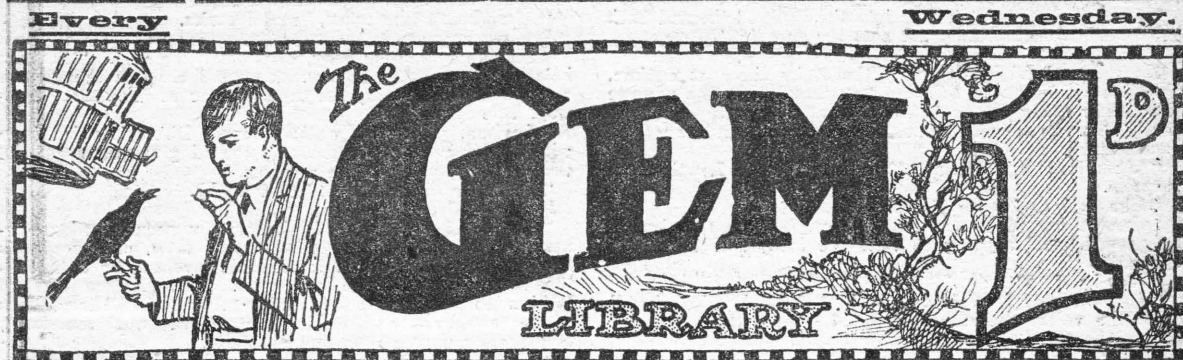


Next Wednesday:
A 27-PAGE TOM MERRY STORY!



Complete Stories for All, and Every Story a Gem.



There is a splendid, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. contained in this week's issue of our companion paper, "The Penny Popular." The title of the story is "The Snobs of St. Jim's," by Martin Clifford, and you should not miss it on any account; so get "The Penny Popular"—out on Friday—and read more about the famous Chums of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 1.
Very Mysterious!

JACK BLAKE came along the Fourth Form passage in the School House at St. Jim's, and turned the handle of the door of Study No. 6. To his surprise, the door did not open. Blake jerked at the handle again, and then kicked vigorously on the lower panels.

"Hallo! Who's in there?" he called out.
 "Weally, Blake!" came the gentle voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, from within the study.

"Open the door, Gussy!"
 "I am sowwy!"
 "Nothing to be sorry about, unless you don't open the door at once," said Blake.

"I am sowwy!"
 "I want my footer!" roared Blake through the keyhole.
 "Herries and Dig are waiting for me. Open the door!"
 "Sowwy!"

Blake kicked at the door again.
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form, who shared that famous apartment with Blake and Herries and Digby, evidently did not want to be disturbed. He had locked himself in Study No. 6, and Blake guessed that

**AT GRIPS WITH
 THE
 GRAMMARIANS!**

A Splendid, New, Long Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's and their rivals of Rylcombe Grammar School.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

he was trying on new waistcoats, or selecting a new tie. He hammered at the door.

"Let me in, you fathead!"
 "Sowwy!"
 "I'll sowwy you!" exclaimed Blake. "If you don't open the door, you, fathead, I'll bump you bald-headed. Let me in!"

"Sowwy, but——"
 Bang! Bang! Bang!
 "Weally, Blake, I wish you would go away. You are throwin' me into quite a fluttah with that feahful wow!"
 "Will you open the door?" said Blake, breathing hard through his nose.

"Impos!"
 "Why, you ass?"
 "I wefuse to be called an ass!"
 "Why can't you open the door?" shrieked Jack Blake.
 "I am twyin' an expewiment."

"Rats! The waistcoats can wait, and the neckties can go and eat coke., Open the door at once, you burbling jabberwock!"
 "I decline to be characterwised as a burblin' jabbahwock, and I wefuse to open the door. I am twyin' an expewiment, and I cannot be bothahed by you youngstals."

Blake snorted.
 "If you don't open this door at once——" he said, in measured tones.
 "Pway go away."

"What experiment are you trying, you ass?"
 "It's a jape on the Gwammawians. I am goin' to make them sit up, deah boy, and give Gordon Gay & Co. the giddy kybosh."
 "Oh, rot!"

Next Wednesday:
A SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE "GEM" CONTAINING A COMPLETE 27-PAGE TOM MERRY STORY.
 No. 263 (New Series), Vol. 7. Copyright in the United States of America.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Are you coming, Blake?" roared the powerful voice of Herries up the stairs.

"The silly ass won't let me into the study!" shouted back Blake. "Come and help me bust the door in."

"Right-ho!"

Herries and Digby came up the stairs three at a time. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came along the passage from their study at the same moment, and paused outside Study No. 6 as they beheld Blake's red and wrathful countenance.

"Wherefore this thushness?" asked Monty Lowther, in surprise.

Blake delivered a terrific kick on the door.

Gussy's locked himself in, and won't open the door!" he gasped. "I'm going to bust the lock, and then bust Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should uttably wufese to be busted, Blake, deah boy," came the voice of Arthur Augustus from within; "and I wegard 'busted' as a vulgah expreshion."

"Open the door!" bawled Blake and Herries and Digby together.

"Sowwy!"

"You're not so sorry as you'll be presently!" roared Blake.

"Weally, deah boy——"

"What on earth is he up to?" exclaimed Tom Merry, laughing. "Blake, old man, you'd better go easy with that row, or you'll have a prefect up here."

"I'll—I'll—I'll——" Words failed Jack Blake, and he could not fully express all the things he would do when the door was once open.

Levison of the Fourth came along the passage. He was grinning.

"Hallo! Trying to get in?" he asked.

"Yes!" growled Blake.

"Who's Gussy got in there with him?" asked Levison.

"Nobody."

"Yes, he has. I saw him at the window," said Levison.

"I saw him at the window—chap with a grey beard and tinted glasses."

"What!"

"It's a fact!"

Blake stooped to the keyhole.

"Gussy, you ass, have you got anybody in there?"

"No, deah boy."

"Oh, what a whopper!" exclaimed Levison, in amazement. "I saw an old chap in there, only two minutes ago. He passed the window, and I was looking up."

There was a chuckle from within the study, and that was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's only rejoinder to Levison's remark.

Blake put his eye to the keyhole, and looked into the study. The keyhole commanded a view of about a third part of the room; and Blake gave a jump as he caught sight of a figure in a frock-coat, with a grey beard and tinted glasses, exactly as Levison had described it. The figure moved out of the line of vision the next moment.

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake.

"What have you seen" asked Manners.

"Chap in there with a beard and glasses."

"What!"

Levison chuckled his disagreeable chuckle. The cad of the Fourth was always pleased in finding anybody out in anything not quite above-board. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had a reputation for truthfulness that completely put in the shade that of the late G. Washington. And yet D'Arcy had stated that there was nobody in the study with him, and Blake had seen a man evidently of middle-age.

Blake was so astonished that he was silent for a full minute.

"Blessed if I understand this," said Tom Merry, equally

amazed. "Gussy said distinctly that there was no one in the study with him."

"Quite distinctly," said Manners.

"Must be off his rocker," said Herries.

Levison sniggered.

"Oh, it's something fishy, of course," he said. "Perhaps he's been borrowing money. That old chap in there looks a bit like old Benson, the moneylender of Wayland. Anyway, he's lying."

"Levison, you uttah wotter," came D'Arcy's voice from within, "if I were out there, I should give you a fearful thwashin' for that wotten wemark."

"Open the door, Gussy!" said Digby.

"Sowwy, deah boy!"

"Gussy old man," said Blake, with unaccustomed gentleness, "open the door, there's a good chap, and we won't bump you." And Blake tapped his forehead as a hint to the others of what he suspected. Prevarication was so foreign to the nature of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, that Blake could only imagine that there was something temporarily wrong with him mentally.

"I should wufese to be bumped, Blake."

"Will you open the door?"

"Sowwy! It's imposs!"

"Must be balmy!" said Monty Lowther. "Better bust in the door, I think; he ought to be taken care of."

"Pway go away, deah boys!"

"Who's that in there with you, Gussy?"

"There is nobody here, deah boy."

"Look here, Gussy, I saw him through the keyhole," said Blake.

A chuckle was the only reply.

"It isn't like you to tell whoppers, Gussy. You must be off your rocker. Now open the door, like a good chap."

"Sowwy! It's imposs! I cannot be bothahed just now."

"I want my footer."

"I will thwow it out of the window to you, if you like."

"I want to come in, Gussy. I'm afraid there's something wrong with you."

Another chuckle.

"Open the door, old fellow!"

"Wats!"

"Well, I'm going in," said Blake determinedly. "We'll bust the lock, and make Gussy pay for a new one."

"Good egg!"

Blake strode along the passage, and dragged back a heavy form. Three or four of the juniors grasped it, to use as a battering-ram. The heavy oaken form crashed upon the lock of the door. The lock was a stout one, but it was not intended to resist attacks of that kind. It flew into pieces, and the door flew open. The juniors dropped the form, and rushed into the study.

"Bai Jove! You wottahs!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice, but Arthur was not to be seen. In the study a gentleman in frock-coat and beard and tinted glasses stood and stared at the intruders, but of the swell of St. Jim's there was no sign in the study. He had vanished apparently into thin air.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Where's Gussy!"

CHAPTER 2.

D'Arcy's Great Jape.

TOM MERRY & CO. stared blankly round Study No. 6. The gentleman in tinted glasses stared at them, and they stared at him.

D'Arcy was not to be seen.

His elegant Etons were lying on the table, his collar and his necktie were on the table, his beautiful boots were on the rug. He had vanished, apparently, leaving his clothes behind him.

For a moment the juniors fancied they were dreaming.

"Where's Gussy?" gasped Blake.

"Gussy!"

"D'Arcy, old man——"

"You uttah asses!"

Then the juniors jumped.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice, and it proceeded from the middle-aged gentleman in glasses.

They understood.

"You—you limb!" said Blake, in great relief. "Blessed if I didn't think there was some giddy magic in it! You fathead!"

"You ass!"

"You chump!"

The juniors regarded D'Arcy in amazement. They observed now that there were many signs in the study that D'Arcy had been "making-up." A box in which supplies for the Junior Dramatic Society were kept was open, and there was a box of grease-paints on the table and several wigs and beards. The middle-aged gentleman before them

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The juniors dropped the battering-ram as the door flew open, and rushed into the study. "Bai Jove, you wottahs!" It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, but he was not to be seen. In the study a gentleman in frock-coat and beard and tinted glasses stood and stared at the intruders. "M-m-m-my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Where's Gussy?" (See Chap 2.)

was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, and now that they looked at him more carefully, they could recognise his features, disguised as he was by the beard and the tinted glasses and by dabs of grease-paint. The grey beard, too, was a little sideways, and its fastenings were distinctly to be seen.

"You—you unutterable ass!" said Blake. "So that is the experiment you were trying?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

It was ludicrous to hear the junior's boyish voice, with its beautiful accent, proceeding from the grave-looking gentleman of middle age.

The juniors could not help grinning.

"I wegard you as twoublesome asses for intewwupting me in this way!" said the swell of the School House. "I had neahly finished my expewiment."

"What is it—a new character in amateur theatricals?" asked Tom Merry.

"Somethin' like that, deah boys. I don't mind tellin' you—but kick that wottah Levison out!"

Levison, of the Fourth, was promptly bundled out of the study. Blake jammed the door shut.

"Now, explain, you image, before we scalp you!" he said.

"I wefuse to be scalped——"

"Explain!" roared Blake.

"It's a jape," said D'Arcy condescendingly—"the jape of the season! I have made the discovery that Mr. Adams, the Fourth Form-mastah of the Gwammah School, has left."

"What on earth——"

"They are expectin' a new mastah at Wylcombe Gwammah School."

"Well?"

"I had it from one of the Gwammawian chaps," D'Arcy explained. "They are expectin' a new Form-mastah—a Mr. Fowlah."

"But what——"

"Don't you tumble?"

"I'll tumble you, if you don't make yourself clear!" growled Blake. "What on earth has a new master at Ryloombe Grammar School got to do with this rot?"

"Oh, he's barmy!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"It's a jape, is it?" said Tom Merry.

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A Magnificent 27-page Complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT WEDNESDAY: "FATTY WYNN: PROFESSIONAL!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And what's the jape?"

"A wegulah sell for the Gwammah cads!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a chuckle. "I have learned that the new mastah is expected to-morrow. Suppose he was to awwive to-day instead?"

"Well, suppose he did?" said Blake.

"Don't you see?"

"See what?"

"The jape, you duffah!"

"Blessed if I do!" said Blake, in bewilderment.

"I suppose you wemembah that Gordon Gay, of the Gwammah School, made himself up as Dr. Holmes, our headmastah once, and palmed himself off on us?" said D'Arcy.

"Yes; he's a jolly good actor," said Tom Merry. "But what—"

"Well, one good turn deserves anothah," said D'Arcy. "I've made myself up as Mr. Fowlah, the new Form-mastah at the Gwammah School, and I'm goin' to palm myself off on the Gwammahians, and give them a wegulah high old time!"

The juniors simply gasped.

Gordon Gay, by his wonderful powers of impersonation, and his still more wonderful powers of sheer cheek, had passed himself off on the St. Jim's fellows as their headmaster on a celebrated occasion.

But that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy should dream of playing the same role was amazing.

In the study the junior had nonplussed his friends for a moment, but only for a moment. At the second or third glance they would have known him. And in the open air his disguise would not have passed muster for a second. And if it had, his unmistakable voice would have given him away at once, immediately he began to speak. They stared at him blankly, in dumbfounded silence. The silence was broken by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's satisfied chuckle.

"What do you think of the wheeze, deah boys?" he asked.

"Oh!" murmured Blake. "Oh, my only Uncle George Peter! Oh!"

"Great Scott!"

"Whew!"

"My word!"

"I'm not surprised that you're surprised!" said D'Arcy loftily. "I think of these things, you know. I'm not supposed to be leadah of this studay, but it requires a chap with some tact and judgment to think of a weally good jape!"

"Oh dear!"

"I shall give the Gwammah cads a wegulah wotten time!" said D'Arcy confidentially. "I shall ordah Gordon Gay & Co. to weck their own studies, and cane them, you know, and give them lines to do, and—"

"You ass!" roared Blake, finding his voice at last.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You frabjous ass—"

"Weally—"

"Do you think you'll take in the Grammarians for a single second?" yelled Blake. "Why, a blind man would know you at once!"

"I wegard you as an ass, Blake?"

"They'll spot you on the spot—"

"Imposs,!"

"There isn't a chap at St. Jim's who won't know who you are as soon as you step outside this study in that rig!" gasped Tom Merry, with tears of merriment rolling down his cheeks.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"It's no good, Gussy!"

"Wats!"

"They'll scalp you, if you go over to the Grammar School like that—"

"Wot!"

"They'll know you immediately—"

"Bosh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. "Let him go! It will be the joke of the season, just as he says—but it will be up against Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you all as asses!" said D'Arcy. "You youngstahs can go and play football, and leave me to finish my bizney. You have intewwupted me!"

"But—but—but you don't really intend to go out of doors like that?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Anybody on the road will see that you're in disguise. Suppose you meet P.-c. Crump; he may take you for a disguised burglar—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He will take me for a Form-mastah," said Arthur

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Augustus D'Arcy, with dignity. "I twust that I am as good an actah as Gordon Gay!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howevah, I shall put it to the test," said D'Arcy. "Before goin' ovah to the Gwammah School, I will dwop into the New House here, and see whethah Figgins & Co. are taken in. If they are taken in, it will be all wight."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"Pway clear out, you cacklin' asses, and don't intewwupt me any more!"

Blake picked up his football.

"Oh, come on!" he gasped. "If he goes over to the New House in that rig, it will be all right. Figgins & Co. will make an example of him, and he won't get as far as the Grammar School. Let's get down to the footer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a set of feahful duffahs! I considah—"

But the juniors did not wait to hear what Arthur Augustus D'Arcy considered. They left the study, and went staggering down the passage, weak with laughter. Arthur Augustus snorted, and closed the door after them, and as the key would no longer hold it, he jammed a chair under the lock. Then he proceeded with his busy preparations for the visit to the Grammar School in the guise of a new Form-master—a visit that was to give Gordon Gay & Co. the "kybosh," and make them hide their diminished heads for ever and ever!

CHAPTER 3.

Not Deceived!

"BUCK up, Fatty!"

Figgins of the Fourth was standing at the open window of his study in the New House at St. Jim's. Kerr was sitting in the armchair, with his feet on the table. Fatty Wynn was at the table, busily engaged in demolishing the last remnants of a pie. Figgins and Kerr were waiting for their chum, but Fatty Wynn seemed to be in no hurry. So long as there was any of the pie left, wild horses could not have dragged the fat Fourth-Former from the study.

"Blessed if I know how you're going to walk after that lot, Fatty," said Kerr. "And it's only a couple of hours since dinner, and you did yourself very well then."

Fatty Wynn looked up from the pie.

"Rot!" he said tersely. "Dinner was very skinny—mutton outlets and vegetables and a pudding. If I hadn't had the foresight to take in some sausages and ham-sandwiches and a saveoly, I should have gone away hungry. And I haven't had anything since, excepting the cold fowl and the cake and the tarts. If we're going to walk to Wayland, it's no good starting out hungry. I've always thought it's a good idea to lay a solid foundation."

"Well, buck up, and lay it," said Kerr. "We don't want to sit here all the afternoon watching you eat."

"No chance of that," said Fatty Wynn, with a sigh. "This is the last thing in the cupboard. But I'll tell you what—suppose we raid the School House instead of going out? Those bounders are down at the footer practice, and we—"

"Rats!" said Figgins. "If you eat any more you won't be able to walk. We're not going to carry you."

"Well, I could do with a cake and some tarts, and I know Blake has—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Figgins suddenly.

He was looking out of the window, and he had caught

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sight of an extraordinary figure approaching the New House. His amazement caused Kerr to join him at the window, but Fatty Wynn continued operations on the pie. Figgins and Kerr stared blankly at the new-comer. They beheld a middle-aged-looking gentleman, with a grey beard and tinted glasses, dressed in a somewhat rusty frock-coat and silk hat. He was approaching the New House, however, with an elegant gait full of youthful verve. And the remarkable thing was that, in spite of the tinted glasses and the beard, the well-known aristocratic features of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were plainly recognisable.

"D'Arcy!" said Kerr.
Figgins nodded.
"Yes, I know it's D'Arcy," he said. "But what on earth is he got up like that for?"
"Theatricals, perhaps," said Kerr.
"Well, chaps don't usually walk out into the quadrangle, got up for amateur theatricals," said Figgins, in amazement.
"They don't, as a rule," agreed Kerr; "though there's no telling what Gussy will do at any time. He's coming here."

"My hat!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, quite unconscious of the fact that he had been seen and recognised from Figgins's study window, disappeared into the porch of the New House.

Figgins and Kerr exchanged glances of astonishment.
"Coming to see us, I suppose," said Figgins.
"I suppose so."
"I'm ready now," said Fatty Wynn, rising from the table.
"That was a jolly good pie, but I wish it had been larger. What are you fellows staring at?"
"Gussy's coming here—"

"Coming to ask us to a feed, perhaps," said Fatty Wynn hopefully. "Look here, let's be civil to him. I don't believe in carrying these blessed House rows too far, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
There was a tap at the door.
"Come in!" sang out Figgins.

The door opened, and the disguised School House junior presented himself. He bowed gracefully to the New House fellows over his silk hat.

"Good-aftahnoon, deah boys!" he said.
"Good-afternoon!" said Figgins.

"I twust you will excuse this intwusion of a stwangah," said D'Arcy.

Figgins & Co. almost choked.
It dawned upon them that the swell of the School House was under the impression that his disguise was so good that it had deceived them as to his identity.

The three New House juniors exchanged a rapid wink. The same thought had occurred to them all at once—to "rot" Arthur Augustus by pretending to be taken in.

"Not at all, sir," said Figgins politely. "Will you take a seat?"

"Thank you, deah boy!"
Arthur Augustus sat down.

"To what do we owe the honour of this visit, sir?" asked Kerr, with elaborate respect. "I suppose you are an uncle of Figgins, or a father of Fatty Wynn?"

"Not at all. As a mattah of fact, my name is Fowlah," explained Arthur Augustus. "I am the new Form-mastah at Wylcombe Gwammah School."

"Pleased to meet you, sir."

"The pleasure is on my side," said Arthur Augustus, with another bow. "I have called in heah before goin' ova—I mean before—in fact—ahem!"

"Exactly, sir!" agreed Figgins.

"Quite lucid," said Kerr.

"Oh, quite!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"As a mattah of fact, deah boys, I undahstand that there have been wows and wags between you and my boys—my boys at the Gwammah School."

"Yes; I fancy there have been some little rags, sir," said Figgins. "I hope you haven't come over to report us to Dr. Holmes, sir."

"Not at all—not at all, Fig—deah boy."

"Thank you very much, sir!"

"Of course," said Kerr, "we must admit that we always got the best of the Grammar cads, sir. There's only one fellow who's always getting the kybosh from Gordon Gay & Co., and he doesn't belong to this House. As a stranger here, I suppose you've never met him—a rather silly ass named D'Arcy."

"Oh!"

"Chap who generally goes about with an eyeglass," explained Kerr. "He's about the limit when you come to really first-rate fatheadedness."

"You uttah wottah—"

"Eh?"

"I—I mean, vewy good," said D'Arcy hastily. "Now, I want to make an appeal to you youngstahs," said the swell of St. Jim's, in the best manner of Dr. Holmes.

"Go ahead, sir!" murmured Figgins.

"I wegard it as wathah wotten that these wags and wows should go on, and I want you to twy to live on bettah terms with my boys."

"Certainly, sir."

"Undah the cirs., I wegard that as a wippin' idea. 'Let dogs deight to bark and bite,' you know, but, children, you should nevah let such angwy passions wise."

"Quite right, sir."

"You speak like an oracle, sir," said Kerr. "Are you going to take charge of the Grammar kids?"

"Yaas, wathah! I'm goin' to take up my dutays there to-day."

"I'm sure Gordon Gay & Co. will give you a ripping welcome, sir. They'll be very glad to see you," said Figgins.

"I twust so." D'Arcy rose to his feet; the interview had proved that his disguise was perfect, and that the New House juniors had not the faintest suspicion of his identity.

"Pway excuse my intwusion."

"Not at all, sir."

"Good-afternoon, deah boys!"

"Good-afternoon, sir!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with another graceful bow, retired from the study.

Figgins & Co. stared at the door as it closed after him. Then they whooped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins sank into a chair and gasped. Kerr wiped his eyes, and Fatty Wynn seemed to be on the vergo of a serious attack of hysterics.

"Oh, my only Aunt Georgiana!" moaned Figgins. "The ass! The duffer! The chump! He thinks he's taken us in with that—that rig! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, he's given me a pain!" groaned Fatty Wynn. "He shouldn't have sprung that on us just after I'd eaten a pie. Oh, dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins ran to the window.

"There he goes!" he gasped.

The New House juniors looked out towards the school gates. There was the disguised Arthur Augustus, as large as life, crossing to the gates. He disappeared from view, and the three juniors of the New House gurgled hysterically.

"He's going to the Grammar School!" said Figgins faintly. "If this won't be the biggest joke of the season—up against the School House, too—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gordon Gay & Co. will be glad to see him, I think!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins wiped his eyes.

"I think we'll take a stroll along to the Grammar School ourselves, instead of going over to Wayland," he said. "Somebody will be wanted to pick up the pieces when the Grammarians have done with him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins & Co. left their study and strolled in the direction of Rylcombe Grammar School, with the benevolent intention of bringing home what remained of the swell of St. Jim's after he had worked his great jape on the Grammarians.

CHAPTER 4.

The New Form-Master.

"HANDS up, or die the death!"

It was Gordon Gay, of the Fourth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School who spoke. He had covered Frank Monk of the Fourth with a ruler, in lieu of a revolver, and Frank Monk promptly held up his hands.

"Lemme see, what do I say next?" said Gay.

"I've got the drop on you, of course," said Tadpole, reading from a scribbled manuscript play.

"I've got to drop on him?" asked Gay.

"No, no! You've got the drop on him."

"Drop of what—water?"

"No, no! With the pistol."

"Oh, I'm to let the pistol drop on him?"

"No, no!" said Tadpole patiently. "Nothing of the sort. In the Rocky Mountains, when you point a pistol at a chap, you've got the drop on him."

"Oh, I see! I've got the drop on you, Monkey."

"That's right," said Tadpole.

"This beats Shakespeare hollow!" said Wootton major. "There's nothing of this sort in old William."

Tadpole nodded.

"Yes; I may say that this is like Bernard Shaw, a little bit better than Shakespeare," he said modestly. "Of course, Shakespeare had his good qualities as a playwright—"

"Go hon!" said Gordon Gay.

"Yes, he had," said Tadpole. "But what is wanted now is something a bit more up to date. 'The Belle of the Prairie' is more up to date. I don't say I'm a first-rate playwright—"

"Wouldn't be much good if you did, Taddy."

"My dear Gay! I don't say so, but others have said so," said Tadpole, with dignity. "My Aunt Gloxiana thinks my plays are splendid!"

"Queer ideas one's relations have about one," murmured Lane.

"My dear Lane—"

"Well, let's get on with the washing," said Gordon Gay. "We've got to rehearse the whole giddy thing this afternoon. Lucky there isn't any Form-master to bother us to-day. I could get on very well without any Form-master at all, for one."

"Same here!"

"Let us proceed," said Tadpole.

"Allons, donc!" said Gustave Blanc, the French boy in the Fourth Form at the Grammar School, generally called Mont Blong by the Grammarians.

The Fourth Form at the Grammar School was crowded with juniors, although it was a half-holiday. It was a grand meeting of the Dramatic Society, of which Gordon Gay, the Australian junior, was president and stage-manager, and nearly everything else. Mr. Adams, the Fourth-Form master, was gone, and his successor had not arrived, and was not expected until the following day. The Fourth-Formers of the Grammar School, therefore, felt entitled to allow themselves some little additional license—and they did. The Form-room was the scene of the play, and the forms had been piled up into a form of a "corral," which was to be attacked by Red Indians, the Red Indians being Frank Monk & Co.

Tadpole of the Fourth had written a play, which he was very anxious to have performed by the junior dramatists, and Gordon Gay had promised to give it a trial. It is possible that Tadpole exaggerated when he declared that it was better than Shakespeare; but it was certainly more to the taste of most of the juniors. It consisted chiefly of shouting, rushing about, yelling, struggling, and uttering dire threats, and the Grammarian juniors felt that it was better than long speeches. Gordon Gay was the handsome cowboy, whose business it was to rescue the Belle of the Prairie from all sorts of deadly dangers, and to fire off a revolver incessantly. He was supposed to charge pretty often upon a fiery mustang, too, but that part of the play had to be left to the imagination. It was not feasible to introduce a steed into the Form-room; besides, fiery mustangs were not to be obtained in Rylcombe for love or money.

"Hands up!" repeated Gordon Gay, keeping the ruler steadily levelled at Frank Monk's head.

"Got 'em up!" said Monk.

"You don't say that," said Tadpole. "You say, 'What does the pale chief want of the dusky son of the prairie?'"

"Oh, good! What does the pale thief want—?"

"The pale chief, you fathead!"

"Right-ho! The pale chief, you fathead—"

"You don't say 'you fathead,' you duffer! You say—"

The Form-room door opened.

"Ahem!"

The Grammarian juniors swung round.

They stared at the new-comer.

At the first glance he appeared to be a middle-aged gentleman, with a grey beard and tinted glasses, and a very respectable if rusty black frock-coat.

At the second glance it was perfectly clear that his beard was false, and that his features belonged to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

The Grammarians glared at him.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Gordon Gay.

"My deah boys—"

"Eh?"

"I am surprised and shocked to find you actin' in this wewpewehensible way!" said the new-comer severely. "Put those forms in their places at once!"

"What?"

"You may not be aware who I am, you young wascals!"

"Yes, we jolly well are!" roared Wootton major.

"I am your new Form-mastah!"

"What?"

"I am Mr Fowlah!"

Gordon Gay sank down on a form faintly.

"You're—you're—you're which?" he gasped.

"I am Mr. Fowlah, your new Form-master!" said D'Arcy severely. "I am shocked to see such conduct in my Form-woom."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Great pip!"

"Pway cease this diswepetful and wibald laughtah at once!" said D'Arcy sternly. "Don't you know it is vewy wude to laugh in the pwesence of your Form-mastah?"

"Our Form-master!" panted Frank Monk. "Oh, this is too rich!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall cane you all severely!" said Mr. Fowler.

"Cane us?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard you as an unwuly set of young wascals!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, still under the blissful impression that his disguise had not been penetrated. "I shall certainly cowcet you vewy severely."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" thundered D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you any ideah whatevah of the wespct due to a Form-mastah?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gay, you are the wingleader. Fetch my cane fwom my desk at once!"

"What?"

"Fetch my cane!"

"Your cane?"

"Mr. Adams's cane. It is my cane now, as you are my pupils. I have already remarked that I am your new Form-mastah."

Gordon Gay staggered to his feet. The Grammarians were in hysterics. That Arthur Augustus D'Arcy imagined that his absurd disguise deceived them for a moment seemed too rich a joke. The Form-room rang with shouts of laughter.

"He—he's rotting!" gasped Frank Monk. "It's a joke!"

"No; he's taking us in," sobbed Gordon Gay.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You wewpewehensible young wascals!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gordon Gay tottered to the Form-master's desk and fetched the cane. He handed it to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The Grammarians stood round almost weeping.

D'Arcy took the cane.

"Now hold out your hand!" he said severely.

"Which hand?" asked Gordon Gay demurely.

"The wight hand."

"They're both white," said Gay, looking at his hands.

"I always keep my hands nice and clean, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't make any wotten jokes, Gay. I have enough of them fwom Monty Lowthah—I—I mean, hold out your hand at once, you wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Gay—"

"Here you are, sir," said Gay.

He held out his hand, and the new Form-master made a swipe at it with the cane. Gay stepped back, and the cane swept downwards and landed upon Arthur Augustus's own leg with a resonating thwack.

There was a yell of anguish from the swell of St. Jim's.

"Ow! Yawwooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwooh! You young wottah! I'll give you a feahful thwashin'! Ow!"

The Grammarians yelled.

"Oh, my only hat!" gasped Gordon Gay. "Gussy, you frabjous ass, do you think we don't know you? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy, you chump!"

"D'Arcy, you burbler!"

"Bai Jove!"

The swell of St. Jim's realised that he was discovered. How, he did not know; but it was evident that he was discovered. He made a rush for the door.

But a crowd of the Grammarians were there before him. "No, you don't!" said Gordon Gay genially. "You've come, and now you're going to stay. Gentlemen, I vote that we show great attention to our new Form-master!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We must show him how glad we are to see him."

ANSWERS

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 263.

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR."
Every Friday.

"Bravo!"

"This beats 'The Belle of the Prairie,'" grinned Frank Monk. "Tadpole, old man, you can put your play in the fire. We're going to play with Gussy."

And the Grammarians formed a ring round the swell of St. Jim's, cutting off his escape on all sides.

CHAPTER 5.

In Deep Disguise.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY felt a little alarmed. He had come to the Grammar School with the blissful conviction that his disguise would impose upon the Grammarians, and that he would jape Gordon Gay & Co. as much as he liked, and have a wondrous tale to tell when he returned to St. Jim's.

The enterprise was evidently not going to work out that way.

"You—you wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus. He took off the tinted glasses, which impeded his vision considerably, and jammed his famous monocle into his eye. "How did you guess?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I pwesume that Tom Mewwy or any of the othahs did not give me away," said D'Arcy. "I have no ideah how you found me out."

The Grammarians shrieked.

"How did we guess?" murmured Gordon Gay.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howevah, I will now wettire—"

"Not just yet," said Gordon Gay blandly. "We've not done with our new Form-master yet."

"No fear!" said Frank Monk emphatically.

"Weally, you wottahs—"

"Collar him!"

"Pway keep off," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I shall handle you watah wuffly if you lay hands on me!"

"He's going to lick the lot of us!" exclaimed Wootton major in alarm. "Hide fane, somebody!"

"Keep off, you boundahs!—Ow—ah—yah—ow!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was collared by a dozen pairs of hands. They yanked him over on a form and sat upon him. The grey beard came off, revealing the well-known features, quite as recognisable as usual, in spite of dabs of paint.

"Poor old Gussy!" said Gordon Gay sympathetically. "Poor old innocent bird, falling into trouble this way! Gussy, old man, the next time you try to pass yourself off as somebody else, I should recommend you to have your voice amputated."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Gay—"

"Gussy has disguised himself so that we shouldn't know him," said Gordon Gay. "One good turn deserves another, so I suggest that we disguise him, so that the other St. Jim's fellows won't know him when he gets back."

"Good egg!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We've got the things all handy," said Gay. "We can spare a little paint and some false hair to make Gussy really presentable."

"Yes, rather!"

"It is ze good idea," grinned Mont Blong, "zat ve stick ze vig and ze viskers on him viz ze glue, so zat zey not come off any more."

"Hooray!"

Arthur Augustus wriggled under the half-dozen Grammarians who were sitting on him and pinning him down on the form by their weight.

"I wefuse to be tweated in such a way!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I am willin' to make it pax!"

"I dare say you are," grinned Gay, "but we're not—just yet. Secotine is a good thing for fastening on whiskers so that they won't come off. There's a tube of it in that box, Carboy."

"Here you are," said Carboy.

"Hold him tight while I disguise him!"

"I wefuse—Ow—ow!"

"Not much good refusing," said Gordon Gay, dabbing the sticky fluid upon the hair of the swell of St. Jim's. "Now give me his beard. He can wear it on the back of his head; it will be just as convincing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now a nice pair of sandy side-whiskers," said Frank Monk.

"And a black pointed beard for his chin."

"And some nice, large red eyebrows."

"Ow—ow—ow—wow!" groaned D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With a liberal use of secotine the hair was fastened upon the swell of St. Jim's. His aspect, with thick red eyebrows, sandy whiskers, and a black beard, was so utterly ludicrous that the Grammarians simply shrieked. The grey beard stuck to his hair added to the curious effect. A few dabs of scarlet paint on his nose and ears enhanced it.

"Now we must give the stuff time to dry, or he'll get it off," said Gay. "Better tie his hands behind him, I think."

"I wefuse to have my hands tied—Ow!"

D'Arcy's hands were tied behind him, in spite of his refusal.

Then he was allowed to slide off the form and stand upon his feet. The Grammarians doubled up as they looked at him.

"That looks ever so much more convincing," said Gay. "You should come to us when you want to be disguised, Gussy. We knew you were D'Arcy the moment you came in, but I'll wager no one will know you now."

"Gwooh! You wottahs!"

"I've got a pair of nigger minstrel striped bags here," went on Gay, looking into his bag of properties. "They've seen plenty of service, and I don't mind giving them away for Gussy's sake."

"Gay, you howwid beast!"

"Shove them on him!"

The striped loose trousers were drawn upon D'Arcy outside his own garments and fastened securely at the waist. The black frock-coat over striped pink trousers had a most extraordinary effect.

"There! Now I think he will do," said Gordon Gay, surveying the victim with great satisfaction. "Now when he goes back to St. Jim's they can't possibly see that he's Gussy, and he can introduce himself as a new Form-master, or a new head-master, or a new fellow escaped from a lunatic asylum."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you uttah wottahs, I can't return to St. Jim's in this state!"

"Bring him along!"

Gordon Gay threw open the door of the Form-room, and the crowd of Grammarians marched Arthur Augustus D'Arcy out, with shouts of laughter. The unhappy swell of St. Jim's was marched into the quadrangle, and there other Grammarians gathered from all sides to see the amazing sight.

"What on earth is that?" exclaimed Delamere, the captain of the school, as he caught sight of the fearsome figure.

"It's D'Arcy of St. Jim's," explained Gordon Gay. "He came over here in disguise, but it wasn't thick enough, so we've finished it for him."

Delamere laughed. The Grammarian juniors marched Arthur Augustus down to the gates and out into the road. There they left him, with his hands still secured behind him, so that it was not possible for him to make any change in his new disguise.

"Good-bye, Gussy!" said Gordon Gay. "Give 'em our kind regards at St. Jim's!"

"You awful wottah—"

"Good-bye, Bluebell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to go in this state! I considah—"

"Pea-shooters to the front," said Gordon. "Give him volleys till he starts. Now then, all together!"

"Ow, wow! You, wottahs! Yow!"

And Arthur Augustus started.

The Grammarians watched him down the road, yelling with laughter, till a bend in the lane hid him from sight, and then they turned back into the gateway, almost weeping.

CHAPTER 6.

The Return of the Japer.

"WH-WH-WHATS that?"

Figgins jumped almost clear of the ground at the sight of the remarkable object in Rylcombe Lane.

"Somebody escaped from a lunatic asylum!" exclaimed Kerr.

"Or the wild man from Borneo!" grinned Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The remarkable object uttered an exclamation of relief at the sight of the three St. Jim's fellows.

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "FATTY WYNN: PROFESSIONAL!"

"Pway untie my hands, deah boys!" said the remarkable object.

"I know that voice," murmured Figgins. "There is only one accent like that in the country. Can it be a revelation of the one and only Gussy?"

"I am Gussy, you ass——"

"Oh! You are Gussy, you ass!"

"I have been tweeked in a gossly diswespectful way by the Gwammah cads," said a voice from the depths of whiskers and beard. "I am feeling wotten!"

"You're looking rather rotten, too!" chuckled Kerr.

"They have stuck these howwid things on me with seccotine, and I'm afwaid they won't come off!" said D'Arcy distressfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to laugh at," said D'Arcy. "I have been japin' the Gwammah cads, but——"

"Looks as if they've been japing you!"

"Yaas, that was how it turned out," said D'Arcy. "Do you wemembah a chap-comin' into your studey this aftahnoon—a new mastah for the Gwammah School?"

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"Well, I was that chap!"

"Go hon!"

"Yaas, it's quite twue; I got myself up like that to jape the Gwammawians, to palm myself off on them as a mastah, you know, as Gay did on us once. As I took you fellows in, I weckoned I could take them in. But it didn't work. Somehow or othah they spotted me."

"Not really?" said Figgins, in astonishment.

"Yaas, weally!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't cackle, deah boys, but untie my hands! I want to get these bags off, even if I can't get the wotten hair and paint off my face!"

Figgins grinned as he untied D'Arcy's hands.

He was tempted to allow the swell of St. Jim's to return to the school in that state but he relented. But untying D'Arcy's hands was all that he could do. The whiskers and the false hair stuck tightly on D'Arcy, would require hot water, and plenty of it, before they came off, and the paint would not be easily removed. Arthur Augustus pulled at the whiskers, and gave a little yelp of pain.

"Ow! They won't come off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, pway shut up!" said D'Arcy crossly. "There is nothin' whatevah to laugh at. I shall feel an awful ass goin' back to St. Jim's like this." He wrenched off the nigger bags and tossed them over a hedge.

"Well, you are an awful ass, you know!"

"It's all your fault, you duffahs!"

"Our fault!" ejaculated Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah! If you had been able to penetwate my disguise, I should not have gone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The yell of laughter from the New House trio let in a light upon D'Arcy's mind. He jammed his eyeglass into the paint round his eye, and glared at Figgins & Co.

"You uttah wottahs!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to say that you were wottin', and that you knew me all the time?"

Figgins & Co. shrieked.

"Bai Jove! I wegard you as wotten wottahs! I wefuse to speak to you! Wun off!"

And Arthur Augustus, with his aristocratic nose very high in the air, tramped away towards St. Jim's. Figgins & Co. followed him, doubled up with merriment.

"Buzz off, you wottahs!" shouted D'Arcy.

"We've going to look after you, Gussy," explained the hilarious Figgins. "Suppose somebody met you and had a fit. Or you might be arrested and taken back to the asylum."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy walked on haughtily, with the New House juniors following in his wake. They did meet somebody; the first was Grimes, the grocer's boy of Rylcombe. Grimes was carrying a basket on his arm, and he dropped it at sight of D'Arcy, and there was an ominous sound of cracking eggs.

"Oh lor!" gasped Grimes. "Wot is it?"

"It's the wild man from Borneo," explained Kerr. "He's going to give a performance at St. Jim's!"

"Oh, my 'at!" said Grimes.

"You wottah, Figgay——"

"Master D'Arcy!" exclaimed Grimes, in astonishment. "I have been tweeked in a gossly diswespectful way, Gwimes——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Grimes. "Ho, ho, ho!"

"Weally, Grimes——"

Grimes sat down on the bank and roared. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave him a withering glance, and stalked on. He met some village boys further along the lane, and they

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greeted him with a yell and began to pelt him. Then he discovered that the escort of Figgins & Co. was valuable after all. Figgins & Co. charged the villagers, and rolled them into the ditch, and marched triumphantly on.

It seemed an age to D'Arcy before he reached the gates of the school; but when he reached them, he began to wish he hadn't. For he was spotted at once, and fellows gathered round on all sides to greet him and stare.

"It can't be Gussy!" gasped Tom Merry.

"More disguised than ever!" remarked Jack Blake.

"Did they spot you, Gussy?"

"How did they guess?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The champion ass really went, after all, then!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "Well, this takes the cake. Gussy, old man——"

"Pway allow me to pass!" said the swell of St. Jim's frigidly. "I wegard you as wottahs!"

"Oh Gussy, Gussy!" said D'Arcy minor—Wally of the Third. "Is this the way you set an example to your minor, as Aunt Adelina told you to do?"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats!"

D'Arcy marched on, and escaped into the School House. He rushed upstairs to a bath-room, and was soon under steaming water, scrubbing away at the paint and the seccotine. He left the juniors yelling.

"Oh, the awful ass, to go over there in that rig!" said Tom Merry, wiping his eyes. "He was going to show himself to Figgins first, or I——"

"He did!" said Figgins.

"Didn't you spot him?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Of course we did! But we wouldn't interfere with a School House jape; that wouldn't be playing the game," grinned Figgins.

"So we let him rip!" said Kerr.

"You bounders!" said Blake wrathfully. "You ought to have stopped him. I've a jolly good mind to dot you on the nose, Figgins!"

"Well, here's my nose!" said Figgins, with a warlike look.

Blake promptly dotted him upon it, and then there was a rush and a row. School House and New House boys mingled in a wild scramble, which lasted till Kildare of the Sixth came out with a cane, and laid it about him impartially. Then the combatants separated. Tom Merry & Co. followed D'Arcy into the School House, and discovered him in the bath-room, mopping his head under steaming water. Most of the paint had come off, and some of the hair, but tufts of it were still clinging lovingly to the head and face of the swell of St. Jim's. D'Arcy turned towards them a face that looked like a freshly-boiled beetroot.

"Ow!" he said breathlessly. "Is it all off?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Not quite!"

"The howwid boundahs stuck it on with seccotine——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway give my head a wub, Blake. I'm exhausted."

"Certainly!" said Blake.

He took the brush and began to scrub. Arthur Augustus gave a wild yell.

"Ow! You silly ass! I didn't tell you to wub my scalp off!" he roared.

"Well, it will want some rubbing, you know——"

"Ow! Leggo!"

"Well, I call that ungrateful," said Blake, releasing his chum's head. "I was doing my best—really putting my beed into it——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Get out, you wottahs; you are as wotten as the Gwammawians! Ow! Gewwout!"

And Arthur Augustus finished his abluitions unaided. He was a long time in the bath-room, but he came down at last with a crimson countenance, and with little tufts of hair still sticking to him, and wherever he went that day he was greeted with prolonged chuckles. And in Study No. 6 that evening he announced that he was not going to waste any more time in putting the Grammar cads in their place, and that he intended to leave Gordon Gay & Co. severely alone, and his chums agreed that he had better.

CHAPTER 7.

A Warm Discussion.

"DEAR me! I am very, very pleased to see this!" Thus Mr. Lathom.

Little Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, was standing before the notice-board in the hall, blinking through his glasses at a paper pinned there. The paper was in the handwriting of Tom Merry, of the Shell, and it ran:

"THE PENNY POPULAR." Every Friday.

Our Companion Papers.

"NOTICE!"

"A meeting will be held in the wood-shed at 5.30 precisely, to discuss the war.

"(Signed) T. MERRY."

Mr. Lathom blinked approval.

"Very good—very good!" he said. "Ah, is that Mr. Railton?" Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was passing, and he paused as the Fourth Form-master spoke to him. "Do you see that Mr. Railton?"

Mr. Railton read the notice, and smiled. "Remarkably intelligent of the juniors, I must say, to take an interest in the Balkan problem," said Mr. Lathom. "Don't you think so?"

"The—Balkan problem!" said Mr. Railton. "Yes. They are holding a meeting to discuss the war," said Mr. Lathom. "I have noticed that Merry, of the Shell, is an unusually intelligent lad. I am very pleased to see the boys taking an interest in world problems."

"Ahem!" said Mr. Railton. "Their knowledge of the subject must necessarily be limited," went on Mr. Lathom. "But knowledge grows by discussion. And I must say that I am pleased, very pleased, indeed, to see the boys taking an interest in such questions, instead of devoting their thoughts wholly to football and games."

"Ahem!"

"Do you not agree with me?"

"Well, yes," said Mr. Railton, smiling. "If this notice refers to the war now going on in South-Eastern Europe, certainly!"

"There is no other war going on that I am aware of," said Mr. Lathom.

"Ahem! No; but—"

"I think it shows a thoughtfulness beyond their years," said Mr. Lathom. "I really think that I might attend the meeting myself, and enlarge their knowledge of the subject with a short address."

Mr. Railton smiled and passed on. He had a suspicion that the war referred to in the notice was nearer home than Adrianople and Thrace.

But Mr. Lathom was feeling very pleased. He repaired to his study and began to look out information on the subject. He was distinctly pleased at the unusual thoughtfulness of junior schoolboys in taking an interest in such a subject. And he thought it an excellent idea to help them get a more thorough grasp of it.

Meanwhile, afternoon lessons being over, a good many fellows might have been seen, as they say in the novels, making their way towards the wood-shed.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were the first, but the chums of Study No. 6 soon followed them, and they were joined by Reilly and Kerruish and Lumley-Lumley, of the Fourth, and Kangaroo and Buck Finn, of the Shell. Then came Figgins & Co., of the New House, and Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, also of the New House. Five or six other juniors dropped in, so that the wood-shed was pretty full by five-thirty precisely.

"Well, we're all here, or nearly all," Tom Merry remarked, glancing over the meeting. "Gentlemen, the meeting is now open!"

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins.

"As chairman of the meeting—"

"Hallo! Who made you chairman?" Redfern, of the Fourth, wanted to know.

"Ass! I called the meeting, didn't I? As chairman of the meeting, I rise to remark that things are getting into a rotten state. The subject of discussion is the war now raging between St. Jim's and Rylcombe Grammar School—"

"Hear, hear!"

"As a rule, we have had the better of it all along the line; we've given the Grammarians the kybosh generally—"

"Hear, hear!"

"But Gordon Gay & Co. never seem to know when they are beaten. And it must be confessed that the grin is up against us now, on account of a rotten wheeze of a Fourth Form kid—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"A rotten School House wheeze, you mean!" said Figgins warmly.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Therefore," said Tom Merry, "it's up to us to come down heavy on the Grammar cads, and let them know what's what!"

"And who's who!" said Blake.

"And which is which!" said Monty Lowther.

"I rise on a point of order," said Redfern, getting up from a heap of faggots. "If Monty Lowther is going to be funny, I move that this meeting be adjourned, or else that the said Monty Lowther goes out on his neck!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Why, you ass—" began Lowther.

"Order!"

"Gentlemen—"

"I say—"

"Look here—"

"Gentlemen, this is no time for recriminations!" said Tom Merry severely. "The honour of the school is trembling in the balance. It's up to us to give the Grammarians the kybosh!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I suggest, therefore, that we put our heads together, and plan a regular campaign. In the first place, the kids must be prepared to back up the Shell, as a Fourth-Former has made such a mess of things—"

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Yaas, wathah; wats!"

Figgins stepped forward.

"I suggest that, as the School House makes a mess of this and everything else, a New House chap be elected as leader, and backed up by all the fellows present," he said.

"Yah!"

"Rats!"

"Go home!"

"Hear, hear!" roared Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

"I second Figgins's motion," said Redfern promptly. "A New House leader is wanted, and I'm quite willing to offer my services—"

"Why, you ass!" exclaimed Figgins. "Who's talking about you? I mean—"

"Now look here, Figgins—"

"Look here, Redfern—"

"I move that Figgins and Redfern go outside to settle their family quarrels!" bawled Blake, of the Fourth.

"Let's get on with the washing!"

"Hear, hear!"

"What I suggest is—" said Figgins.

"Order!"

"Silence for the chairman!"

"Oh, blow the chairman!" said Redfern crossly. "Who made him chairman, anyway? A New House chap ought to be chairman, as representing the cock-house of St. Jim's—"

"Rats!"

"Gentlemen," roared Tom Merry, "I appeal to this meeting to keep order, and to New House kids to shut up and behave themselves—"

"Oh, don't ask impossibilities!" said Monty Lowther.

"Shut up, Lowther!"

"If Lowther's going to be funny—"

"Yaas, wathah; it's weally too thick, Lowthah, you know! We have enough of it in the comic column in the 'Weekly,' you know—"

"Gentlemen—"

"Booh!"

"Things are in a rotten state!" pursued Tom Merry.

"We've had that!" said Lawrence. "Put on a new record!"

"Things are in a rotten state. The Grammarians are cackling at us. Gussy has made an ass of himself, and given them the laugh against our side."

"Well, I agree to that," said Figgins. "Gussy has played the giddy goat, and I do agree that, if there's a bigger ass at St. Jim's than Gussy, I should like to know where to find him!"

"Hear, hear!" yelled Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fatty Wynn's answered your question, Figgins!" said Lowther. "Gentlemen, I move that Fatty Wynn be thanked for the information given!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fathead!" said Fatty Wynn. "What I meant was—"

"Order!"

"Silence for the chair!"

"Rot!" said Figgins. "I came to this meeting to talk business! What I mean by business is, arranging for a New House chap to take the lead. But if you're not going to talk sense, I move that this meeting adjourn!"

"Now, Figgins, you know that that's rot—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gentlemen, I move that all New House duffers be turned out of the meeting!" bawled Herries.

"Hear, hear!"

Figgins pushed back his cuffs.

"Come on, then!" he roared.

"Order!"

"Rats!"

"Dry up!"

"Piffle!"

There was a wild scramble for the wood-shed. The meeting was growing very excited. Three or four School House fellows

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

grasped Figgins, and helped him towards the door. The Co. rushed to the rescue. In a moment more the meeting had turned itself unanimously into a free fight. The din was terrific, and it was at its height when the door of the woodshed opened, and a well-known cough was heard.

"Ahem!"

"Cave!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's Lathom!"

In a moment the struggle ceased. The juniors made instantaneous attempts to appear quite innocent and ordinary in the manner; not with much success, but, fortunately, Mr. Lathom was very short-sighted. He came into the woodshed with an agreeable smile upon his face, and nodded very genially to the juniors.

"Ah, quite a numerous meeting!" he remarked.

"Ye-es, sir," said Tom Merry.

"I have read your notice on the board," explained Mr. Lathom. "I fully approve of the object of this meeting, and I may say that I am very, very pleased to see such a discussion held among the juniors. I wish to contribute my little mite towards the discussion. Pray let the discussion proceed, and pray treat me, my dear lads, as if I were quite one of yourselves."

And Mr. Lathom blinked round at the astounded juniors through his spectacles in the most genial manner.

CHAPTER 8.

A Slight Misapprehension.

A PIN might have been heard to drop in the woodshed. The juniors had supposed that the Form-master had heard the din in the woodshed, and had come to inquire into its cause; and they had seen lines, if not canings, looming ahead.

But the Fourth Form-master was evidently not on the war-path.

He had come to the meeting.

He had read Tom Merry's notice on the board, and was attending the meeting, and fully approved of its object.

No wonder the juniors were astounded.

The warfare with the Grammar School was certainly an important matter—from a junior point of view. The alarms and excursions against the Grammarians occupied a great deal of the thoughts of the St. Jim's juniors. But hitherto interest in the matter had been confined to the juniors. The senior boys regarded the matter with lofty eyes, and did not take part in it.

As for the masters, they were supposed to know hardly anything about it, and to care less. That a Form-master should enter into the struggle between Tom Merry & Co. on one side, and Gordon Gay & Co. on the other, was almost incredible. True, it was just as it should be; but it was extraordinary and unexpected, all the same. No wonder the juniors could hardly believe their ears, and stared at Mr. Lathom as if they fancied they were dreaming.

"My word," murmured Digby, furtively dabbing his nose with his handkerchief, "this must be a giddy dream!"

"There's a mistake somewhere," murmured Lowther.

Mr. Lathom was smiling most genially. He did not seem to see anything extraordinary in his statement.

"You—you have read my notice, sir?" stammered Tom Merry at last.

"Yes, Merry."

"And—and you approve of the object of the meeting, sir?"

"Most decidedly."

"You are very kind, sir."

"Not at all," said Mr. Lathom. "I consider it most gratifying to see junior schoolboys taking an intelligent interest in such things."

"Oh!"

"I think that such a discussion is likely to enlarge the bounds of knowledge," said the Fourth Form-master. "With your permission, I shall make a few remarks."

"Pl-pl-please do, sir," murmured Manners.

"In the first place, to take the matter at the root, and begin at the beginning, which is always a judicious method of proceeding, let us take the cause of the trouble," said Mr. Lathom.

"Ye-es, sir."

"The question arises, was this struggle inevitable?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"We see two rival forces placed in juxtaposition," said Mr. Lathom. "One party may be described as the original inhabitants, the others as practically new-comers."

Mr. Lathom was referring to the Bulgarians and the Turks. The juniors, not unnaturally, supposed that he was referring to St. Jim's and the Grammar School.

"Quite so, sir," said Figgins, "and it was a cheek of the new-comers to stick themselves where they are, at all."

"Yaas, wathah."

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"That is a boyish way of describing it," said Mr. Lathom benevolently; "but undoubtedly there is something in what you say, Figgins. Given, then, these rival parties established close to one another, was an outbreak of hostilities inevitable?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir."

Mr. Lathom nodded.

"Yes, I think we may agree that it was inevitable," he said. "Sooner or later, this struggle was certain to commence."

"Exactly, sir," said Tom Merry, in great wonder. He had rather expected the Form-master to expatiate upon the necessity of keeping the peace; and it was very gratifying to hear him express the opinion that the rows between the Grammar School and St. Jim's could not possibly have been avoided.

"It's jolly good of you to say so, sir," said Blake. "We never expected a Form-master to back us up like this."

"Wathah not."

"My dear Blake, I am always willing to back up my boys in holding a useful and informing discussion. Now, to take the actual state of affairs, matters at present are in something of an impasse. Operations in the open field have come to an end, and the successful party find their enemy too strongly entrenched to be reached."

"Oh, there are ways of gettin' at the wottahs, sir!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I myself—"

"It's a question of getting at them in their own quarters, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, that is it, exactly, Merry."

"That's what I think ought to be done, sir."

"Yes, indeed, if possible."

"That's what we were discussing, sir," said Tom Merry. "Ways and means of getting at the bounders in their own place, and making them sit up."

Mr. Lathom smiled.

"Ah, you are discussing a plan of campaign!" he remarked.

"Yes, sir."

"Very interesting," said Mr. Lathom. "very interesting and instructive. I shall be very pleased to contribute any little knowledge I possess to such a discussion."

"You—you're very good, sir."

"Not at all, Merry. Now, in the first place, it is evident that matters cannot go on as they are."

"Quite so, sir."

"And as it appears to be impossible to establish peace—"

"Oh that's out of the question, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah."

"The question arises, what form the struggle will now assume," said Mr. Lathom.

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"What are your views, Merry?"

"Well, I think that a good leader should be chosen, sir," said Tom Merry, "a chap who is really qualified to take the lead."

"I agree to that," said Figgins. "I think——"

"Yaas, wathah, but——"

Mr. Lathom looked puzzled.

"But the Bulgarians already have a very efficient general," he remarked.

The juniors jumped.

"The—the what, sir?"

"The which?"

"The B-B-Bulgarians, sir!"

"Yes," said Mr. Lathom, surprised. "We were discussing the investing force at present encamped before Constantinople——"

"C-C-C-Constantinople, sir," said Tom Merry feebly.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"The ancient city of the Cæsars can only be invested from the land side," pursued Mr. Lathom.

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"H'm!"

The juniors understood at last. Mr. Lathom had evidently drawn a wrong impression from the notice Tom Merry had posted up on the board.

The juniors looked at one another. Figgins stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth, and Monty Lowther was taken with a violent fit of coughing. Several suppressed gurgles were heard in different parts of the woodshed.

"The present military situation——" went on Mr. Lathom.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Digby," said Mr. Lathom, turning a severe eye upon the Fourth-Former, who had burst out quite involuntarily, "I see no cause for merriment in this discussion."

Digby turned crimson.

"I—I—I beg your pardon, sir," he stammered.

A bell rang in the distance.

"Hallo, that's the tea-bell!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn.



"Give him another dozen as he won't obey my orders!" said Captain Coker to the fags. Swish! Swish! Swish! "Oh!" roared Loder. "Stop it, you young scoundrels! I'll do anything you like!" (An incident taken from the long complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled "CAPTAIN COKER," by Frank Richards. This grand story is contained in the current issue of our popular Companion Paper, "The Magnet" Library, and is one that all "Gem" readers will enjoy. Ask for this week's "Magnet" Library. On sale everywhere.)

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom. "If you juniors wish to go to tea, perhaps the discussion had better be postponed. I—"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Very well; we will resume this most interesting and instructive discussion at another time," said Mr. Lathom benevolently.

And with a genial nod to the juniors he departed.

They waited till he was gone. Then a shriek of laughter rang through the wood-shed, and the meeting collapsed in helpless merriment.

CHAPTER 9.

A Very Polite Invitation.

"**B**AI JOVE! That is certainly vewy polite." Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing in Study No. 6 with a letter in his hand. The letter was in Gordon Gay's handwriting, and the swell of St. Jim's had opened it rather suspiciously; but the contents evidently pleased him.

"Hallo!" said Blake "What has Gay got to say to you? Something about your visit there the other day?"

"Not at all, deah boy."

"Some new jape, I suppose," growled Herries.

"Nothin' of the sort, Herries. Wead it."

Blake and Herries and Digby read the letter. They looked puzzled. It was certainly very polite; but the politeness of the Grammarians made them distrustful. They were like the gentlemen of olden time who feared the Greeks when they came with gifts in their hands. The letter ran:

"Dear D'Arcy,—We are having a rehearsal of our new play this afternoon, and as it's a half-holiday we thought you might like to run over and see us, and you might give us some tips about the acting and costumes. — Shall be very glad to see you.—Always yours, GORDON GAY."

"Wathah sensible of Gay, you know, to ask me for some tips about the actin'," remarked Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "I dare say he knows that I am weally the only good actor in our dwamatic society."

"Yes, he's bound to know that," agreed Blake. "It's common knowledge."

"Yaas, wathah!"

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NEXT WEDNESDAY:

"FATTY WYNN: PROFESSIONAL!"

A Magnificent 27-page Complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"They're going to jape the silly ass when they get him over there," said Herries.

"Weally, Herries."

Blake shook his head.

"No; Gay wouldn't do that," he said. "They won't touch Gussy if he goes over on an invitation. But what on earth does it mean? There's some game on!"

"Weally, Blake."

"There must be," said Digby. "Gay knows that Gussy is as big an ass in acting as in everything else, and—"

"Weally, Dig."

"It's a dodge to get him over there; but what on earth do they want him for?" said Blake, puzzled. "They can't jape him if he goes on an invitation. That wouldn't be playing the game. But what do they want him for?"

"Weally, Blake; Gay expresses himself plainly enough. They're havin' a rehearsal, as it's a half-holiday. I wemembah they were rehearsin' some Wed Indian wubbish when I went ovah there in disguise. They want to have some of my knowledge of stage-managin', and so forth, and I shall be vevy pleased to place it at their service."

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, you ass—"

"It's a lark, but I don't quite catch on to it," said Blake.

"Better not go."

"I shall hardly wefuse so polite a wequest," said the swell of St. Jim's loftily. "I wegard it as my dutay to stand by the youngstahs in such a mattah. They are bound to want some chap to advise them in actin' a play."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I decline to have my wemarks weceived with wibald laughtah," said D'Arcy; and he retired from Study No. 6 with his nose in the air.

"What on earth is the little game?" said Blake in perplexity. "It's some lark up against us, I expect, and they want to get Gussy out of the way. But what for?"

"Ask me another," said Herries.

"Blessed if I know!" said Digby.

And the juniors gave it up. They were playing football that afternoon, and naturally soon forgot about Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his invitation to the Grammar School. While they were preparing for the match, Arthur Augustus donned his most elegant Etons and his shiniest silk topper, and walked elegantly over to the Grammar School. Gordon Gay & Co. received him most graciously.

"So jolly good of you to come," said Gordon Gay, shaking hands with the swell of St. Jim's. "This way—we're having a rehearsal in the gym. We're going to give the performance of the Belle of the Prairie in the gym. next Wednesday. We shall be glad if you'll come and bring the fellows."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus walked into the gym.

A crowd of the Grammarian juniors were gathered there. Frank Monk and half a dozen other fellows were already in Red Indian costume. It was to be a dress rehearsal, and certainly the Red Indians looked very effective. Perhaps they would not have been mistaken for Red Indians; but certainly they would never have been recognised as Frank Monk, and Lane, and Carboy, and the rest. They wore leggings and blankets, and head-dresses of feathers, and their faces were covered with red ochre.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the Red Indians. "Who are those howwid-looking boundahs?"

"They're Sitting Bull & Co., the fiery Sioux," said Gordon Gay.

"Bai Jove!"

"They have to capture the Belle of the Prairie, and I rescue her," said Gordon Gay. "It's a ripping play, I can tell you. Tadpole says it's better than Shakespeare. He ought to know, as he wrote it."

"More lively, you know," explained Tadpole.

"Young Wootton is going to be the Belle of the Prairie," went on Gordon Gay. "He will have to make up as a girl."

"Ugh!" said Frank Monk, waving a tomahawk—a wooden one—in dangerous proximity to D'Arcy's silk hat.

D'Arcy jumped back.

"Pway be careful, deah boy!" he exclaimed.

"Wah! What seeks the white dog in the lodges of the Sioux?"

"Weally, Monk—"

"Scalp the white dog!" said Carboy. "Scalp his topper, at any rate."

"Weally, you ass!"

"No larks, you know," said Gordon Gay warningly.

"Gussy is our guest. Honour the stranger that is within the gates."

"My mistake!" said Monk blandly. "It's awfully good of you to come over and give us some tips, Gussy!"

"Yes, rather; jolly good!"

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"Not at all, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "I'm always pleased to place my supewiah knowledge at the service of you youngstahs."

"You cheeky ass—ahem!—I mean, thanks awfully!" said Monk, grinning horribly under his red ochre. "What do you think of our make-up? Do you think anybody would know us on the spot, same as they do some fellows who go round disguised?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Monk."

"Zat you do not ship our shum, Monkey," said Mont Blong. "It is not comme il faut to ship ze guest vizin ze gates."

"Quite right, Mont Blong," said Gordon Gay. "Now you fellows, buck up with the rehearsal. Will you sit here, Gussy, and look on? And don't hesitate to speak when you think anything might be improved."

"Wathah not, deah boy!"

"Put it to them quite plainly. I'm sorry that I sha'n't be able to attend the rehearsal. Got an important engagement," said Gay. "Wootton major is my understudy, and he's going to take my place. If you think Wootton isn't up to the mark, you tell him plainly what he ought to do."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Gordon Gay strolled out of the gymnasium.

Then the rehearsal commenced.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat in the place of honour; and he watched the rehearsal through his eyeglass with great attention.

He did not hesitate to pass criticisms upon the acting; some of them extremely personal, as a matter of fact.

But the Grammarians heard them all with the most profound attention and respect.

If D'Arcy had been of a more suspicious nature, he might have suspected that the Grammarians had some ulterior motive for their excessive politeness.

But D'Arcy was anything but suspicious.

He was there to place his superior knowledge at the service of his young friends, as he considered it; and he did it unreservedly.

The rehearsal lasted quite a long time; and when it was over, and the costumes and the paint removed, the Grammarians took D'Arcy in to tea in Monk's study.

Arthur Augustus was the guest of honour at the tea-table. All his remarks upon the subject of acting, and making-up, and stage-managing were listened to with great respect.

By the time tea was over the Grammarians had risen very much in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's estimation. In fact, he considered that they had been done great injustice; for a more polite, reasonable, and sensible set of fellows he had really never seen. It was evident that they were quite alive to his merits, and knew how to honour a really distinguished guest. But if Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been able to guess what was going on at St. Jim's at the same time, perhaps he would not have been so satisfied in his mind, and his flattering opinion of the Grammarians might have undergone a great change.

CHAPTER 10.

A Crowded Tea-party.

JACK BLAKE came into the School House with a ruddy glow in his cheeks, and a football under his arm. The Fourth had been playing the Shell that afternoon, and the result had been a draw. Each side considered that it had been unlucky to lose, being the best team, and so all the footballers were satisfied with themselves.

"I wonder whether Gussy's got back?" said Blake, remembering the existence of the swell of St. Jim's now that football was over.

"He wasn't playing for the Fourth," remarked Tom Merry. "Where is he?"

"He went over to see Gordon Gay."

"Oh! Another jape, I suppose."

"No," said Blake. "I can't quite make it out. They said that they wanted his opinion on their acting for some rotten Red Indian play they're getting up; but of course that was all—"

"Piffle!" said Monty Lowther.

"Exactly. I suppose they've been rotting him."

Blake threw open the door of Study No. 6. There was a light burning in the study. The evening dusk was falling. The room was evidently occupied.

"Hallo! Got back, Gussy?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What did they want you for— Great Scott!"

Blake stared at the junior in the study.

"Blessed if he hasn't got into his giddy Form-master rig again!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Blake—"

"What's the game, you ass?"

"I wufuse to be called an ass."

"But, you fathead—"

"Wats!"

Tom Merry & Co. crowded in the doorway, and all of them stared at the junior in the study. He was dressed in black frock-coat and rusty trousers, and had a grey beard and tinted glasses. He was the image of the pretended Mr. Fowler, who had gone over to the Grammar School as the new Form-master; but his disguise this time was certainly better, for his features were unrecognisable. A grey moustache and grey whiskers had been added to the disguise, and a wig that quite covered up the hair.

"What's the game now, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry.

"I am twyin' my disguise again, deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha! I suppose you're not going to try to work the same wheeze again on the Grammarians?" yelled Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Well, I'm hungry," said Blake. "I'm going to have tea. Cut down to the tuckshop and get something, Gussy. It will give Mrs. Taggles a treat to see you like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wufuse to cut down to the tuckshop, deah boy! How-
evah, I am weady for tea, and you can get it if you like."

"We're in funds," said Tom Merry. "I've had a remittance from Miss Fawcett—a really stunning one. Come along to my study."

"Good!"

"I will join you in a few minutes, deah boys," said the disguised junior.

"Right-ho!"

"Not coming in that rig, are you?" asked Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, my hat! Suppose a master spots you in the pas-
sage—"

"Oh, wats!"

"I'm afraid Gussy's going off his rocker," said Monty Lowther, with a solemn shake of the head. "However, if a master meets you, you can pass yourself off as the Head if you like."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors crowded out of the study.

"May I bwing a fwiend or two to tea, Tom Mewwy?" asked the disguised junior.

"Many as you like, old man."

"Vewy good."

Tom Merry & Co. lost no time in getting tea. They were hungry after the football. Tom Merry was in funds, as he had said, and he was quite lavish with that tea. The table groaned under the goodly viands, as the novelists say, and the juniors gathered round the table, prepared to do full justice to the tea. They were just beginning, when the door opened and the pseudo Form-master came in.

"What the ass wants to go about like that for is more than I can imagine!" said Blake, puzzled. "Why don't you get into your own clobber, Gussy?"

"I wegard clobber as a vulgah expression, deah boy!"

"Well, here's a chair," said Tom Merry. "Don't shove your beard into the jam, ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, as the door reopened, and Wally D'Arcy, of the Third, came in. "What do you want?"

"I've come," said Wally.

"Well, now you can go."

"I've come to tea."

"Rats! We don't have Third Form fags to tea!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah! I had Tom Mewwy's permish to bwing a fwiend or two, and I have invited my minah—"

"Oh, that alters the case!" said Lowther. "Come in, young hopeful!"

Jameson and Gibson and Joe Frayne, of the Third, followed Wally into the study. The tea-party regarded them with surprise.

"Did you ask these chaps, too, Gussy?" asked Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, all right."

The study was pretty well crowded by this time. But a few minutes later Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen, of the New House, presented themselves. The School House fellows jumped up, under the impression that it was a raid. But Figgins waved his hand in sign of friendship.

"It's all right!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, is it?" said Tom Merry. "What do you want?"

"We've come to tea."

"Well, of all the cheeky bounders—"

Gussy invited us," said Figgins. "He called out to us from his study window that you had told him to bring a few friends. We're all friends of Gussy's—"

"Especially at teatime," said Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come in, deah boys! You will find woom somewhah. It's all wight."

The Terrible Three were looking a little dismayed by this time.

They didn't want to be inhospitable; but certainly the study was crowded now to its utmost limits, and the feed, ample as it was, was not likely to go far among so many guests. And it was not over yet!

There was a trampling of feet in the passage, and Mellish and Levison and Lumley-Lumley, of the Fourth, looked in cheerfully. The door was wide open now. The study was too crowded for it to be shut. Behind the new-comers appeared Reilly, and Kangaroo, and Glyn, and Clifton Dane, and Lorne, and Bishop, and Kerruish.

"Hallo! You're rather crowded!" said Kangaroo.

"But we don't mind," grinned Levison.

"Not at all," said Mellish. "I can stand."

"Look here—" began Tom Merry.

"Gussy invited us," explained Lumley-Lumley. "I guess we couldn't refuse such an invitation, as he said it was an extra special feed."

"Come wight in, deah boys!"

"Standing room only!" grinned Reilly. "Faith, I think you may as well hand my little whack out here in the passage."

"Same here," said Kerruish.

"Hallo! Here's some more coming!" exclaimed Kangaroo, as a dozen or more fellows came crowding along the passage.

"Yaas, wathah! I've asked quite a lot."

The Terrible Three looked grimly at the disguised junior. The study was crammed, the passage outside was crammed, and it looked as if it would be blocked all the way to the stairs. A crowd of Third and Second Form fags were trying to get to the study, demanding to know what they had been asked for if there wasn't any room and any feed.

"I suppose this is a little joke, Gussy?" said Tom Merry at last.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Blessed if I see the joke!" growled Manners.

"I have asked a fwiend or two—"

"Two hundred, it seems to me!" grunted Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Gussy's rotting this study—that's what it is!" said Tom Merry. "Gussy, old man, you are dangerously near to getting a thick ear!"

"I should wufuse to have a thick eah, Tom Mewwy."

"What on earth is Gussy in that rig still, for?" asked Kangaroo.

"Oh, he's dotty!" Lowther explained.

"Weally, Lowthah, you wottah—"

"Here, make way, there, you fags!" shouted a voice in the passage—the sharp, somewhat unpleasant voice of Cutts, of the Fifth.

"That's Cutts," said Tom Merry. "What on earth does he want?"

"I've asked him to tea, Tom Mewwy."

"What!"

"Cutts, and Pwye, and Gilmore, and Jones, and Lefevre," explained the disguised junior. "I saw them ffrom the studay window you know, so I thought I'd ask them."

"Well, you—you ass!"

"You fathead!"

"It's a rotten jape!" roared Monty Lowther. "Bump him."

"I wufuse to be bumped!"

"Here, hold on," chuckled Blake, "you gave Gussy permission to bring some friends. He's only done what you said."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Make room there, you fags!" came Cutts' voice again. There was a sound of shoving and trampling and angry voices in the passage.

"Yah! Go home!"

"Get out of the way!"

"Don't shove!"

"Gerroff my feet!"

"Clear out!"

"Yah!"

"There'll be a blessed free fight soon!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Here, let me get to the door, and I'll explain to Cutts."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, you dry up!"

"I wufuse to dwy up. I considah—"

"Rats!"

It was not easy to get to the study door; but Tom Merry struggled through the crowd, and put a red and excited face out into the passage.

"Cutts!" he called out.
 "Hallo! Is tea ready?" demanded the Fifth-Former.
 "It's a mistake! Gussy was rotting you!" explained Tom Merry.
 Cutts snorted.
 "Oh, rotting me, was he?" he exclaimed. "Is he there?"
 "Yes."
 "Then I'll jolly well show him that it doesn't do to rot the Fifth," said Cutts. "Now, then, you fellows, shove all together, and we'll give these cheeky cads a lesson. Rotting the Fifth, by Jove!"
 There were five of the Fifth-Formers, all powerful fellows, and they shoved together, and drove and wedged a way through the juniors in the passage. The juniors were squeezed helplessly to the walls, and into other studies, and a good many of them rolled on the floor, and were walked over. Cutts & Co. drove their way to the door of Tom Merry's study, and glared in.

CHAPTER 11.

Quite Mad.

"GET out!" roared the juniors.
 "Buzz off!"
 "Clear!"
 "Shove in!" yelled Cutts. "If there isn't any tea, we'll wreck the blessed study."
 "Hear, hear!"
 "Get out!"
 "It's all wright, deah boys, come wight in. Tom Mewwy gave me permission to bwing my fwiends, and he can't back out now."
 Cutts stared at the speaker.
 "Is that D'Arcy?" he gasped.
 "Yaas, wathah."
 "What on earth are you got up like that for?" demanded Cutts.
 "I'm twyin' this disguise for pwivate theatwicals, you know."
 "Looks to me as if you're balmy," growled Lefevre; "that's what I say—balmy!"
 "Weally, you fathead—"
 "Anyway, we've been asked to tea, and there isn't any tea," said Prye, of the Fifth. "Turn the blessed study inside out if they don't provide tea at once."
 "Yes, rather; that's what I say."
 "Yaas, undah the cires, I considah that you would be justified in waggin' those Shell boundahs, deah boys."
 "And we're jolly well going to do it," declared Cutts.
 "Now, then, Tom Merry, is it to be tea or a rag?"
 "Oh, go and eat coke," said the unhappy captain of the Shell. "If you weren't a guest here, Gussy, I—'d jump on you. You ass!"
 "I weward you as a silly fathead, Tom Mewwy. I considah—"
 "Where's the tea?" roared Gilmore.
 "It's jolly well all gone," said Tom Merry. "I didn't expect fifty chaps to tea. It's a jape of that howling ass, D'Arcy!"
 "If you chawactewise me as an ass, Tom Mewwy, I shall wctire fwom the studay!"
 "You can retire and eat coke, you silly chump."
 The disguised junior struggled to the door and retired. But the juniors had no time to think of the personal feelings of the swell of St. Jim's.

Cutts commenced operations by seizing the tea-table and turning it sideways. Crockery and tray and cloth slid to the floor, among a forest of legs and feet. There was a roar of wrath from the Terrible Three, and they hurled themselves upon Cutts.
 "Chuck him out!" panted Tom Merry.
 "Wreck the blessed study!" gasped Lefevre. "That's what I say."
 "Faith, and we'll do it."
 "Hurray!"
 "Crash, crash!"
 The chums of Study No. 6, and Figgins & Co., backed up the Terrible Three as well as they could. But they could do little; they were overwhelmed. In a few moments pandemonium seemed to reign in Tom Merry's study.
 When the din died away, the Fifth-Formers and the crowd of indignant juniors took their departure, satisfied in their minds.
 But the unhappy Co. were not satisfied.

Tom Merry picked himself up out of a heap of broken crockery, and gasped.
 "Oh, my hat!"
 "Groooh!"
 "Oh!"
 "Ow!"
 The study was a wreck. The juniors looked like wrecks, too. Blake was breathing wrath, as he dabbed a crimson stream from his nose with his handkerchief.
 "Let's go and find Gussy," he said. "We'll scalp him. We'll snatch him bald-headed. We'll jump on him and slaughter him!"
 "Good egg!"
 And the dusty and dishevelled juniors rushed away in search of the swell of St. Jim's. They rushed into Study No. 6. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not there; the study was empty. And it was not only empty; it was wrecked, and was not in a much better condition than Tom Merry's study. The table was overturned, books and papers and crockery and cinders were scattered about, the bookcase stood wrong end up, the carpet was hanging half-out of the window, and ink was smeared on the looking-glass and the window-panes. On the wall was chalked in large letters:
 "Wats!"
 Blake gasped.
 "He's mad!" he exclaimed. "Must be mad as a hatter. Fancy a chap wrecking his own study. He's gone clean off his dot!"
 "Great Scott!"
 "Must be balmy!"
 "Poor old Gussy!"
 "We must find him!" exclaimed Tom Merry.
 They rushed out of the study. There was a yell from Reilly, who had just looked into his own room. It was almost in the same state as Study No. 6. Yells from the other fellows announced they had found their quarters wrecked. The word ran from one to another that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had become insane; there seemed to be no other way of accounting for it. And he had disappeared.
 The juniors trooped breathlessly downstairs. Kildare, of the Sixth, was in the lower passage, and they rushed up to him breathlessly.
 "Have you seen D'Arcy?" exclaimed Tom Merry.
 "No," said Kildare.
 "He was got up in a queer way," explained Tom Merry. "Theatricals, you know. He had on a frock-coat, and a beard and glasses."
 "Oh," said Kildare, "was that merchant D'Arcy! I wondered who he was when he passed me."
 "Has he gone out?"
 "Yes; he went over to the New House, I think."
 Figgins gave a yell.
 "The New House—my study—"
 He did not finish, but tore away across the quadrangle towards the New House.
 The whole crowd followed him; they rushed into the New House, and up the stairs, and into Figgins's study. A scene of devastation met their gaze. The state of Study No. 6 was as nothing to the state of Figgins's study. Figgins collapsed into a chair, and gasped.

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Cutts & Co. were on the warpath. They had considered that they were greatly honouring a junior study by coming to tea there at all. And to discover that there was no tea for them, and that it was all a rag, was a little too much. Cutts & Co. wanted vengeance, and wanted it badly.
 And most of the juniors, though, as a rule, they would have been "up against" the Fifth, were inclined to back Cutts & Co. up now. Three parts of the invited guests had not been able to get even into the study, let alone to obtain a share of the feed. And they were very excited about it.
 "Wreck the blessed place!" shouted Gore, of the Shell.
 "Bump those bounders!"
 "Shove the table over."
 "Rag them!"
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"Wah!" growled the Red Indian. "What seeks the white dog in the lodges of the Sioux?" "Weally, Monk—" began Arthur Augustus. "Scalp the white dog!" interrupted Carboy. "Scalp his topper at any rate!" "Weally, you ass—" (See Chapter 9.)

"Oh, my hat! He must be raving!"

"Fairly off the dot!"

"But—where is he?"

"Must find him!" said Tom Merry.

And the amazed and excited juniors rushed out once more in search of the elusive swell of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 12. Poor Old Gussy!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY walked cheerfully in at the school gates in the dusk. He was feeling very pleased and contented with himself and the Gram-marians. The latter had given him a very good time, and he was anxious to explain in Study No. 6 that Gordon Gay & Co. had not been "japing" when they invited him over to the Grammar School to witness the rehearsal of the "Belle of the Prairie." There was a sudden yell as D'Arcy came into the radius of light from the School House.

"There he is!"

And there was a rush of excited juniors at once, D'Arcy was surrounded.

"Yaas, here I am, deah boys!" he said, adjusting his eye-glass, and looking in considerable surprise at the excited faces round him. "Is anythin' the mattah?"

"Matter!" said Tom Merry. "I should say so!"

"You're dotty; that's what's the matter!"

"Potty, you ass!"

"We're going to get you a strait waistcoat!"

"You've been changing your clobber again, have you, you fathead?"

"Collar him before he gets away!"

Arthur Augustus struggled as hands closed upon him on all sides. His silk hat was knocked off, and his collar came away from its stud, and his eyeglass floated at the end of its cord.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah? Are you all pottay?" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "What are you up to?"

"Got him now!"

"Yank him in!"

"Mind he doesn't get away again!"

"But I have not the least intention of gettin' away," protested D'Arcy. "I have only just returned from the Gwammah School.

"Wh-a-at!"

"Only just returned?" said Blake.

"Yaas!"

"You—you ass! It isn't ten minutes since you wrecked our study!"

"Since I wh-ah-what?"

"Wrecked Study No. 6, and Figgy's study in the New House!" yelled Blake. "If you're not potty, what did you do it for?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Gently!" said Tom Merry. "Don't bump him. If he's potty, he can't help it, and he'll have to be taken care of."

"That's so," said Blake. "But mind he doesn't get away. Something might happen if he goes wandering about in that state of mind."

"You fwightful ass——"

"Lost his memory," said Figgins. "Mad people do that sometimes, you know."

"I wefuse to be regarded as a mad people—I mean person. I shall give you a feahful thwashin', Figgins!"

"Quiet!" said Figgins soothingly. "Take it calmly. Don't get excited!"

"You fwightful ass——"

"We're not going to hurt you, Gussy," said Tom Merry reassuringly. "Only going to take care of you, you know, and see that you don't come to any harm."

"You burblin' duffah——"

"Let him run on," said Manners, "it may ease his mind. I've read somewhere that it's dangerous to contradict lunatics."

"Mannahs, you beast——"

"Only don't let him escape!"

"What does all this mean, you silly asses?" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I do not compwehend in the least. Has anythin' happened while I've been away?"

"It's all right, old chap," said Kerr. "You haven't been away, you know; you only imagine that. But it's all right."

"Haven't been away!" ejaculated D'Arcy, almost staggering in astonishment. "I have been ovah to the Grammar School, and have only returned this minute."

"Let him run on," murmured Tom Merry. "Don't contradict him. He might begin raving."

"Speak to him gently."

"So you've been over to the Grammar School, have you, Gussy?" said Blake, in a tone of gentle humouring.

"Yaas, wathah, to see the dwess wehearsal of a Wed Indian play," said D'Arcy. "You wemember Gordon Gay's lettah, I suppose? I went!"

"Yes. But don't you remember coming back?"

"I've only just got back."

"Don't you remember being in Study No. 6, got up in your disguise as Mr. Fowler, the new Form-master?" said Blake gently.

"You uttah ass! I have not twied on that disguise again. I have not put it on since the othah day when the jape pproved to be no good."

The juniors exchanged sympathetic glances. It was evident that the swell of St. Jim's had totally lost his memory.

"Poor old Gussy!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"I suppose it was the ragging did it," said Redfern.

"Poor old Gussy! We shall have to be very gentle with him after this."

"Yes, rather!"

"And you don't remember having tea in my study, and inviting all the fags, and Cutts of the Fifth, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry.

"You uttah ass! I had tea with Fwank Monk and his fwends in their study at the Gwammah School!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Simply potty!" said Monty Lowther. "It's awful!"

"Poor old Gussy!"

"If you wefer to me as poor old Gussy again, Figgins, I shall punch your silly head. I do not undahstand what you are gettin' at. I have had a vewy good time at the Gwammah School, and the fellows tweated me with great wespsect. It was not a jape at all!"

"Then you've really been to the Grammar School?" asked Digby.

"Of course I have, you ass!"

"When did you leave?"

"About twenty minutes ago."

"Go easy, Gussy," said Herries. "Twenty minutes ago you were in Tom Merry's study got up as Fowler!"

"I begin to think you are all wavin' mad," said D'Arcy.

"Pewwaps somebody else has been puttin' on that disguise and wpetendin' that he was me."

"Oh!"

"He couldn't put on your voice," said Tom Merry.

"I don't know," said Blake, with a start; "I've heard Gordon Gay immitate Gussy's voice to a T, so that you'd

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think it was Gussy speaking. But Gordon Gay's over at the Grammar School; I suppose you saw him there, Gussy?"

"Yaas, he was there when I awwived, but he wasn't at the wehearsal; he had an engagement somewhere else," said D'Arcy.

Tom Merry started.

"An engagement somewhere else!" he exclaimed. "How long since you met him, Gussy?"

"Two or three hours since I met him ovah there," said D'Arcy. "But I met him in the lane ten minutes ago as I was coming back, and he gave me a note for you."

"In the lane—coming from St. Jim's?"

"Yaas!"

"Oh, crumbs! How was he dressed?"

"He was dwessed as usual, I believe," said D'Arcy. "He was cawwyin' a parcel, and he said he had just come fwom St. Jim's."

"Just come from St. Jim's?" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah, and he gave me a note. He said he had left in too gweat a huwvy to give it to you himself, and he scribbled it in pencil and gave it to me to bwing to you."

"Hand it over!"

"Pway wefease me, then, you asses. I couldn't get it out of my pocket while a set of blithewin' duffahs are holdin' my hands."

D'Arcy was released. The truth was beginning to dawn upon the St. Jim's fellows; they realised that D'Arcy was not insane, after all, and that they had been hoaxed by the Australian junior at the Grammar School. Arthur Augustus felt in his pocket, and found the pencilled note, and handed it to Tom Merry.

Tom Merry unfolded it, and read it—with a score of fellows crowding round him to read it, too. It ran:

"Dear Merry,—One good turn deserves another!"

"Always yours,
GORDON GAY."

The St. Jim's fellows stared at the note, and stared at one another. They understood. The fellow in the disguise as Mr. Fowler had not been, as they had supposed, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy trying on his disguise again. The Grammarians had asked D'Arcy over to the Grammar School to get him out of the way; and while Frank Monk & Co. were keeping him there, Gordon Gay had calmly penetrated into the School House at St. Jim's in the exact imitation of D'Arcy's wondrous disguise as "Mr. Fowler." The St. Jim's fellows had not had the faintest suspicion; indeed, how could they have had? Mr. Fowler had been quite unrecognisable, and his imitation of D'Arcy's voice had been exact. The invitation to Arthur Augustus to attend the dress rehearsal was now explained.

"Done!" was all that Tom Merry said.

"Spoofed!" said Figgins.

"Diddled!" said Monty Lowther.

"Dished!"

"Taken in!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Pewwaps you will kindly explain what has happened now," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sarcastically. "I am quite in the dark. Do you mean to say that Gordon Gay has been ovah here japin' you while I was at the Gwammah School?"

"Yes," roared Blake; "he's come here in the same disguise you went there in, and we thought it was you playing the giddy ox again!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"He's wrecked Study No. 6, and Figgy's study, and brought about a free fight in Tom Merry's quarters——"

"Bai Jove!"

"And it's all your fault, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! What are you cackling at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled D'Arcy.

"The blessed image thinks it's amusing now!" said Monty Lowther. "What is there to cackle at, you dummy?"

"Ha, ha, ha! This is what comes of my leavin' you youngstahs alone for an aftahnoon," said D'Arcy. "Some-thin' was bound to happen. You have been spoofed! Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors glared at the swell of St. Jim's. They had certainly been spoofed, and badly spoofed; but it was too much to see the cause of it all laughing at their misfortunes. They closed round D'Arcy with grim looks.

"So you think it's funny, do you?" said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha! Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "we've been spoofed by the Grammar cads, and it's all Gussy's fault! I think it will be agreed that it's all Gussy's fault?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then I suggest that we bump Gussy!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hold on! I wefuse to be bumped—I uttably decline to

"Ow, ow, ow, ow!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yawo-o-o-oh!"

CHAPTER 13.

Tom Merry's Idea.

TOM MERRY came into Study No. 6 a couple of days later with a letter in his hand. It was evening, and the four chums of No. 6 were doing their preparation.

"I've got a letter," said Tom Merry.

"Well, run away and read it," said Blake, without looking up.

"From Gordon Gay!"

Blake looked up then.

"Oh, those blessed Grammarians again!" he exclaimed.

"Is Gay trying to spoof you this time, instead of Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"No," said Tom Merry, laughing. "It's a polite invitation—"

"So it was in Gussy's case!"

"Well, I'll read it out to you," said the captain of the Shell. "It's an invitation for all of us to go over on Wednesday evening and watch them playing the giddy goat!"

"Yaas; they mentioned it to me," said D'Arcy. "They're givin' a Wed Indian play in the gym., and Fwank Monk said they were goin' to invite us ovah."

Jack Blake grunted.

"Catch me going over to see their rotten Red Indian plays!" he said.

"Especially after they've been japing us," said Digby. "We should have to be on our good behaviour. It wouldn't be etiquette to throw things, I suppose?"

"Wathah not!"

"Frightful bore!" said Herries. "I wouldn't go!"

"Well, let's hear the letter!" said Blake.

Tom Merry read out the letter:

"Dear Merry,—We are giving a dramatic performance on Wednesday evening in the gym. Title of the piece, 'The Belle of the Prairie,' written by Tadpole, of ours, and acted by the Junior Dramatic Society of Rylcombe Grammar School. We shall be glad if you will come over, and bring as many friends as you like. Seats free. Performance begins at seven sharp.—Yours,

"GORDON GAY."

"Well, it's civil enough," yawned Blake. "But it would be a rotten bore. The Grammarians don't come over to see our amateur theatricals, and one good turn deserves another, as Gay said himself."

"Quite twue, deah boy!"

"Tell 'em to go and eat coke!" said Herries.

"I've got an idea!" said Tom Merry.

"Where did you borrow it?" asked Blake politely.

"I think it's a jolly good idea," said Tom Merry modestly.

"Now, they're going to give a rotten play, and they want us to swell the audience. Some of us can go and do that, out of politeness—"

"Better send Shell chaps, then!" grunted Blake. "You won't dig up anybody in this study to be bored to death out of politeness!"

"No fear!"

"There may be some fun going that's worth seeing," said Tom Merry. "My idea is that a crowd of us might go and join the audience, and some others—"

"Well?"

"Some others might go and join the actors."

"But they don't say that they want any extra supers!"

"They may get 'em without wanting 'em."

"How do you mean?"

"It's a Red Indian play," said Tom Merry. "As Gussy has seen the dress rehearsal, he can tell us all about it. I suppose a lot of them are made up as Red Indians, Gussy?"

"Yaas; Fwank Monk is Sittin' Bull, and a crowd of fellows, seven or eight, will be made-up as Wed Indians," said D'Arcy.

"What do they do?"

"They attack the camp, and cawwy off the Belle of the Pwawie. Wootton minor is made-up as a gal, as the Belle of the Pwawie. Then Gordon Gay comes in as a cowboy, with a crowd of chaps, and defeats the wedskins, fightin' against odds, you know, and dwivin' them before him, and he wescues the Belle of the Pwawie."

"When the kids are made-up as Red Indians, I suppose they're not easy to recognise?"

"Imposs., deah boy. I didn't know them till they spoke."

"And it wouldn't be necessary to speak," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"What on earth are you driving at?" asked Blake.

"A wheeze, my son—a real, ripping wheeze for getting at grips with the Grammarians, and giving them the giddy kybosh!"

"Now you're talking!" said Blake. "Go ahead!"

"They're giving this rotten show in the gym., Gussy?"

"Yaas!"

"Where is their dressing-room?"

"There's a woom openin' off the gym., where they keep dumb-bells and Indian clubs and things," said D'Arcy. "That's bein' used as a dwessin'-woom, and the stage is awwanged so that it's behind the scenes. There's a back door into it frowm the quad., you see. They've weally got ewevythin' awwanged vewy well, considerin'. I was able to give them a few tips about the awwangements—"

"Yes; I've no doubt you were. When Monk and the rest are making-up as redskins, where are Gordon Gay and his giddy cowboys?"

"They're on the stage, hidden by the forest frowm view. They come burstin' through the twees when the wedskins attack the camp at the other end of the stage. The twees are made of cardboard, of course."

"Good!"

"Blessed if I see what the wheeze is!" said Blake. "It's no good thinking of rushing them on the stage; we should have the whole Grammar School on our necks in a jiffy. And there will be prefects present, you can bet your hat, and perhaps the Head, as Dr. Monk is young Monkey's pater."

Tom Merry nodded.

"I know that. I'm not thinking of a raid. Of course, the chaps who accept Gordon Gay's invitation will have to keep order in the audience—honour bound, you know. Can't accept a chap's invitation and then rag him."

"Wathah not! But—"

"But chaps who don't accept the invitation to join the audience can do as they like," said Tom Merry, with a glimmer of fun in his blue eyes; "and they can turn up, all the same, but not in the audience."

"But what—?"

"Half a dozen of us might drop in at the stage door, when the Red Indians are going on the scene," Tom Merry remarked. "It will be after dark, and as there will be a lot of St. Jim's fellows about, we shouldn't be noticed."

"Yes; but—"

"If Gordon Gay can plant himself on us disguised as a silly ass—"

"Weally, Tom Mewvy—"

"Then I don't see why we can't plant ourselves on him, disguised as Red Indians—"

"Oh!"

"And introduce a new and unexpected variation into the scene, when the redskins come on the stage," said Tom Merry.

Blake gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha! Oh, my hat! What a wheeze, if it will work!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I think it will work," said Tom Merry, grinning. "Anyway, there's no harm in trying. Some of the fellows can reply to this letter, accepting the invitation, and join the audience. And the rest of us can excuse ourselves, as we've got something else on—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wippin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I will take charge of the partay to go to the stage door, with pleasuah."

"I dare say you would, old chap; but we're not looking for a leader," said Tom Merry affably. "I can do that quite well."

"Weally, deah boy, what is required for a thing of this sort is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"We'll take Figgins & Co. into it," said Tom Merry.

"This is a school affair, and we're going to line up, shoulder to shoulder, to give the Grammarians the kybosh."

"Yes, rather!"

"But mind—mum's the word!"

"You bet!"

And Figgins & Co. were promptly called into council, and the St. Jim's juniors elaborated their scheme with many chuckles.

CHAPTER 14.

"The Belle of the Prairie."

"I THINK that's about 'all," said Gordon Gay.

It was Wednesday evening.

The Junior Dramatic Society of Rylcombe Grammar School had done yeoman work that afternoon.

The gymnasium, the use of which for the dramatic performance had been kindly granted by the Head, had been prepared as an auditorium.

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Forms and seats were arranged for a numerous audience.

At one end there was the stage, with a curtain that would really go up and down when required to do so.

This, as Gay remarked, was a great advantage, not always to be met with in amateur theatrical performances.

The company had been through a final rehearsal, and all was ready. Every fellow knew his part to a "T." They were all letter-perfect, or at least, they were satisfied that they were.

"Yes; I think it's all right now," said Frank Monk, with a sigh of relief. "The great white chief has spoken!"

"The cowboy part will go off all right, anyway," Wootton major remarked.

"Wah! My brother is talking out of his hat," said Frank Monk. "It's the Red Indian part that will really knock the audience."

"What price the belle of the giddy prairie?" grinned Wootton minor. "I think my lines are jolly good, considering that Tadpole wrote them!"

"My dear Wootton," said Tadpole.

"Spare my life, oh, great chief!" spouted Wootton minor. "Slay not the paleface maiden who kneels at your feet!"

"Wah! The paleface maiden shall come with Sitting Bull, to dwell as a squaw in the lodges of the Sioux!" said Monk.

"Never! Never-r-r!" wailed Wootton minor. "Oh, where is my brave and noble Cowboy Jim in this dreadful hour?"

"Oh, where and oh where can he be?" sang Carboy.

"Shut up, Carboy, you ass!"

"Those are not the lines," said Tadpole, who could never see anything in the nature of a joke. "You do not speak to Carboy at all, Wootton. Carboy comes in later as a Red Indian. You say: 'Never will I be a squaw in the lodges of the Sioux!'"

"Never will I squawk in the lodges of the Sioux!"

"No; 'Never will I be a squaw in the lodges of the Sioux,'" said Tadpole. "Death, a thousand deaths were preferable! Oh, where is my noble Cowboy Jim?" Then Gordon Gay comes through the trees with his cowboys, and says—"

"Let's go and have something to eat," said Lane.

"Not at all, Lane. He says—"

"I'm hungry."

"No, no; he doesn't say that—"

"But I say that, fathead!" said Lane. "I'm hungry, and I'm jolly well going to have tea, or we sha'n't have time before the performance. The audience are going in already."

And the dramatic company, satisfied with their preparations, went in to tea.

The audience were already taking their places. Most of the Grammar School fellows were going; even the seniors were turning up, in honour of the performance. Some of the masters had promised to look in. And fellows from St. Jim's were already arriving. The Grammarians were very keen to have St. Jim's fellows in the audience. They were not above wishing to show the Saints how things should be done in the amateur theatrical line, and letting them see that the Grammar School could handle such matters a little better than they were handled at St. Jim's.

Gordon Gay was in his cowboy costume—and very handsome he looked in it—when he received the first arrivals from St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Fatty Wynn were the first to arrive, and the cowboy chief showed them to the places reserved for the St. Jim's fellows.

"I hope Tom Merry and the rest will be able to come" said Gordon Gay genially.

Fatty Wynn grinned, and D'Arcy coughed.

"They may drop in in the course of the evening," Fatty Wynn explained. "Figgy may drop in; so may Kerr; so may Reddy. But they've got something on for this evening, so I can't answer for them."

"Well, I hope you'll enjoy the show," said Gay.

"Oh, we shall enjoy it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

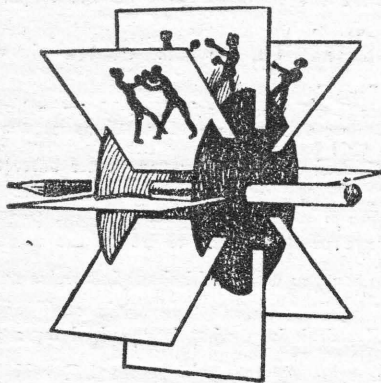
"In fact, we're looking forward to a jolly good time," said Fatty Wynn. "It isn't often that we get an entertainment like this for nothing."

"Wathah not!"

Gordon Gay glanced rather sharply at Fatty Wynn; but the Fourth-Former's face was quite placid and innocent.

"No larks, you know," said Gay.

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"Larks!" said Fatty Wynn, as if he did not comprehend.

"What kind of larks?"

"No ragging."

"Well, Weally, Wynn, I twust you do not think that, aftah-takin' places in the audience, we should think of waggin' the show," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in his most stately manner.

"No, no; of course not," said Gay. "But—"

"But we're supposed to laugh in the funny places, ain't we?" asked Wynn.

"There aren't any funny places," said Tadpole. "This is a tragedy of the Far West—a thrilling drama of the Rocky Mountains, you know."

"But some of it may be funny without your meaning it—accidentally, you know."

"My dear Wynn—"

"The drama may be a little rocky, as well as the mountains, and—"

"Look here, if you're going to be funny," said Wootton major, a little aggressively.

Fatty Wynn looked surprised.

"I'm not going to be funny," he said. "I was only suggesting that perhaps you fellows were going to be funny."

"Oh, rats!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wats, Wynn, my deah boy! Don't make jokes about a fellow's play; it's liable to be misunderstood, you know. If it's a twagedy, we're called upon as ordably chaps to suppress our mewwiment."

"Oh, good!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'll do my best."

"I dare say we shall be more inclined to cwy than to laugh," said D'Arcy.

"Look here—" began Gay warmly.

"Pway don't misundahstand me, Gay, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "Chaps are supposed to cwy at a twagedy, ain't they?"

"Yes; but—"

"Well, I want to do ewevythin' in ordah."

"There are some very touching places," said Tadpole.

"Where the Belle of the Prairie receives the ring from the cowboy chief—"

"Bai Jove! Does the cowboy wing a bell?"

"No, I mean the Belle of the Prairie—Wootton minor, you know."

"How can the cowboy chief wing Wootton minor?"

"He doesn't ring him, fathead! He gives him a ring."

"Isn't that the same thing?"

"An engagement ring, you ass!"

D'Arcy nodded.

"Oh, I see. The cowboy chief is engaged—"

"Yes; that's it."

"Engaged to ring a bell on the pwaiwie," said D'Arcy, with an air of complete comprehension. "Good! Who engages him?"

"You don't understand. You see—"

"Oh, chuck it, Taddy!" said Gordon Gay, laughing. "You won't make him understand. Let's get back to the green room."

"But I'd like D'Arcy to understand."

"Impossible! He hasn't got anything to understand with."

"Weally, Gay—"

"Come on, Taddy. We want the curtain up soon, and we've got to get ready."

And the Grammarians walked away.

Arthur Augustus and Fatty Wynn sat down smiling. They were joined by Lawrence and Owen and Gore and Skimpole and Brooke and Reilly and Kerruish, and a crowd more of St. Jim's fellows came in by twos and threes. But the leaders of the St. Jim's leaders were conspicuous by their absence. Tom Merry was not to be seen, or Monty Lowther, or Manners, or Blake, or Herries, or Digby, or Figgins, or Kerr, or Redfern. But in the crowd their absence was not specially noticed by Gordon Gay & Co., who had plenty of other matters to think about at that moment.

Dr. Monk, the Head of the Grammar School, took his place with several other masters, and Delamere, the captain of the school, came in with a crowd of seniors. Gordon Gay watched the gym. filling, from behind the scenes, with a great deal of satisfaction.

"We shall have a jolly good audience," he remarked.

"And the audience will have a jolly good play," said Tadpole.

"Blessed is he who bloweth his own trumpet," grinned Wootton minor, who was already made up as Mustang Madge, the Belle of the Prairie. "The acting will be all right, at any rate."

"Yes, rather!"

"Especially the title role," said Wootton minor modestly.

"Blessed is he that bloweth—"

"Better get into your redskin rig, Monkey," said Gordon Gay. "The first scenes will last nearly half an hour before you're wanted, but you may as well be ready."

"Right-ho!" said Monk.

"You go on first, Gay," said Tadpole. "You meet Buckskin Bill—that's Wootton major—by accident in the forest, and he tells you the Sioux are on the warpath."

"We know our parts, fathead! Are you ready, Buckskin Bill?"

"I guess so," grinned Wootton major.

"Got your hair on safe, kid?" asked Gay, surveying Wootton minor's golden wig. "You don't want it to come off and fall on the redskin chief's moccasins, as it did in the last rehearsal."

"Quite safe this time."

"All serene. May as well have the curtain up now; we're ten minutes late already."

And the curtain was rung up.

The scene disclosed a forest in the Far West, and Buckskin Bill lighting his pipe under the trees. To him enter Cowboy Jim, with a rifle under his arm. The rifles of the Grammar School Cadet Corps had been requisitioned for the play. Gordon Gay promptly covered Buckskin Bill with his rifle, amid a thrill from the younger members of the audience.

"Hands up!"

Up went Buckskin Bill's hands.

"Waal, I swear," said Buckskin Bill, "if it isn't my old pard Cowboy Jim!"

Cowboy Jim lowered his rifle.

"Buckskin Bill!" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"The werry identical article!" said Buckskin Bill.

"Shake!"

And they shook.

"Is this where we laugh, or where we cry?" murmured Fatty Wynn to the swell of St. Jim's.

"I weally don't know, deah boy."

They settled the point by laughing.

CHAPTER 15.

Capturing the Redskins.

"MY feathers on all right?" asked Frank Monk.

"Right as rain!"

"You want some more red ochre on your chivvy, Lane."

"Give us a dab, then. Ow! Not in my eye, fathead!"

"I zink zat I look ze Indian brave all right, n'est-ce-pas?" grinned Mont Blong, surveying himself with much pride in a glass.

Frank Monk grinned horribly under his war-paint.

"You look the part all right," he said. "But you don't talk it—don't open your mouth on the stage."

"My dear shum—"

"Mum's the word for you, Mont Blong," said Carboy.

"We don't want to have red braves talking with a Mont-martre accent."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How are they going on?" asked Monk. "Take a look on the stage, Lane; you're done."

"Right."

Lane pulled back the curtain which covered the doorway leading into the wings. He had a view of the forest in the Far West, and Gordon Gay and Buckskin Bill engaged in talk on the subject of the Sioux, who it appeared were on the warpath, with the wicked intention of capturing the Belle of the Prairie.

"Going strong," said Lane.

"How do the audience look?"

"No casualties yet, as far as I can see."

"Oh, don't be funny!"

Tadpole looked into the dressing-room.

"Ready, Wootton minor?" he asked anxiously. "They are going off to the left now, and you enter on this side."

"Quite ready," said the Belle of the Prairie.

"Then get into the wings."

Wootton minor followed Tadpole out.

The redskins put the finishing touches to their war-paint, and waited for their cue.

The door into the room from the quad. opened, and a well-known face looked in. It was the face of Tom Merry, of St. Jim's.

The redskins stared at him.

"Hallo," said Monk, "is that you, Merry? You don't come in here. This is the stage-door. The audience go round to the front."

"Just wanted to have a look at the redskins on their native heath, you know," said Tom Merry blandly. "I don't belong to the audience. I didn't accept the invitation."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Looking at Sitting Bull. I suppose you're Sitting Bull?"

"Or Standing Donkey?" said Monty Lowther over Tom Merry's shoulder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co came in. Lowther and Manners, Blake

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and Herries and Dig, Figgins and Kerr and Redfern, Kangaroo and Bernard Glyn, followed the St. Jim's leader into the room.

The Grammarians stared at them.

"Look here, to be quite plain, you're not wanted here!" said Frank Monk gruffly.

"My dear chap—"

"Outsiders aren't allowed in this part. Clear out!"

"Where's Gordon Gay?" asked Tom Merry.

"He's on the other side of the stage, lying low in the wings with his cowboys. The Belle of the Prairie is on the stage now, and we're going in to capture her in five minutes," said Monk, consulting his watch.

"Everybody busy excepting yourselves, I see."

"We're too busy to talk to duffers," said Lane. "Get out! You're bothering us."

"Oh, quite!" said Carboy.

"Yes, travel along, do!"

Tom Merry made a sign to his followers.

Figgins, Kerr, Kangaroo, and Lowther planted themselves before the door leading to the stage. Herries and Dig guarded the other door. The redskins looked surprised and alarmed.

"Look here, what are you up to?" demanded Frank Monk.

"You were going to capture the Belle of the Prairie?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"Well, you won't be able to do it."

"Why not?"

"Because you're going to be captured yourselves."

"What?"

"We can't allow ferocious redskins to go round loose in a civilised country," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head.

"Look here—"

"Collar them!"

"Why—what—look out! Oh!"

There was a rush.

The half-dozen Grammarians were simply overwhelmed.

They struggled valiantly; but, taken by surprise as they were, and outnumbered, they did not have the ghost of a chance.

In a twinkling they were on their backs on the floor, and the St. Jim's juniors were sitting on them.

"Lock the doors!" said Tom Merry hurriedly.

Both the doors were promptly locked.

Frank Monk tried to yell, but the handle of his own tomahawk was poked into his open mouth in time, and he only gurgled. The other redskins were reduced to silence by means equally efficacious.

"Groooh!"

"Ow-w-w-w-w!"

"Captured!" said Tom Merry, with great satisfaction.

"Now, Monkey says there are only five minutes to go before the cue, so we shall have to hurry. Strip them!"

Monk gurgled.

"Lemme up—groo— Oh!"

"Sit on his head if he won't keep quiet."

"Gerrroooh!"

"Now off with those redskin things, and tie them up."

"Gerroooh!"

"Sharp's the word!"

The redskins were stripped of blankets and feathers, and other appurtenances, almost in the twinkling of an eye.

Then they were tied hand and foot with cord that the raiders had thoughtfully brought in their pockets for the purpose. Their own handkerchiefs were stuffed into their mouths, and tied there with string.

They glared at the St. Jim's juniors as they lay on their backs, looking fully as ferocious as the realest of real redskins.

"Don't mind us, Monkey," said Tom Merry blandly.

"It's all in the game, you know."

"Groooh!"

"I know the audience are expecting redskins in a few minutes, but we're not going to disappoint them. Get into these things quick, you chaps!"

The Grammarians writhed and struggled with their bonds. But in vain.

The victors had not left anything to chance, and the Grammarian juniors had not the slightest prospect of getting loose, or of calling out to their comrades.

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

"We're not going to disappoint the audience. We're going on in your place."

"Groooh!"

"Is that a Sioux word?" asked Monty Lowther. "Sorry I don't speak the language, Monkey. I'll try if you like. Groooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"Buck up!" said Tom Merry. "No time for jokes!"
The raiders clothed themselves rapidly in blankets and leggings and feathers. Then they daubed their faces with thick layers of ochre.

Their identity completely disappeared under the war-paint.

No one could possibly have told that they were St. Jim's juniors, or that they were not Frank Monk & Co. They might have been anybody.

The door leading into the wings rattled as someone tried to open it on the other side.

"Hallo!" came Tadpole's voice. "What have you got the door locked for?"

"Stage-manager, I suppose," murmured Figgins. "Let him in and tie him up with the rest."

"Good! The more the merrier."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Open the door, you fellows!" called out Tadpole. "It's your cue in a minute!"

Tom Merry threw the door open.
Tadpole hurried in, and as he did so he was seized on all sides. Before he had time for anything but an amazed gasp, he was on the floor, a handkerchief was stuffed into his mouth, and a cord was being knotted round his wrists and ankles.

Tadpole, gasping and gurgling, was laid along with the plundered redskins on the floor, too astonished to do anything but blink dazedly.

"All serene," said Tom Merry. "Now, as it's our cue, we'd better go on. Turn out the light here, in case anybody should look in."

"Good!"

The light was switched off, and the dressing-room was plunged into darkness. In the darkness the bound Grammarians lay and wriggled and gurgled.

Tom Merry & Co.—metamorphosed into Sitting Bull and his ferocious braves—calmly stepped into the wings. The audience were expecting redskins, and the audience were not to be disappointed. But the redskins who arrived were very different redskins from the redskins that had been expected.

CHAPTER 16.

Unrehearsed.

"HERE come the giddy redskins!" said Fatty Wynn.
"Yaas, wathah!"
"Faith, and I'm blessed if I know them!"
said Reilly.

The St. Jim's juniors in the audience stared hard at the new arrivals. Whether Tom Merry & Co. had succeeded in their raid they could not tell yet. The redskins presented exactly the appearance that Frank Monk & Co. would have presented if they had come on as arranged. The Saints could only wait for developments. If the redskins were Monk & Co., the play would go on as per programme. If they were Tom Merry & Co., there would be changes in the programme—decided changes. The audience could only wait and see. As for the Grammarian crowd, they had not the slightest suspicion.

Wootton minor, alias the Belle of the Prairie, was standing alone on the stage, the cowboys being off the scene to the right, watching for the moment to rush on to the rescue. The redskins came creeping on in a stealthy, redskin manner, and the Belle of the Prairie did not seem to be aware of their approach. She was making her speech, and had no eyes for redskins.

"Alone—alone on the vast prairie!" cried the heroine of Tadpole's thrilling drama. "Oh, where is my brave Cowboy Jim? Who knows but that Indians may be lurking in these fatal woods—"

"Sure, and I should think she'd see the giddy Indians! They're not a yard off!" murmured Reilly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Whoop!"

It was a sudden terrific yell from the redskins, and they rushed at the Belle of the Prairie and surrounded her.

Wootton minor shrieked.

"Alas! The redskins!"

"Ugh!" grunted Sitting Bull.

"Help!"

"Cry not for help to the detested palefaces!" said Sitting Bull, in a deep and husky voice. "The paleface maiden must slope with me to the lodges of the Sioux."

"You ass!" murmured the paleface maiden, under his breath. "You've got the lines all wrong!"

"Speak not to the chief of the Sioux!" said Sitting Bull. "Seize her!"

"Look here, you fathead, this is where I go down on my

"knees!" whispered Wootton minor, dismayed at the "bloomers" Monk was making.

"Rats!" said Sitting Bull.

"Wha-a-at!"

"Seize the paleface maiden!" said the deep voice of Sitting Bull. "I suspect that her hair is false! Ugh!"

"You—you frabjous ass!" said Wootton minor, forgetting to subdue his voice in his excitement. "Don't touch my hair! It will come off!"

There was a yell from the audience.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wootton minor was seized.

A redskin dragged at her golden locks, and they came off in his dusky hand, and the audience shrieked.

"Ugh! 'Twas as I suspected!" said Sitting Bull. "Her hair is false!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, where is Cowboy Jim?" shrieked Wootton minor.

"Rescue!"

Gordon Gay & Co. had been surveying the unexpected scene from the wings, with amazement and alarm.

"Monkey's gone off his dot!" gasped Wootton major.

"He's messing up the whole thing!"

"Come on!" said Gordon Gay hurriedly. "We'll hurry on the rescue scene a bit; and you needn't be too gentle in handling that silly ass!"

"What-ho!"

And the cowboys rushed to the rescue.

There were only five of the cowboys; but, according to programme, several of the redskins should have been slain on the spot, and the rest should have taken to flight, leaving the rescued damsel with the gallant cowboys.

But the scene did not go according to programme.

The redskins put up an unexpectedly good fight.

They met the rush of the cowboys, and closed with them, and a wild and whirling combat took place on the stage.

The audience yelled with delight. The younger members of the audience, especially, were overjoyed to see a real fight going on, and they jumped up in their places, and yelled and clapped and cheered frantically.

"Hurrah!"

"Dear me!" said Dr. Monk, in surprise. "Surely that scene is too violent to be merely make-believe!"

Delamere grinned.

"I fancy the cowboys were meant to win," said the captain of the Grammar School; "but the Indians seem to be getting the best of it."

"Dear me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the audience. "Go it!"

The Indians were undoubtedly getting the best of it.

They were two to one, and they were fighting hard. Cowboy Jim was on his back on the stage, with two redskins sitting on him. The other cowboys were very hard pressed, and one by one they were brought down and sat upon. Then the redskins proceeded to tie them hand and foot.

"You idiots!" bawled Gordon Gay. "Leggo! We beat you, you don't beat us! You are mucking up the whole thing!"

"I rather fancy we beat you, this time, Gay, old man!" said Sitting Bull, in his natural voice.

Gordon Gay gasped.

"Tom Merry!"

"Why, you—you—you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rescue!" bawled Gordon Gay. "Rescue! It's—oh—oh—oooooh!"

A fragment of a torn blanket was stuffed in Cowboy Jim's mouth, effectually stopping his utterance.

"Bind the paleface dogs!" shouted Sitting Bull. "Bind and gag them, ere we convey them to the lodges of the Sioux!"

And the paleface dogs were bound and gagged, the Belle of the Prairie sharing their hapless fate.

Gordon Gay & Co., aware now that they were in the hands of the enemy, but unable to convey that knowledge to the Grammarians in the audience, glared ferociously at Sitting Bull and his braves.

"This is where we come in, Gay," murmured Tom Merry. "Beats disguising yourself as Gussy playing the giddy ox, doesn't it?"

"Grooh!"

"One good turn deserves another, you know."

"Groooooohh!"

"Bring hence the paleface prisoners," said Sitting Bull.

The cowboys were dragged off the stage into the dressing-room. There Gordon Gay & Co., as soon as the light was turned on, saw the original redskins on the floor. They were added to the collection.

"Quite a surprise, isn't it?" grinned Tom Merry. "This

is where St. Jim's comes out on top." He removed the gag from Gay's mouth. "Do you want to speak?"

"Ow! You beast?"

"Is that all?"

"Yah!"

"Anything more?"

"Grooh! I'll make you smart for this! Ow!"

"My dear chap, you said yourself that one good turn deserves another," grinned Figgins. "You can't complain of the fortune of war."

"Oh, you rotters! I'll—I'll——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rescue!" yelled Gordon Gay. "Resc—ow—ow—grooh!" The handkerchief was promptly stuffed into his mouth again.

"Can't allow you to make a row," said Tom Merry, with a gentle shake of the head. "Now, you chaps, as we've done our little bit towards amusing the audience, we may as well get this stuff off and clear. Don't want to meet a crowd."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors washed off the war-paint, as well as they could hurriedly, and stripped off the redskin garb. Then they appeared in their own identity, with somewhat smudgy faces, and grinning joyously.

"This is where we sortie," said Tom Merry. "Good-night, Gay. When the audience get tired of waiting for somebody to come on the stage, they may come and look for you. Good-night."

"Grooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The St. Jim's juniors departed. They made their way round the gym., and Tom Merry looked in at the big door, and gave a whistle. It was the signal for the St. Jim's members of the audience to clear off. It would hardly have done for any St. Jim's fellow to remain within the precincts of the Grammar School, when the Grammarians became aware of what had happened. The Saints crowded out of the gym., and Tom Merry & Co., laughing uproariously, took their way home to St. Jim's.

Meanwhile, the Grammarian audience waited in amazement, and watched the empty stage. Ten minutes had passed, a quarter of an hour—twenty minutes. The audience were getting very restive.

"Dear me," said Dr. Monk, "I suppose the play is over, or else something has gone very wrong with the arrangements. I'm afraid I cannot stay any longer."

And the Head retired from the gym., with the other masters. Most of the seniors followed. The gym was in a buzz of voices; the Grammarians did not know in the least what to make of the empty stage, and the non-appearance of the actors.

"Let's go and see what's become of the duffers?" exclaimed Carker at last, and his suggestion was adopted.

A crowd of Grammarians invaded the stage and the wings, and passed through into the dressing-room at the back.

There was a roar of astonishment as they saw the whole dramatic company stretched on the floor, vainly struggling with their bonds, and trying to bite their gags away.

"M-m-m-my hat!" gasped Carker. "What's happened?"

Gordon Gay made frantic signs to him. Carker stooped and removed his gag.

Gordon Gay gasped.

"Have the St. Jim's chaps gone?" he stuttered.

"Yes; a quarter of an hour or more ago. But what——"

"Cut me loose, you ass!" growled Gordon Gay. "It's too late! Why couldn't some of you dummies come along before?"

"But—but what——"

"Tom Merry's been here, fathead."

"Oh! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!"

But Carker did not shut up. He roared, and so did the rest of the Grammarians when they learned what had happened. Gordon Gay & Co. were released; and they dashed down to the gates at once, in the hope of coming upon some straggler belonging to St. Jim's. But the St. Jim's fellows were far enough away by that time. The Grammarians returned raging, while at St. Jim's, Tom Merry & Co. were celebrating their victory and rejoicing exceedingly.

It was a famous victory; and there was no doubt that Tom Merry & Co. had scored, at grips with the Grammarians; but it was a long time before Gordon Gay & Co. were able to see the joke. The next morning Gordon Gay received a postcard with a single line written upon it—a line he knew well by this time:

"One good turn deserves another."
(Signed) TOM MERRY.

(A grand extra-long, complete tale of *The Chums of St. Jim's next Wednesday*, entitled: "*Fa ty Wynn: Professional*," by *Martin Clifford*. Order next week's "*Gem Library*" now—Price one penny as usual.)

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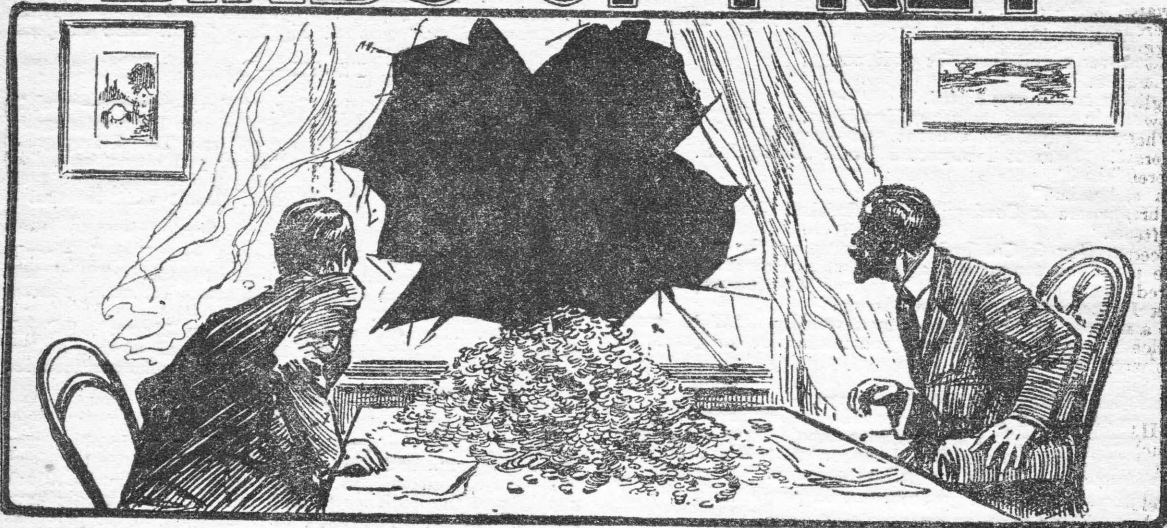
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WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR.

Nelson Lee, the world-famous detective, is devoting all his energies to the task of breaking the power of a gigantic criminal organisation, known as the Order of the Ring. The infamous secret society is under the leadership of a man who is known to all the members as "The Chief," but who also passes under the name of Mr. Stephen Meredith. His principal lieutenants are known as "The Squire," "The Doctor," and "Lady Ursula"—a beautiful young girl with the heart of a tiger.

With the intention of forcing him to join the Order, the Chief kidnaps Jack Langley, a young engineer, and Miss Aylmer, his fiancée. Jack proves obdurate, and so the two young people remain the captives of the Order. Their only hope of release comes from Nelson Lee, who is hot on the track of the Chief and his associates.

By a stroke of daring, Nelson Lee discovers and enters the retreat of his enemies, and succeeds in imprisoning Lady Ursula and the Squire in a secret room in their own house. Ethel Aylmer is rescued and brought in safety to Sheffield. Then, accompanied by an inspector, the detective visits Penleven Grange, on the Cornish coast, to arrest Sir Philip

Aylmer—Ethel's uncle—and a member of the Order of the Ring. The detective and his companion encounter the baronet in a narrow cliff-path, and with him are the Doctor and the Chief!

A tremendous struggle ensues; with a blow from his truncheon, the inspector fells the Doctor at his feet. Then, after a short encounter, he is successful in handcuffing Sir Philip Aylmer. Nelson Lee, however, has a long and furious fight with the Chief, until, unknown to both, they get near to the cliff-edge and fall over. Both are unhurt, but the detective loses his quarry, and after a while he goes to London, where he manages to enter the meeting-place of the Order of the Ring.

In the meantime, the Chief, who has escaped to Cherbourg, sends word by a sailor, to Jack Langley's gaoler to burn down the house with Jack inside. Lee, who is unaware of the message, enters, and, in company with Jack, is trapped in the burning building.

"The window!" gasps Nelson Lee. "It is our only chance!"

(Now go on with the Story.)

A Gallant Rescue.

He staggered across to the open window, and thrust out his head. Jack picked up the loose end of his chain—the other end was still fastened to the band round his ankle, of course—and followed the detective's example. In the street below was a surging crowd of men and women, who greeted their appearance with frantic shouts of excitement.

"Why the dickens don't they fetch a ladder?" growled Jack.

"Some of them have gone for one, I fancy," said Nelson Lee. "And I fancy, too, that the fire-brigade isn't far away, for I can hear the clanging of a bell and the clatter of horses' hoofs. But we daren't remain here until they arrive. We shall be roasted to death unless we clear out of this at once!"

This was only too obviously true, for even whilst he was speaking a long, thin tongue of flame was hungrily licking his heels.

"It's easy to say we must clear out," said Jack despondently; "but how are we going to do it? There's nothing below us but fifty feet of smooth, bare wall."

"Look up," said Nelson Lee. "The edge of the roof

is only just above our heads. We must climb out on to the slates, and wait until the ladder or the fire-brigade arrives."

"All right; I'm game!" said Jack. "Lead the way!"

"No, no," said the detective chivalrously; "you must go first! Give me the end of that chain, and I'll hand it up to you when you're on the slates."

There was no time to argue the point, so the young engineer gave Nelson Lee the end of the chain, and climbed out on to the narrow sill outside. When he stood erect, the edge of the sloping roof was exactly on a level with his waist. He bent himself forward in such a way that the upper part of his body lay flat on the slates. Then he gripped the slates as best he could with his elbows and his hands, and cautiously drew up his legs.

For a moment all went well. He got one knee over the edge of the roof, and was drawing up the other, when all at once, to his horrified dismay, he lost his grip on the slippery slates, and began to slide down. He made a frantic attempt to regain his foothold on the window-sill, but the effort ended in failure, and the next instant, amid a chorus of startled cries from the crowd, he slid back over the edge of the roof, and shot downwards through the air.

Then occurred one of the most marvellous and sensational feats that Nelson Lee had ever performed. As already

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described, Jack had handed him the end of the chain which was fastened to the iron band around his ankle.

The instant the young engineer began to slide down the roof the detective saw what was going to happen, and, with matchless presence of mind, he clutched the chain in a vicelike grip with both his hands, and braced his knees against the inside of the wall below the window.

Scarcely had he done so ere a violent shock jerked him forward, and almost tore his arms out of their sockets. By a herculean effort, he managed to prevent himself being dragged through the window, and an instant later the crowd below were electrified by the sight of Nelson Lee hanging half-way out of the window, with the young engineer, dangling head downward in the air, a couple of yards below him!

What a mighty roar of applause went up when the crowd understood what had happened! And even whilst they cheered the thunder of horses' hoofs was heard, mingled with the jingle of silvery bells, and a moment later the fire-brigade dashed up.

After that the rest was comparatively easy. One glance sufficed to show the firemen what had happened, and in less time than it takes to tell the fire-escape was run out and reared against the back of the house. Two minutes later Jack Langley's limp and senseless form was being carried into a neighbouring house, and Nelson Lee was struggling to extricate himself from an enthusiastic and cheering crowd that was bent on raising him shoulder-high.

On the Track of the Chief.

"Have you got the caretaker?"

Such was Nelson Lee's first questions as soon as he could make himself heard.

"Yes!" cried a dozen excited voices. "We broke into the club as soon as we heard the alarm of fire, and we found him lying unconscious in a big room on the first floor."

"Where is he now?"

"In mine house," said a benevolent-looking German Jew, elbowing his way to the front. "Come mit me, and I will take you to him."

"By-and-by," said Nelson Lee. "I must first go and see Mr. Langley."

"Is dot der young shentleman you haf shust now rescoot?" asked the Jew.

"Yes."

"Den you can two birds mit von stone kill!" said the Jew. "Both der caretaker and Herr Langley haf into mine house been carried."

"Right! I'll come with you in half a minute," said Nelson Lee.

He turned and beckoned to a constable who was assisting to keep back the crowd.

"Do you know the name of the caretaker of the Raglan?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said the constable. "Leastways, I don't know his surname, but he's known to everybody hereabouts as Black Bruno."

"Are you aware that he's a member of the Order of the Ring?"

The constable started as though he had been shot.

"Bruno a member of the Order of the Ring!" he gasped.

"That's what I said," said Nelson Lee. "The Raglan was the headquarters of that infamous league of murderers and thieves, and the man I have just rescued is Mr. John Langley, the electrical engineer, who has been a prisoner in the hands of these scoundrels for over six months. The arrest of the Squire and the Doctor, and the discovery of their secret mint have evidently caused something like a panic in the Order; and to-night, if I hadn't happened to interfere, the Raglan would have been burnt to the ground, and Jack Langley would have been roasted to death!"

"Well, you've saved Mr. Langley, but neither you nor anybody else can save the Raglan," said the constable, with a significant glance at the blazing building. "In an hour's time there'll be nothing left of the place save a few bare walls. But do I understand you to mean that the place was set on fire on purpose?"

"Yes," replied Nelson Lee.

"By Bruno?"

"Yes. That's what I want to speak to you about. It was I who gave him that knock on the head which deprived him of his senses. I want you to take charge of him now—to sit with him until he comes round, you know—and then I want you to place him under arrest for arson and attempted murder. It is quite possible that I may have other charges to prefer against him later, but those will suffice for the present. Now, sir, will you kindly lead the way to your house?"

This last request was addressed to the Jew, who accordingly conducted them into his house.

Bruno had been laid on the couch in a cosy little sitting-room, and was already showing signs of returning conscious-

ness. Jack was lying on a mattress on the floor, and was being examined by a doctor.

"Is he seriously hurt?" asked the detective, in anxious tones.

"It depends upon what you call serious," replied the doctor. "All the joints on one leg—the leg by which you held him—have been terribly strained and twisted; but, so far as I can ascertain, there is no fracture and no dislocation. His loss of consciousness is due to the fact that when he had dropped the full length of the chain, and came to a sudden stop, he banged his head against the side of the house with so much force that it stunned him."

"Concussion of the brain, in other words?"

"Exactly!"

"There is no fracture of the skull?"

"None that I can find."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said the detective fervently. "If your diagnosis is correct, he'll probably be all right in the course of a day or two—barring the injuries to his leg, of course."

"That is my opinion," said the doctor. "Do you know where he lives?"

"Yes; but his house has been shut up ever since he disappeared."

"Then I should strongly recommend that he be sent to the Middlesex Hospital."

"Very good," said Nelson Lee. "I will send for the ambulance at once."

He turned to the constable, who was mounting guard on Bruno, and despatched him to the hospital for the ambulance. Then he seated himself by the side of the half-unconscious Italian, and calmly proceeded to rifle his pockets.

"I'm not robbing the wounded!"—seeing the doctor and the Jew were regarding him with wondering eyes. "I was watching the Raglan to-night, and saw this man receive a letter under somewhat peculiar and mysterious circumstances. Shortly afterwards I caught him in the act of setting fire to the premises, and I shrewdly suspect that the letter he received was an order from a confederate—from the Chief of the Order of the Ring, in fact—commanding him to burn the place to the ground. He may have destroyed the letter, of course, but I'm hoping that he has it in one of his pockets, and if he has I mean to have a look at it. Ah, this is it, I expect!"

He drew the Chief's letter from Bruno's pocket and eagerly unfolded it.

"Confound it! It's in cipher!" he said, in a somewhat disappointed voice. "However, I never came across a cipher yet that I couldn't solve, so I'll take the trouble of annexing this letter in order to study it at my leisure."

He placed the letter in his pocket-book, and a few minutes later the ambulance arrived.

Leaving the constable in charge of Bruno, the detective accompanied Jack to the Middlesex and handed him over to the house-surgeon. He then despatched a wire to Ethel Aylmer, informing her of her lover's safety, and afterwards drove to Scotland Yard, and reported his discoveries. Following this he returned to his rooms in Gray's Inn Road, and as soon as he had had a bath and changed his clothes, he lit a pipe, seated himself at his writing-desk, drew out the cipher letter, and set to work to decode it.

This proved a stiffer task than he had bargained for, and long before it was accomplished the sun was streaming through the sitting-room window. At last, however, on the stroke of half-past eight, his perseverance was rewarded. He discovered the key to the cipher in which the letter was written, and, tearing a page from his notebook, he copied it out, word for word, in plain, straightforward English.

The Chief's letter, as the reader may possibly remember, contained the following passages amongst many others:

"England is too hot for me just now, so I am going to take up my quarters with our comrades in Paris for a while. In the meantime the Raglan is a standing danger to us, for if once that cursed Nelson Lee gets into the place, and discovers those books and papers in the safe, the Order of the Ring will be utterly and eternally ruined. . . . The word which opens the safe was changed at our last meeting; it is now ABSOLU. Fire the place to-night, and then come over and join me at our French establishment in the Avenue de la Reunion."

As soon as Nelson Lee had read his extraordinary communication, he was torn between two conflicting desires. His first desire was to rush back to the Raglan to superintend the removal of the safe, and to find out the nature of those "books and papers," on which the Chief apparently set such store. His second desire was to fly to Paris, and to hunt for that "establishment" in the Avenue de la Reunion, where the Chief had evidently taken up his quarters.

"To be or not to be—the safe or the Chief; which shall I go for first?" he muttered to himself, balancing the letter in his hand.

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He consulted his watch.
 "Twenty minutes to nine, and the boat express leaves Holborn at nine sharp. There's no time to be lost in hesitation. Shall I go, or shall I not?"
 "I'll go!" he exclaimed, as he thrust his watch back into his pocket. "Scotland Yard may have the safe, and I'll have the Chief!"
 He snatched up his pen and scribbled a hasty note to the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police:

"Dear Sir Edward," he wrote,—“Amongst the ruins of the Raglan Club you will find a fireproof safe. The lock is a combination lock, and, if it hasn't been destroyed by fire, the word that opens it is ABSOLU. If the lock is destroyed, burst open the safe in the best way you can. Inside it you will find important documents relating to the Order of the Ring. I am off to Paris to hunt for the Chief. Yours in haste,
 NELSON LEE.”

Five minutes later this note was in the hands of an express messenger, and was on its way to Scotland Yard. At nine o'clock the detective left Holborn, en route for the shores of France. His final quest had begun.

The Capture of Nelson Lee.

The Avenue de la Reunion is one of the longest thoroughfares in Paris. It starts just opposite the theatre of the same name, in the heart of the city, and, after crossing the line of the fortifications, it runs in an almost straight line for over two miles beyond the city boundaries. Inside the city it consists, for the most part, of cafes, hotels, and semi-public buildings, but as soon as it has crossed the fortifications it becomes more and more rural in its aspect, until at last it is little more than a country road, bordered on each side by private dwelling-houses of considerable size.

The reader will remember that the only clue that Nelson Lee had to the whereabouts of the Chief was the statement in his letter to Bruno that he had gone to “take up his quarters at our French establishment in the Avenue de la Reunion.”

Seeing that there were probably some two or three hundred houses and other buildings in the Avenue de la Reunion, it will be readily understood that this clue, important though it was, left a good deal to be desired in the matter of precision.

As soon as the detective arrived in Paris, therefore, he drove at once to the Prefecture of Police, and asked the Prefect if he could give him any information which would enable him to form an idea as to which was the house in which the Chief was hiding.

“There is only one house which appears to fulfil your requirements,” said the Prefect, after consulting his secret registers. “It is a big house, standing in its own grounds, about a mile and a half beyond the fortifications. It was purchased some four or five years ago by an Englishman of the name of Samuel Smith.

“According to my notes, Mr. Smith is an eccentric middle-aged bachelor, who is such a confirmed woman-hater that he will not have a female servant about his house. He has a fair number of servants, I understand, but all of them are men, and all of them are English. Moreover, there is a note in the register to the effect that no Frenchman has ever been known to be allowed to enter the house.”

“That's the house, without a doubt,” said Nelson Lee. “Mr. Samuel Smith is doubtless another alias for the Chief of the Order of the Ring. He told Mr. Langley that they had an establishment in France for the production of spurious banknotes and bonds, and this house in the Avenue de la Reunion is doubtless the place to which he referred.

“His so-called servants are probably the men who are engaged in the production of the banknotes, and no stranger is allowed to visit lest their illegal occupation should be discovered.”

The Prefect agreed that all this sounded very plausible, and as soon as the detective obtained a full description of the exact situation of the house he took his leave, and set out on a tour of exploration.

It was half-past seven when he reached the house, which was an old-fashioned family mansion, standing in extensive and well-wooded grounds, surrounded by high stone walls.

The more he examined it—from the road, of course—the more he felt convinced that this was the house for which he sought, and he determined, therefore, that as soon as it was dark he would enter the grounds, and endeavour to examine the house at closer quarters than was possible from the road.

With this intention he returned to the city, and invited himself to dinner with one of his many friends in the Champs Elysees.

At half-past eleven he set out again for the Avenue de la Reunion, and almost exactly on the stroke of midnight he

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was standing outside the big iron gates that gave admittance to the grounds of the house he suspected.

The night was pitchy dark, with more than a suspicion of thunder in the air. As it was impossible to tell what hidden dangers lurked in this darkness, he hesitated for a moment before he entered, but as nothing occurred to arouse his distrust he opened the gate and stole inside. Revolver in hand, he started to grope his way up the winding carriage-drive that led towards the house, but before he had taken a dozen strides—a couple of ghostly figures—each of them armed with a revolver—started out of the darkness and clapped their weapons to his head, one on his right and the other on his left.

“Halt!” said one of the men in a commanding voice. “One step farther, one single cry, and you're a dead man! What brings you here, and whom do you seek?”

The detective glanced from one to the other in speechless dismay. It was only too plain that these were sentinels posted by the Chief to guard the entrance to the grounds.

Probably they had been watching from the first, and had only waited until he was well inside before pouncing upon him and challenging him. So swift had been their action, so ghost-like their movements, that the first warning he received of their presence was the pressure of their revolvers on his temples.

In spite of this, however, his presence of mind never deserted him for a moment, but with lightning-like rapidity he dropped on his knees between the two men, caught each of them by a leg, and flung them backwards off their feet.

This novel method of attack was so unexpected that the two men were sprawling on their backs before they had time to realise what was happening. As the detective sprang towards the gate, however, an enormous mastiff bounded through the darkness and leaped at his throat. As he had dropped his revolver in order to grip the sentinels, he was practically defenceless, but with matchless courage he seized the hound by the throat, and exerted all his strength to strangle it.

In the meantime, however, the two men had scrambled to their feet, and a moment later they flung themselves upon him and bore him to the ground. Despite the odds against him, the detective defended himself with characteristic pluck and determination, but before the struggle had been in progress many seconds a crowd of excited men, attracted by the barking of the mastiff, poured out of the house and rushed to their comrades' assistance.

Kicking, struggling, fighting to the last, the detective was finally overpowered, and carried in triumph towards the house.

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"Have you got him?" said a well-remembered voice, as they dragged him up the steps that led to the front door. "Bring him into the light, and let me see if I know him." They hauled the helpless detective into the lighted hall. Then the Chief—for such it was—started back with a cry of exultant surprise.

"Welcome! A thousand times welcome, Mr. Nelson Lee!" he cried. "At last I have got you into my clutches, and, by Heaven, I'll exact a bitter revenge for all that has happened these last six months!"

Nothing daunted, the detective raised his head and faced the Chief with a calm, unwavering gaze.

"Yes, you have got me into your clutches at last," he said, proudly and defiantly. "But your triumph comes too late. All the revenge in the world will not undo the work which I have accomplished. The Squire and all his subordinates, the Doctor and Lady Ursula, Black Bruno and Sir Philip Aylmer, all these are now in custody. Miss Aylmer and Jack Langley are at liberty. The Firefly and the Dolphin are lying at the bottom of the sea. Dashwood House, and the house in Belgrave Square, Abbeyvale Hall and the underground mint—all these are in the possession of the police. The Raglan is a heap of smoking ruins, and the contents of the safe—"

He paused, to let his own words sink in.

"Yes?" said the Chief, impatiently. "The books and papers in the safe—what of them?"

"They are now in the hands of the police," said the detective quietly.

The Chief recoiled, with a low, hoarse cry of mingled fury and dismay.

The books and papers in the safe included, amongst other things, a complete register of the names and addresses of all the members of the Order of the Ring, together with sufficient documentary evidence to send all of them to prison, and many of them to the gallows. In addition to this, there were also many letters and reports relating to the house in the Avenue de la Reunion, and the purpose for which it was used. Truly, then, if these books and papers had fallen into the hands of the police, the Order of the Ring would indeed—as the Chief had said in his letter to Bruno—be "utterly and eternally ruined," wiped out of existence, exterminated root and branch.

"You are lying!" said the Chief, striding up to Nelson Lee, and shaking his fist in the detective's face. "You think to frighten me. Black Bruno opened the safe, and scattered the contents all over the place, before he set the Raglan on fire!"

"He would have done so if I had given him time, no doubt," said Nelson Lee.

"You prevented him?"

"I am proud to think that I did," said the detective.

"Then it is you we have to thank for the capture of Black Bruno, and the seizure of those papers?"

"It is I whom you have to thank for everything," said Nelson Lee. "Single-handed I have fought your famous Order of the Ring, and single-handed I have beaten you! What care I, then, do you think, for the threats of exacting a bitter revenge? My work is finished. Kill me, torture me, do what you will, the victory still is mine; the sting of defeat is yours!"

For a moment the Chief glared at him in speechless fury. Then he turned to his confederates.

"Let the two sentries return at once to their posts," he said. "The rest of you bring Mr. Lee into the dining-room. If what he says is true, the sooner we settle accounts with him, and make ourselves scarce, the better for all concerned."

Sentenced to Death.

The dining-room was a large but low-roofed apartment, lighted in the day-time by a couple of French windows, and at night by a handsome chandelier, which hung from the centre of the ceiling. Immediately underneath this chandelier, which was lighted now, of course, was a long, narrow table, with six chairs on each side of it, and one at each end.

By order of the Chief, the detective was forced into the chair at the foot of the table, and two of his captors took up their stand beside him—one on either side—each with a loaded revolver in his hand. The Chief then took his seat at the head of the table, and the rest of the men, to the number of ten, seated themselves in the chairs at each side.

"You have heard Mr. Lee's statement, gentlemen," began the Chief, after laying his revolver on the table in front of him. "If what he says is true—if the police are really in possession of the books and papers of our Order—then the secret of this house is a secret no longer. Such being the case—always assuming that Mr. Lee is speaking the truth—the English police will probably lose no time in writing to their

colleagues in Paris to raid this house and arrest its inmates. In fact, for anything we know, the English police may have wired already, and at this moment the gendarmes may actually be on their way here.

"Under these circumstances, it will be obvious to all of you that we haven't a moment to lose. As I said before, the sooner we settle accounts with Mr. Lee, and clear out of this house, the better for all concerned. Most of you have heard me say that if ever Mr. Lee fell into my hands I would exact a prolonged and terrible revenge for all the misfortune he has brought upon us. As you are aware, I had intended to keep him in captivity for weeks and months, probably for years, and to make his life one hideous, long-drawn scene of agonising torture. But this, I deeply regret to say, is no longer possible. If the police are in possession of the secret of this house, we daren't afford to waste any time in fanciful schemes of revenge. Our vengeance must be sudden, short, and swift. Do I speak well?"

A growl of assent ran round the table.

"According to our rules," continued the Chief, "the sentence of death can only be pronounced by a majority of the Ruling Council, which consists, as you know, of the Squire, the Doctor, and myself. But the Squire and the Doctor, thanks to Mr. Nelson Lee, are at present in the hands of the police. Strictly speaking, therefore, I have the right to pronounce a sentence of death on Mr. Lee without consulting anybody. But I desire to waive that right. I wish to do nothing that has not your unanimous approval. I wish you to look upon Mr. Lee as the prisoner at the bar, upon myself as the judge, and upon yourselves as the jury. The charge against him is one of conspiring to overthrow the Order of the Ring. What is your verdict? Is he guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!" yelled every man present.

"And your sentence?"

"Death!"

The Chief bowed, and took up his revolver.

"Prisoner at the bar," he said, addressing Nelson Lee, "you have been found guilty, and sentenced to death. Have you anything to say—anything to urge why I should not now proceed to carry out the sentence of the court?"

The detective rose from his chair, his face as calm and impassive as though it were carved in marble. He glanced round the room with an air of quiet self-possession; and then, with the swiftness of a lightning-flash, he dashed his fists into the faces of the two men on each side of him, and sprang towards the nearest window.

A dozen revolvers were instantly levelled at his head, and a dozen bullets flew about his ears. But his life seemed to be charmed, and he had actually reached the window, and was in the act of tearing down the blind, when one of his foes, more nimble than the rest, leaped upon him from behind and dragged him to the ground.

Like a pack of ravening wolves the rest of the scoundrels rushed towards him; but in less time than it takes to tell, he shook his assailants off, and leaped to his feet.

With his fists as his only weapons he charged into the thick of his foes, and scattered them like chaff before the whirlwind.

Inch by inch he fought his way towards the door, and for several seconds it seemed as though the intrepid detective, by sheer pluck and audacity, was about to effect his escape.

Suddenly, above the uproar, the voice of the Chief was heard.

"Stand back, you idiots!" he yelled. "Have you all taken leave of your senses? Stand aside, and let me have a shot at him!"

The crowd fell back, and the Chief raised his revolver; but at the same instant the detective snatched up a chair, and hurled it at the chandelier. The crack of the Chief's revolver mingled with the deafening crash of broken glass, and the next moment the room was plunged in total darkness.

Wounded though he was, for the Chief's bullet had passed through the fleshy part of his arm, the detective instantly dropped on his hands and knees, and crawled beneath the table. Under cover of this novel shelter, and whilst his demoralised foes were rushing about in the darkness, and seizing each other by mistake, he started to creep towards the door.

When he reached the end of the table, which was three or four yards from the door, he threw himself flat on his face, and began to wriggle across the floor between his enemies' feet in that snakelike fashion so dear to the heart of the Red Indian.

Scarcely had he emerged from beneath the table, however, when somebody stumbled over him, and an instant later he felt a man's hands on the back of his neck.

"Here he is! I've got him!" yelled the man; but almost before the words were out of his mouth the door was suddenly burst open, and one of the sentries rushed into the room.

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"Quick! Flee for your lives!" he gasped. "The police have arrived, and are coming up the carriage-drive!"

It was true. On receipt of Nelson Lee's note, the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police had immediately dispatched a number of men to disinter the safe from the ruins of the Raglan. Owing to the fact that one of the walls had fallen in, and had buried the safe under a mammoth pile of masonry, this task had not been accomplished until late in the afternoon, but by seven o'clock in the evening the safe had been removed to Scotland Yard, had been opened, and had been rifled of its contents.

Amongst the contents, as already stated, were a number of documents relating to the banknote factory in the Avenue de la Reunion. As soon as the authorities at Scotland Yard had read these papers they had wired a long report to the Prefect of the Paris police, and had asked him to set a watch on the house, and, if necessary, to arrest its inmates. This report had reached the Paris Prefect shortly after eleven o'clock, and without a moment's loss of time, remembering what Nelson Lee had told him earlier in the day, he had mustered a troop of gendarmes, and had sent them off to the Avenue de la Reunion, with instructions to raid the house and secure all its occupants.

This, as the reader knows, was exactly what the Chief had feared, and the moment he found that his fears were realised he rushed to the nearest window, tore down the blind, flung open the sash, and vanished into the darkness outside.

This cowardly desertion plunged his twelve confederates into panic-stricken confusion, and ere they had recovered their presence of mind, the detective hurled his captor aside, leaped to his feet, sprang through the open window, and dashed away in pursuit of the Chief.

By that time the Chief had crossed the lawn in front of the house, and was making for the boundary wall which divided the grounds from the neighbouring fields. Owing to the darkness, the detective could not see him; but he could hear the thud of his flying feet, and, with this as his only guide, he chased his quarry across the grounds, over the wall, through a couple of fields, and into a narrow, deserted country road that bordered the railway-line.

For upwards of a mile the detective chased his fleet-footed foe along the road, gaining ground at every stride. At last, finding that he could not shake his pursuer off, the Chief wheeled round and opened fire with his revolver.

Crack—crack—crack—crack!

Four bullets in quick succession whistled through the air, but flew harmlessly over his pursuer's head.

Again he pressed the trigger, forgetful of the fact that he had fired twice already in the dining-room.

Click! No flash and no report.

With a savage oath, he hurled the empty weapon into Nelson Lee's face, and sprang on to the low, wooden fence which divided the road from the railway-line. Quick as thought the detective sprang after him, and the next instant they were rolling down the sloping embankment, locked in each other's arms.

Then commenced a desperate scuffle on the railway-line. For a time the Chief appeared to be gaining the supremacy,

but little by little the detective wore him out, and at last succeeded in rolling him over on his back and fastening his hands on his throat.

"Now will you surrender?" he panted.

For a moment the Chief made no reply. He ceased to struggle, and lay perfectly still. Then a blaze of triumph illuminated his eyes. He threw his arms round Nelson Lee's waist, and locked his fingers behind the detective's back.

"Listen!" he hissed.

The detective's face turned suddenly pale. Clearly and distinctly, growing louder every second, he heard the sullen rumble of an approaching train.

"Do you hear it?" hissed the Chief, tightening his grip on the detective's waist, and twining his legs round those of Nelson Lee's. "It's the one o'clock express from Paris! It's coming down this line! In another two minutes it will pass over the spot where we are lying! How do you like the prospect, Mr. Nelson Lee?"

A thrill of horror shot through the detective's frame as he realised the Chief's meaning. The scoundrel knew that he himself was doomed, whatever happened, and he had apparently made up his mind to engulf them both in a common destruction.

As soon as Nelson Lee had grasped this appalling fact, he loosed his hands from his prisoner's throat and seized him by the arms.

He made a furious attempt to force the miscreant's hands apart; but the Chief only clung to him all the tighter, whilst at the same time he burst into a shrill, maniacal laugh.

"Not so—not so, Mr. Nelson Lee!" he cried. "You have caught me, and, by Heaven, you shall keep me! The hangman's noose or the wheels of the train—it's all the same to me! You have sworn to have my life, and you shall have it now! We will perish together!"

Summoning up all his remaining strength, the detective made another desperate effort to free himself. But the fiercer he struggled, the tighter grew his adversary's grip.

Over and over they rolled in the four-foot way, first one and then the other uppermost; but never for an instant did the Chief relax his grim and remorseless embrace.

In the midst of their reckless struggle, the headlights of the oncoming express burst into view round a curve in the line about five hundred yards away. With a final, despairing effort, the detective clenched his fist and dealt the Chief a terrific blow between the eyes. Half dazed by the blow, the Chief, for one brief fraction of a second, allowed his grip to relax, and in the twinkling of an eye the detective wriggled out of his grasp and rolled into the safety of the six-foot way.

Foaming with rage, oblivious of his danger, the Chief leaped wildly to his feet; but even as he did so, the train came thundering up and hurled him to the ground.

Across the night a single piercing shriek rang out. Then the train swept on, like some remorseless Juggernaut. It had been the end of the once dread Chief of the Order of the Ring!

THE END.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S SPECIAL ALL-STORY NUMBER WILL CONTAIN A 27-PAGE COMPLETE TOM MERRY TALE.

GRAND NEW SCHOOL SERIAL STORY,

"Sir Billy, of Greyhouse,"

By R. S. WARREN BELL,

. . . Starts in . . .

No. 265 "THE GEM" LIBRARY.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 263.
"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR."
Every Friday.

What to do in Canada.

BY A SUCCESSFUL EMIGRANT.

I stood on the landing-stage at Liverpool one day last week. There was a great crowd of people pressing around the barriers that held the pressure in check. I noticed one of these people in particular. He was a lad of about sixteen years of age, and his face fairly glowed with joy at the prospect of the voyage he was about to go on. I heard him mention that he was bound for the city of Toronto; and I wished that I could accompany him, for I have very happy memories of that fine city.

It may be that, in the near future, some of my readers may find themselves starting out on the same journey. I took that voyage ten years ago, and I have never once regretted it. There is always an opening—and a good one—for the youth with plenty of pluck in any part of our splendid North American colony. But there are certain things which only experience can teach that lead to the greatest success. It is not always pleasant to have to wait for experience to teach us; so, as I have had the teaching, and as I know now what to do, and what to avoid, I will have great pleasure in telling you some things.

Now, let us suppose that you have landed at Montreal. You have no friends to meet you, and your funds consist of the sum which you must produce before the authorities will allow you to land. This sum is, between April and November, £5; and between November and April, £10. It is very unwise to embark on a new life in a new country with anything short of £20, at least. But let us say you have the bare £5. When you leave the boat at Montreal, you are in the south of the city. On each side of you rise up the great grain elevators, and right ahead lies the centre of the city.

You will find many people ready to conduct you to hotels. Don't go with anyone! What I would advise you to do is, go to the Young Men's Christian Association building. Here you can obtain both food and a room, and have the company of young fellows, many from your own country, who will be only too pleased to put you in the way of getting into a situation. You can apply to the registry office in the building, and it is ten chances to one that you will find yourself at work next day.

But I must warn you in one particular. Do not be too hard to please in the kind of job. Take the first job that comes along, and during the time you are getting used to the ways of the city, or country, keep your eyes open for something better.

The wages are better than you can get at home. But, on the other hand, you will find things a little dearer. You should take plenty of heavy underwear if you start out to spend a winter, for the cold is very intense, though being of a dry nature, one can bear it better than if it were like our own damp winters.

Money is mostly paper. First you have the cent. This is the same size as our halfpenny. Next comes the five-cent piece, made of silver, and worth twopence halfpenny. The ten-cent piece comes next, then the quarter and half dollar pieces. The dollar is usually paper, and is worth four shillings and twopence—100 cents.

A working lad can get full board and lodging for three and-a-half dollars per week. If you only take a room, you can get a nice, warm, bed-sitting-room for one-and-a-half dollars per week. There are plenty of good restaurants where you can get right good food for less than you would have to pay at home.

For fifteen cents you can get a good meal. I found out that these eating-houses issue tickets with numbers marked on them from one to twenty-one. You purchase a ticket, and instead of paying for every meal, you have a number punched out. The advantage of the ticket system is this, you get each meal at a less cost than if you paid as you eat. A fifteen cent meal on a ticket is only charged at the rate of twelve cents. Therefore, on a twenty-one meal ticket, you save two shillings and sevenpence-halfpenny.

The summer is very hot, and, as I have said, the winter is very cold. But what glorious sports! I'd give a lot to be on the St. Lawrence to-day! Where in the summer one had to take the ferry across to St. Helen's Island, you can spin with the speed of the wind across a mass of ice ranging from four to six feet in thickness. And the fairy lights and the bands! Oh, it is splendid sport!

Then there are the theatres, music-halls, and picture-houses, just the same as at home. I never found time hang on my hands for want of some sport.

Now, I guess I have told you enough of the cities. I will take you to the country next week.

A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of 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, Scotch, 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.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

K. Poulton, Clarence Street, Burwood, Sydney, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader about 14 years of age, living in England.

F. Paske, Nyora, Fernbank Street, Warwickville, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, would like to correspond with a girl reader, age 16, living in London.

W. J. Bradley, 35, Eastwood Street, Ballarat, East Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age about 15, living in the British Isles.

S. Lindell, 76, Primrose Street, Moonee Ponds, Victoria, Australia, would like to exchange stamps with "Gemites" in different parts of the world.

S. Clifton, 253, Bouverie Street, Carlton, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader age about 17 to 18, living in England.

B. H. Stolz, Clarence Park, S. Australia, wishes to correspond with two girl readers of the "Gem," living in England, age 16.

I. Helper, 132, Sarahaki Street, Wellington, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, about 16, living in England.

F. Lane, age 17, of Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader about the same age, living in England, who is interested in athletics.

F. E. Smith, 317, Carlton Street, Winnipeg, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 17 to 20, living in England.

R. Telfer, Lane Street, off Brazil Street, Broken Hill, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers, with a view to exchanging stamps.

T. C. F. Blick, Greta, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in England, between ages of 16 and 19.

W. Allan, Berneth, Nashville, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with young English girl reader of "The Gem," living in England, age 14 to 15.

F. Kelley, Box 271, Pretoria, S. Africa, wishes to correspond with an Irish or Welsh (boy or girl) reader, age 18.

E. J. Godden, 132, Eagle Avenue, Brantford, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Kent, England.

W. Deneby, 10, Glassford Street, Armadale, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a British boy reader, age 20.

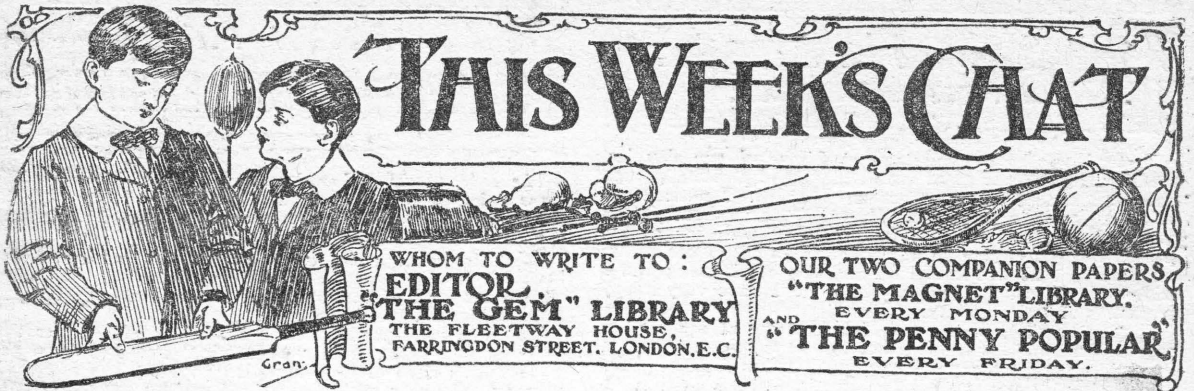
H. Dickenson, A.B., H.M.S. Alert, Persian Gulf, care of G.P.O., London, wishes to correspond with a young lady living in England, age 18 to 20.

S. W. Jansen, 15, Westminster Road, Salt River, Cape-town, S. Africa, wishes to correspond with an English boy reader, age 16 to 17.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 263.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE

**For Next Wednesday.**

A Twenty-seven-Page School Story, entitled

"FATTY WYNN: PROFESSIONAL."

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

Next week's grand, long, complete story of the chums of St. Jim's tells of the amazing device adopted by Fatty Wynn, the plump Welsh partner, in the famous New House firm of Figgins & Co., with the primary object of "raising the wind," in order to provide the wherewithal to feed his almost insatiable appetite. Fatty Wynn turns his brilliant talent of goalkeeping to good account, and in addition to hard cash, wins a considerable measure of fame as the schoolboy goal-keeper of a professional football team. The fat Fourth-Former keeps his new profession a strict secret at St. Jim's, but his chums are not very long in finding him out, and

"FATTY WYNN: PROFESSIONAL,"

has to be content with a short, though brilliant career as a football "pro."

EIGHT CASH PRIZES WON.

I have much pleasure in announcing this week the result of the "Friends' Opinions" Competition, which has been running in connection with Nos. 13, 14, and 15 of our companion paper, the "Penny Popular." Needless to say, I had great difficulty in selecting the winners from the avalanche of postcards which descended upon this office, bearing a most varied and interesting assortment of "Non-Readers' Opinions," but the task was gradually narrowed down by a process of careful judging, and the eight prize-winners were at length decided.

The sum of Ten Shillings has therefore been sent to each of the following readers:

Thomas Jordan, 76, Horseferry Road, Westminster; C. Kelly, 36, Hunter Street, Liverpool; C. Ayres, 5, Avenue Terrace, Cavendish Road, Merton, Surrey; Albert Webster, Lumb Farm, Triangle, near Halifax, Yorkshire.

The four prizes of Five Shillings each have been sent to the following readers:

H. Winter, 9a, Wells Terrace, Finsbury Park, London, N.; Ernest Levi, 59, St. Kilda's Road, Stoke Newington, London, N.; H. Shubrook, 64, Coverton Road, Tooting, S.W.; Henry Hayes, Meadow Cottage, Tettenhall, Wolverhampton.

The Colonial section of this competition, for which additional Cash Prizes are offered, is still open.

TO REMOVE TATTOO MARKS.

A number of readers have written up to me from time to time to know if there is any method of taking out tattoo-marks from the skin. There is a method, but the greatest care must be exercised in applying it, or serious mischief may result. For this reason I strongly advise those of my readers who have been so foolish as to have marks tattooed upon their skin to leave them alone. However, for the benefit of those who have specially written to me for a remedy, I can recommend the following as the best method:

The tattooed part should be thoroughly washed first with soap and water, and then some antiseptic solution, such as weak carbolic lotion. I cannot impress too strongly upon you the necessity for scrupulous cleanliness, both in this and the other stages of the operation, as the use of a dirty instru-

ment, or the puncturing of the skin where it is not thoroughly clean, may lead to blood-poisoning.

When the part is thoroughly washed and sterilised, take a bunch of six or eight needles (very fine ones), bound together with silk thread, and dip the points first into boiling water, and then into the antiseptic solution, so that they may also be thoroughly sterilised.

Having satisfied yourself that the points are perfectly clean, dip them into a solution of glycerole of papoid, and prick this well into the tattoo-marks. This glycerole of papoid may be obtained from practically any chemist, who will also, on application, supply you with a suitable antiseptic solution. On the whole, if the tattoo-marks are not disfiguring, I should advise you to leave them alone.

Replies in Brief.

J. Smith.—Thanks for your postcard. Addresses have been published from time to time of various presidents of "Gem" Leagues in different parts of England.

"Nemo" (Birr).—Thanks for your letter and suggestions, which I will consider.

L. H. (Grays).—Thanks for your suggestion, which, however, I am sorry to say I cannot see my way clear to carry out.

R. White and W. Packwood.—Thank you for pointing out a mistake. In spite of all precautions, these errors will creep in sometimes.

Bill Adam (Toronto).—Much as I should like to carry out your suggestion, I am afraid both Martin Clifford and Frank Richards are too busy at present. However, we will see what can be done.

C. R. Wykes (Paddington).—Thank you for your letter and suggestion. I am sorry I cannot see my way clear to adopt this latter just at present.

W. T. (Sunderland).—Thank you for your letter. The cost mentioned in the Replies in Brief Column some time back, of posting six "Magnets" to Canada is 2s. 6d. If you make inquiries at your post-office, you will find that "The Magnet" cannot be sent per "Magazine Post," the rate of which is a penny a pound.

Griffith, H. (Melyncourt, S. Wales).—I am sorry I cannot find a separate record of the matches between "All Blacks" and Welsh teams played in 1905. You could find out from the editor of "The Sporting Life," 148, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

THE MAGIC OF NUMBERS.

1. If two even numbers are added together or subtracted from each other, their sum or difference will be an even number. 2. If two uneven numbers are added or subtracted, their sum or difference will be an even number. 3. The sum or difference of an even and uneven number added or subtracted will be an uneven number. 4. The product of two even numbers will be an even number. 5. The product of an uneven and an even number will be an even number. 6. If several different numbers divisible by three are added or multiplied together, their sum and their product will also be divisible by three. 7. If two numbers divisible by nine are added together, the sum of the figures in the amount will be a number divisible by nine.

YOUR EDITOR.