualify for Colney Hatch."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"P, B, T, D, chay, jay, kay, gay—"

Blake and Digby staggered out of the study. They seemed to be suffering from a very severe attack of hysterics as they went down the corridr. From Study No. 6 the chanting voice of the swell of St. Jim's followed them:

"P, B, T, D, chay, jay, kay, gay, ef, vee, ith—"

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry Chucks It!

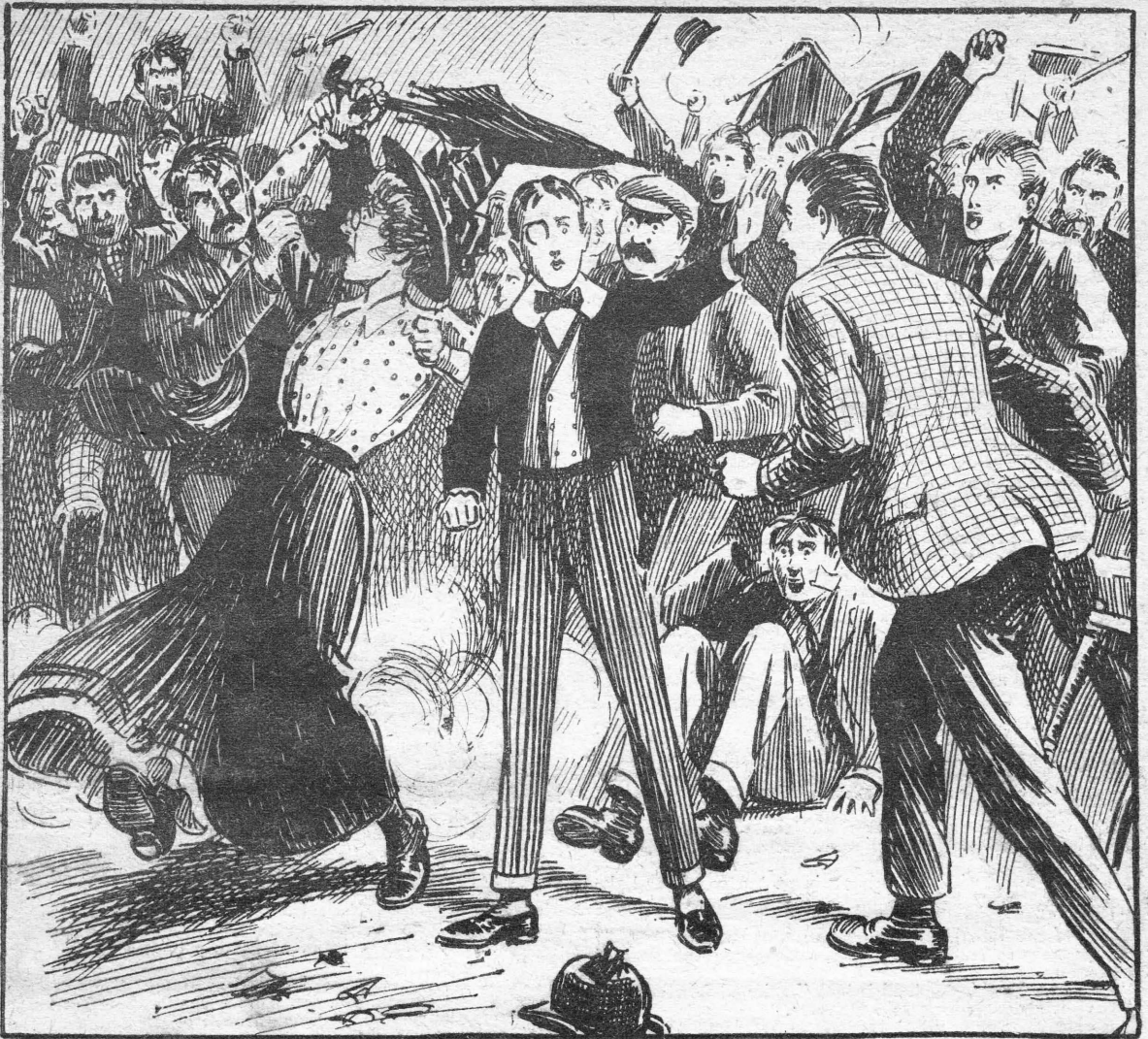
TOM MERRY looked at the open window of his study. He was sitting at the study table on that glorious summer's afternoon, with a pen in his hand, and innumerable sheets of foolscap before him. Outside, the merry click of bat and ball could be heard from the cricket-field, and the shouts of the fellows there. Under the window the voices of Manners and Lowther, of the Shell, could be heard. They were chanting in a monotone:

"Chuck-that-rot-and-come-out-and-play!"

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SHOW YOUR FRIENDS THIS ALL-SCHOOL-STORY NUMBER OF "THE GEM,"



"Release that lady!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I refuse to allow this wuff treatment!" The "chuckers-out" did not pay any heed to the excited swell of St. Jim's. They conducted the lady, struggling and shrieking, to the door. (See Chapter 6.)

Over and over again that urgent refrain sounded in at the study window.

Tom Merry, like many heroes in drama and opera, was torn between inclination and duty. The splendid weather, and the insistent voices of his chums, called him out to the cricket-field. But duty held him to his table. For to be not the chief editor of that famous magazine—"Tom Merry's Weekly." The editor's life, like the policeman's, is not always a happy one.

For "Tom Merry's Weekly" was over-due. In fact, in the stress of the cricket season, whole weeks and fortnights had elapsed without a number appearing at all. And at last sarcastic youths in the School House had been chipping the editor unmercifully on the subject. Kangaroo, of the Shell, had even posted up a notice on the door of the editorial study, which stated:

IN MEMORIAM.

Sacred to the Memory of "Tom Merry's Weekly," which departed this life unwept by anybody. The sad event was due to general rot.—R.I.P. Hip-pip!

Tom Merry had torn down the memorial notice, and pitched it out of the window in fragments, and settled down at last to his duties as editor-in-chief.

He had settled down to them at a moment most unfortunate for himself. The afternoon was a half-holiday; and the cricket-ground seemed simply to call to him. Manners and Lowther actually were calling to him.

But he resisted the temptation nobly. He was going to prove to everybody that the school magazine was not defunct; that the "Weekly" was still

going strong, in fact stronger than ever after its lapses and relapses.

And he drove away heroically at his leading article, and turned out jokes to fill up columns, and conundrums to go into odd corners, and letters to the editor in praise of the magazine, and, in fact, fairly buckled to and tackled his editorial duties.

"Chuck-that-rot-and-come-out-and-play!"

The insistent chant came floating in at the window, and Tom Merry snorted. He found himself writing down those words instead of what he intended to write, and that, of course, spoiled his leading article. When he began a sentence and finished it with the words that were dinning in his ears, the effect was not impressive, as when he wrote—

"The record of the cricket season has been splendid, and all players are to be congratulated. Fellows who have really gone into the game are requested to chuck that rot and come out."

Tom Merry paused over that sentence, blotted out the latter part of it with his thumb—a simple method, more appropriate to a junior study than to an editorial office—rose from his chair, and went to the window. From below the combined voices of Manners and Lowther rose imploringly.

"Chuck-that-rot-and-come-out-and-play!"

Tom Merry leaned an exasperated face out of the window. "Will you shut up!" he roared. "You're spoiling my articles."

"Chuck-that-rot-and-come-out-and-play!" chanted the chums of the Shell.

"I've got my work to do."

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S CONCERT PARTY!" A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Chuck that rot and come out and play!"
 "Look here, Manners, you ought to come in and do your photography column," said the editor. "How am I to get a make-up of the giddy rag, if you won't do your whack?"
 "Photography columns are off," said Manners. "Chuck that rot and come out and play!"
 "Lowther, you ass—"
 "Chuck that rot and come out and play!"
 "You ought to come in and do your article on tennis."
 "Ich will nicht," said Lowther.
 "Eh! You ass! What are you babbling in German for?"
 "Can't you decline the article in English," explained Lowther.
 "You—you ass! If you won't come in and work, get out, and let a chap get on," said Tom Merry. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"School magazines are all very well for the winter evenings," said Manners, with a shake of the head. "Can't be bothered with 'em on summer afternoons. Why not leave it over till the winter, and bring out a bumper Christmas number?"

"Ass! The fellows have been ragging me up hill and down dale because we haven't had a number since the cricket started."

"Let 'em rag!"
 "You might stand by a chum—"
 "I'll stand by you on the cricket-ground, or at the counter of the tuck-shop," said Manners.

"Same here," said Lowther. "Neyer shall it be said that Monty Lowther refused a lemon-squash that was offered him on a summer's afternoon."

"Well, shut up, and let me get on."
 "Chuck that rot and come out and play!" chanted Lowther and Manners.

"Gussy's playing up splendidly," said Tom Merry reproachfully. "He's going over to Wayland this afternoon to report the mayor's speech on the woman suffrage question, for the column of the 'Weekly.'"

"Good old Gussy! He can do our columns, too," said Lowther.

"If you'd all wire in, we could get the number out to-morrow," said Tom Merry. "Look here, come in and work!"

"Work on a day like this!" said Lowther, looking shocked.
 "No fear!" said Manners.

"Then, buzz off and let me work, you slackers!" roared Tom Merry, and he slammed down the window, and went back to his table.

He drove away with the pen again at top speed, and the article grew. From below came the chant in louder tones.

"Chuck that rot and come out and play!"
 Manners and Lowther kept it up without cessation. Their vocal power was really marvellous, considering the heat of the weather.

"He won't be able to stand it long," grinned Lowther.
 "Give it a bit louder," said Manners.

"Right-o!"
 And the two fresh young voices, as a novelist would say, were uplifted again.

"Chuck that rot and come out and play!"
 The window was jammed up with a crash, and a red and furious face looked out. Manners and Lowther grinned up affably. One of Tom Merry's hands was on the window-sill as he leaned out. The other was behind, and it grasped an inkpot.

"Will you buzz off?" he roared.
 "Thanks, no," said Lowther, "not till you chuck it."
 Tom Merry snorted.

"You want me to chuck it?"
 "Yes."

"You won't go till I chuck it?"
 "No fear."

"Then I'll chuck it."
 Tom Merry's hidden hand swept forward, and he "chucked" it—the ink. It came down from the pot in a sweeping shower, and scattered all over Manners and Lowther's upturned faces in jetty spots. There was a wild roar from the chums of the Shell.

"Ow!"
 "Yow!"

"I've chucked it," said Tom Merry, cheerfully, "now clear off."

And he slammed down the window and went back to work. He took the precaution of locking the study door before he sat down. It was just as well; for about twenty seconds later there was a sound of racing footsteps in the Shell passage, and Manners and Lowther hurled themselves on the door. It stood fast under the attack. They shook the handle, and kicked the lower panels, and yelled through the keyhole; during which performance Tom Merry sat tight and wrote his leading article, with a pleased smile upon face. The enraged Shell fellows did not desist until the

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voice of Knox, the prefect, roared along the passage, and then they departed somewhat hurriedly, and went away to wash. And Tom Merry, in peace at last, finished the leading article of the "Weekly" in triumph.

CHAPTER 3.
 Theory and Practice.

TAP! It was about an hour later that that tap came at the door of the editorial office of "Tom Merry's Weekly."

Tom Merry paused for a moment in the midst of a column of the "Latest Jokes," which he was copying out from a worn-looking jest-book, dated 1820.

"You can buzz off," he called; "I'm busy."

"Weally, Tom Merry—"
 "Oh, is it you, Gussy?"

Tom Merry jumped up and opened the door. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped into the study. The swell of St. Jim's was looking his usual elegant self, and he held a silk topper in his hand.

"I'm weady to go," he remarked. "I think I shall be able to take down the mayah's speech all right. It will be wathah a new departure for the 'Weekly' to have verbatim reports of speeches by pwminent people in the county, and it ought to make the numbah go. We must think of the circulation."

"Certainly," said Tom Merry. "You must get in some comic bits about the Suffragettes in your report."

"But suppose there are no comic bits, deah boy?"
 Tommy Merry smiled.

"Reporters are supposed to have some imagination," he explained. "Is the mayor going to speak in favour of the Woman Suffrage or against it?"

"I weally don't know."

"Well, if he speaks for it, comic interruptions from a man at the back of the hall, calling out: 'Who's going to wash the clothes?'—or, 'Go home and mind the babies for your missis.'"

"But suppose nobody says that, Tom Merry?"

"My dear chap, you're not writing history, but a newspaper report. If reporters restricted themselves to facts, they'd have to print an eight-page paper with seven sheets blank every morning; and do you think the public would buy it?"

"I suppose not," admitted D'Arcy.

"If he speaks against Woman Suffrage, it will work out better for the report," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "In that case, of course, you introduce the militant Suffragette, who clings to the doorkeeper and yells 'I WANT THE VOTE,' in capitals—I mean at the top of her voice."

"Baj Jove!"
 "Make it lively, anyway," said Tom Merry. "Besides the report of the speech, you can have a couple of columns for the description of the meeting—dresses of the ladies on the platform, kind of trousers the mayor wears, and so on. That kind of thing is very interesting to the public; they have yards of it in 'Home Bosh,' and 'Piffle For All,' and the public buy it up like hot cakes."

"I could do a vewy good article on the attire of the people pwesent," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "It is a vewy important subject."

"If you don't have time to take down all the mayor says, put in the principal bits, and leave blanks in your notebook to be filled up afterwards. I believe that's the professional way."

"All wight."

"And you can have as much space as you like," said Tom Merry generously. "The contributions will be rather short in this number, and we shall want some stuff."

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"Very good. I shall have the whole speech, from end to end," explained D'Arcy. "I have learned shorthand so as to take it down all wight."

Tom Merry jumped.

"You've done what?" he gasped.

"Learned shorthand, you know," said D'Arcy cheerfully.

"W-w-when did you learn shorthand?"

"This afternoon."

"My hat!"

"I'm not quite proficient yet," said D'Arcy modestly, "but I can make most of the consonants, you know. I shall finish it in the twain goin' ovah."

"Oh, all—all right!" said Tom Merry faintly. "If—if you shouldn't be quite up to reporter's style, you could fall back on longhand."

"Oh, that will be all wight."

And Arthur Augustus, having received the editorial instructions, departed to do his duty as a reporter. Tom Merry sat down to drive on with his articles, having now turned to the subject of swimming. The article on swimming ought really to have been done by Redfern of the New House, who was one of the finest swimmers in the junior Forms at St. Jim's. But Redfern had gone out swimming instead that afternoon, and the writing on the subject was left to his much-burdened editor.

The door opened while Tom Merry was thus engaged, and a round face and an enormous forehead, decorated with a pair of exceedingly large glasses, looked in. Face and forehead and spectacles all belonged to Skimpole of the Shell.

"Ah! I'm glad I have found you, my dear Merry," said the genius of St. Jim's, blinking at the editor, who looked at him in dismay. "I hear you are reviving the school paper."

"Reviving your grandmother," growled the editor. "The paper is coming out as usual. It has been coming out as usual all the time, excepting that—that the numbers haven't actually appeared."

"Dear me! That's sounds very perplexing, my dear Merry. Would you mind saying that over again?" asked Skimpole, cocking his head a little on one side in order to give the matter his very deepest attention.

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "Run away; I'm busy, and none of the slackers will come and help me."

"My dear Merry, that's exactly what I've come to do," said Skimpole, with a beaming smile. "I am prepared to do an article which will take up three-quarters of the whole magazine."

"Go hon!"

"I am quite serious, my dear Merry. The subject will be Determinism, and my article will be a short and pithy exposition of the views held on that subject by the famous Professor Balmcrumpet."

Tom Merry groaned.

"Couldn't you play cricket instead of talking Determinism, Skimmy?" he asked.

"Impossible, my dear Merry. I could not bring my brain down to such trivial matters, when there are great questions remaining to be decided by the giant intellects of the day."

"Well, run away and write the article."

"I have already written it, my dear Merry," said Skimpole, producing a sheaf of manuscript from his pocket. "I will read you the first chapter."

"Thanks; not just now!"

"No trouble to me at all, my dear Merry. Now, in the first place we must define what is Determinism. Those persons who maintain that Determinism is merely the result of the feeble workings of minds already half-way to lunacy, are entirely mistaken!"

"I don't believe they are, Skimmy," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "But, any way, I haven't time to go into the subject—now. I'm busy."

"Determinism holds that every action of a human being is the outcome of heredity and environment, acting together on such being, and that no one is really to blame for anything—"

"Shut up!" roared the unhappy editor.

"Heredity and environment being the only—"

"Buzz off!"

"Really, my dear Merry, I wish you would not interrupt me. You see, as you hold the position of editor here, you ought to have your mind enlightened. I am enlightening it. Professor Balmcrumpet holds the view that—"

"Get out!" roared Tom Merry.

"The view that, in the future, Determinism will—"

Three Shell fellows came along the passage, and glanced in as they heard Skimpole's droning voice, and the unhappy editor's yells. They were Kangaroo, otherwise Harry Noble, and Clifton Dane the Canadian, and Bernard Glyn. Tom Merry shouted to them.

"Come in, you chaps!"

The three Shell fellows halted.

"Thanks, no!" grinned Kangaroo. "No blessed contributions to-day. We're due on the cricket ground."

"I want you to help me—"

"Leave it till the winter," suggested Clifton Dane.

"Fathead! I want you to help me by taking Skimpole away. Do anything you like with him. Throwing him into the river would be best. But if you've got a rope handy you might hang him. Anyway, shove him out!"

"Oh, we'll do that for a chum in distress!" said Kangaroo.

"Lay hold!"

And the chums of the end study grasped Skimpole.

"Really, you fellows," gasped Skimpole, as he was propelled towards the door, "this is quite unjustifiable! Under a system of Determinism—"

"That's all right!" grinned Kangaroo. "I know all about Determinism. Chap is the slave of his heredity and something else—"

"Environment, my dear Noble."

"That's it! I knew it was a long word which silly asses can use instead of a short one when they want to fog people," assented Kangaroo. "Well, as I'm a slave of the combined influences of my heredity and thingummy—"

"Environment."

"Yes, that's it! Then I can't help what I do, can I?"

"Certainly not!" said Skimpole. "None of us can help what we do. We are all the unresisting slaves of natural forces, and Professor Balm—"

"Exactly!" said Kangaroo. "Well, my heredity is bucking me up just now in the direction of rolling you along the passage. Dane and Glyn have got it the same."

"Ha, ha! Just the same!"

"So we can't help it, and so it's no use your objecting," said Kangaroo. "We can't help it, and certainly you can't help it. So out you go!"

"Really— Oh, oh! Ow! Yow!"

Tom Merry's door closed. The worried editor of the "Weekly" settled down to work again, soothed by the pleasing sound of Skimpole being rolled and bumped along the passage.

CHAPTER 4.

Inky!

THREE juniors in white flannels, with straw hats on the backs of their heads, came out of the New House and sauntered down to the school gates. They arrived there just as Arthur Augustus came down, resplendent in elegant Etons and a topper that gleamed in the summer sun. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn grinned affably at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Wacky for you, Gussy!" said Figgins solemnly.

"Really, Figgins, I fail to see the dwif of your remark—"

"It's too hot to chase your topper along the lane," explained Figgins.

And the Co. chuckled.

"I should uttably refuse to have my toppah chased along the lane, you New House boundah!" said the swell of the School House stiffly, and he walked out of the gates with his noble nose very high in the air.

"P, B, T, D, chay, jay!"

Figgins & Co. heard the swell of the School House muttering those mystic monosyllables to himself as he started down the lane, and they stared after him in astonishment.

"The hot weather!" murmured Fatty Wynn, with a shake of the head, "It has queer effects on people. It makes me hungry—"

"Kay, gay, ef, vee, op, wop—"

"My hat!" said Figgins.

"Pop, chop, kop—no, that isn't wight."

And Arthur Augustus consulted the book again.

Figgins & Co., greatly curious, joined the swell of St. Jim's.

"Are you a Mason?" asked Figgins.

"Certainly not, Figgins! Pway don't intewwupt me with wiculous questions."

"I thought that might be a pass-word or something," explained Figgins.

"Pway don't be an ass! Chay, kay, gay, hay, way, wop—"

"What is it?" gasped Fatty Wynn.

"Sounds to me like shorthand," said Kerr.

Kerr knew shorthand—in fact, there were very few things that the Scottish junior did not know, as a matter of fact. Kerr was the object of great admiration in the New House. He was a kind of Admirable Crichton; only, as Figgins proudly asserted, he left the Admirable Crichton several degrees in the shade.

A fellow who could play the violin better than most concert

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S CONCERT PARTY!" A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

performers, and could play a game of football or cricket in a masterly way, and could not only read Greek, but write it and speak it just as easily as he could French or German or English, was a fellow who might have been excused if he had put on a little side; but Kerr was so quiet and modest in his demeanour that no one would have suspected him of knowing anything more than any other fellow in the Fourth. Only to his intimate chums did he confide the pains it gave him when he heard the Sixth-Formers do their annual Greek play.

Arthur Augustus gave Kerr an approving nod. "Quite wight, Kerr, deah boy," he said; "it is shorthand! I've learned shorthand this afternoon, to report the mayor's speech at Wayland Town Hall for the 'Weekly.'"

Kerr gave quite a jump. "You've learned shorthand this afternoon!" he ejaculated. D'Arcy nodded.

"Yaas, watah! I wegard it as a most useful accomplishment, and I shall find it awfully handy lots of times. Suppose a chap goes bwoke, you know—and any man might go bwoke in these days, when Lloyd George is puttin' taxes on all sorts of things. Well, suppose I go bwoke, I shall be able to get a posish as chief secretawry or somethin' if I know shorthand and things. I'm thinkin' of learnin' book-keepin' by double entry one of these evenin's."

"Oh, good!" gasped Kerr. "What speed have you got up—in one afternoon?"

"No, that isn't quite wight. Ef, vee, kee, see, me——" "That sounds ripping!" said Kerr. "You'll get the speech down splendidly. We are going over to Wayland to the meeting, by the way. We might be able to help you out with some longhand notes if you don't get it all down."

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy. But I shall get it down all wight. To take down a speech verbatim, a chap only requires to know shorthand, and to have a fountain-pen and a wuled notebook. I've got a wuled notebook, and I've bowwowed Wally's fountain-pen, and I'm learnin' shorthand on the way ovah."

Figgins & Co. shrieked. "I wealdy don't see anythin' to cackle at," said D'Arcy, in surprise. "Ef, vee, ith, thee, see, me, say, pay, hip, pip." "Hip-pip!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Wealdy, you fellows——" Figgins & Co. chuckled joyously as they walked down the lane with D'Arcy. They had intended to walk through the wood to Wayland, but a keen interest in D'Arcy's progress with shorthand made them take the train with him instead at Rylcombe.

Arthur Augustus looked very thoughtful as they got into his carriage.

"Of course, I'm delighted to have you chaps with me," he said a little doubtfully. "But I twust you will keep quiet, and not intewwupt my studies. If I don't get on to the cowwespondin' style by the time I weach Wayland I may lose some of Mr. Japp's speech."

"That would be rotten!" said Figgins sympathetically. "Don't say a word if you can help it, you fellows. Better not breathe, I think."

"P, B, T, D, chay, kay, gay——" murmured D'Arcy, as the train started.

He looked up from his book presently. Figgins & Co. were sitting in a row, very quiet, and as good as gold. "I'm gettin' on to the exahices now," D'Arcy remarked. "I believe you know somethin' about shorthand, Kerr?"

"Just a little bit," assented Kerr.

"What does it mean when you have a thing somethin' like a pair of scissahs with the handles bwoken off?"

"Well, it might be 'rsp,'" said Kerr thoughtfully.

"Good! And what does a little circle at the end of a line mean?"

"Probably a final 's.'"

"Bai Jove, you know, that's watah clevah!" said D'Arcy.

"Chap who invented this was a clevah chap. It seems easy enough to learn, but I think pewwaps it will take longah to wemembah it all. What do you think, Kerr?"

"Well, it might take an extra hour or two," admitted Kerr.

D'Arcy nodded thoughtfully, and studied the book again. Some doubt appeared to be creeping into his mind as to

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whether he would be an accomplished shorthand writer by the time the train reached Wayland.

"I say——" began Figgins.

D'Arcy held up his hand.

"Pway don't speak, deah boy! You intewwupt the thwead of my thoughts."

"But I was going to say——"

"Pway don't!"

"I was only going to point out——"

"Wealdy, Figgins, aftah gettin' into this cawwiage with me, I think you might shut up, you know. It would only be consedwate."

"Oh, all right!" said Figgins. "I won't say a word."

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy!"

And Figgins & Co. sat as silent as Egyptian mummies while the train ran on. It stopped in Wayland Junction, and Figgins threw open the carriage door. He jumped out, and Kerr and Wynn followed him, and Arthur Augustus stepped from the train in a more leisurely manner.

"I think we've got lots of time," he remarked, putting his hand to his watch. "Bai Jove! Oh, gweat Scott! Oh! Ah!"

His delicately-tinted kid glove had come away from his watch deeply stained with black ink. D'Arcy gazed down at his waistcoat. It was a beautiful fancy waistcoat, of light colours; but the light colours were darkened now in many places by the admixture of thick ink. D'Arcy's preoccupation had prevented him from noticing it before, and he gazed at it now in horror.

"Bai Jove! What—what——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Figgins. "It's the giddy fountain-pen!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus jerked the fountain-pen from the upper pocket of his waistcoat. It was one mass of thick ink from end to end. The swell of St. Jim's gazed at it, and at his glove, and at his waistcoat, in speechless horror.

"That young wascal Wally! I asked him specially if the fountain-pen was all wight, and he said it was all wight if I kept the wight end up—I forget which end."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wealdy, you uttah wotahs, you might have told me——"

"You wouldn't let me!" shrieked Figgins. "I tried to tell you in the train, but you wouldn't let me say a word."

And the Co. yelled.

Arthur Augustus hurled the fountain-pen across the platform.

"Bai Jove! I wegard you as wotahs! How can I possibly go to a meetin' with my waistcoat in this awful state?"

"Take it off," suggested Kerr. "It would be cooler without it."

"You are an ass, Kerr! Bai Jove, this is feahful! I shall give Wally a feahful thwashin' for lendin' me that fountain-pen!"

"I shouldn't wonder if he gives you one for chucking it away!" grinned Kerr.

"I wufuse to cawwy such a howwible thing about with me! Bai Jove! I shall be late for the meetin' if I don't huwwy. There goes five!"

And the swell of St. Jim's hurried out of the station, followed by Figgins & Co., in a state of mild hysterics.

CHAPTER 5.

D'Arcy, the Reporter.

WAYLAND town-hall was crammed. Apparently the inhabitants of the market town took a great interest in Votes for Women, or perhaps the crowd was partly caused by the fact that it was market day, and entertainments in the country town were not numerous.

Whatever the cause, the town-hall was crammed. There had been rumours that some local Suffragettes intended to interrupt the mayor's speech, and that, too, might have helped to draw the crowd.

Certainly, in the audience there were a number of ladies with very determined faces, some of them accompanied by mild-looking little gentlemen who looked as though they cultivated patience and meekness as fine arts.

The juniors of St. Jim's succeeded in getting in, however, and Arthur Augustus looked round for the seats allotted to reporters. An attendant whom he requested to guide him there smiled, and said certainly, and walked away and was not seen again.

Figgins dragged D'Arcy into a seat well up near the platform, however, and he sat down with the Co.

"But this isn't the place for a weworth," said Arthur Augustus.

"They're just going to begin," said Figgins. "You ought to have brought a professional card with you: 'A. A. D'Arcy,

SHOW YOUR FRIENDS THIS ALL-SCHOOL-STORY NUMBER OF "THE GEM."

Special Reporter on the Staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly," or something like that."

"I suppose my word is good enough for these chaps!" said D'Arcy loftily.

"H'm! Yes; but—"

"I regard it as a duty to stand up for the dignity of the Pwess!" said D'Arcy. "A fellow should always stand up for his profession!"

"But you'll get tired," said Kerr. "And you're only allowed to stand up at the back of the hall!"

"I was speakin' figuratively, deah boy! I didn't mean stand up—"

"Well, sit down!"

"But I considah—"

"Sit down in front!" roared a gentleman in corduroys at the back of the hall. "Take that pane of glass hout of your heye, and 'sit down!"

"Bai Jove! That fellow cannot be addressin' me surely?"

"I mean you—you with the Roman nose!" roared the gentleman. "Sit down, and don't let's see your face! Do you call it a face?"

"Bai Jove! You are a wude fellow!" called back D'Arcy indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sit down!"

"Silence!"

"Horder!"

Figgins dragged the swell of St. Jim's into his seat. Arthur Augustus sat in a state of palpitating indignation.

"Don't mind him," whispered Figgins. "I dare say he's a chap on the other side, you know. Very likely he takes you for Mr. Asquith!"

"Bai Jove!"

The platform crowd had taken their seats, sitting in that semi-circle of blank faces without which no public meeting in Britain is complete. They faced the audience, each of them trying to look blanker than the rest. The Mayor of Wayland, a very short and very stout gentleman with a purple face fringed by white whiskers, bowed to the audience, and coughed a platform cough.

There were cheers and catcalls. Arthur Augustus took out his ruled pocket-book, which was quite ready for business, whatever had happened to his fountain-pen or his shorthand.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "Can you lend me a fountain-pen, deah boy? Speeches can't be weported without a fountain-pen."

"Pencil do?" asked Figgins.

Arthur Augustus looked doubtful.

"Well, the book says that a weportah ought to be provided with a fountain-pen and a wuled notebook," he said. "I've got the wuled notebook. I don't know whethah my shorthand would be all wight with a pencil instead of a pen."

"Just as good, I should say," said Kerr blandly.

"Well, I will twy the pencil. Thank you, Figgins!"

Arthur Augustus rested the book on his knee, and prepared for business. He jammed his monocle a little tighter into his eyes, and scanned the platform.

"Who's that chap with the bandy legs who's talkin' now?" he asked.

Figgins chuckled.

"Oh, he's the chairman!"

"Ought I to weport his wemarks?"

"Shouldn't trouble. Besides, we can't hear 'em."

"No; that's vewy twue!"

It was not long before the mayor was upon his legs. It was pretty clear that he was anxious to begin, all the time. He stood up, very important and very purple, and was received with loud cheers. From the conversation round them, the juniors learned that the Mayor of Wayland was opposed to granting votes to women, and that he was seriously alarmed by a Bill that had been introduced into the House of Commons, which, to him, portended that the British Empire was practically on its last legs, and only to be saved by the country rallying and backing up the Mayor of Wayland.

"Is that the mayah, Figgay?" asked D'Arcy.

"Yes; that's the great speaker."

"I regard it as vewy impwopah of a man in his posish, to come to a big meetin' dweessed so vewy carelessly!" said D'Arcy. "Look at his twousahs! They are a most wiculous shape, and want pwessin' feahfully! There is simply no cwease at all in them!"

"Never mind his bags! Listen to the palaver!"

"Yaas; all wight!"

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the mayor, in a deep voice, which seemed to carry a flavour of port wine with it.

"Ear, 'ear!" responded the gentlemen.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I've only got a few words to say—"

"Bravo!"

Arthur Augustus jabbed at his ruled notebook with his pencil, and then turned a worried look on Kerr.

"I—I say, Kerr, how do you make an 'L'?" he murmured. "I sha'n't have time to consult the book, I'm afwaid, while I'm takin' down the speech!"

Kerr nearly exploded.

"Haven't you finished learning shorthand?" he asked innocently.

"No; Blake and Digby intewwupted me vewy much, and—and—upon the whole—I believe you know shorthand pwetty well, Kerr?"

"Yes."

"Pewwaps you might take it down for me, till I wemembah how it goes."

Kerr chuckled.

"All serene!" he said. "Hand me the book!"

And Arthur Augustus handed Kerr the ruled notebook and the pencil.

"Thank you vewy much!" he said. "I will give you some tips as we go on. What are you makin' those cwuous marks in the book for, Kerr?"

"Shut up! I'm taking down the speech!"

"Bai Jove! Is that a P, B, T, D, chay, or gay?"

"Ass! It's three sentences!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Don't interrupt, or I shall be putting down what you say instead of what the other ass is saying!"

"Weally, Kerr—"

"Cheese it!"

Kerr's pencil was going like lightning, and D'Arcy could only watch him in wonder. It dawned upon the swell of St. Jim's that there was more in shorthand than met the eye at first glance.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "I couldn't do that, you know."

"Go hon!" said Figgins.

"I regard Kerr as a vewy clevah chap. It must have taken him hours to learn that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!"

"Horder!"

"'Ear, 'ear!"

The mayor was under full way now. There were constant interruptions from the back of the hall. Some of the gentlemen there seemed to believe in female suffrage, and some did not believe in it; but all, evidently, believed in making as much noise as possible. Half the mayor's remarks were drowned in clamour, but the audience did not seem to mind very much.

"Gentlemen!" roared Mr. Japp, "the country is on the 'igh-road to ruin! I repeat it—on the 'igh-road to ruin! I don't care who 'ears we say it, gentlemen, it's on the 'igh-road to ruin!"

"'Ear, 'ear!"

"'Urray!"

The shocking state of the country, on the high-road to ruin, did not seem to discompose the gentlemen at the back of the hall. Perhaps they felt that the country would very likely last their time.

"The 'igh-road to ruin!" repeated Mr. Japp, evidently pleased with that phrase. "And wot can save it, gentlemen? I repeat—what can save it?"

A thin lady in a weird bonnet jumped up in the middle of the hall.

"Votes for Women!" she shrieked.

CHAPTER 6.

Manly Hearts to Guard the Fair.

"E AR, 'ear!"

"Sit down!"

"Go it, lidy!"

"Chuck 'er out!"

"Votes for Women!" repeated the lady, in a very high falsetto. "I demand the right to be heard!" It would have been very difficult for anyone in the hall, or near it, not to hear the lady, as a matter of fact. "Votes for Women!"

"Sit down!"

The lady cast a defiant glance round the crowded hall. She seemed to glory in the prospect of a possible martyrdom. She was a lady of forty summers, not to mention the winters, and she was dressed in a style which would have been exceedingly youthful for a girl of twenty-five. But she had a determined, square jaw, and evidently meant business.

"Votes for Women! Down with this cowardly Government! Down with everybody! Votes for Women!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, missis!"

"Is your old man mindin' the kids at 'ome?"

"Pore Mister 'Enpeck!"

"Horder, horder!"

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The mayor struggled to make his voice heard, but he simply did not have a look-in with the Suffragette lady. She had a high-pitched soprano which beat his deep bass all along the line, and she had evidently come there specially to voice the wrongs of the downtrodden half of humanity—and she had a splendid voice for the purpose.

"Ladies and gentlemen—" roared the mayor.
 "Votes for Women! I pay rates and taxes—"
 "Wot does 'ubby do?" came a questioning voice from afar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "He minds the kids!" said another voice.
 "Haw, haw, haw!"
 "This country is on the 'igh-road to ruin—"
 "I demand the vote!"
 "Pway sit down, madam!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who happened to be near the excited lady. "The mayor hasn't got any votes with him, you know. You are intewwuptin' the pwoceedin's. Fair play, you know. Let him wun on."

"On the 'igh-road to—"
 "Votes for Women!"
 "Shut up!"
 "Chuck her out!"
 "Go and git yer ole man 'is dinner, mam!"
 "Pore old 'ubby! Wot a time he's goin' to 'ave when she gets 'ome!"
 "Votes for Women!"

Several stewards were struggling through the crowd to persuade the lady to retire. They reached her, and wasted eloquence upon her, in vain. Then they essayed to assist her gently to the exit. The lady clung to a seat, and declined to move.

Then three strong pairs of hands descended upon her, and she was jerked away. She shrieked wildly.

Up jumped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy like a lion in his wrath.

"Welsee that lady at once!" he shouted. "I wefuse to allow a lady to be tweated wuffly in my presence! Welsee her at once!"

Figgins dragged him down.
 "Shut up!" he said. "She must go out if she doesn't keep quiet, Gussy. The mayor's paid for the use of this hall, and he's entitled to a show."

"That's all vewy well, Figgay, but nothin' is so important as bein' decent to a lady, you know. It doesn't mattah if the poor gal wuns on, you know. Women ought to be allowed to talk as much as they like. Besides, I cannot respect a man who addresses a public meetin' in twousahs like that."

"Sit down!"
 "I wefuse to sit down!"

And Arthur Augustus broke away from Figgins, and rushed to the rescue of the Suffragette.

There was a roar:
 "Chuck him out, too!"
 "'Ooray!"

"Welsee that lady at once! I wefuse to allow this wuff tweatment!"

"Stand back!"
 "Welsee her, I ordah you, you wuffians, or I shall certainly pwevent you!"

How D'Arcy was going to prevent the stewards from ejecting the lady was not quite clear, as there were now half a dozen of them on the spot, and all of them burly and powerful men. But Arthur Augustus never counted odds when he was excited.

The "chuckers-out" did not pay any heed to the excited swell of St. Jim's. They conducted the lady, struggling and shrieking, to the door. The lady's bonnet was gone by this time, and her hair had come down—some of it as far as the ground. Certain mysterious additions to the head which are called "waves," and "fronts," and "switches," and so forth, peeled off the head of the unfortunate champion of women's rights, and disappeared under trampling feet.

Arthur Augustus hurled himself upon the attendants and hit out.

"My hat!" gasped Figgins. "He'll get hurt! Rescue!"

And Figgins & Co. attempted to rush to D'Arcy's aid, with the idea of dragging him off to safety. But the crowd was too thick, and they could not get through. Arthur Augustus was wildly fighting with three or four attendants, and he planted several doughty blows, and one of the men was on his back already. Then the swell of St. Jim's and the Suffragette disappeared through the doorway together, in the midst of a pandemonium of shrieks and howls and gasps and flying arms and legs.

"Oh, Christopher Columbus!" gasped Figgins. "We'd better go out and look after him. Never mind the meeting!"

And Figgins & Co. squeezed their way out. As they went,

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there was a wild hubbub behind them, and the voice of the mayor was booming forth again.

"This country is on the 'igh-road to ruin—"
 "'Ooray!"

Figgins & Co. emerged breathless from the town-hall into the street.

On the pavement outside lay a gasping, woebegone figure. The Suffragette had disappeared, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remained—what was left of him.

He was hatless, and his hair was wildly rumped. His jacket had been torn into shreds, and his waistcoat was split up the back. His trousers were a wreck, and his shirt was a ruin. He was utterly out of breath, and he lay pumping it in with loud gasps.

Figgins & Co. roared.
 "Ha, ha, ha! Poor old Gussy! Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Bai Jove!"
 "Where's the giddy Suffragette?"
 "I—I think she's gone!" gasped D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, I feel wotten!"
 "You look rotten, too!" shrieked Figgins.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 D'Arcy sat up.
 "The howwid wuffians!" he gasped. "I've a jollay good mind to go back into the place and give them all a fearful thwashin' all wound! They have tweated me with the wossesst diswespect!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "There is nothin' whatevah to laugh at. I wegard this as howwible. And now I sha'n't have a weport of the speech for the 'Weekly'!"
 "That's all right," said Kerr. "I've got down all the gas that escaped. I've got it all down in shorthand."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "But the west of the speech—"
 "That's only the first part over again. The mayor didn't intend to get off the high-road to ruin until the meeting broke up," explained Kerr. "But how on earth are you going to get back in that state?"
 "Bai Jove!"
 "Better drop into a shop and buy an ulster and a cap," said Figgins. "You can't walk home in rags and tatters, you know."
 "Yaas; that's a wathah good idea!" gasped the unfortunate reporter of "Tom Merry's Weekly." "Pway give me the notes of the speech, Kerr. I shall want them for my weport."
 And Arthur Augustus was provided with a cap and an ulster to cover up the battered state of his garments, and in that guise was taken back to St. Jim's, feeling, as he described it, vewy wotten, indeed!

CHAPTER 7. D'Arcy's Report.

TOM MERRY came out of the School House in the gathering dusk. It was a beautiful summer's evening, and Tom Merry felt that he was entitled to a stroll after his arduous labours in the editorial office. Manners and Lowther joined him, looking rather grim. Tom Merry greeted them with a cheerful smile.

"Pax, my sons!" he said. "It's all right. I've got through the editing."

"I've a jolly good mind to bump you bald-headed!" growled Lowther. "You've spoiled my flannels with your silly ink."

There was a shout in the dusk of the quadrangle.
 "Good old Gussy!"
 "Ain't it warm?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here's my special reporter come back," grinned Tom Merry. "He's got down the mayor's speech at Wayland this afternoon. He learned shorthand specially to-day."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quite a crowd of fellows were coming across the quadrangle with the swell of St. Jim's. The reporter of "Tom Merry's Weekly" was attracting a very great amount of attention. Tom Merry saw the reason as soon as he came up to the School House. The swell of St. Jim's had gone forth to report the speeches at Wayland in elegant Etons and silk-hat and a fancy waistcoat. He came back wrapped from head to foot in a thick, cheap ulster, with a cheaper cap on his aristocratic head.

ANSWERS

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The ulster would have been a warm one for December. D'Arcy's face was red with heat as he laboured along in that warm covering in the hot summer evening. And the sight of the swell of St. Jim's thus strangely clad drew a curious crowd round him, much to D'Arcy's exasperation.

The Terrible Three stared at him and grinned. "What on earth are you wearing that thing for, Gussy?" demanded Tom Merry. "That isn't the style for a special reporter on my staff."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"
"Gussy has been in the wars," said Figgins gently. "He is a wreck."

"I suppose he has been wreckless," said Monty Lowther, who never could resist the opportunity of a pun, good or bad. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"He fought the whole hall in defence of a giddy Suffragette," explained Kerr. "It was simply ripping of Gussy, and he has been pretty well ripped. But it shows that the days of chivalry are not past, in spite of the piffle we read in Burke on the subject. Gussy is a giddy hero."

"Weally, Kerr—"
"See the Conquering Hero Comes," grinned Blake. "I never saw a conquering hero in a reach-me-down ulster before, but I suppose it's all right."

"Let's get in to tea," said Fatty Wynn, dragging Figgins and Kerr away. "I'm hungry. Blake can take Gussy in."

"Oh, all right!" said Figgins. "Good-night, Gussy."

"Good-night, deah boy."
And Figgins & Co. disappeared across the quadrangle. Jack Blake slipped his arm through his dishevelled chum's, and led him into the School House, followed by Herries and Digby and the Terrible Three. The crowd remained below, laughing, while the chums of the Shell and the Fourth led the swell of St. Jim's to Study No. 6. Arthur Augustus was very warm and very tired. Immediately he was in the study, he tore open the ulster and hurled it away from him.

"Bai Jove," he gasped, "I'm glad to be wid of that!"
The juniors looked at him, at his clothes rent and torn and dusty, and shrieked. Arthur Augustus groped for his eyeglass to survey them scornfully; but only a fragment of the famous monocle remained attached to the cord. It had been smashed in the struggle at the town-hall in Wayland.

"Weally, you wottahs, I can see nothin' whatevah to laugh at," said the swell of St. Jim's stiffly.

"Look in the glass!" shrieked Blake.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Weally, Blake—"

"How on earth did you get into that state?" demanded Tom Merry. "I shall have to get a new reporter, if this goes on. Can't have this kind of thing happening on the staff of a respectable paper."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"
"Poor old Gussy!" said Blake. "Have a lemonade, with a dash of soda in it!"

And Blake swamped lemonade into a tumbler, and sizzed soda-water into it from a syphon, and handed it to D'Arcy. The tired and dusty swell of St. Jim's drank it gratefully.

"Thank you vevy much, deah boy," he said. "I feel bettah now. I have weally had an awful time. You see, they were handlin' a lady wuffly, and as a gentleman I was bound to intahfero. The poor gal only wanted a vote, but she wouldn't leave off talkin', and they chucked her out. It was vevy wude. I simply had to intahfero."

"And you got chucked out, too, I suppose?" said Digby.
"Well, yaas," admitted Arthur Augustus. "You see, I'm a wathah powahful chap, but I couldn't handle thwee or four grown-up men at once. They collahed me vevy wuffly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"It was not at all funny, deah boys."
"Seems funny to me!" grinned Blake.

"But what about the report of the speech?" demanded Tom Merry. "We specially wanted that for the 'Weekly,' to show that we can do local and county news as well as the local rags do it. Haven't you got a report?"

"Yaas, as far as the wow. Aftah I was chucked out, of course, I didn't hear any of the speech; but Kerr says the chap was beginnin' again at the beginnin'."

Tom Merry laughed.
"Well, let's have what you've got," he said.
D'Arcy groped in his pocket, and drew out the ruled notebook, and handed it to his editor.

"In shorthand, I suppose?" said Tom Merry, with a grin.
"Yaas, deah boy."

"What!" ejaculated Tom Merry.
"Rot!" said Herries.
"Weally, Howwies—"

"Do you mean to say that you've got a report of the speech there in shorthand?" shouted Jack Blake.
"Certainly, deah boy."

"Oh, piffle!"

"Pway look at it, then, you ass!"
Tom Merry opened the pocket-book. Tom Merry had a rather hazy notion of shorthand himself, but he could see that the report dotted down in the notebook was done in a business-like way.

He stared at it blankly.
"My only hat, this looks all right!" he gasped.
"It is all wright, deah boy."
"It's really a report of the speech?" demanded Blake, in astonishment.

"Yaas, the first part of the speech."
"That will do," said Tom Mewwy. "We can print that much, and a note to the effect that the rest of the speech was lost owing to disorderliness in the audience—Suffragettes and schoolboys, and—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"
"We shall want it construed, though," said Tom Merry. "No good sending a shorthand report to the printer. It will have to be written out in longhand."

"Get Kerr to do it, deah boy."
"My dear chap, we can't go over to the New House asking a fellow to construe your shorthand for you. If you wrote it, I suppose you can translate it!"

"But I didn't write it, deah boy," said D'Arcy calmly.
The juniors jumped.
"You didn't write it?" roared Tom Merry.

"Certainly not."
"You—you—you—"

"I weally don't know shorthand well enough," D'Arcy explained. "I found that the words wouldn't come, and I asked Kerr to do it. Kerr can do things, you know. He's a wathah clevah chap, and I weally believe he can do ewevythin' f'wom impersonations to playin' the flute. It was quite a surprize to me when he jabbed all that wubbish down there. I suppose it means somethin'." He said it did.

"You ass!" yelled Tom Merry. "I understood that you wrote it!"

"I weally don't see why you should have understood that, deah boy. I certainly did not say so. I said it was in shorthand."

"Ass! Well, if Kerr perpetrated this, Kerr will have to unperpetrate it, and make it ready for the printer," said Tom Merry. "I'll take it oyer to the New House after tea, and you can get on with an article describing the meeting."

"Yaas, wathah! I have some wemarks to make concernin' the carelessness, not to say slovenliness, of a public official appeawin' at a meetin' in such twousahs."

"Oh, good! Keep an eye on the libel laws, you know."
"A twue and conscientious weportah cannot be pwvented f'wom sayin' what he thinks, Tom Mewwy, libel law or no libel law. I wufuse to have any of my copy wescinded f'wom a wotched feah of consequences."

"You'd make a big newspaper pay, if you were on the staff!" grinned Tom Merry. "But go ahead. I don't suppose the Mayor of Wayland will read your illuminating remarks on the subject of his bags. Pile in!"

"I'm goin' to change my clothes first, deah boy. But I'll let you have the copy some time to-night," said D'Arcy graciously.

And Arthur Augustus went to clean himself after his painful experiences as a reporter, and then over tea in the study he thought out his great article, while Tom Merry went over to the New House to get Kerr to write out the shorthand report in common or garden English.

CHAPTER 8. Crowded Out.

THE wits of the School House and the New House were still waxing eloquent on the subject of "Tom Merry's Weekly." The long absence of that paper from public view was the general topic, and the editors were chipped on the subject without limit. As Reilly, of the Fourth, pointed out, a paper with so many editors had no excuse for not keeping up a regular appearance. Besides Tom Merry, who was editor-in-chief, there were ten sub-editors, which was certainly a liberal allowance for any paper.

Blake, and Herries, and Digby, of the Fourth, were all sub-editors; and Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, of the New House, were all subs; Bernard Glyn was "Hobby" editor, Kangaroo and Clifton Dane were "Colonial" editors, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was "Fashion" editor. Such a quantity of editing was hardly known in the annals of journalism, and if editing could do it, the paper should certainly have been in a flourishing condition.

But there had been inexcusable slackings. Fellows preferred playing cricket to writing about it; they went out boating instead of doing articles on boats; they swam instead of writing swimming articles. Even the editor-in-chief had slacked, though he was bucking up now splendidly. In one

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afternoon Tom Merry had been a host in himself, and he had turned out wonderful articles on all sorts of subjects. He was well up in some subjects, and not so well up in others; but it was necessary to write a certain number of columns, and he wrote them. Indeed, in his hard-up-ness for copy, he was very near inserting "Good Quotations from Classical Authors," which would have been whole chunks of Livy, and Virgil, and Horace in the original. Fortunately, he was saved from that dire resource by the report of the great speech at Wayland, and the article on the meeting which Arthur Augustus turned out at considerable length.

While the regular contributors were slacking in this way, outside contributors were very generous with their stuff. Fellows who had been saving up rejected manuscripts for whole terms, trotted them out now, and placed them at the disposal of the editor. Gore's story of the Redskin Raider of the Rio Grande made a new appearance in Tom Merry's study, and stayed there five minutes. Skimpole's long article on "Determinism" found a final resting-place in the fire-grate, the waste-paper basket being full to overflowing.

But the noble example of Tom Merry in sacrificing a half-holiday in the cause of duty, had some effect on the staff. The paper was almost ready to send down to the printer's the day after the visit of the special reporter to Wayland. Tom Merry had it made up almost to a finish, and after morning school he went up to his study to give the final touches. Then the repentant contributors, who came in with yards of copy, found that they were too late.

Figgins was the first. He came into Tom Merry's study and found an argument in progress. Manners and Tom Merry were holding a heated discussion.

"Impossible!" said Tom Merry decidedly. "Copy that comes in too late for press has to be held over."

"But I did this article on photography in class this morning!" howled Manners. "I got fifty lines from old Linton when he found what I was doing, and I've got to do that, too! And it's a ripping article!"

"Sorry!" said the editor firmly. "Can't go in this number. It's made up to the last page now."

"Leave out something else—that rotten article on swimming, for instance."

"I did that article!" said the editor, with dignity.

"Well, that accounts for the way it's done, I suppose. Leave it out."

"Can't be did!"

"Ass!"

"The editor's decision is final!" said Tom Merry. "Still, I'll keep your article for the next number."

"When will that be?" hooted Manners.

"Blessed if I know, if the staff keep on slacking as they've been doing lately!" said Tom Merry severely. "I'm not going to cut out work that I bunged in yesterday instead of playing cricket!"

"Leave out some of Bishop's serial, then."

"There wasn't much to go in. I had to lengthen the instalment myself."

Manners snorted.

"You can cut all that," he said.

"No fear!"

"Yes; be reasonable, Manners, old man," said Figgins. "After all, the articles on photography are only to fill up space; and the space is all filled up, so what does it matter?"

Manners glared.

"You unspeakable ass!" he roared. "The photography articles are the only sensible thing in the rotten paper!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Figgins warmly. "What is wanted is fiction—good fiction."

"Poof!"

"You can say poof as much as you like, but the readers of this paper want good fiction."

"They may want it," said Manners. "They jolly well don't get it, I know that."

"I sat up last night in the dorm, doing the first chapters of a new serial, to help Tom Merry out," said Figgins.

"Oh, you did, did you?" asked Tom Merry grimly.

"Yes, rather! It's a splendid story—"

"Ahem!"

"The title is very taking—'The Black Brigand; or, the Mysterious Marauders of the Murky Mountains,' said Figgins, with some pride.

"Oh, good!"

"Yes, it is good, though I say it myself," said Figgins. "The scene is laid in Italy, and I've worked in a lot of really good local colour."

"You know the subject from end to end, of course?" suggested Manners, sarcastically. "A shilling guide-book—eh?"

"I've talked with a chap who spent last vacation in Italy," said Figgins. "Chap named Cherry—Bob Cherry, of Greyfriars. He went to Mount Vesuvius, and Naples, and places

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with some other Greyfriars chaps, and he's told me all about it. We had a jaw one evening when I met him at a place. I've got a description of Mount Vesuvius that will simply make your hair curl. Listen to this bit—"

"Look here—" began Tom Merry.

"The terrific volcano was belching forth smoke, and flame, and ashes, and lava, and things!" began Figgins, reading from his manuscript. "On the slopes of Mount Vesuvius stood the Black Brigand."

"My hat!"

"What do you think of that for a beginning?" demanded Figgins.

"Must have been a jolly dangerous place for the Black Brigand to stand," said Manners. "What was he standing there for?"

"Oh, nothing in particular, but it's a picturesque idea. It goes on like this—"

"You see, Figgins—"

"A shot rang out," said Figgins, unheeding. "The Black Brigand ground his—"

"Razor?" asked Monty Lowther, joining in the conversation cheerfully.

"Teeth!" roared Figgins.

"Teeth?" said Lowther, in surprise. "Was he going to bite anybody?"

"You ass—"

"Well, I think that ought to be made clear," said Lowther argumentatively. "Readers are jolly particular, you know. If you say a chap ground his teeth, you ought to say why he wanted them to be specially sharp. And what did he grind them on? Did he use an oil-stone?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Black Brigand ground his teeth!" hissed Figgins. "His eyes flashed fire! He trembled with rage! He drew a gleaming, glittering dagger!"

"What with?" asked Lowther.

"Eh? With his hand, of course!"

"Yes; but did he use a pencil or a pen?"

"Eh?"

"I suppose he would have a sketch-book with him if he was doing Mount Vesuvius?" said Lowther thoughtfully.

"I believe every tourist who doesn't carry a camera carries a sketch-book. But why should he draw a dagger? It would be much more natural for him to draw a mountain or a valley, or something like that, if he was keeping it as a souvenir."

"You imbecile!" yelled Figgins. "When I say he drew a dagger, I don't mean that he drew a dagger, I mean that he drew it!"

"Well, that's jolly lucid, at all events," agreed Lowther. "But do you think an explanation like that would be clear enough for the general reader?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins almost exploded.

"If Lowther doesn't stop making rotten puns, there will be a row in this study," he said. "The Black Brigand drew a dagger from his belt. A shot rang out—"

"Another shot?" asked Manners.

"Yes, idiot! The Black Brigand staggered. From the distant mountain there came the peal of a bell."

"If the Black Brigand staggered, it was much more likely to be caused by the peal of an orange," remarked Lowther.

"Look here—" roared Figgins.

"But what has the bell got to do with the story?" asked Tom Merry.

"Nothing."

"Then what on earth do you shove it in for?"

"Ass! That's realism!" said Figgins witheringly.

"My hat! Is that realism?"

"Of course it is! That's how the French realists write. A French realist always puts it like that. For example: The dying man turned his face to the wall and expired. On the hillside a sheep bleated," said Figgins. "That's realism. The sheep hasn't anything to do with the yarn, and it doesn't matter twopence whether he bleated or not. It's just realism."

"Oh!"

"On the distant mountain," said Figgins, continuing his ripping serial, "a sheep ran—I mean, a bell bleated—that is to say, there came the peal of an orange—I mean, a bell. You silly asses, you are putting me out!"

"We jolly well shall put you out if you go on reading that piffle here!" said Lowther.

"But what bell was it?" asked Tom Merry, puzzled.

"Even if it's realism, in the latest realistic style, there ought to be a certain amount of sense in the story, oughtn't there?"

"Not at all necessary," said Lowther. "If people had to put sense in their stories, what would all the great modern authors do for a living?"

"The bell pealed out, and that's enough," said Figgins.

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Lord Mauleverer soon fell into the spirit of the thing. He danced well, and the crowd roared, and 'Erb played his mouth-organ till it seemed as if he could not have an ounce of breath left in him. "My hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "This is fun! Go it Mauly!" (The above incident is taken from the splendid, long complete tale of the Chums of Greyfriars, entitled: "HARRY WHARTON & Co's BANK HOLIDAY," which is contained in our popular companion paper "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.)

"Artistic touches of that kind are meant to show that ordinary matters are going on just the same as usual, while fearfully dramatic climaxes and things are coming along."

"Oh, I see!"

"Besides, it might have been an hotel bell," suggested Lowther. "It would be more realistic to say a gong, though—a dinner gong!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A shot rang out——" continued Figgins.

"You mean a bell——"

"No, I don't; I mean a shot, you blithering fathead!"

"But you said that before."

"I suppose a chap can fire more than once, can't he?" demanded Figgins.

"That's according. What kind of a rifle did he have?"

"A good author doesn't go into particulars of that kind."

"A shot rang out——"

"That's a fourth one?"

"No, idiot; that's the same shot! You interrupted me."

"Did they all hit the Black Brigand?" asked Lowther,

with interest. "I should think he was beginning to look like a colander by this time!"

"The Black Brigand hurled himself upon his foe, and his dagger flashed aloft," shouted Figgins. "There was a groan up on that lonely hill——"

"Was the Black Brigand a boy?" asked Lowther.

"A boy! No; a man, of course!"

"He was grown-up, then?"

"Of course he was, ass!"

"Then they were both grown-up?"

"Yes."

"Then there were two grown-ups on that lonely hill?" said Lowther. "You said just now there was a grown-up on that lonely hill. You ought to have said two."

"I said a groan up on the hill!" yelled Figgins.

"Yes; and I said there were two, if——"

Figgins could stand no more. He rushed towards Monty Lowther, and there would certainly have been damage done in the editorial sanctum if Tom Merry and Manners had not

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S CONCERT PARTY!"

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

rushed between. Monty Lowther waved his hand gently to Figgins.

"Go away, old chap!" he said. "Go away quietly, and take the serial with you! My advice to you, as a friend, is to go over it again, and get the correct number of characters specified, and whether they were grown-up or not."

"You babbling burler—"

"Peace, my children—peace!" sighed Tom Merry. "Figgy, old man, it was simply ripping of you to sit up late doing that serial—"

"Well, I meant to do you a good turn," said Figgins, calming down a little.

"But it's too late; the number's made up!"

"Oh, you can easily shift out something else!" said Figgins. "It's always best to put in good stuff when you've got the chance, you know, even if it gives a little more trouble."

"Ahem! The copy's going off to the printer this afternoon, and he's promised to let us have it on Monday—"

"Tuesday will do if it goes in a bit later—"

"Too late already, my son! I'm just sending it off!"

"Look here, my serial's going in!" roared Figgins. "Look how the title will attract the readers—'The Black Brigand—'"

"Or the 'Murderous Mugwump of the Muddy Mountains!'" murmured Monty Lowther.

"You howling ass—"

"Black is a rather sombre colour for a brigand," said Lowther, with a shake of the head. "He ought to be a bit gayer. You remember the chap in the song—the bandy pierrot—I mean, the Bandillero? Why not put him into pink, and call him the 'Pink Pincher'?"

That was too much for an exasperated author. Figgins made a jump at Lowther before Tom Merry and Manners could stop him, and in a moment Lowther was dragged off the armchair, and he was rolling on the hearthrug with Figgins.

"Yaroo!" roared Lowther. "Ow! Help!"

Two pairs of hands were laid upon Figgins, and in spite of his fierce struggles he was ejected into the passage. In the conflict his serial had suffered very much, the sheets having been torn in pieces.

Figgins, breathing fury, and gasping wildly, went down the passage, leaving his great serial scattered in very small instalments on the floor of the editorial office!

CHAPTER 9.

Two are Satisfied.

TOM MERRY felt very much relieved when the number was safely despatched to the local printer at Rylcombe, and "Tom Merry's Weekly" was off his mind. During the day, and the following day, belated contributors ambled into the editorial office with articles and stories of great value.

Tom Merry cheerfully pointed to the wastepaper-basket as a convenient receptacle, and the contributors retired breathing disgust.

The captain of the Shell looked forward with more than usual keenness to the appearance of that number, since most of the contributions were from his own pen, the work of that devoted half-holiday. Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shared the honours between them, and were likely to be very well satisfied with the result; but whether that satisfaction would be general was another matter.

The Rylcombe printer was true to his word, and on Monday there was a large and heavy package delivered at St. Jim's for Tom Merry.

The editor found it in his study after morning lessons, and a whole body of sub-editors and contributors accompanied him there to see the number.

Tom Merry cut the cord and opened the parcel, and there was a rush for the numbers.

There were fifty copies in all, that being the number generally printed of "Tom Merry's Weekly." Each of the juniors soon had a copy in his hand, and there was a loud and general shout of disgust as they looked into them.

"Leading article signed 'Tom Merry!'" growled Figgins.

"Article on Swimming, T. M.!" granted Redfern.

"Latest Jokes, selected by T. M.!"

"Correspondence Column, conducted by T.!"

"Short Story, by M.!"

"Description of Cricket Matches, by Tom Merry!"

"Tom Merry from start to finish!" granted Blake.

"The more the Merrier!" said Monty Lowther, with a grin.

"Oh, cheese it! Nothing here but Tom Merry's rot and Gussy's piffle, and a bit of a serial by Bishop!"

Bishop gave a yell.

"Look at my serial! It's been mucked up!"

"Well, it wasn't much of a thing, anyway!" said Lowther, by way of being grateful and comforting.

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"Look here!" shrieked Bishop, waving the paper in the air. "I've got a scene with a dying child in it, and some idiot has put in a football match!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I had to pad it out," said Tom Merry. "If you leave me without copy, what am I to do? I couldn't let the child die half-way down the column, could I, and leave the rest blank? I put in the footer match, and shifted the death-bed to the end of the next column."

"Oh! You ass—you Philistine!"

"Nothing of mine in here!" said Figgins, with a snort.

"Nothing of mine, either!" said Fatty Wynn. "I was going to do a splendid article on making light pastry, if you'd given me time!"

"Well, I've got a report of a speech, anyway," said Kerr. "Why, my hat, blessed if the Wayland report isn't signed by that ass D'Arcy!"

"Weally, Kerr—"

"D'Arcy's signed my report!" roared Kerr.

"It is signed by A. A. D'Arcy, special reporter for 'Tom Merry's Weekly,'" said the editor, with a worried look.

"That's all right, isn't it?"

"Yaas, watah!"

"But I took down the report!" yelled Kerr.

"You helped me!" said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Helped you! Why, it was taken down in shorthand, and you couldn't even construe it for the printer!" shrieked Kerr.

"It was my report! You offahed to take it down for me, because I hadn't quite finished learnin' shorthand, owin' to being intewwupted that aftahnoon by Blake and Digby!"

"Well, if I took it down, it was my report, wasn't it?"

"Certainly not! You took it down for me merely as a shorthand w'itah! You might as well say that this papah is Mr. Tipah's, because he pwints it for us!"

"Well, my hat!"

"The fact of the mattah is, you're hardly up to weportin' speeches, Kerr!" said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. "You are all vewy well as an assistant, but you could hardly do that kind of thing on your own, you know!"

Kerr appeared to be suffocating.

"Yes; that's quite right," said Tom Merry. "A special reporter has a right to get any assistance he likes, of course. Gussy might have employed a typist to type it for him, for instance, but it would have been his report all the same."

"Well, of all the cheek—"

"As a mattah of fact, I'm quite willin' to take Kerr wound with me when I go out weportin'!" said D'Arcy generously. "He can do all the shorthand bizney. But, of course, he will have to undahstand that he is only an assistant, and not weportah!"

"You—you frabjous ass—"

"Well, it's a rotten number," said Fatty Wynn. "There isn't any New House in it at all."

"All the bettah for that, deah boy. I wegard it as a wippin' numbah. Havé you wead my article on the meetin' at the town-hall?"

"Blow your article!"

"The weport is all wight, but the article is bettah. I will wead it out to you chaps, if you care to listen."

"We don't!" roared the chaps, with wonderful unanimity.

But Arthur Augustus had already started.

"Havin' been pwesent at the meetin' in Wayland Town Hall for weportin' purposes, we venture to make a few remarks. In the first place, we must weally expwess our gweat surprishe that a public official in the position of Mr. Japp should have appeared at a public meetin' in a vewy careless state of attire—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dry up!"

"Cheese it!"

"We must be allowed to dwaw particulah attention to Mr. Japp's twousahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Surely it is not too much to ask of a gentleman in a wespensible position that he should appeah in public dwessed in a mannah calculated to set a good example to his townspeople. Mr. Japp's twousahs had evidently not been pwessed for a considewable time—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Undah the cires—"

"You'll have Japp after you if he ever sees that," gasped Blake, with tears in his eyes. "You should have let his bags alone, you ass."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I have my dutay to the Pwess and the public to considah," he replied firmly. "Ewewy weportah should considah his dutay to the Pwess and the public. I wegard Mr. Japp as havin' failed to act up to his posish., and it is therefore my dutay to wag him on the subject."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Suppose he goes for you for libel?" asked Tom Merry.

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"I should not care. A newspaper must always be prepared for libel actions, if it is to do its duty to the public. Some newspapers that attack wotten abuses are always gettin' mixed up in libel actions."

"My only hat! I wonder what the Head would say if we had one here?" grinned Blake.

"I trust the Head would approve of a weportah doin' his duty to his papah and to his public, deah boy."

"It would be ripping if Japp saw that, and came along to explain things to Gussy with a big stick," chuckled Redfern.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Weddy—"

"Somebody ought to send him a copy," said Lawrence.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall certainly send him a copy myself," said D'Arcy loftily. "My wemarks are intended chiefly as a wepwoof to Mr. Japp."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's a rotten number!" said Kerr. "If you can't do better than this, Tom Merry, you'd better let the editorship be shifted over to the New House."

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wathah; wats, deah boy!"

Figgins & Co. snorted and took their departure. The other editors remained to give Tom Merry their opinion, at great length, of the paper, and of the kind of editorship it was getting.

"We shall have to alter the obituary notice," said Kangaroo thoughtfully. "Died from a bad attack of editing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, clear off!" growled Tom Merry exasperatedly. "What's an editor to do, with his staff all slacking? You're jolly lucky to get a number out at all. And there's some really good stuff in it. I don't know about the report, or the article on Japp's bags, but the leading article and the short story are all right."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Rot from start to finish, bedad!" said Reilly.

"Rubbish!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

"Tosh!"

And, having paid the editor and his chief reporter those kind compliments, the crowd departed from the editorial office.

"Nevah mind, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"It's a jollay wipplin' numbah, and I'm quite satisfied."

Tom Merry laughed.

"So am I," he said. "And the rest can go and eat coke."

"Yaas, wathah! Shall I wead out the west of my article about Japp—"

"There goes the dinner-bell," said Tom Merry hurriedly.

And he fled.

CHAPTER 10.

Kerr's Little Scheme.

"**H**A, ha, ha!" It was Wednesday morning, and the rising-bell had not yet sounded at St. Jim's. But Kerr of the Fourth, who was always an early riser, was sitting up in bed in the Fourth-Form dormitory in the New House, and he had suddenly burst into a roar. Evidently some idea of an extremely comic nature had suddenly smitten Kerr.

Figgins sat up in bed and blinked at him.

"Anything wrong?" he queried.

"Ha, ha! No."

"Tain't rising-bell," said Fatty Wynn sleepily, from the bed on the other side of Kerr's. "Go to sleep, and let a chap snooze."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the row?" called out Redfern. "Choke that duffer, somebody!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's Kerr, and he's gone dotty," said Owen. "I really think he might go dotty somewhere else, and let a chap sleep."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up!" roared Pratt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr tumbled out of bed, and roared with laughter. The other fellows sat up, and regarded him with astonishment and exasperation. The rising-bell began to clang, and completed what Kerr's sudden attack of merriment had begun, and the whole dormitory turned out.

"If you're not off your silly chump," said Figgins crossly, "what's the matter?"

"It's a wheeze, my son!" said Kerr.

"What is it, then?"

"I'll tell you when we go down," grinned Kerr. "It's the catch of the season, and no mistake. Ha, ha, ha!"

And when the chums of the New House went down, Kerr, still chuckling, unfolded his plan in the sunny quadrangle.

"Gussy did me out of my report in the 'Weekly,'" he remarked, as a beginning.

"That's ancient history," said Figgins. "Let's have a run round the quad, before brekker."

"Hold on! I don't mind Gussy collaring the report, as he's such a giddy special reporter, but his article—"

"I think—" began Fatty Wynn.

"Well, what do you think about it, Fatty?"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that! I think we'd better go over to Dame Taggles', and have a snack before brekker."

"Ass! D'Arcy's article—"

"It was a definite article," grinned Figgins.

"Oh!" groaned Fatty Wynn. "Don't you borrow Lowther's rotten puns, Figgy, and spring 'em on us. I say, I'm hungry."

"Look here, are you going to hear the wheeze, or are you not going to hear the wheeze?" roared Kerr.

"Oh, go ahead!"

"Gussy has done an article slating the Mayor of Rycombe, and specially ragging him about his bags."

"Yes. And the ass sent a copy by post to the mayor!" said Figgins. "If he hadn't given it to Blake to post, there might have been a row about it. But I think Blake chucked it into the Ryll."

"Well, somebody else may have sent a copy. Mellish of the Fourth would be bound to. He wouldn't miss a chance of making trouble."

"Well, suppose he has?" said Figgins, mystified. "What about it?"

"The mayor's coming here, that's all."

"Here!" ejaculated Figgins.

Kerr nodded.

"My hat! Gussy will have a good time. But how do you know?"

"I've planned it."

Figgins and Fatty Wynn gazed at their chum in amazement and alarm.

"My word!" said Figgins. "You don't mean to say you've planned to bring old Japp over here, and spring him on Gussy? Dash it all, that's too thick!"

"You saw Jappy at the meeting, when he was on the 'igh-road to ruin," said Kerr, unheeding. "Did you specially notice him?"

"He was a fat little bounder," said Figgins thoughtfully.

"How tall, do you think?"

"I don't know. Not so tall as I am—'bout your size."

"Just so."

"But I don't see—"

"You will in a minute, after I've explained it in words of one syllable!" grunted Kerr.

"Look here, you blessed haggis—"

"Have you forgotten the Amateur Dramatic Society? Have you forgotten my impersonations?" demanded Kerr. "Have you forgotten that I've made-up as Gussy and taken him in before now?"

"Oh!"

"Mr. Japp is just the character!" said Kerr, grinning. "Nature seems to have built him especially for a jape like that. He's short, and he's fat, and he's purple-coloured, and he wears whiskers. What could be better?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will be as easy as rolling off a form for me to make-up as Jappy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And this afternoon, what could be more natural than for Jappy to come over in a frightful rage with a copy of the 'Weekly' in his hand, asking to see Gussy, and threatening an action for libel?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins and Fatty Wynn roared, and Fatty Wynn even forgot for a moment that he was hungry. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence came out of the House, and they stared at the Co.

"What's the matter with you chaps?" demanded Redfern suspiciously. "What little game are you getting up to?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can't you explain, you asses?"

Figgins explained, with tears in his eyes. Redfern & Co. went off into a wild yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, let us help!" sobbed Redfern. "I want to see Gussy's face when Japp comes! Look here, let him bring a writ for libel with him, and hand it to Gussy!"

Figgins gasped.

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"The School House chaps will be in the bluest of blue

funks!" grinned Redfern. "They'll try to get round Jappy and ask him to tea and flatter him. And Jappy can come round in time, and be fed, and make them invite a crowd of New House chaps."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will be the biggest joke of the season on the School House, and they'll stop saying the New House is dead and buried!" grinned Lawrence.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The six heroes of the New House joined hands and executed a triumphant war-dance in the quadrangle. Tom Merry & Co., coming back from a morning trot round the quad, caught sight of them, and paused.

"Hallo! What's the joke?" asked Tom Merry.

"There isn't one," said Redfern calmly. "There are three!"

"Three! What are they?"

"Merry, Manners, and Lowther!"

The New House juniors chuckled, and the Terrible Three glared.

"Excuse us smiling!" said Redfern graciously. "Whenever we see your faces they bring back tender recollections of childhood—the joyous day when first our parents took us to the Zoo—"

The Terrible Three sniffed and walked away.

"We shall have to keep it dark, though," said Kerr. "If the School House bounders were to get a hint of it, Japp the Second would have a warm reception in the School House this afternoon."

"Yes, rather! Let's get in and look out the clobber!" said Lawrence.

In their spare time that morning the juniors looked out the necessary garments for Kerr to wear in the character of Mr. Japp, of Wayland. Kerr had a most extensive wardrobe of theatrical requirements, and it was quite easy to get a suit of clothes closely resembling those of Mr. Horace Japp—baggy trousers and all. And at padding out the figure and making-up the face, Kerr was a past-master.

After dinner that day Figgins & Co. and the New Firm did not go down to the cricket. They were too busy.

CHAPTER 11.

Mr. Japp Looks In.

"I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to play cwicket this afternoon, Tom Mewwy, deah boy," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked thoughtfully, in the passage.

"Why specify this afternoon?" queried Monty Lowther.

And the Terrible Three grinned.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and gave the humorist of the Shell a glance of scorn, which did not appear to disturb Monty Lowther in the least.

"I'm afraid I shall have to cut the cwicket, Tom Mewwy"

"But what's the team to do?" said Manners solemnly.

"You can put Weilly in, in my place. Weilly says they play wonderful cwicket in Belfast, and you can give him a show."

"Well," said Tom Merry, with an air of great consideration, "perhaps the team might survive it, if you didn't play, Gussy. We'll see."

"But what's on this afternoon?" asked Manners.

"Are you going out reporting in shorthand?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have wathah dwopped shorthand lately," said D'Arcy stiffly.

"I find that it is a subject hardly up to my bwain powah. I am goin' to do an article this aftahnnoon for the next number of the 'Weekly.'"

"That will be the Christmas Number, I suppose?" smiggered Gore of the Shell, in passing.

"Oh, rats!" said the editor-in-chief.

"I wegard it as our duty to keep the school magazine up to time," explained D'Arcy, "and as the staff are such wotten slackahs, I am goin' to make sure of always havin' enough weally good stuff in hand."

"That's very thoughtful and considerate of you, Gussy!"

"As a mattah of fact, deah boy, it's my intention to be

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thoughtful and considewate. I'm goin' to do an article on twousahs, for the benefit of the fellows generally. I have been weally disgusted by the carelessness of some of the fellows in the Sixth. I wegard it as a seniah's duty to set a good example to the Lowah Forms, and I weally saw Dawwel yesterday with twousahs baggin' at the knees!"

"Horrid!"

"And Kildare is vewy careless, too! He has had the same stain on his twousahs for three days!"

"Awful—not to say hawful!"

"I think it is vewy pwob. that my article will do a lot of good," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Anyway, I'm goin' to twy. A fellow can but do his best."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So pway do what you can, without me this aftahnnoon, Tom Mewwy. If mattahs go vewy badly, you can call me, and I'll be last man in!"

This offer seemed to throw the Terrible Three into an unaccountable state of hysterics, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sniffed and retired to his study.

From the study window, as he sat down to work, he could see the cricketers going out to the playing-fields.

It was a House match that afternoon, and Tom Merry's eleven was made up without D'Arcy, who usually had a place in it. Figgins's eleven, too, was not inclusive of all the usual members. It was captained by Redfern for once, and Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were absent.

Arthur Augustus had no eyes for those little matters, however.

His thoughts were busy on the subject of his article. D'Arcy was an authority upon clothes, especially upon trousers. To D'Arcy, the crease of a pair of trousers was a matter of high art, and whether they were turned up or not was a question beside which most other questions of the day paled into insignificance.

With a wad of blank foolscap and a pen and an inkpot before him, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy settled down to literary work.

He had been engaged about an hour, when there was a sound of footsteps in the passage. The House was deserted on that bright summer's afternoon, excepting for the swell of St. Jim's, sitting in the study at his literary labours. D'Arcy could not help noticing those footsteps in the silent passage. They were very heavy, as of a fat and heavy man, and as they came closer to his door, he heard a sound of stertorous breathing, as of a fat man who had toiled up the stairs, and was feeling the exertion and the heat of the afternoon very much.

The footsteps stopped at D'Arcy's door.

There was a loud knock.

"Come in!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, patiently resigning himself to an interruption of his literary labours.

The door opened.

Arthur Augustus glanced across at the new-comer, and simply jumped as he saw him.

He was a short, stout gentleman with a purple face, fringed with white whiskers, and dressed in a frock-coat that did not fit well at the shoulders, and trousers that bagged perceptibly at the knees. He had a silk hat in his hand, and a thick, heavy stick under his arm.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "Mistah Japp!"

The visitor tramped heavily into the study, and puffed for breath.

"Ho!" he said. "Huh!"

"Ot, those stairs!"

"Go-go-good - aftahnnoon!"

said D'Arcy.

"Afternoon!" said Mr.

Japp.

"Pway take a seat, my deah sir!" said Arthur Augustus, with one eye on the big stick. "You must be tired if you have walked ovah from Wayland."

"I haven't!" said Mr.

Japp.

"Pway take a seat, sir!"

"Before I take a seat I've got something to say!" said the rich, deep port-wine voice of the Mayor of Wayland.

"And I think you're the young chap I've got to say it to!"

"I'm sure I shall be vewy pleased to heah any remark you would like to make, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "May I take your hat and— and stick, sir?"

"No!"

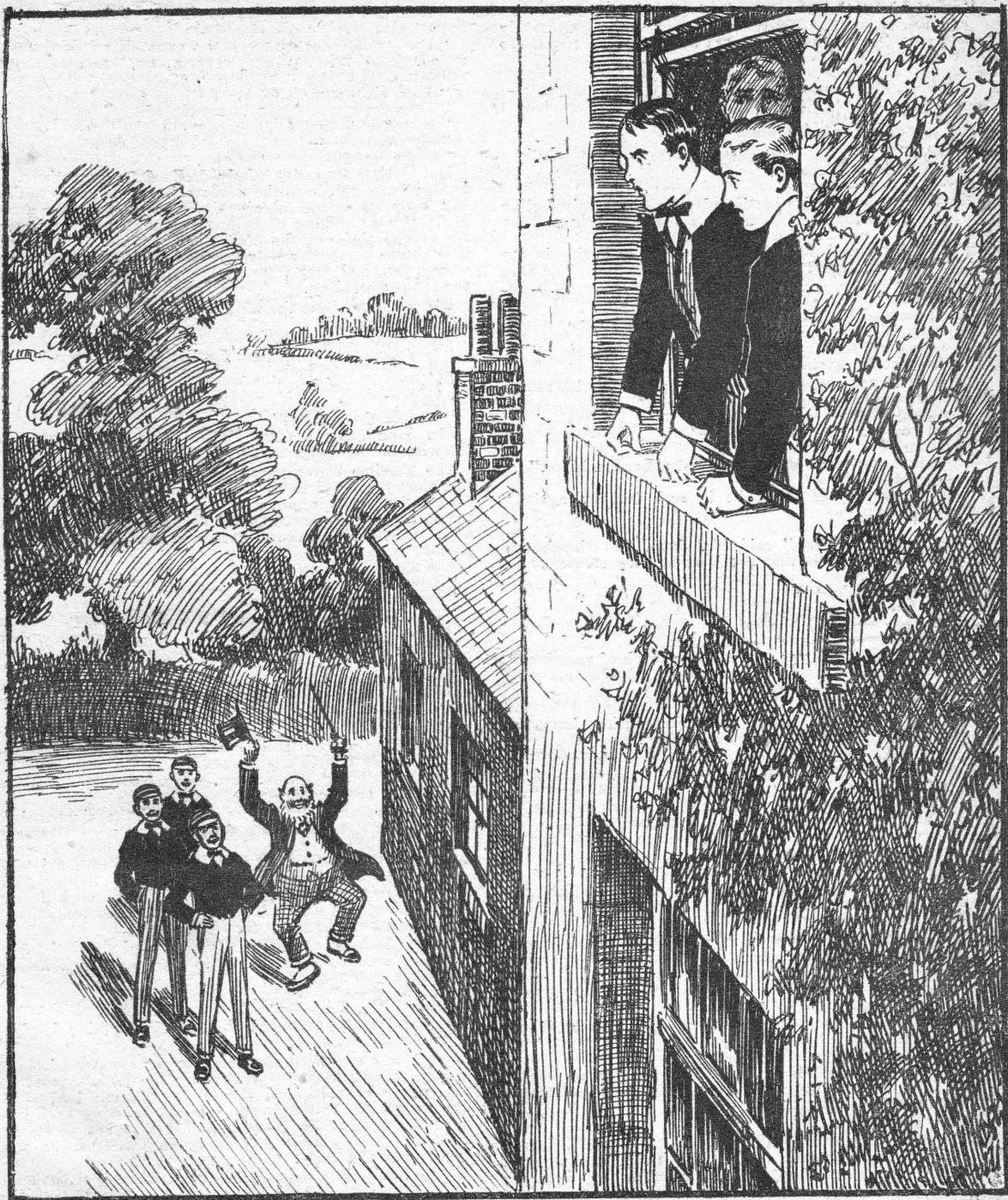
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There was a shout from the quad, outside the window. The juniors looked out, Figgins and Redfern & Co. were standing below with the unspeakable Mr. Japp among them. "Hallo!" said Figgins. "Have you read the writ?" (See chapter 14.)

"Ahem!"
 "My 'at and stick will do very well where they are," said Mr. Japp. "I shall want that stick soon."
 "Oh!"
 "I asked a young gent outside, and he told me the way up," said Mr. Japp. "This 'ere is the School House, ain't it?"
 "Yaas."
 "This 'ere is, No. 6 Study—eh?"
 "Yaas."
 "Then you're Master D'Arcy."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Then you're the feller I want to see."

Mr. Japp groped in the pocket of his coat, and produced that fatal number of "Tom Merry's Weekly."
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gazed at it with startled eyes. He had suspected from the first what his visitor's object was, and now he knew.
 "You see this paper?" exclaimed Mr. Japp.
 "Ya-a-a-as!"
 "I'm mentioned in this paper."
 "We are vevy pleased to mention pwominent public officials in our little papah, sir," said Arthur Augustus, in a faltering voice.
 "Huh!"
 "As a highly respected public official—"

"What about the trousers, sir?" roared Mr. Japp. And he grasped the big stick and advanced threateningly towards Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who retreated round the table in alarm.

CHAPTER 12.

A Terrible Visitor.

"T-T-TWOUSAHS, sir!" gasped D'Arcy.
 "Yes! Trousers!"
 "I—I—"

Mr. Japp rushed in his hostile advance, apparently feeling himself a little too stout to follow a slim junior round the table.

"Yes!" he roared, flourishing the school magazine in the air. "Yes! Trousers! You—I s'pose it was you wrote that article?"

"Ya-a-a-as."
 "You dare admit it to my face, you young villain!"

"Weally, Mr. Japp—"
 "You say 'ere that my trousers bagged at the knees—"
 "It is quite twue, sir."

"That a mayor ought to set an example to his townsmen in dressing carefully at public meetings—"

"Certainly!"

"That you are surprised at me—"

"So I am!"

"And that you recommend me to get a London tailor?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And never appear in public in such trousers again!"

roared Mr. Japp.

"Yaas."

"I've come over 'ere," said Mr. Japp, "to thrash the young fellow who wrote that about me and my trousers."

"Oh!"

"You're the feller—"

"Yaas, but—"

"Come 'ere—"

"My dear sir—"

"I'm goin' to thrash you, sir, within a hinch of your life!"

roared Mr. Japp. "And I've got a writ for libel for you, too!"

"Bai Jove!"

Mr. Japp made a rush round the table. Arthur Augustus dodged round and eluded him again, panting.

Exactly what would have come of a combat between the two was difficult to say. Mr. Japp was fat, but he looked a powerful man, and he had a big stick. But D'Arcy was restricted by the evident impossibility of striking a man three times his age. It would be too awfully bad form to lay violent hands upon a gentleman of middle age, and the mayor of a market town.

"Pway calm yourself, my deah sir!" gasped Arthur Augustus across the table. "I do assuah you that my remarks were meant in a vewy fwriendly spiwit—"

"Come 'ere!"

"I was weally givin' you some valuable tips, you know, on the subject of twousahs, which is weally a vewy important subject—"

"Come 'ere!"

"I wufuse to come there. But—"

Mr. Japp made another rush. Once more the swell of St. Jim's darted round the table.

The fat gentleman paused and breathed hard.

"You young raskil!" he gasped. "I'll learn you! Talking to a man about baggy trousers! Huh! I had those trousers before you were born!"

"Yaas, they look as if you did!" agreed D'Arcy.

D'Arcy's agreeable assent did not seem to please Mr. Japp. He gave another roar, and rushed round the table again, and the elegant junior barely eluded him.

Arthur Augustus glanced at the door. As Mr. Japp was a gentleman of too advanced age to be smitten with the fist there was no disgrace in beating a retreat. But it was quite clear that D'Arcy would not be able to reach the door. Mr. Japp never got far enough from it to give the swell of St. Jim's time to get it open and get away. Now that he paused for breath, he paused between D'Arcy and the door, to make assurance doubly sure.

"You ain't goin' out," he remarked. "You're goin' to take the punishment of your impudence to a gentleman old enough to be your father."

"Gwandfathah, my deah sir," said D'Arcy politely.

"You young raskil!"

"I wufuse to be called a young wascal, and I beg of you to leave my studay immediately," said Arthur Augustus indignantly.

Mr. Japp snorted.

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"You know what's got to 'appen before I go!" he remarked.

"I am willin' to expwess my wegwet if anythin' pwinted in our journal has given you pain, sir," said D'Arcy, on reflection.

"That ain't enough."

"Then really you ought to see the editor."

"Blow the editor!"

"My deah sir—"

"Come 'ere!"

But Arthur Augustus wisely declined to come there. He backed away a little to the window, but stood ready to dodge Mr. Japp round the table again if he should make a rush. D'Arcy was thinking of calling for help, and, fortunately, he caught sight of the Terrible Three near the window. The chums of the Shell had batted first, and their wickets were down, and they were strolling in the quadrangle while the innings went on.

D'Arcy called from the window:

"Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry looked up.

"Hallo, Gussy! Still time for last man in if you like!"

"Pway come up here!"

"Eh?"

"Help!"

"What's the matter?"

Mr. Japp made a rush. Arthur Augustus had to leave the window and dodge round the table again.

The Terrible Three gazed up in surprise at the window, and simply jumped as they caught a glimpse of Mr. Japp's face, as he passed in pursuit of the swell of St. Jim's. From the open study window came the sound of a crash. Evidently some article of furniture had been knocked over in the pursuit.

The Terrible Three gazed at one another.

"Japp!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Jappy!" gasped Manners.

"The Mayor of Wayland!" said Tom Merry. "Ho's come!"

"Poor old Gussy!"

"No wonder he wants help!"

"Let's go up!" said Tom Merry determinedly. "We can't have Gussy slaughtered. After all, he was quite right about Jappy's bags."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Shell hurried into the School House and up to the Fourth Form passage. There was a sound of the loud trampling of feet in Study No. 6 as they approached that famous apartment.

Tom Merry threw open the door, and the chums of the Shell caught sight of Arthur Augustus tearing wildly round the study table, with Mr. Japp after him, brandishing his big stick. He was making lunges and cuts with the stick; but somehow the blows never reached D'Arcy, though really he was within reach half the time. But the stick reached other objects, and all sorts of things had been smitten over and scattered on the study carpet.

"Help, deah boys!" gasped D'Arcy, as he saw the Shell fellows. "Pway hold Mr. Japp! I wathah think he's off his wocker, you know!"

"Mr. Japp—"

"Please, Mr. Japp—"

Mr. Japp paused and eyed the juniors, breathing deeply.

"Well?" he snapped.

Tom Merry cudgelled his brains for some means of placating the incensed Mayor of Wayland. The juniors, certainly, could easily have handled the fat gentleman. But if Mr. Japp complained to the Head, it would be worse than if he licked the swell of St. Jim's with his big stick. And very likely that was what he would do, especially if he were ejected from the study.

It was evidently a moment for diplomacy and sweet words.

Tom Merry worked up a most artistic smile of friendship to his face, and bestowed a deep bow upon Mr. Japp, who stared at him.

"It is very kind of you to come here, Mr. Japp!" he exclaimed.

"Eh?"

"We are very much honoured by receiving a visit from a distinguished public official, sir," said Monty Lowther, taking his cue from Tom Merry.

"Huh!"

"We have felt a little hurt, sir, at your never taking notice of us before," said Manners solemnly. "You have been mayor of Wayland for three terms—I mean for a year now—and you have never given us a look-in."

"Wa felt slighted, sir," said Lowther.

"Bai Jove!"

"We thought that a gentleman in your position, sir, ought to take public schools, and such institutions, under his special

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patronage," explained Lowther. "But now you've come to visit us at last, it's all right."

"All serene."

"We hope you'll let us show you round, sir, and give you some little refreshment," said Tom Merry. "When Lord Eastwood was here, he had tea in the study with us. If you would do the same, sir, we should all feel honoured."

"Very much honoured," said Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy.

Mr. Japp's ferocity died away.

"What about them trousers, though?" he demanded.

"I am sure Lord Eastwood's son will apologise for any injudicious remarks he may have made," said Monty Lowther, with great cunning. Monty Lowther was a very observant youth, and he knew the wonderful power of titles, especially upon persons who never come into contact with the same.

And apparently he had hit the right nail on the head.

Mr. Japp showed a new respect towards D'Arcy all of a sudden.

"Lord Eastwood's son?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; Lord Augustus D'Arcy," said Lowther unblushingly.

"Weally, Lowther—"

"Lord Augustus will apologise, I'm sure," said Tom Merry.

"I wefuse—"

"My lord!" exclaimed the Terrible Three, in one voice.

"I wefuse to be called—"

"Pile in, Gussy!"

"I am quite willin' to apologise to Mr. Japp for any pain I may have given him, and I twust my remarks may have enlightened him on the subject of twousahs—"

"Hear, hear!"

"I'll think about it," said Mr. Japp. "I've got to think of my official position. Look 'ere!" He half-drew a thick, folded blue paper from his pocket. "That's a writ for libel! I come 'ere to serve it personally on Master D'Arcy."

"Oh, you blithering ass! What would the Head say?" murmured Tom Merry to D'Arcy.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I don't want to be 'ard on Lord Augustus," said Mr. Japp thoughtfully.

D'Arcy shuddered. If Mr. Japp had called him the Honourable Augustus, it would have been bad enough; but to make a solecism like that was inexpressibly painful to the swell of St. Jim's. But it was evidently not a time to enlighten the worthy Mayor of Wayland.

"I'll think it over," said Mr. Japp finally; and he thrust the thick blue paper back into his pocket.

The chums of the School House exchanged glances. There was only one thing to do; to butter up Mr. Japp and keep him in a good temper, and gradually edge him out of the school and back to Wayland. And to that delicate and diplomatic task the Terrible Three turned all their attention now.

CHAPTER 13.

A Treat for Figgins & Co.

MR. JAPP did not appear to be implacable.

He confessed that he was fatigued, and felt the heat of the weather, and accepted the arm-chair in Study No. 6 with pleasure.

He had graciously accepted the proposal of tea in the study; and the juniors set about at once getting it ready.

Blake and Digby and Kangaroo were called in to aid, and the matter hurriedly explained to them, and they all realised the seriousness of it.

If that terrible blue paper were served on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and a libel action followed, it was difficult to see what would be the end of it.

The juniors of St. Jim's, naturally, did not know everything about law. Kerr, of the New House, knew something about it certainly, as he knew something about nearly everything; but Kerr was not available for advice just then—for very good reasons. The sight of an official-looking blue paper gave the juniors a painful shock. At all costs that paper must not be served upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; and the only way to keep it in Mr. Japp's pocket was by keeping Mr. Japp in a very good temper.

And that the juniors strove their hardest to do.

Mr. Japp appeared to take very kindly to flattery. He seemed also to like the idea of chatting familiarly with a lord, and so Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was invested with all the honours of the peerage, much to his exasperation. The fact that he was really an Honourable was always dropped into the background by D'Arcy, who had a deep dislike of anything appertaining to "swank;" and to be called a lord, when he was nothing of the sort, exasperated him. He contrived to draw Tom Merry into the passage, to get something to grace the tea-table, and in the passage he expostulated earnestly.

"I won't have it," he said. "It's too wotten, Tom Mewwy!"

You know vevy well that I shouldn't be called Lord Augustus unless I were the son of a marquis or a duke, and you know jolly well that my patah isn't a marquis or a duke."

"Well, he ought to be, then," said Tom Merry. "You can't say that it's my fault that your governor forgot to be a marquis or a duke."

"You uttah ass! It is a feahful solecism to call me a lord. I wemembah I was called a lord when we were travvelling in Amewicah, and I was vevy waxy about it."

"But we've got to keep Jappy happy," urged Tom Merry. "You know how these people love titles. Of course, I agree with you that titles are all rot—"

"Eh?"

"Mere rubbish, of course—"

"You ass! I nevah said titles were wubbish. But the w'ong title—"

"Mere piffle," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "I quite agree with you, Gussy. I know as well as you do, that for a grown-up man to have a silly thing like that to play with is absurd—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"But to keep Jappy happy, and not snappy—"

"I weward you as an ass, Tom Mewwy, and I object—"

"But if we don't keep Jappy happy, he will become a snappy chappy, and—"

"Fathead!"

"So we must keep the chappy happy—"

"I wefuse to entah into a discush if you are goin' to talk in that wiculous way, Tom Mewwy!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "As a matter of fact, you do talk too much, old man."

"I wefuse to be called a lord—"

"I'll make it your grace, if you don't cheese it."

"You uttah duffah—"

"Oh, scat!"

And Tom Merry went back into the study, followed by D'Arcy, and the swell of St. Jim's, under pain of being treated as a duke, had to submit to being called a lord.

Mr. Japp seemed quite to enter into the spirit of the thing. "Your lordship is very kind," he said, as Arthur Augustus offered him the seat of honour at the table. "I thank your lordship."

Arthur Augustus writhed.

"All sewene, deah boy," he said. "I mean, deah sir. Do you like your tea stwong?"

"Half-and-half!" said Mr. Japp absently.

The juniors grinned. Tom Merry poured out the tea. Mr. Japp cast an appreciative eye over the table.

"I think I saw your lordship at the Suffragette meeting at the town-'all?" he remarked thoughtfully.

"Yaas, wathah! I was there as a weportah."

"You had some friends with you?"

"There were some New House fellows there."

"Send for 'em," said Mr. Japp; "as we're all so friendly and 'earty now, let's 'ave 'em all in."

The School House juniors exchanged glances.

"Weally—" murmured D'Arcy.

"I should take it as a very great favour of your lordship."

"Pway, go and look for Figgins & Co., deah boy," said Arthur Augustus to Blake.

"Tell 'em to bring their friends," said Mr. Japp.

"All right," said Blake resignedly.

And he departed from the study.

He returned in about five minutes with quite a crowd. Figgins, and Wynn, and Redfern, and Owen, and Lawrence had, by a lucky chance—perhaps—been standing just outside the School House, chatting together over the cricket, which was nearly finished now. They had accepted Mr. Japp's invitation with alacrity, and they came back with Blake with their company smiles on.

Mr. Japp waved his hand to them.

"Glad to see you, young gents!" he said graciously.

"You was at the meeting?"

"Wynn and I were there, sir," said Figgins. "We heard you make a splendid speech, sir."

Mr. Japp looked gratified.

"I think I knocked them a bit," he said. "I'm agin all these new movements. I don't care what a movement is, or what it's about—I'm agin it! Those are my principles, sir! I stand for the British Constitution and a strong Fleet. I'll 'ave 'am!"

Ham was piled on Mr. Japp's plate.

"Don't seem to be enough chairs for you young gents," said Mr. Japp. "P'raps these young gents won't mind standing?"

Tom Merry & Co. stared.

They had been willing to do anything they could to accommodate Figgins & Co., but to be told to stand while the New House bounders took their seats was, as Blake privately remarked, rather thick.

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But it was necessary, above all, to keep Mr. Japp in a good temper, and Mr. Japp's word was law in Study No. 6 just now.

Tom Merry & Co. relinquished their chairs to Figgins & Co. and the New Firm, who sat down cheerfully in their places.

The School House fellows accommodated themselves as best they could, while the heroes of the New House made themselves very comfortable.

"Jolly good of you fellows to ask us in to meet Mr. Japp!" said Figgins affably.

"Oh, it was Mr. Japp's idea!" grunted Kangaroo.

"Glad to see you all together looking so 'appy and 'earty!" said Mr. Japp.

"It's ripping to have you here, sir!" said Monty Lowther hypocritically.

"Trousers and all!" said Mr. Japp facetiously.

Arthur Augustus turned red.

"Oh, weally, my deah sir—"

Mr. Japp wagged a finger playfully.

"Never mind, my lord!" he said. "Your lordship will have a little joke. We must allow a little licence to the aristocracy, or what would become of the British Constitution? I ain't a believer in this idea of abolishing the 'ouse of Lords. Far from it! I'm proud to shake the 'and of your lordship!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Not that I'd 'ave took you for a lord, if you 'adn't been introduced to me as such!" said Mr. Japp. "But when you come to think of it, wot's the difference between a lord and, say, a waiter?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Now, you'd make a splendid waiter!" said Mr. Japp, with enthusiasm. "You've got the figger for it, and that nice perlite manner, too!"

Arthur Augustus almost fainted.

"More ham, sir?" said Tom Merry, coming to the rescue.

"Thank you, young gentleman! Help my young friend here, too!" said Mr. Japp, jerking a thumb towards Fatty Wynn. "He looks hungry!"

Fatty Wynn looked up from a plate he had cleared at record speed.

"I always get extra hungry in this hot weather," he remarked. "You can't do better than lay a solid foundation. That's what I always say. I'll have some more ham, and some tongue, and pass the mustard, please, and the pepper! And you can give me some of the baked potatoes, and pass the pickles!"

And Fatty Wynn piled in again.

Tom Merry & Co. had expended all their available pocket-money to provide a really tempting feed for Mr. Japp, and the study table was loaded with good things; and the New House juniors had plenty of scope for their gastronomic powers.

And they did full justice to the spread.

The table was cleared at a very good rate, but the School House juniors did not mind that. They only wanted to keep Mr. Japp in a good temper, and to keep that terrible blue paper in his pocket.

Fatty Wynn looked round the table at last, and saw that it was cleared, and sighed, like Alexander, for fresh worlds to conquer.

Mr. Japp rose.

"Thank you, young gentlemen, and especially your lordship, Lord Augustus!" he said.

"Bai Jove!"

"Not at all, sir!" said Monty Lowther. "It's an honour and a pleasure to entertain a gentleman holding a great public office!"

"Quite right," agreed Mr. Japp; "it is!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Perhaps these young gents will walk down to the gates with me," said Mr. Japp, looking at the New House juniors.

"With pleasure, Mr. Japp!" said Redfern.

"What-ho!" said Figgins.

And the New House juniors opened the door, and stood ready.

"We'll all come!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Such a pleasure to see you off, sir!"

Tom Merry gave him a warning glance.

"No; don't you fellows come!" said Mr. Japp. "I've got something 'ere for you! I got this 'ere paper to serve on his lordship!"

And he drew the blue paper from his pocket.

"Oh, sir!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh!"

The School House fellows looked simply sickly as Mr. Japp drew the official-looking blue paper from his pocket, and laid it on the table.

"For his lordship!" he said.

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Then he walked out of the study with the New House juniors. Figgins closed the door. A sound suspiciously like a chuckle came back through the open door; but the dismayed juniors in the study did not notice it. They stood staring at the folded blue paper on the study table in the silence of dismay.

CHAPTER 14.

The Writ.

TOM MERRY was the first to break the painful silence in Study No. 6.

"My hat!" he said.

Blake gave a groan.

"The giddy writ is served, after all!"

"Poor old Gussy!"

"There will be an awful row!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Mean beast!" growled Kangaroo. "After we've fed him up to the chin, and told him nice whoppers about himself, and fed his New House friends, too!"

"It's ungrateful!"

"Caddish!"

"Beastly!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you're in for it now, Gussy!" said Digby. "Why couldn't you let Jappy's bags alone? His bags ain't your business!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass firmly into his eye.

"I wefuse to wecede from my posish!" he said. "A weportah is bound to do his dutay to the Pwess and the public. If he is called upon to state unpleasant twuths, he must state them without feah or favah, and twust to public opinion for the consequences. I decline to admit that I haven't been wight!"

"Ass!"

"How will you look appearing in court in a libel action?" shrieked Blake.

"I twust I shall sustain the dignity of the Pwess!"

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"Chump!"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised by those oppwobious names!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I am willin' to wesign my posish, as special weportah for the 'Weekly,' but so long as I w'ite, I must w'ite accordin' to my conscience!"

"Ass! Fathead! Burler!"

"What will the Head say?"

"We shall have to get round old Japp somehow!"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I wefuse to make any attempt to get wound old Japp, as you expwess it," he said. "I weally considah that I have made too many concessions already. I shall accept this w'it, and appear in court!"

"We might chuck it into the fire," suggested Digby.

"No good! It's served now!"

"Jolly queer proceeding for the man to serve it himself, though!" said Kangaroo thoughtfully. "I don't know much about the law, but I don't think that's usual."

"Well, it's served now!"

"Yaas; and I am goin' to answah it!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, taking up the writ. "I will look at it and see— Gweat Scott!"

He opened the official-looking paper, and stared blankly at it.

His eyeglass dropped from his eye, and fluttered at the end of its cord.

His face was a study.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured faintly.

The juniors looked at him anxiously. It seemed that the writ was of a more serious nature even than they had dreaded.

"What is it?" exclaimed Blake nervously. "I suppose you ain't charged with anything worse than libel?"

"Bai Jove!"

"What does it say?"

"Read it out, ass!"

"Gweat Scott!"

Tom Merry jerked the blue paper from D'Arcy's hand. He looked at it, and then he gave a wild roar.

"Oh! My hat!"

"What is it?" shrieked the juniors.

"Look at it!"

Tom Merry flung the writ upon the table.

The School House juniors crowded round anxiously to look at it. But when they looked, they could hardly believe their eyes. One furious yell arose from all of them.

"Spoofed!"

"Done!"

"Diddled!"

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"Dished!"

For the official look of the blue paper was only on the outside. On the inside it was blank, save for a few lines of writing—the neat, clear caligraphy well-known as that of Kerr, of the New House. And this is what was written:

"Whereas, it is well-known that the New House is cock-house at St. Jim's, and that the School House is simply nowhere, and whereas this well-known fact is disputed by the School House duffers, be it known by these presents that the School House duffers—herein referred to as the Fatheads—are called upon to acknowledge the well-known fact aforesaid, viz., that the New House is cock-house at St. Jim's.

"And whereas, the New House fellows—hereinafter referred to as Figgins & Co.—have taken a great deal of trouble to drive the facts into the silly noddles of the Fatheads aforementioned, the Fatheads are called upon to toe the line, and admit that they have been thoroughly, completely, and entirely done, dished, diddled, and spoofed, and that they are required to sing small in the future.

"Given under our hand and seal,

(Signed) FIGGINS,
KERR.
WYNN."

The heroes of the School House stared at the paper, and stared at one another.

The inscription on the paper was plain enough proof that they had been done; but even yet they could not understand it quite.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who's cock-house at St. Jim's?" roared Figgins.

And Mr. Japp and the rest roared:

"New House! New House!"

"Who's been done brown?"

"School House!" yelled the Co. "School House!"

"Hear us smile!" yelled Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The smile of Figgins & Co. could be heard across the quadrangle.

Tom Merry & Co. breathed fury.

"Come on!" gasped Tom Merry. "Let's get down and smash 'em into little bits before they can get away!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Slaughter the bounders!" yelled Kangaroo.

"Go for 'em!"

The School House juniors left the window and ran for the door. Down in the quadrangle, Figgins & Co. scooted across to the New House, yelling with laughter. Tom Merry dragged at the study door, but it did not come open. The New House juniors had covered their retreat by attaching a cord to the handle outside, and tying it to the handle of the door opposite.

"The door's fastened!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

"Yank it open!"

"Lend me a hand, then—all together!" Tom Merry gasped.

He grasped the handle of the door with both hands, and the juniors lined up behind him and grasped him, and they all tugged together.

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"The New House rotters were in the game all the time, then?" said Tom Merry dazedly.

"They must have got Japp to come over here——"

"Japp was japing us——"

"Extraordinary thing for a man like Japp——"

"I've got it!" shrieked Blake.

"What?"

"It wasn't Japp!"

"Eh?"

"It was that bounder Kerr—you remember, he didn't come in with Figgins and the rest, and I wondered why he didn't! I know now; he was here all the time. It was another of his giddy impersonations!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"My only Aunt Sempronias!"

"The awful spoofer!"

"We've been done!" growled Blake. "It's jolly lucky for Gussy it isn't a real libel action, though."

"Yaas, wathah; but——"

"But we'll make those New House bounders sit up for it!" roared Kangaroo.

There was a shout from the quad. outside the window. The juniors rushed to the window and looked out.

Figgins and Redfern & Co. were standing in the quad. below, and the unspeakable Mr. Japp was among them.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "Have you read the writ?"

"You rotters!" roared Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Redfern.

"It's all right," said Mr. Japp, speaking in Kerr's voice now. "I think you have been pretty well spoofed—eh?"

"I—I— We— Oh——"

There was a snap in the passage as the cord broke, and the door flew open with startling suddenness.

"Ow!"

"Yow!"

"Yah!"

"Gro-o-o-oh!"

A wild heap of juniors, seemingly all arms and legs, struggled on the floor, hurled there by the sudden yielding of the door.

They struggled to their feet, and struggled out of the study, and rushed downstairs, to execute summary vengeance upon Figgins & Co., and especially upon the pretended Mr. Japp. They came out into the quadrangle with a wild whoop, and looked round furiously for victims.

CHAPTER 15.

The Genuine Article.

TAGGLES, the school porter, came out of his lodge, with his hat in his hand, and a very respectful bend in his neck. A stout gentleman had come in at the gates of the school, and Taggles recognised the Mayor of Wayland. The stout gentleman, who was very warm with walking, paused and breathed hard as he saw Taggles.

"'Ot day, sir," said Taggles respectfully.

"'Ot is the word!" said Mr. Japp. "And I've walked! Very 'ot!"

And he fanned his red face with a large pocket-handkerchief.

"I s'pose the Head is in?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you, my man!"

And Mr. Japp—the genuine Mr. Japp—walked into the green quadrangle of St. Jim's, and was grateful for the shade of the old elms.

He paused, curiously, as he heard a wild whoop from the direction of the old School House, and saw a mob of juniors rush suddenly out.

They were Tom Merry & Co., in search of the New House jokers.

Figgins & Co. were gone, and the School House fellows trooped off towards the New House, determined to run the enemy down, even in their lair.

Mr. Japp smiled indulgently.

"Boys will be boys!" he murmured. "Was a boy myself once. Boys will be boys—bless their hearts!"

And with that benevolent sentiment on his lips, Mr. Japp proceeded at a slow and easy pace towards the School House, to call upon the Head.

He had almost reached the School House, and Tom Merry & Co. had almost reached the New House on the other side of the quad., when Monty Lowther glanced round and caught sight of the stout figure.

He gave a yell:

"My hat!—Look!"

The juniors spun round.

They could hardly believe their eyes. They had rushed out to avenge themselves upon the false Mr. Japp, and at the sight of Mr. Japp walking calmly into the School House, under their very eyes, they were astounded. Kerr had escaped from the trap only to put his head into it again deliberately! The juniors stared in blank amazement at the stout figure in the baggy trousers and well-filled frock-coat and shiny topper.

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The check!"

"The nerve!" gasped Tom Merry.

"He's going in again!"

"After him!" roared Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Collar the funny ass!"

And the School House juniors raced back across the quadrangle at top speed, breathing vengeance.

Not for a single instant did the thought cross their minds that the real Mr. Japp had arrived at St. Jim's at that inopportune moment.

They had rushed into the quadrangle to find somebody exactly like Mr. Japp—and here was somebody exactly like him—and that was all they wanted.

They rushed back to overtake him—which was not difficult, for Mr. Japp was walking very slowly—as was natural to a stout, middle-aged gentleman on a hot afternoon.

Figgins & Co., who were looking out of their study window, simply gasped. Kerr had been stripping off his disguise, and emerging his natural self. He joined Figgins and Fatty Wynn at the window.

"Great Scott!" Figgins gasped. "That's the real Japp!"

"The genuine article!" ejaculated Kerr. "Lucky I didn't meet him in the quad."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're after him!" shrieked Redfern. "Look!"

"Great Scott!"

"They're going to collar him—Japp—the real Japp—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There'll be an awful row over this!" gasped Figgins. He jammed up the window, and leaned out, and shouted:

"Hi, hi! Tom Merry! Stop!"

But Tom Merry & Co. were too far off to hear or heed Figgins's well-meant warning.

Mr. Japp had reached the steps of the School House, and was ascending them with due deliberation.

He had just reached the top step when the avengers reached him.

"Collar him!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Grab the boulder!"

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Japp jumped—if he had been a lighter weight, he would have jumped clear of the ground, in his amazement.

Boys would be boys, as he had remarked, but he had never expected boys of St. Jim's to rush upon him in this way, and collar him as if he were a junior schoolboy himself, and ready for any horseplay.

He staggered as the grasp of many hands fell upon him from all sides, and he was dragged over on the steps.

"Ow!" he roared. "'Elp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bump him!"

"'Elp!" shrieked the unhappy Mr. Japp. "They're gone mad! It's hyderphoby! 'Elp!"

He made a terrific effort to wrench himself away, and went staggering into the House with the juniors clinging to him like so many cats.

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Mr. Japp and the juniors went to the floor in a wild and struggling heap.

"Ow! 'Elp!"

"Hold him!"

"Look out for the other bounders; they're not going to rescue him!"

"Wathah not!"

"Hold him tight——"

"Bump him!"

The School House juniors scrambled up, yelling, and colored the amazed and breathless Mayor of Wayland on all sides.

"Bump him!" roared Tom Merry.

They strove to drag the stout gentleman from the floor, to bump him down again, in the approved style of schoolboy punishment.

But Mr. Japp's weight was rather too much for them. Mr. Japp tipped the scale at sixteen stone, and was not easy to handle.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry, in surprise. "That padding must weigh a lot! I wonder he can carry it about in this warm weather."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now, Kerr, you beauty——"

"Pull his whiskers off!"

"Yes, rather—tug away!"

"Yow-w-w-w-w!"

Mr. Japp shrieked with anguish as the juniors strove to pull his whiskers off. Nature had implanted them too firmly for them to be pulled off easily, but the juniors did their best.

"Bai Jove! He must be usin' some awf'ly stwong gum or glue or somethin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "They won't come off!"

"Give 'em another tug."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Bump him—bump him! The New House boulder!"

"Hurrah!"

"Can't bump him!" gasped Kangaroo, perspiring with his wild efforts. "He's too heavy! Roll him along instead!"

"Good egg!"

"Have those whiskers off, and his wig, too!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow! 'Elp!"

"He's still keeping it up!" said Tom Merry, with a roar of laughter. "What's the good of trying to humbug us now, Kerr, you ass! We know who you are!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ow, ow! Stop pullin' my 'air!" shrieked Mr. Japp. "Ow dare you 'andle me like this! Ow! Leggo! I'll 'ave you all prosecuted, you young ruffians! 'Elp!"

"Doesn't he do it well?" said Blake admiringly. "Not that it's any good now, now that we know who he is!"

"Chuck it, Kerr, old man!"

"'Elp!"

"You can put the 'h' in, old chap; you can't expect to make us believe you're Japp!" grinned Blake. "We'll teach you to bring spoof writs here!"

"Yaas, wathah! It threw me into quite a fluttah, you know. Woll the wascal ovah!"

"Yaroooop!"

"Roll him over! Go it!"

"'Elp! Murder! 'Elp!"

A crowd of School House fellows were gathering round. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came in with a cricket-bat under his arm, and regarded the scene in astonishment.

"What on earth——" he began, pushing his way forward.

"It's all right," said Tom Merry.

"Is that Mr. Japp——"

"Ha, ha! No. It's Kerr of the Fourth—he's been spoofing us, pretending to be Japp, you know, and doing us out of a feed in the study. We've caught him!"

Kildare burst into a laugh.

"Ha, ha! He's got up wonderfully well!"

"Yaas, wathah; but we know him, you know."

"Ow! 'Elp!"

"He's still keeping it up!" grinned Manners. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"'Elp! Murder!"

"What is this dreadful noise?" exclaimed Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, coming hastily along the passage. "What—why—what—is that Mr. Japp you are handling in that way?"

"No, sir."

"Not at all, sir!"

"It's only a joke, sir. Kerr of the Fourth, sir, impersonating old Japp!"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Railton. "Kerr should certainly not have done anything of the sort. It is very disrespectful!"

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"Yes, sir; that's what we're bumping him for," said Tom Merry. "He mustn't do these things, sir—it's naughty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow! Oh! 'Elp! Mr. Railton, 'elp! I'm Mr. Japp—ow! I'm the Mayor of Wayland—yow! Oh! I've called to see the 'Ead and these young villains set on me! Yowp!"

Mr. Railton ran forward.

"You have made a mistake, you young rascals!" he exclaimed, in horror. "I know Dr. Holmes was expecting a call from Mr. Japp this afternoon, about the fund for the Wayland Hospital. Let him alone instantly."

"Yes, sir; but it's all right—this is Kerr of the Fourth—"

"He came into our study in that rig, sir—"

"And did us out of a feed, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Stand back!" said Mr. Railton sternly.

The juniors fell back, and the School House master raised the suffering Mr. Japp to his feet. Mr. Japp was crimson and breathless, and almost speechless with rage and fright. He leaned heavily upon Mr. Railton's strong arm, and pumped in breath.

"Ow—ow—ow! Oh! The young raskils! Oh!"

"My dear sir—"

"I'll have 'em prosecuted—I'll have 'em flogged!" gasped Mr. Japp.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Oh, draw it mild, Kerr!" he said. "You'll get an impot. if you play it off on a master, you know! Chuck it, you ass! We've told Mr. Railton who you are!"

"Great Scott!" roared Blake suddenly.

"Eh? What's the matter?"

Blake pointed to the doorway—he was incapable of speech. Figgins & Co. had come tearing across the quad. to explain, and save the School House fellows from bumping so important a personage as the Mayor of Wayland. They had arrived a little too late; but they had arrived.

The School House juniors gazed at Kerr—who was his ordinary self again—in silent horror.

They realised the mistake they had made.

There was Kerr standing there, unmistakably Kerr, and it followed of necessity that the stout gentleman they had been bumping could not possibly be Kerr of the Fourth.

"My only Aunt Maria!" gasped Tom Merry faintly.

"It's Japp!"

"The real Japp!"

"Bai Jove!"

And the juniors gazed in horrified silence at the panting, puffing Mayor of Wayland.

CHAPTER 16.

Quite a Brick.

MR. JAPP puffed and panted and gasped.

It seemed as if he would never be able to pump in a sufficient quantity of breath, in spite of his frantic efforts.

Kildare kindly patted him on the back, but perhaps a little too vigorously, for Mr. Japp gave him a most ungrateful glare.

"Ow! Leave off! Groo!"

"Feel better, sir?" said the captain of St. Jim's anxiously.

"Yow! 'Ands off!"

"I'm so sorry this has happened, Mr. Japp," said Mr. Railton, giving the incensed and breathless mayor the support of his arm. "The boys have made a ridiculous mistake; of course, they would never have done this knowingly."

"Young raskils!" spluttered Mr. Japp. "Ow, ow!"

"Oh, sir," exclaimed Tom Merry penitently, "we hope you'll excuse us, sir! We hadn't the faintest idea it was you, sir."

"Certainly not, deah boy—I mean, deah man—that is to say, deah sir! It was a most wotten mistake."

"We should never have dreamed of bumping a prominent public official, sir," said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"It was all my fault, sir," said Kerr. "I made up like you, sir—you see, sir, I do a lot of acting and impersonations and things, and it's so easy to make up as a man of striking appearance, that it's a temptation to a chap to do it."

"Huh!" said Mr. Japp, apparently not to be won over immediately by what the juniors would have described—in private—as "soft sawder."

"We are weally vewy sowwy, sir; and I wish I had nevah mentioned the twousahs, though, considewin' a weportah's duty to the Pwess and the public, I—"

"Please forgive us, sir!" said Manners.

"Huh!" said Mr. Japp. "So you made up as me, did you, you young rascal?"

Kerr bowed his head in penitence, though there was a twinkle in his eye.

"Yes, sir," he answered penitently; "I did, sir. I know it was an awful cheek on my part, sir."

"I should say it was," said Mr. Japp gruffly. "I should say it was, sir."

"But you see, sir, I—I—I—"

"I'm going to see the Head," said Mr. Japp grimly.

The juniors gazed at him in dismay.

If the dusty and dishevelled Mr. Japp complained of his treatment to the Head of St. Jim's, there was no telling what would come of it. Wild mental visions of floggings and expulsions floated before their eyes.

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Huh!"

"Weally, Mr. Japp—"

"Huh!"

"We're all awfully sorry, sir—"

"Huh!"

"We hope, sir—"

"Show me in to the 'Ead!" said Mr. Japp, in his most stately manner.

"If you please, sir—"

Mr. Japp waved a fat hand.

"Enough!" he exclaimed. "Young raskils! I'm going in to see your headmaster."

And Mr. Japp followed Mr. Railton to the Head's study. A silence of dismay fell upon the juniors crowded in the school hall.

"Well, you've done it now, you young beggars, and no mistake!" said Kildare grimly, as he turned away.

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "We have! All the fault of you silly New House bounders, too! B-r-r-r-r!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kerr chuckled softly.

"Never mind; we took you in all along the line," he grinned. "If Jappy was a sport, he'd say nothing more about it."

"Yaas, wathah; I must say I am surprisid at Japp."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Even a sport might not like being rolled over on the floor, and having his coat rent and topper busted," said Tom Merry dolefully. "He'll pitch it to the Head, and get us all licked."

"We've done it!" groaned Jack Blake. "We're in for it. We shall have to grin and bear it."

"He, he, he!"

That ill-natured cackle came from Mellish of the Fourth. The juniors turned upon him in great exasperation.

"Shut up!" roared Tom Merry.

"He, he, he!" cackled Mellish. "You've put your foot in it now. You'll be sacked, as sure as a gun—and serve you jolly well right. He, he, he!"

Tom Merry & Co. did not answer Mellish in words. They fell upon him, and whirled him off his feet, and rolled him down the School House steps into the quadrangle. Mellish sprawled there, gasping for breath, and wishing sincerely that he had kept his satisfaction a little more to himself.

Then, somewhat relieved in their feelings, the juniors discussed the possibility of getting out of the situation. Figgins & Co. were sympathetic. But there was no doubt that the chums of the School House were "in for it"; and how to escape the consequences of their unfortunate mistake was a puzzle they could not solve.

They crept down the passage towards the Head's study, and waited. From within the study came a faint murmur of voices. Mr. Japp was doubtless expatiating upon his wrongs and manifold injuries to the Head of St. Jim's.

The unhappy juniors wished that it was all over. Why couldn't Japp buck up, and let them be called into the Head's study, and caned, or flogged, or sacked, as the case might be, and have it done with? It was simply cruel to linger it out like this.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at last. "I weally feel as if I cannot stand the stwain any longah. It thwows me into quite a fluttah! I'm jollay well goin' in!"

"Hark! What's that?" exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly.

The juniors pricked up their ears.

A sound had proceeded from the Head's study, through the closed door, and it was a sound suspiciously like a laugh.

The juniors looked at one another blankly.

"Perhaps he's got over it, and sees how funny it is," murmured Blake lugubriously.

"Bai Jove!"

Figgins shook his head.

"No fear!" he said gloomily. "He's chuckling over having us all flogged. Groo!"

"I wegard it as wotten bad taste for Japp to chuckle, undah the circs. Look here, I'm goin' in."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped desperately towards the

door of the Head's study. Just as he reached it, it opened, and Mr. Railton looked out into the passage. Arthur Augustus paused, blinking at the Housemaster.

"Ah! You are here!" said Mr. Railton quietly.

"Ya-a-a-s, sir."

"Come in, all of you—all who were concerned in this outrageous attack upon Mr. Japp!" said the Housemaster.

"Ya-a-s, sir."

"Very well, sir," said Tom Merry heavily.

The juniors filed into the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes was sitting at his desk, with a stern frown upon his brow, though there was a peculiar glimmer in his eyes which the juniors were too much disturbed to notice for the moment.

Mr. Japp stood by the desk, his portly frame very erect, and a magisterial frown upon his purple brow.

"They are here, sir," said Mr. Railton.

The Head nodded.

His stern glance ran over the dismayed juniors, and his lips twitched a little as he noted the dismay in their faces.

"You boys were all concerned in this outrageous proceeding, I understand?" he demanded.

"Ye-es, sir."

"It was all a mistake, sir," said Tom Merry eagerly.

"We mistook Mr. Japp for somebody else, sir—"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"Of course, we respect Mr. Japp far too highly to think of playing a game like that with him, sir," said Monty Lowther.

"I trust so," said the Head. "It appears that one of you has been making up to resemble Mr. Japp."

"Yes, sir," said Kerr. "It was I, sir."

"Mr. Japp has been treated most outrageously," said the Head. "I have decided to allow Mr. Japp to name your punishment."

The juniors gasped.

"Oh, sir!"

"I have the punishment in his hands, and he will say what shall be done!" said the Head sternly.

The juniors looked anxiously at Mr. Japp.

The purple face was so stern, that they entertained little hope of mercy in that quarter. They stood waiting for their doom.

Mr. Japp coughed.

"So one of you young rascals made up as me, did he?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir. You see, it's a temptation to make up as a man of striking figure and imposing appearance, sir, and—"

"No blarney!" said Mr. Japp fiercely.

"Oh!"

"And you rolled me over in mistake for that young villain?" demanded the Mayor of Wayland.

"Yes, sir."

"Yaas, wathah, Mr. Japp! I twust you do not think that we should tweek a gentleman of your yeahs in that diswepctful mannah if we knew?"

"Huh!"

"Undah the cires., sir—"

"Under the circumstances, your headmaster has left the punishment in my hands," said Mr. Japp, in a terrific voice.

"Oh, sir!"

"And I'm going to deliver judgment," said Mr. Japp, a twinkle creeping into his eyes. "I order you—" He paused for a moment, and a shiver of expectancy ran through the juniors. "I order you—to run away and play and say no more about it," said Mr. Japp, bursting into a laugh.

The juniors could hardly believe their ears for a moment. It seemed a little too good to be true. They could only stare blankly at Mr. Japp.

But Mr. Japp's fat and oily laugh and the smiles of the Head and Mr. Railton convinced them.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with enthusiasm. "Bai Jove, sir, you are a bwick, sir, and no mistake!"

"Yes, rather, sir!" said Tom Merry. "You're awfully good, sir! I—I'm afraid we must have hurt you a bit, sir."

Mr. Japp rubbed his elbow and grinned.

"You did," he replied—"so you did! But boys will be boys—bless their 'earts! And I was young myself once. Only don't do it again, you know. At my age I'm too old for that sort of thing. Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors joined in Mr. Japp's merry laugh.

"You may go, boys," said the Head, smiling, "and you may thank Mr. Japp for his very great kindness."

"Yaas, wathah, sir! We're awfl'y obliged to you, Mr. Japp!"

"You're a brick, sir!"

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"Three cheers for Mr. Japp!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

And the juniors, forgetting for the moment that they were within the sacred precincts of the Head's study, gave them with a will.

"Hurrah!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Bravo, sir!"

Mr. Japp smiled.

Then the juniors streamed out of the study with cheerful faces, and they found a crowd of fellows waiting in the passage to hear what had happened. They had heard that ringing cheer, and wondered what it meant. And when Mr. Japp's noble conduct was explained they all agreed that the Mayor of Wayland was a brick.

"We'll give him all the honours!" exclaimed Redfern. "Let's wait for him to come out, and chair him across the quad."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good egg!"

And the juniors waited for Mr. Japp to appear. It was not long before the Mayor of Wayland came down the passage with a benign expression on his face. He smiled at the juniors.

"Good-bye, my lads!" he said.

Tom Merry & Co. made a rush.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Mr. Japp, in alarm. "Hold on! Oh!"

For a moment he thought that his experience at the hands of Tom Merry & Co. was to be repeated. But he was quickly reassured. Half a dozen of the strongest juniors hoisted him up, and he was borne shoulder-high into the quadrangle. Then Mr. Japp smiled again.

They marched him shoulder-high to the gates—no light task, considering the very great weight of Mr. Japp—amid loud and ringing cheers from a swarming concourse.

Mr. Japp was set down, very breathless, but quite pleased, at the gates, and the juniors sent loud cheers after him as the fat little gentleman trotted down the road.

"He's a brick!" said Tom Merry enthusiastically. "And if you say another word about his trousers again, Gussy—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, looking round—"gentlemen and fellow-editors—"

"Hear, hear!"

"I suggest that the special reporter of our paper has overstepped his reporterial duties in making personal allusions to Mr. Japp's bags, and that he should forthwith be bumped."

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally, I— Oh—yah—oh!"

Bump!

"Yawwooh!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he sat, breathless, on the ground while the juniors trooped away, laughing. "Ow! Bai Jove, I wesign my posish, as special weportah on the 'Weekly'! I uttably wefuse to do any more shorthand weports."

And he never did!

THE END.

NEXT THURSDAY.

TOM MERRY'S CONCERT PARTY

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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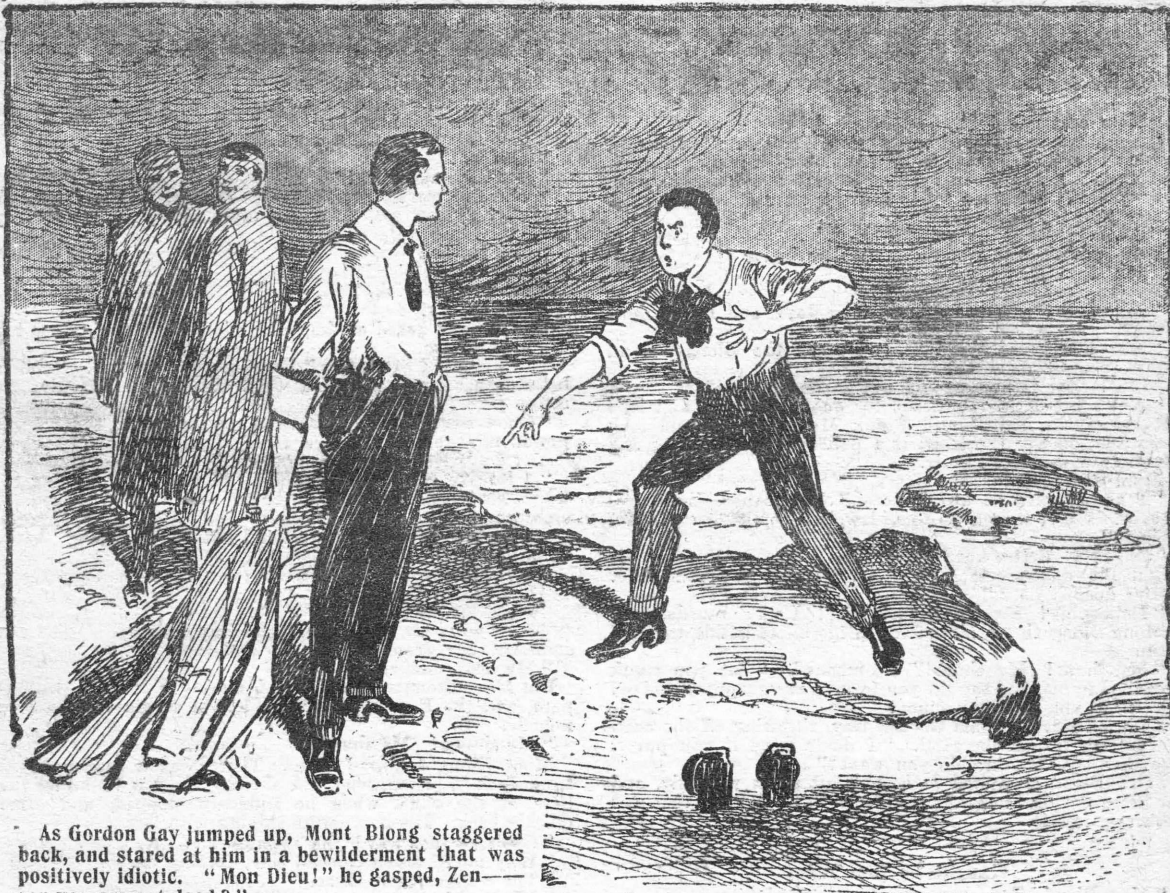
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THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!

A Rousing, New and Original School Story of Gordon Gay, Frank Monk & Co.

By **PROSPER HOWARD.**

EDITORIAL NOTE.—There is no need to see back numbers for this serial. The preceding chapters have been carefully re-written in order to make what has already been told quite clear to new readers!



As Gordon Gay jumped up, Mont Blong staggered back, and stared at him in a bewilderment that was positively idiotic. "Mon Dieu!" he gasped, "Zen—zen you are not dead?"

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO F.I.C.

"The School will assemble in Big Hall at half-past six o'clock. An important announcement will be made.

"(Signed), E. MONK, Headmaster."

The appearance of the above brief notice on the school board is the first hint that the Rylcombe Grammar School receives of the great change in its circumstances that is pending—nothing less than the removal of the whole school into temporary quarters under canvas by the sea, on the Essex coast. Dr. Monk's formal announcement of this step is greeted with the greatest enthusiasm by the entire Grammar School, with the exception of Herr Hentzel, the unpopular German-master, who has, apparently, reasons of his own for objecting. Gordon Gay & Co., and Monk & Co., and indeed the entire Fourth, as the liveliest Form in the school, are particularly excited at the prospect of the change. Just at this time the ranks of the Fourth Form are reinforced by Gustavo Blanc—immediately christened Mont Blong—a new boy from across the Channel. Mont Blong, who attaches himself to

Gordon Gay & Co., is a slim and elegant youth with a peculiar flow of English, but he quickly shows his worth by holding his own with Carker, the bully of the Fourth. Amidst great excitement the Grammarians travel down to their new abode. On their first night under canvas Mont Blong is surprised by the sudden appearance of Herr Hentzel and a German friend, and addresses Gordon Gay in perfect English. Gay is at first dumbfounded, but afterwards accuses the French junior of having deceived the school. Mont Blong challenges the Cornstalk to a duel, which is fought late at night. To the French youth's horror, Gordon Gay appears to fall, shot in the leg, which is apparently forthwith amputated with a chopper. A terrific groan bursts from Gordon Gay as the end of the operation.

"Ciel!" screams Mont Blong, struggling in the grasp of the Co. "You have murdered him! Mon Dieu!"

(Now go on with the story).

Mont Blong shuddered. "It" was evidently Gordon Gay's right leg.

Splash!

The sound as of a heavy stone falling into the sea warned the French junior that the amputated leg had been disposed of.

"How do you feel now, Gay?" he heard Lane ask.

Groan!

The Death of Gordon Gay.

Surrounded by Frank Monk & Co., who held him securely, the French youth could not see what was taking place. But the loud chop of the chopper ringing on the rock told him enough.

"Better get rid of it," said Lane. "Chuck it into the sea."

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NEXT THURSDAY: **"TOM MERRY'S CONCERT PARTY!"** A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Keep your pecker up, you know. I made a beautiful cut at it—came off as clean as a whistle."

Groan!

"Better tie it up now, Wootton."

"Certainly."

Groan!

"Poor old chap! You'll feel better presently. You can have a cork leg, you know," said Lane. "I'll get my pater to send you the name of the firm who will supply you with one at a reduction."

No reply. The groaning had ceased.

"I say, Gay—"

Silence.

"Gay—Gordon Gay."

Chilling silence.

"My only hat!" said Lane. "I haven't been able to save his life, after all. I must say it's a bit rotten of Gay to go and die like this, after I've taken so much trouble."

"Sure he's quite gone?" asked Wootton major.

"Well, look at him."

"Cover something over him," said Wootton, in a hushed tone.

"Your coat will do."

"Might get some blood on it," said Wootton. "Of course, I want to treat poor old Gay's remains with proper respect, but there's no sense in spoiling a coat that's nearly new. Gay wouldn't want me to do it if he were alive, I'm sure. Shove your coat over him."

"Oh, all right, I don't mind."

Lane laid his coat over the motionless junior

Then Mont Blong was released.

He was very pale.

"My shum!" he moaned "He is dead, and I have keel him!"

"The honour of the Bongs—I mean the Blongs—is all right, though," said Frank Monk.

"Ciel! Zat is nozzing! I am ze murderair!"

"Not a bit of it. Buck up, for goodness' sake, and let's get rid of the body," said Frank Monk. "It would look suspicious, to say the least, if a policeman came along and found us with a dead body."

Mont Blong shuddered.

"I navair keep ze awful secret," he moaned—"nevair—nevair! I give myself up to ze law, and zey hang me! Zat is just!"

"Oh, rot! Better keep it dark," said Lane. "Hanging is frightfully uncomfortable, and it spoils a chap's necktie. Better keep it dark."

"Impossible! My dear shum! Ciel! I am ze murderair!"

Mont Blong threw himself upon his knees beside the still form.

"My shum! My shum!" he moaned "Zat you speak vun vord to me, and say zat you forgive ze unhappy Gustave! Speak but vun vord, my shum!"

"Oh, all serene!" said Gordon Gay, throwing off the coat, and sitting up on the sand. "I don't mind if you put it like that. What word do you want?"

Mont Blong staggered back, and sat down violently, and sat there staring at Gordon Gay in a bewilderment that was positively idiotic.

Caught by the Tide.

"Mon Dieu! Zen—zen you are not dead!"

Gordon Gay grinned.

"Well, not quite," he said cheerfully. "I'm not a giddy spiritualistic medium, and I can't talk after I'm dead, you know."

"Mon Dieu!"

"If it's all the same to you, I'll go on living a bit longer," said Gordon Gay. "Of course, if you have any objection—"

"Oh, my shum! My shum!"

"Congratulations, old chap!" said Wootton major. "Never saw such a sudden resurrection in all my born days!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ah! It is not a matter of to laugh," said Mont Blong. "I zink zat I have keel my shum, and I am in despair! But he live—he live!"

"All alive and kicking!" said Lane.

"He'll have to kick with only one leg, then," said Frank Monk. "But I dare say Mont Blong will stand you a wooden leg, Gay."

Mont Blong wept.

"Oh, my shum, you have only ze vun leg now! Ciel! Zat I could recall zat vicked shot! My shum! It is I zat have cripple you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We might be able to stick the leg on again, only Wootton has chucked it away," said Lane thoughtfully.

"It is not a matter of to joke, Lane. I am desolate."

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, perhaps it will relieve your mind to know that my leg's all right," grinned Gordon Gay, throwing the coat completely off, and rising to his feet with a yawn.

Mont Blong gasped.

"Vat! You have ze two legs!"

"Yes, always had, from my very infancy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But ze leg zat Wootton throw into ze sea!" shrieked Mont Blong. "Is it zat I am mad or zat I dream viz myself?"

"Oh, you're mad, I think!" said Frank Monk. "Or not exactly mad, but a little cranky in the crumplet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gay! You have not lose ze leg!"

"Doesn't look like it, does it?" said Gay. "This leg's all right. Feel!"

He gave Mont Blong a push with his foot, and the French junior rolled over on the sand.

There was no doubt at all that Gordon Gay's leg was all right.

The French junior staggered to his feet. It dawned upon him at last that he was the victim of a jape, and he glared round at the grinning juniors. They yelled.

"Zen—zen you are not wounded?" he gasped.

"No fear!"

"But—but ze bullet!"

"There wasn't any bullet," explained Frank Monk genially. "You see, these are only toy pistols, and they don't take bullets."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but ze blood!"

"That was red ink."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mont Blong gazed at the yelling juniors, with feelings too deep for words.

"Aftair all, I am please," he said, after a pause. "Zat is better zan zat you are dead, Gay. I zink zat I forgive zis rotten joke."

"Good egg!" said Wootton major, slapping the French junior on the back with a force that made him stagger.

"And don't let's have any more rot."

"I forgive you, my shum," said Mont Blong turning towards his second. "It is better zan zat ze blood is shed. I embrace you."

"No, you don't!" ejaculated Monk, jumping back.

"Hands off—!"

"My shum—"

"Hands off, fathead!"

"Zen I embrace you, Gay!"

"That you jolly well don't," said Gay dodging. "You can embrace your grandfather! Go and eat coke!"

"My dear shums—"

But Mont Blong's dear chums, laughing, ran along the sea-path, and the French junior was left to embrace himself or nobody.

"My shums! My shums!"

Mont Blong followed them. There was a sudden shout from Jack Wootton, who was ahead. He was rounding the base of the cliffs, when he suddenly stopped, and came quickly back. His boots were shining with wet.

"Can't go that way!" he exclaimed

"Why not?" asked Gordon Gay, coming up.

"The sea's come in there."

"My hat!"

Gordon Gay peered round the cliff. Where the path lay along the sands to the camp school sea-water was now lapping up to the grey cliffs. The juniors had noticed that the tide was coming in as they came down to the headland, but they had attached no particular importance to it.

But they saw that it was important now. At high water the tide came in right up to the cliffs, and the caverns at their base were flooded, and the sea-path was under water. Their return to the school camp was cut off.

"Phew!" said Frank Monk.

Mont Blong came up panting.

"Vat is ze mattair, my shums?"

Frank Monk pointed to the lapping tide.

"The path's under water!" he cried. "We can't get back this way."

"Mon Dieu!"

"We shall have to go round the other end of the cliffs, up the river, and by the village," said Wootton major, with a low whistle of dismay. "That will take a couple of hours. We shall get in late, and get into a fearful row."

Gordon Gay's face was very grave.

"I only hope it will be nothing worse than that," he said, in a low voice.

"What do you mean?" asked Frank Monk, startled by his look.

"Suppose the tide's up at the other end of the cliffs?"

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"Great Scott!"

"Buck up!" said Lane quickly. "We may have time to pass."

The juniors ran back the way they had come. The great embayment of the cliffs was under water, they knew, at high tide, and the rocks at either end of it stretched far into the sea at flood tide. If the rocks were impassable at the other end, they were shut in there, prisoners of the tide, and their only escape would be by climbing the cliffs. They were too far from the school camp for their voices to be heard if they called for help, and in the darkness of the night there was no chance of a boat coming to their aid.

They dashed along at top speed—silent now, save for the panting of their hurried breath. They knew that the situation was serious now, and that they might be running for life or death.

The sand ground up under their rapid footsteps. Once or twice a slush of water came over their boots, as a wave more advanced than the rest shimmered over the sand at their feet.

The tide was coming in fast now. Gordon Gay was ahead of the others, and he reached the bluff rocks at the northern end of the embayment first. He halted there.

The others came panting up. "We're out of it!" said the Cornstalk junior quietly. "Good heavens!"

The tide was lashing on the rocks. Already there was a depth of several feet where the path had run an hour ago.

"Shut in!" said Frank Monk between his teeth. "My only hat! We shall have to wait here till the tide goes down."

"All night!" said Jack Wootton. "Mon Dieu!"

There was a lapping of water, and a wave soaked them to the knees. They ran up closer to the cliffs, with the lapping, whispering waves behind them.

They drew as close to the base of the precipitous cliffs as they could, and looked at one another with pale faces. Deep and strange murmurs came from the cliffs as the waves boomed in the hollow caverns.

"My hat!" said Frank Monk, in a scared whisper. "The tide comes right up to those cliffs, you know. It will be on us in a few minutes."

Gordon Gay set his teeth.

"We've got to climb."

"I—I don't know this place at all," said Frank, with chattering teeth. "But they say that these cliffs can't be climbed."

"Oh, don't be a giddy Job's comforter!" said Wootton major. "We've got to climb, or else be drowned like rats in a trap! Groo!"

"Mon Dieu! It is all ze fault of me!" groaned Mont Blong.

"Well, come to think of it, it is," said Gordon Gay. "This is the result of your playing the giddy goat, you silly ass!"

"They may search for us in a boat," said Carboy hopefully.

Frank shook his head.

"Not likely. We kept it dark where we were going, you know."

"My aunt! So we did!"

"We've been a set of precious asses!" said Gordon Gay, whose face was very pale now, though there was no fear in it. "This is trouble, and no mistake. Scatter along the cliffs, and look for a place to climb."

"That's all we can do."

"Mon Dieu!"

The juniors scrambled along the base of the cliff, looking for a likely place to climb. But the headland rose rocky and abrupt above their heads, and on all sides slippery rock met their gaze, with seemingly no hold for a seagull. The tide was coming in steadily, and the waters were lapping at their feet now.

White and scared, the juniors gathered together again in the highest spot close to the base of the cliff. They looked seaward. The moon was rising on the sea, and there was a dim glimmer of pale and ghostly light on the wide rolling waters. Far out to sea they saw the glittering lights of a ship, many miles away.

With a steady swish-swish the water came rolling in, and it rolled round the juniors, and laved them to the knees as they stood back to the rock.

They listened, in the faint hope of hearing a shout from the land that would tell them that they were searched for, and that help was at hand.

But no sound came to their straining ears, save the ceaseless lapping of the water at their feet.

Gordon Gay turned a haggard glance upon his comrades.

"It's all up!" he muttered. "Unless we can find a way up the cliff we're done for!"

"We've looked," said Frank Monk. "It's no good."

"Mon Dieu!" moaned Mont Blong. "It is all my fault. Forgive me, my shums!"

The juniors were silent. Only the lapping of the waters, as they closed round the cornered chums, broke the silence of the night.

From the Clutch of the Tide.

Slowly, with a dim glimmer of silvery light, the moon came out over the sea.

The light fell upon the black headland and the juniors crouching against the rocks at the foot of it. The sand at their feet was churned up now by the advancing waves, and the water as it dashed rose round their waists.

Gordon Gay & Co. clung to the rocks, shivering in the cold contact of the water as it dashed round them, and the spray as it stung their faces.

Gordon Gay scanned the steep rocks of the headland as the moon came out. It seemed inaccessible from the sea; but unless the juniors could climb, there was but a little time before they must be swallowed up by the incoming tide. Gustave Blanc gave a piteous groan.

"Mon Dieu! And zis is all my fault!"

"Never mind that," said Gordon Gay; "we've got to get out of it somehow. If we could reach a ledge and hang on, out of the tide—"

"But we can't!" said Frank Monk hopelessly. "A fly couldn't climb here!"

"We're done for!" muttered Wootton major.

"We're not done for till we're drowned!" said Gordon Gay grimly. "I'm going to have another try!"

There was but little time left. The water had risen to their waists, and it was coming in fast. The juniors had to cling to the rough surfaces of the rock to avoid being swept away by the swirling waters. Once swept away from the cliff, and they knew what would happen. All of them could swim, but they knew that they would not swim long in that wide flood.

They would be dashed against the rocks by the tide, or carried out to sea; and next day, perhaps, their bodies would be thrown up on the sands within sight of the schoolboy camp.

Gordon Gay felt along the rough cliff with his hands, seeking a hold. But there was none to be found. But suddenly, as he gazed upward, a bright light shone out from the darkness overhead, almost blinding him by its glare. It appeared for a moment, shining out from the darkness of the cliff, and then vanished, and all was dark again.

Gordon Gay rubbed his eyes.

It seemed as if it must have been a trick of his fancy, so amazing was it to see that light shining from the front of the steep cliff towards the sea.

"Did—did you fellows see that?" he exclaimed.

"Oui, oui!"

"Yes," said Frank Monk, in amazement. "It was a light from the top of the cliff!"

"It wasn't from the top of the cliff," said Gordon Gay decidedly. "It was from about half-way up—not more than fifty feet over our heads."

"Well, it looked like it, but it couldn't be. How could anybody be half-way up the cliff?"

"Someone is!" said Gordon Gay.

Jack Wootton drew a quick breath.

"If there's somebody up there, we can get up there, too!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, rather!"

"Suppose we shout for help, and they may send us down a rope."

"Hold on! There's the light again!"

Bright and clear it flashed out from the face of the cliff. This time all the juniors had their eyes turned upward to it, and they saw it clearly. There was no mistake about its position. The light was glaring out midway to the top of the cliff, and it was evidently an electric light.

"There's someone there!"

"What can it be?" muttered Lane.

"It is a signal, my chums!" muttered Mont Blong. "Look! Zat is a signal vich 'ave answer from ze sea!"

"My hat!"

In their amazement and curiosity the juniors almost forgot for the moment the terrible peril that overshadowed them.

From the dimness of the sea came back an answering flash to the light on the cliff.

Then both lights disappeared abruptly, and all was dark again, save for the faint, dim glimmer of the half-hidden moon.

"Zat is a signal from a ship at sea!" muttered Mont Blong. "It is not natural zat zey make zese signals here. Do not call out, my shums!"

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S-CONCERT PARTY!" A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Why not?" asked Monk.

"Because zat would be more dangerous zan to remain quiet!"

"What!"

"Zey are against ze law, zey who make zese signals," said the French junior quietly. "You zink a little, and you know zat!"

The Grammarians were silent in the strangeness of that new thought.

Yet there could be little doubt about it.

What could the signal mean?

"Smuggler, perhaps!" muttered Gordon Gay.

"This is the only place where the signals could be made without being seen," said Frank Monk. "All the rest of the coast along here is low-lying, as far as the Blackwater. Just this headland sticks up, and there's nothing else for miles. And when the tide's in, there's nobody on the seaward side to see the signals made. It's some game! I suppose it must be smugglers, and somebody's up there signalling that the coast is clear, and it's safe to come in."

"But smugglers wouldn't leave us here to drown," said Wootton major. "Let's yell to them!"

"Zat you keep silent!" Mont Blong exclaimed excitedly.

"I tell you zat it is death! Zey are not smugglers!"

"How do you know?"

"Never mind zat, but I do know! Zey are rascals, and if zey know zat we watch zem, zey leave us to die—zey throw down rocks upon us, I zink! I tell you if zey knew we see zem, we never live to tell!"

The juniors stared at the French junior in astonishment. His manner was so earnest that they could not help being impressed by it.

"But we shall be drowned if we stay here," said Carboy.

"Zat we swim," said Mont Blong. "Zere is no way to climb; but up zere, zere must be a cave, or zat signal could not be made. Ven ze vater rise higher, ve get in, if we keep close to ze cliff."

"My hat!" said Gordon Gay. "We can do it! Keep close together, and keep hold of one another, and swim! And keep hold of the cliff!"

"Does the water rise as high as that?" asked Wootton major doubtfully.

"No fear! But a bit higher it's not so steep, and we can climb!"

"Good!" said Wootton, rather doubtfully.

The juniors held to one another, and to the rough, broken surface of the cliff. The water was up to their necks now, and they had to swim. Fortunately, the sea was coming in very calmly. If there had been a rough swell on the sea, they would have been swept away from the cliff, in spite of their efforts. But now there was no danger of that. The water curled round the rocks, lapping them gently, and so long as the juniors could swim they were not in immediate danger.

Gordon Gay had calculated well.

Nine or ten feet above their heads there was a slope in the cliff, and there it would be possible to obtain foothold. Below high-water mark, the cliff was washed smooth by the action of the water, but above it, it was possible to climb.

How high the water went they did not know, but they knew it must go some distance, and if they could swim so long, there was a good chance.

And the sea was coming in very fast. The tide had flooded on far past the headland now on both sides, and its front towards the sea was disappearing inch by inch under the lapping water.

There was no longer sand under the feet of the juniors. They were swimming now, still holding to one another, and some of them clinging to the cliff, as they found fresh hold higher and higher.

Again the light winked and blinked out above their heads, and the juniors knew that the dots and dashes were a part of some signal code which they could not understand.

Perhaps Mont Blong understood, but if he did, he did not say so. The juniors were very silent now. They needed all their strength to save their lives; and they were fearful, too, that their voices might reach the ears of the man on the ledge of the cliff above them.

If he was, indeed, a foe, as Mont Blong declared, it was necessary to keep him in ignorance of their presence there. A loose rock rolled down upon them would have dashed them away from the cliff.

It seemed impossible that there could be a man upon the cliff villain enough for such an act; but the juniors very naturally did not want to run the risk.

Dot and dash in winking lights answered from the sea.

Then the lights vanished, and did not reappear. The signalling, whatever it meant, was done.

In the silence of the night, the juniors heard a faint sound from the cliff above—the sound of a boot grinding upon hard rock.

They understood. The signaller, his work done, had gone

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back from the edge of the cliff-ledge where he had been standing. That was clear enough indication that there was an opening in the cliff—a cavern of some sort.

Higher and higher rose the water.

Gordon Gay muttered an exclamation.

"Look out, you fellows! There's a hold here!"

"Good egg!"

The abrupt rise of the cliffs had been passed, now that the tide was almost at the full, and above the water the rocks were sloping and broken. Further above, as the juniors knew, the abrupt steepness began again; but the flashing light had shown them that there was an opening midway to the top, and into that opening they meant to go. It was impossible to climb to the top of the cliff, and it was hopeless to think of clinging to the rock till morning. Long before morning they would become exhausted and roll into the sea. There was one chance of life—and that chance the flashing of the signal light had revealed to them. If they could get into the cave they were saved.

And whether friend or foe waited above, into the cave they meant to go.

The Hidden Cave!

Gordon Gay led the way.

The rough and broken surface of the cliff at the point to which the Grammarian juniors had been floated by the rising of the tide, afforded hold for hands and feet, steep as it was. The juniors would never have attempted the climb from choice; but they were desperate now. There was hungry death in the waters below, and there was no choice in the matter. Taking their courage in both hands, so to speak, the seven juniors climbed the steep front of the cliff, dragging themselves drenched and dripping from the water. They left the sea lapping hungrily below.

A dozen feet more upwards, slowly and cautiously. Then Gordon Gay muttered a word to his followers.

"I can feel the ledge now," he whispered. "Quiet! If Mont Blong's right, and it's an enemy there, he mustn't hear us."

"Right-ho!" whispered back Monk.

"Oui, oui! Vous avez raison!" murmured Mont Blong.

Gay, reaching his hand above him, could feel a narrow ledge on the face of the cliff. It was nearly flat, but it was not more than eight inches wide at most, and so it was not surprising that it was not noticeable from the shore below. Getting a good grip upon the ledge, the Cornstalk drew himself up upon it, till his feet rested upon it, and he threw his weight against the steep cliff above.

He was on the ledge now, at the level at which the light had been flashed, but at a spot some yards to the left of the signaller's position.

Gay gazed searchingly along the cliff.

He could see nothing.

Dim as the night was, with thick clouds sailing over the moon, Gay could have seen the signaller if the man had been still upon the ledge.

It was certain that the unknown had gone back into an opening of the cliff. If he emerged again he was certain to see the juniors, and if he was indeed an enemy, their position would be one of terrible peril. If there was to be a struggle, it was necessary to get a firm footing in the cave before it commenced.

Gay moved slowly and silently along the ledge, and in another minute Frank Monk had reached it, and stood in the spot where Gay had been standing, holding on to the cliff.

Then he moved along, and Wootton major gained his place. One by one the juniors reached the ledge, with silent caution. In spite of the wetting from the sea-water, the exertion made them warm enough, and they panted for breath.

Gordon Gay, moving cautiously along the ledge, feeling the rock with his hands as he went, reached the expected opening.

A narrow cave, not more than two feet in width, hardly more than a fissure, opened in the face of the headland above the ledge.

Within was dense darkness.

Where was the man who had made the signals? Was he there in the dark? Was he afraid of showing a light in case it should be seen?

Whether the cave was now tenanted or not, it was not necessary to enter. Gordon Gay glanced back at his comrades, clinging to the cliff on the ledge behind.

"Ready?" he whispered.

"Yes!"

"Oui, oui!"

"Come on, then!"

Gay stepped boldly into the cave.

There was no sound, save the slight impact of his wet boot

SHOW YOUR FRIENDS THIS ALL-SCHOOL-STORY NUMBER OF "THE GEM."

upon the rocky floor. Sand ground under his foot, and that was all.

He felt his way cautiously in the darkness, and advanced farther into the cave. The darkness was blinding. He could not see his hand before his face.

In a couple of minutes the rest of the juniors were in the cave with him. Still there was no sound of any other occupant.

"Nobody's here!" whispered Gay at last.

"Then there must be another way out!" muttered Frank Monk.

"Must be!"

"Well, we can get out that way, if that signaller chap can," said Wootton major. "Suppose we strike a light."

"Non, non!" muttered Mont Blong anxiously. "It is not safe."

"Look here," grunted Wootton major, "I don't see how you can know anything about that signalling chap, Mont Blong. If you do know anything, tell us."

"Yes, go ahead, Mont Blong."

"Zat is not possible. But—"

"Well, I'm going to strike a light!" growled Wootton major.

"The matches will be wet, Harry!" said Gordon Gay.

"I've got a waterproof matchbox in my pocket."

"I zink zat you—"

"Oh, cheese it! We've got to see where we are!" said Wootton major, as he fumbled in his wet pockets for the matchbox. "We might tumble down a hole and break our necks."

Scratch!

The flare of a match glimmered through the darkness of the cave.

The juniors looked round them eagerly.

The cave, narrow as it was at its opening in the face of the cliff, widened farther on, and a dozen feet from the juniors it had a width of at least six yards. Farther than that they could not penetrate the gloom, but they could see that the cave extended farther into the rocky headland.

The floor of the cave was very uneven, and there were little pools of water in the hollows of the rock, showing that in stormy weather the water dashed into the cave, high as it was above the tide.

The walls of the cave were rugged and irregular, and there were deep fissures in them, extending on all sides, and great masses of loose rock lay about the cave.

"Plenty of cover here if we had to hide!" said Wootton major.

The next instant he uttered an angry exclamation as Mont Blong leaned towards him and blew his match out.

"You ass! What—" began Wootton, as they were plunged into darkness again.

"Hush! Ze silence!" said Mont Blong, in a voice of agony.

"But I—"

"Silence! Zere is a light!"

"My hat!"

From the deep darkness at the farther end of the cave a light gleamed suddenly. It was at a height of about three or four feet from the cavern floor, and it was moving in an irregular manner. It needed no more to tell the Grammarians that it was carried in a man's hand. It grew clearer to the view every moment, though the lantern it came from was evidently still at a distance.

"That's the chap who made the signals," whispered Gordon Gay.

"He's coming back!"

"Mon Dieu! Zat man must not find us here!" whispered Mont Blong. "Zat you take cover, my shums; zat ve hide."

"Look here, Mont Blong—"

"Take ze cover!" said Mont Blong, in a kind of suppressed shriek. "Take ze cover! It is a matter of ze life or ze death!"

The juniors, startled as they were by the strange situation, shaken by the perils they had passed through, were impressed by the French junior's earnestness. That Mont Blong had a secret Gordon Gay already knew. Was his secret, then, in connection with this mysterious signaller from the cliff? It was possible.

"Yes, get into cover, quick!" Gordon Gay muttered.

The glimpse the juniors had obtained of the interior of the cavern by the light of the match made it easy for them to take cover. They drew back among the big rocks that piled the cavern floor, crouching down out of sight when the light should come by.

The sound of footsteps was now audible in the cavern, echoing with a strange hollowness through the recesses of the cliff.

Closer and closer!

(To be continued next week.)

NEXT THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S CONCERT PARTY!"

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

A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns will be from those readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl, English, Scot, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons. One taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet." Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

All requests should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, 23, Bouverie Street, London, E.C., England."

SECOND LIST.

W. Gee, of 16, Adam Street, Kimberley, S. Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy and a girl reader living in India.

Torahiko Yamawaki, age 40, Domiyoji, Minamikawachi, Oraka, Japan, wishes to correspond with English readers of "The Gem."

S. Sejco, of Orontes, Westbourne Street, Petersham, N.S.W., Australia, would like to correspond with English readers.

Miss E. Cameron and Miss V. Bunce, of Epping, Victoria, Australia, wish to correspond with two boy or girl readers, age about 14 or 15.

G. P. Corbett, Plant Street, Charters Towers, Queensland, Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader about 15 years old.

K. J. Stewart, Edward Street, East Orange, N.S.W., Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy chum in Edinburgh or Glasgow, age about 15.

A. Haslett, of 74, Islington Street, Collingwood, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, would like a girl reader to correspond with him.

W. E. Owen, 199A, Canning Street, Montreal, Canada, age 17, would like to correspond with a girl chum.

A. Hahn, Pumper, care of Locomotive Foreman, South African Railways, Braamfontein, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, about 17 or 18, living in England.

J. A. Siebert, care of Crown Lands Department, Government Offices, King William Street, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to exchange postcards with a boy or girl reader, age 17, living in Edinburgh, Scotland.

F. Lamb, 168, Coventry Street, South Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England.

J. Rogers, Byrie Street, Geelong, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with an English public-school boy, age 16-17.

W. Brown, care of W. Gray, Allwood, Upper Diamond Creek, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl, age 17, living in Scotland.

S. McGuffie, 61, St. George's Terrace, Battery Point, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl, age 14, in England.

D. J. Price, McIsaac Street, Tighes Hill, Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to exchange picture postcards with a boy or girl reader in England.

C. L. Willshire, care of G. H. Willshire, Saddle and Harnessmaker, Millicent, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl, age 17, living in England.

H. S. Pepper, care of T. J. Crisp, blacksmith, Millicent, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl, age 18, in England.

H. Hassett, 105, Harrington Street, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader, age 15-18, with whom he can exchange postage stamps.

J. Allen, 1, Madeira Terrace, Off Holt Street, Surrey Hills, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader, age 15-16, in England.

G. Naldrett, age 20, of Irene, Brooklyn Street, Tempe, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, of the same age, living in the British Isles.

T. Ford, 40, City Road, City, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 17, living in London.

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OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE

**"TOM MERRY'S CONCERT PARTY."**

Under the above title Martin Clifford has written a tale of the chums of St. Jim's for next week, which will compare favourably with any of the previous work which has made this talented author justly famous. The "concert party," which is the subject of this splendid, complete story, adds to the gaiety of St. Jim's considerably, as may be imagined, and the members of Tom Merry's band make up in enthusiasm what they possibly lack in musical ability.

My readers should therefore make no mistake about procuring

"TOM MERRY'S CONCERT PARTY,"

which should be ordered in advance as a measure of precaution.

Cecil Elkington is a Leeds reader, who tells me that one day as he was walking along the street, a lad much bigger than himself came along and said, "Hallo! What are you reading that bloodthirsty book for?"

This rather upset my reader, who objects to THE GEM Library being a "blood," and the result was that they fell to fighting, with the consequence that a man in blue had to separate them.

Now, although I do not approve of fighting, in general, nor the resorting to physical force in order to settle an argument, yet I cannot help admiring the pluck of my reader, who, rather than hear his favourite paper decried, took up arms in its defence; and I think I may dodge the question as to whether he was right or wrong, and simply thank him for his pluck in defending THE GEM Library.

A Shorter Week.

It used to be the complaint on the part of readers that it always seemed a terrible long time to wait from one Thursday to another before the next copy of THE GEM Library came out. Now, however, judging by the letter of H. B., this weary period of waiting from one Thursday to another has disappeared for ever, and the reason of it is that on Tuesday "The Magnet" Library comes out and splits the week into two halves, and makes the period of waiting from one Thursday to another a very pleasant time indeed.

I am very glad to hear such a high opinion of THE Library, and am glad to find that it is filling the gap so efficiently. There are still a few readers of THE GEM, however, who are not yet readers of "The Magnet," and I want these few to come up to the scratch, and buy my companion paper every Tuesday.

Replies in Brief.

F. Knight (Penrith, New South Wales).—Thanks for letter. The characters you mention are still both at St. Jim's, and you may hear more of them at some later date.

"Glasgow Reader" (Glasgow, W.).—Many thanks for your long and very interesting letter, and also for the suggestion you make in it. This I will make a note of, but I will not make any definite promise on the subject. I must also thank you for the help you have given me in gaining new readers for the two popular companion papers.

"A Gemite" (Walworth).—Thank you for your letter, and also for pointing out an error which you found in the pages of THE GEM Library. With regard to your question, I am afraid it is impossible for you to obtain THE GEM Library so much in advance. If, however, you send the address you are going to, with postal-order to cover cost and postage, they will be forwarded on to that address as soon as they are published. This is the best way you can get the books, unless you wait the ordinary course of events, and buy them in Australia when you arrive there.

A. E. C. T. (Bristol).—Thank you for your letter, which I

am sorry has not been answered before. If you take my advice you will leave the stage alone, as this profession is already overcrowded, and unless you have very special talent your chances of success are very remote. Even then you would probably find yourself "resting" a good bit—otherwise, taking an enforced holiday. An actor's expenses are very large compared with other trades, the profits small, and altogether his life is unsatisfactory and extravagant. It would be much better for you to stick to some less exciting but more profitable business. If, however, you really wish to go "on the boards" there are many agencies in London you could apply to.

Note for Swansea.—Will the reader, living in Swansea, who sent a back number of THE GEM to W. Dyson, of 6, Frederick Crescent, North Brixton, London, a few weeks back, accept W. Dyson's best thanks for the same. He is sorry he could not write, but the letter was unfortunately mislaid, and the address lost.

The Care of Cycle Chains.

One part of the bicycle which really needs a lot of care, but which is more often than not absolutely neglected, is the chain. This is an important item in the free and easy running of a machine, for every ounce of power that is transmitted to the road-wheel is through the chain. Naturally, if this is clogged up with dirt and grit the speed of the "bike" will be greatly reduced. Cyclists who use their mounts in all weathers, and who have no gear-case fitted, suffer most, and they should frequently get rid of all dirt and grit by removing the chain and immersing it in a bath of paraffin-oil.

This is best done in a deep dish or tin, and a good method of thoroughly cleaning the chain is to use an old, stiff nail-brush. When it is perfectly clean hang the chain up to dry. There is no need to waste the paraffin, as if the dirt is allowed to settle the oil can be poured off into a bottle, and stored for use on some future occasion.

Now, when the chain is clean, melt in a tin half a pound of tallow, and add two ounces of flaked graphite. If this cannot be obtained, a good substitute is powdered blacklead. When this is well melted, place the chain in the molten mixture, and allow it to soak well. Then, while the graphite grease is still hot and "runny," take the chain out of the pan and allow lubricant to drain off. Then refix the chain on to the machine. If this is done about every four hundred miles, the chain will last much longer and wear much better.

The chain should be kept properly adjusted, and as soon as it becomes worn and stretched, which fact is proclaimed by a series of loud cracks at every downward push, buy a new one. This is much better than having an old one break on the road, and in addition, the use of a worn chain will in time destroy the pitch of the sprocket-teeth, so that even a new chain will not run over them smoothly.

It is a mistake to run a bicycle-chain too loose. For some machines the average chain that is sold is too long, even when the back wheel is adjusted back as far as possible. The remedy for this, of course, is to remove a link or two as required. If you do not feel inclined to remove them yourself, a cycle-repairer will do it for a few pence. However, the way to do it is this. Place the chain in a convenient position, and file the head of the rivet until it is level with the side plate. Then punch the rivet out with a pin-punch, and slide off the links. Be sure not to remove the link that is threaded for the connecting bolt. Examine the remainder of the rivets to see that none are loose. It is advisable to make this examination periodically as the rivets work loose, even in the best of chains, especially after any hard riding. To re-rivet the chain, place it side upwards on a piece of iron, and hammer gently until the head of the rivet is burred securely over.

THE EDITOR.