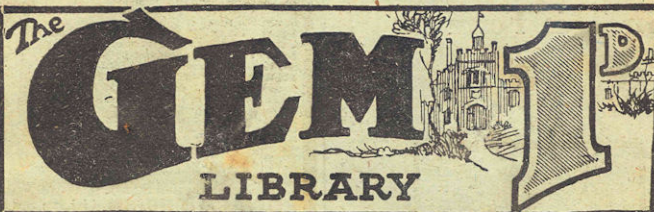


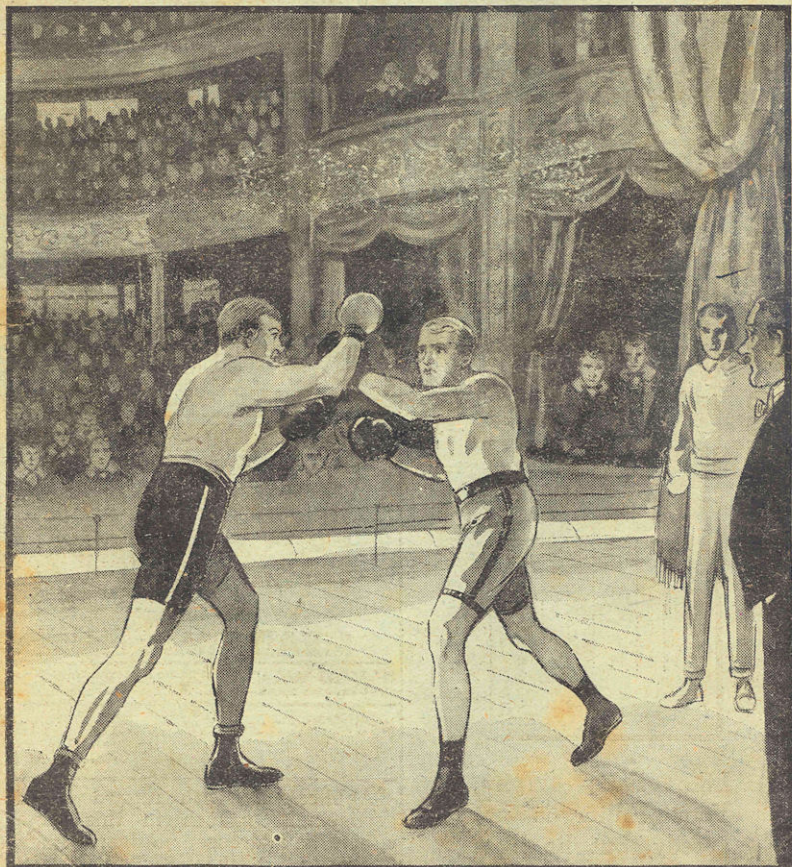
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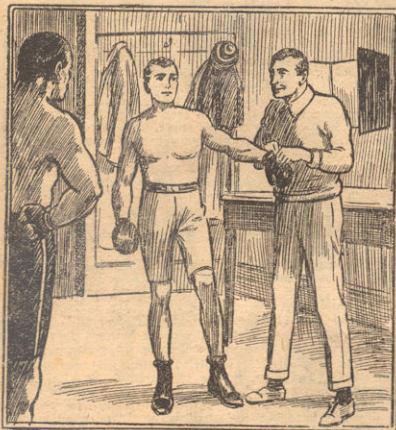
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CHAPTER I.

Supporting the Empire!

"THE question is—"
"Whether we can raise the tin," said Blake thoughtfully.
"Certainly not, deah boy. The question is—"
"Whether we can dodge the prefects," said Tom Merry.
"Weally, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, in a tone of mild remonstrance, "I am surprised at you. That is not the question at all. The question is—"
"Whether we can get our prep. finished in time," said Monty Lowther.
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy extracted his eyeglass from the pocket of his elegant waistcoat, and jammed it into his eye. Having lodged it there to his satisfaction, he surveyed the juniors gathered in Tom Merry's study majestically. There were seven fellows there in all—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, of the Shell, and Blake and Herries and D'Arcy and Digby, of the Fourth Form.
They were debating the question—whatever it was—very earnestly. Blake was going through his pockets, and counting the various coins he extracted therefrom. Herries was examining a bad shilling with intent gaze, as if by the intensity of his stare he could turn it from a bad one into a good one. All the juniors were looking very serious, as became fellows who had a difficult problem to solve, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, standing in an elegant attitude by the mantelpiece, was laying down the law.
It was rather a favourite practice of D'Arcy's, laying down the law; but his majestic opinions sometimes fell upon unheeding ears. It was said of old that wisdom erics out in

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

the streets, and no man regards it; and the same applies to the studies of junior schoolboys.

"The question," resumed D'Arcy, "is—"

"To be, or not to be, that is the question," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "I know that, because I've read it in Shakespeare. To be, or not to be, that is the question—whether 'tis good or bad for my digestion?"

"Pway don't be funny now, Lowthah, at a serious moment," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely. "It is not a question of money. You are quite w'ong there, Blake. It is not a question of money at all."

"How are we to get in if he can't pay for admission?" demanded Blake.

"That's all wright. It's not a question of money. I've got lots of money."

"Now you're talking!" said Lowther. "Why couldn't you say that at first? Gentlemen, it's Gussy's treat; and after Gussy has come to the rescue in this noble manner, it's up to us to risk the prefects and blow the prep."

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally, Lowthah, I wish you would let me finish!"

"Life's too short!" said Monty Lowther, with a shake of the head. "Gentlemen, now that the question is settled—"

"But it isn't settled!" shrieked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I insist upon speakin'. It is not a question of money. It is not a question of the prefects. We can dodge prefects—we've done it before, and can do it again!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We've done them before, and can do them again," agreed Lowther. "Good. Now the question's settled!"

"Likewise, it is not a question of pwep. We can mug up enough to get through to-morrow mornin' in class, and anyway, it only means a wow, and we've been in wows before."

Next Wednesday

"MISUNDERSTOOD!" AND "THE CHEER-OH CHUMS!"

"Boy-vow!" said Lowther. "So we have!"

"The question is—"

"Settled?"

"The question is one of form."

"Eh!" said five voices all at once.

"The question is one of form!" pursued Arthur Augustus victoriously.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Blake. "Here's Gussy getting on the high horse again; and he won't get off in time for us to start for Wayland. I know him."

"It's a question of form, deah boys!"

"Which Form?" asked Lowther. "Fourth, Fifth, or Shell?"

"I don't mean that kind of form, you ass!"

"Oh!" said Lowther, appearing to comprehend all of a sudden. "I understand. You mean about the seats at the Wayland Empire. That's all right, Gussy. We shan't have to sit on forms there as we do here. We shall have good seats in the stalls."

"I am not alluding to that kind of form, eithah!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "It is a question of good or bad form!"

Blake took out his watch.

"I suggest that we give Gussy two minutes to talk, and then get on and do as much of our prep. as we can before it's time to start for Wayland," he said.

"Agreed!"

"I refuse to talk for two minutes—I mean, for only two minutes. I have some very important remarks to make. The question weally is; whethah it's good form to go to the Wayland Empire without permish?"

"Go hon!"

"In the first place, the Wayland Empire is a music-hall. I know that music-halls have greatly improved in modern times, but I have some doubt whethah the Head would allow us to go to a music-hall."

"That's why we're not going to worry the Head about it at all," explained Blake. "I believe in being considerate towards a chap, even if he's a headmaster. We're not going to bother him. I refuse to bother him. I won't allow you to bother him."

"Certainly not," said Tom Merry. "I'm surprised at you, Gussy. Chap can't help being a headmaster, and you must admit that Dr. Holmes is a very good specimen—a very good specimen, indeed. He's a brick. I disapprove strongly of worrying him about this. I shan't mention the matter to him, for one."

"You are deliberately misunderstandin' me, you wotahs!" said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard through his aristocratic nose. "I think it prob. that the Head would not approve of our goin'." The question is, whethah it would be good form to go to a place that the Head might disapprove of. I want to go as much as you do, but I decline to be guilty of bad form."

"Nawfully deep question to decide," said Monty Lowther, shaking his head. "I'll tell you what, Gussy. You shall stand the seats, as you're rolling in money, and we'll go without you, and you can spend the evening thinking whether it's good form or not. You can let us know what you've decided when we get back."

"Hear, hon!" said the other fellows heartily.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle a little tighter into his eye, and bestowed a withering look upon the hilarious juniors.

"I regard you as asses. You will get into some trouble if I'm not there to look afah you. Besides, I want to go. Only I want to have it settled whethah it would be good form to go to a place the Head mightn't approve of. Suppose we ask Kildare for passes out, and tell him we're goin' to the Wayland Empire."

"And that we're not going to do any prep. because we've got other engagements!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Time's up," said Blake, putting his watch back into his

pocket. "You've had your innings, Gussy. Now let's grind for half an hour till calling-over."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Look here, Gussy," said Tom Merry, laughing. "The Wayland Empire is a decent place; it's not a low music-hall, but a place where a chap can go and take his father. If it wasn't a decent place, nobody here would want to go. But masters and prefects sometimes don't understand things, and they have objections to chaps going out in the evening, and they are awfully obstinate about preparation being done. Least said soonest mended, so we'll go, and trust to luck for the good form."

"Hear, hear!"

"I'll tell you what," said Lowther. "I'll put it to Mr. Lathom, if you like. I'll ask him his opinion in a general sort of way without mentioning that we're thinking of going, and see if he approves of the Empire. How's that?"

"Out!" said Digby.

"Well, that would be all wight," said D'Arcy doubtfully. "But how are you goin' to mention it without lettin' on?"

"Leave that to me!" said Lowther airily. "You're not the only chap in the school gifted with tact and judgment, old man. Follow me!"

"Vewy well, I agree to that!"

Arthur Augustus followed Lowther downstairs with a rather puzzled brow. The other juniors followed them grinning. They were pretty certain that the humorist of the Shell was only pulling Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's aristocratic leg, and that he had no intention of giving the Fourth Form-master any hint of the intended excursion.

Mr. Lathom was chatting with Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House, in the hall, and Lowther waited till Mr. Railton went into his study. Then he approached the Fourth Form-master very meekly and respectfully. Mr. Lathom blinked at him genially over his glasses. Mr. Lathom was always genial and good-tempered and absent-minded, and all the School House fellows agreed—not in Mr. Lathom's hearing, of course—that Lathom was a good little ass.

"Well, Lowther, what can I do for you?" said the Fourth Form-master good-naturedly, seeing that the Shell fellow wished to speak to him.

"If you please, sir, we've been having a little discussion, and I want to ask your advice, sir," said Monty Lowther meekly.

"Certainly, my boy—certainly!" said Mr. Lathom.

"We've been talking about the Empire, sir," pursued Lowther, blandly—"whether it's not a Briton's duty to put all other considerations aside and support the Empire."

"Most decidedly!" said Mr. Lathom, who was a great Imperialist, and who, it was rumoured at St. Jim's, had opened champagne in his study on the celebrated day when the news of the relief of Mafeking arrived, and who had a dreadful headache the next day. "Under all circumstances, my dear boy, it is the duty of every true-born Briton to support the Empire."

"Thank you very much, sir! I was sure you would agree with me," said Lowther.

"I am glad to see that you juniors discuss such interesting and instructive questions," said Mr. Lathom—"very pleased indeed!"

And the little Form-master walked away with a very genial nod.

Monty Lowther turned to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Satisfied?" he asked.

The juniors grinned, but Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and regarded Monty Lowther with a glance of the utmost severity.

"You uttah wotah, Lowthah! You have been pullin' Mr. Lathom's leg. He thought it was the British Empire you were alludin' to, not the Wayland Empire."

"Go hon!" murmured Tom Merry.

Lowther shook his head.

"I've got Mr. Lathom's assurance that it's our duty to support the Empire," he said. "That's quite good enough for me. If you know better than your Form-master—"

"But Mr. Lathom meant—"

"I know what he said. Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," said Monty Lowther, looking round, "Gussy agreed to leave it to the decision of Mr. Lathom, and Mr. Lathom has counselled us to support the Empire under any circumstances, and to put any other considerations aside."

"Hear, hear!" said the juniors.

"Therefore it is our duty to dodge the prefects and leave over the prep.—"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"And support the Empire," said Lowther. "This is where Gussy shuts up."

"But weally, Lowthah—"

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"You uttah wottah! Lowthah, you have been pullin' Mr. Lathom's leg. He thought it was the British Empire you were alludin' to, not the Wayland Empire." "Go hon!" murmured Tom Merry. "I've got Mr. Lathom's assurance that it's our duty to support the Empire," said Lowther. "That's good enough for me."
(See Chapter 1.)

"Stick to your bargain, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "It's up to a D'Arcy to stick to his word, you know."
"But I—"

"Now we'll go and do as much prep. as we can," said Jack Blake.

And Arthur Augustus gave in.

CHAPTER 2.

Arthur Augustus is Too Cautious.

IT was not very long since the new Empire had been opened in Wayland town.

Wayland had been a very sleepy old town at one time, waking up only on market-days. But the tide of modern progress had reached even that quiet old place in the heart of Sussex.

Wayland was waking up. There was a brand-new Hotel Royal, with a garage. There was a Suffragette Society, with processions and window-breaking. There was a cinematograph, with coloured pictures. And now there was the last sign of progress and civilisation—a local Empire.

"Twice Nightly!" stared at the Wayland folk from all the hoardings and dead walls in the town and round it.

Naturally the chums of St. Jim's wanted to visit the place and see the show. Excepting for an occasional circus or ventriloquist entertainment, the fellows did not have opportunities of seeing many shows.

And, according to the published advertisements, the programme was quite a refined one, and the Empire was a place

to which, as Tom Merry remarked, any chap could have taken his father.

It would not hurt the juniors to hear Mr. Curll singing "Flanagan's Sunday Trousers," or Miss Belle Bouncer rendering "The Loved, Loved Homeland."

Neither were the trick cyclists or the character-sketch artists at all harmful to the youthful imagination.

Best of all, there was a boxing turn, and that was what especially appealed to the minds of the juniors. Tom Merry especially, who was a very keen boxer, wanted to see "Tiny Tim box with the Limehouse Slogger."

In spite of Arthur Augustus's doubts and misgivings as to the good form, or otherwise, of visiting the local Empire, the party made up their minds to go.

And Arthur Augustus made up his mind to go with them—perhaps because he was really afraid that they would get into mischief without his fatherly care, or perhaps because he wanted to go.

On such an occasion, as Lowther said, preparation could be put off. And after calling-over the juniors prepared to get out.

They would be able to see the "first house," getting there a little late, and leaving before it was quite over in order to be back at St. Jim's for bedtime.

"Keep it awfully dark, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus.

"I fancy Knox, of the Sixth, has a wotten eye on us, for some reason. I have been very tactful with him, but so of your fellows might let the cat out of the bag, you know."

Jack Blake grunted.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY!

"MISUNDERSTOOD!"

"I suppose you've been doing that already!" he growled. "Weally, Blake, I have been doin' nothin' of the sort. Knox happened to see me bwingin' my coat down from the dorm, that's all.

"What did you let him see you for?" roared Blake. "I weally fail to see how I was to pwecent it. But I hoodwinked him all right," the swell of St. Jim's said, with a chuckle. "He asked me if I was goin' out—"

"And did you tell him?" demanded Digby sulphurously. "Certainly not! I told him that it was wude to inquire into nothan fella's affairs," said D'Arcy. "He gave me fine lines, the best! Howevah, I think my wemark put him in his place, don't you?"

Blake growled. "Put him on the watch, more likely, you ass! Knox is always looking for a chance to catch us, and now you've given him one."

"Wats!" "Knox'll come nosing along to the study presently to see if we've gone out," grunted Digby, "and he'll find us out."

"We shall have to wisk it, deah boys. Are you weady?" "Yes," growled Blake. "We're meeting the Shell chaps in the quad. Slip out of the House one by one, and don't let anybody see you."

"Wight-ho!" The juniors descended the stairs one at a time, and slipped out of the School House. The dusk was deep on the old quadrangle of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus was the last to leave the leave the House, and he slipped out with such elaborate precautions that five or six fellows at last spotted him as he went.

"Hallo, Gussy!" called out Kangaroo, of the Shell.

"Going out?" D'Arcy turned on the School House steps, and made a sign of great caution to the Cornstalk junior.

"Hush, deah boy!" Kangaroo stared at him. "What is there to hush about?" he asked.

"I'm goin' out without a pass, and doing it vewy sowevelly," the swell of St. Jim's explained.

"Oh, you look as if you are!" said Kangaroo. "Knox was watching you from the common-room as you came down. You'd better come in and start afresh."

"Oh, wats!" And Arthur Augustus disappeared. Knox, the prefect, came down the passage. He glanced out into the quadrangle, and then looked at the Australian junior.

"Did D'Arcy go out into the quad, just now, Noble?" the prefect asked.

"D'Arcy?" repeated Kangaroo. "Yes. Did you see him?"

"See him?" said Kangaroo. Knox knitted his brows.

"Did you see D'Arcy go out?" he demanded. "Out?" said the Cornstalk reflectively.

Knox gritted his teeth. He had old grudges to pay off against the chums of the School House, but there was evidently no information to be gained from Kangaroo. The prefect went out into the quad.

Kangaroo looked out after him, and gave a low, shrill whistle. Knox turned back angrily.

"Who are you whistling to?" he demanded. "Whistling!" said Kangaroo.

"Take fifty lines!" shouted Knox. "Lines!" repeated Kangaroo, with imperturbable calmness.

Knox strode away in the dusk, and Kangaroo chuckled. He had given a signal to the truant juniors, and that was all he could do.

The chums of Study No. 6 had just joined Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther by the school wall when they heard that whistle through the dusk from the direction of the House. Blake, who was just mounting the wall with the assistance of the slanting trunk of an old oak-tree, dropped to the ground again.

"That's Kangy's toot," he said. "It means danger."

"I'm afraid Knox is on the watch, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, we're goin' all the same. Buck up before he gets here."

"Ass!" said Tom Merry politely. "We don't want to be caught out. You fellows lie low, and I'll put Knox off the track."

"Bettah leave it to me, Tom Mewwy, deah boy—"

"Shurrup!" Tom Merry looked away towards the lighted front of the School House with an anxious brow. He caught sight of a moving figure. "You chaps buzz off," he whispered. "We can't chuck it up now, Knox or no Knox. You chaps get off to Wayland, and I'll follow you later. I've got an idea for putting Knox off the scent. Book a seat for me, and keep it for me at the Empire."

"But you—" began Lowther. "Buzz off! I'm leader!"

"But weally, Tom Mewwy—" "Here comes Knox, you ass! If he catches us we can't go! Buzz off!"

Tom Merry dashed back into the quadrangle. Knox evidently knew which part of the school wall to make for; he had climbed out by means of the slanting oak more than once himself, as a matter of fact—though that was a dead secret.

"I can see you there!" called out Knox. "Stop!" "Buck up!" murmured Blake. "Leave it to Tommy!"

"Weally, Blake—" Blake shoved D'Arcy up the wall without waiting for him to finish. D'Arcy's silk hat rolled over into the road, and the swell of St. Jim's followed it. There was the sound of a dreadful crunch.

"Oh! My toppah!" "Quiet!"

"I have busted my toppah—" "Shut up, you fathead—"

"But I shall have to go back for nothan toppah—" Blake grasped Arthur Augustus's arm, and dragged him away, and the juniors ran down the road.

CHAPTER 3. Not Out of Bounds.

RASH! "Ow!" roared Knox. Bump!

Tom Merry had rushed back under the elm-trees in such a hurry that he dashed right into Knox, and the prefect reeled back and fell, and the Shell fellow sprawled over him.

But for that timely accident the little party for the Wayland Empire would certainly have been spotted in getting over the wall.

Tom Merry was sprawling on the prefect, and seemed in no hurry to rise. He grasped Knox, and jammed him down on the ground, apparently under the impression that he was getting hold of a much less august person than a prefect of the Sixth.

"I've got you, Figgins!" he yelled. "You New House bouncer! I've got you!"

"Goo!" gasped Knox. "Ow! Gerroff!" "Got you this time, Figgins—"

"I'm not Figgins!" yelled Knox. "I'm not a junior, you young villain! I'm Knox!"

"Oh, don't be funny, Figg, old boy!" said Tom Merry. "I can't see you in the dark, but I know jolly well that you're Figgins! And—"

"Leggo!" "Rats!" said Tom Merry, sitting astride of his enemy's chest, and pinning him down by sheer weight. "Not till you own up that the School House is cock-house of St. Jim's!"

"Gerrup!" "Not just yet, Figg! I'm quite comfy, thanks!"

Knox made a terrific effort to throw off the junior. But Tom Merry had the advantage, and he kept it. He persisted, too, in thinking that it was Figgins, of the New House, he was sitting on. As he had said, he could not see him in the dark, so the mistake was natural.

"You young scoundrel!" said Knox sulphurously. "I'll report you to the Housemaster for assaulting a prefect! I'll hammer you! I'll cane you! I'll smash you! I'll have you gated for a term! I'll—"

"What a flow of eloquence you're getting, Figgins!" said Tom Merry admiringly. "Blessed if I knew you could roll it out like that! Go on!"

"I'll—I'll smash you!" gasped Knox. "I'll—"

"Hear, hear!" "I'll throttle you!" roared Knox. "Go hon!"

"Will you let me get up?" shrieked Knox. "I tell you I'm a prefect, and you know it jolly well, Tom Merry, you young villain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Knox struggled furiously.

Although the Sixth-Former was not athletic, and Tom Merry was the best athlete in the Lower School, probably his age and size would have told in a stand-up tussle. But Knox was down, and his enemy was sitting on him, and that made all the difference. The prefect struggled frantically.

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but he could not throw him off. He gasped and panted under the firm weight of the junior.

"You young hound!" he spluttered, choking with rage. "I'll be the death of you! You know perfectly well that I'm Knox, of the Sixth!"

"Keep it up!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Will you let me get up?" screamed Knox. Tom Merry grinned in the darkness. His friends were safe enough away by that time, and he could afford to discover his mistake, and realise that the fellow he was sitting on was not Figgins, of the Fourth.

"I say, is it really you, Knox?" he asked. "You know it is," yelled Knox. "You're sure you're not Figgins?" said Tom Merry, in a tone of hesitating doubt.

"You—you—you—"

"Are you sure you're not Figgins?" asked Tom Merry calmly. "Yes," spluttered Knox.

"Then I'm sorry, Knox, old man!" said the Shell fellow. "I'm willing to overlook the whole occurrence if you are."

"You—you villain! I'll have you flogged! I'll—"

"Will you?" said Tom Merry. "You're going to have me punished for biffing you over and sitting on you?"

"Yes!" screamed the furious Knox. "You're going to make it as bad for me as possible?"

"You'll see that I am, you young hound!"

"Then there's no hurry for me to get up!" said Tom cheerfully. "If it's to be as bad as possible, anyway, I may as well earn it! What do you think, Knox?"

"I—I—I—"

Knox made another desperate effort. He sank back, gasping and exhausted. Tom Merry was not to be shifted until he chose.

"Suppose we agree to make it pax?" said Tom, in a voice as gentle as that of a cooing dove. "I'm willing to let bygones be bygones, if you are."

"I'll smash you!"

"Then I'm afraid I shall have to continue thinking that you are Figgins, and keep you here till you're in a better temper."

"I—I—I—"

"Better not wriggle like that, Figgins. You'll get my knee in your ribs if you do! There! What did I tell you?"

"Ow, ow!"

"Better make it pax!" suggested Tom Merry. Knox panted with rage. It was miles beneath his dignity as a prefect to dream of making it "pax" with a mere junior. But he was quite helpless, and he had a natural disinclination to call for help and be discovered in such a ridiculous position.

"I—I'll let you off, Merry!" he stuttered. "It's pax?"

"Yes," said the prefect, between his teeth. "Good enough!"

Tom Merry jumped up. Knox leaped to his feet, and although he had made it pax, he made a wild grope after his assailant. But Tom Merry did not wait for that grope. He had disappeared under the darkness of the trees. Knox ground his teeth, and stumbled on towards the school wall, but he found no one there.

"Merry! Where are you?"

There was no reply.

"Merry!"

Knox set his teeth, and strode away towards the School House. He entered the House, and found Mr. Linton in the hall. Mr. Linton was master of the Shell—Tom Merry's Form.

"I have to report one of the Shell for breaking bounds, sir," said Knox.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Linton. "Who is it?"

"Merry, sir!"

"He was at calling-over," said Mr. Linton.

"He has gone out since, sir, and is out of bounds now!" said Knox.

"Very good! I will make a note of it!" said the master of the Shell.

And he went into his study.

Five minutes later there was a tap at Mr. Linton's door.

"Come in!" said the Shell master.

Tom Merry entered.

Mr. Linton gazed at him blankly. Tom Merry advanced to the Form-master's table, and laid a sheaf of impot. paper thereon.

"My lines, sir!" he said.

"Your—your lines!" stammered Mr. Linton.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, in a tone of mild surprise.

"Don't you remember, sir, you gave me lines this afternoon in classics?"

"Yes, yes!" said Mr. Linton. "But—but I have just heard from Knox that you were out of bounds, Merry!"

Tom Merry looked astonished.

"Out of bounds, sir!" he ejaculated.

"Certainly! I have made a note of it!" said the Shell master, frowning, and erasing the note in his pocket-book.

"But I'm here, sir!" said Tom Merry innocently.

"Yes, as I can see," said Mr. Linton tartly. "I have eyes! I suppose Knox was mistaken. Have you been outside the school walls since calling-over, Merry?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Where have you been?"

"I was in the quad, sir," said Tom Merry with perfect truth. "Then I was in my study. Then I remembered I'd forgotten to bring my lines to you, sir, so I brought them!"

"And you have not been out of bounds?"

"No, sir!"

"Knox had not been mistaken, then," said Mr. Linton.

"Very well, Merry, you may leave your lines. You may go!"

"Yes, sir!"

And Tom Merry went.

In the passage he paused to smile, and then quietly walked out into the quadrangle. He took his cap from under his jacket and put it on his head, and scudded away for the school wall. He was over the wall in a twinkling, and he chuckled as he dropped into the road.

He had certainly not been out of bounds before, but he was now; but of that fact Mr. Linton remained in cheerful ignorance.

CHAPTER 4.

The Bantam!

TOM MERRY took the short cut to Wayland market town, sprinting by the shadowy path over the meadows, and then through the wood. It was possible that he would be able to overtake his friends before they reached Wayland, and he kept up at a steady trot. He left the fields behind, and came along the footpath through the wood at a steady run.

The woods were very dark and silent round him. After dark, the woodland footpath was little used; and Tom Merry, as he trotted under the dark shadows of the trees, remembered—rather late in the day—that the path was not quite safe in the evening. Lately there had been several outrages by footpads in the vicinity, and Tom, as he thought of it, would have been glad to overtake his friends.

But he was by no means nervous, and he had no fear. He ran on; and suddenly, as he caught sight of several dark forms ahead of him under the shadows of the trees, he called out cheerfully:

"Hold on, kids! Here I am!"

The dark figures stopped.

Tom Merry ran on, nothing doubting that he had overtaken the party from St. Jim's. A hand came from the darkness and grasped his shoulder, and then he realised his mistake.

He struggled to break away from the grasp upon his shoulder; but it tightened, and another hand fastened on him.

"Show a light 'ere, Cracker!" said a hoarse voice.

A match scratched out, and the light fell on Tom Merry's face.

For a moment he caught a glimpse of three rough figures, with rough, grimy, stubby faces, and then the match went out.

"Let me go!" said Tom Merry quietly, though his heart was beating hard.

There was a hoarse chuckle.

"Not quite so fast, young gentleman! Keep a 'and on 'im, Jen!"

"I've got 'im!"

"Let me go!"

"Not till you've 'anded out your ticker and your loose change, my covey!" said the hoarse voice again. "Now, then, sharp's the word!"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

He knew that he had fallen into the hands of the gang of footpads who had been at work in the district for the past week, and for whom the local police had been looking in everywhere but the right place. It came into his mind, too, that there was more reason than he had thought of for calling-over and keeping within bounds, and that those rick-some rules were not made simply for the purpose of worrying cheerful juniors. He was in an awkward position, and he knew it; but he had no intention of being robbed if he could help it.

He stood quite still in the grasp of the ruffians, to throw them off their guard; and then, with a sudden and unlooked-for

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 284.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD,
Order Clearer,

br wrench, he tore himself away from the hands that were grasping him and sprang away.

There was a yell from the owner of the hoarse voice.

"Collar 'im!"

Tom Merry dashed down the footpath towards the Wayland Road. If he could get over the stile into the road, he would be safe. But the three ruffians were tearing on his track, muttering savage oaths as they ran.

Tom Merry ran on desperately.

Whizz!

A heavy cudgel flew by his head, and crashed into the bushes. If it had struck him, he would have fallen stunned to the ground.

"Stop, you young 'ound!"

Tom dashed on.

The stile was in sight now, and beyond it the glimmer of a road lamp. One minute more! He dashed on desperately; and at that moment his foot caught in a trailing root, and he tumbled and fell heavily to the ground.

Bump! The foremost of his pursuers stumbled over him and fell. There was a shout.

"I've got 'im!"

"Old him, Ginger!"

"Wot!" said Ginger savagely, between his teeth, as he grasped the fallen junior, and planted a heavy knee on him. "The young 'ound! I'll make him smart for this! Gimme your stick, Jim!"

"Ere you are, Ginger!"

A shudder ran through Tom Merry. He seemed to feel already the heavy cudgel crashing down upon him in the darkness.

He made a desperate effort to tear himself loose, but the heavy knee was grinding into his back, and he could not move.

"Help! Help!" shouted the junior wildly.

"I'll 'elp yer!" muttered Ginger. "I'll 'elp yer, me covvy! You won't make that 'ere row long! I'll 'elp yer!"

"Help!"

"Hallo, there!"

It was a voice from the road. A figure in an overcoat had passed by the stile, and was looking into the footpath. Ginger, already grasping the cudgel, paused with an oath. The man in the overcoat vaulted over the stile in a twinkling, and the next moment he was on the scene. Tom Merry felt the heavy knee go from his back, and he heard a thud and a deep grunt as Ginger rolled in the grass. A hand grasped him; and, too confused and bewildered to know quite what was happening, he was whisked over the stile into the road.

He staggered, gasping, against a tree. There was a chorus of oaths from the trio of ruffians on the footpath, and they came clambering over the stile. The high-road was lonely, and they were evidently not inclined to relinquish their prey.

"Hold my coat!" muttered Tom Merry's rescuer.

The overcoat was thrown to him, and he caught it mechanically. The man who had helped him was a small fellow—not much taller than the boy himself—and his clean-shaven face looked very youthful in the glimmer of the lamp. He had a square jaw, and little, twinkling eyes, and there was a grin on his face now, as he stood and waited for the three ruffians to come up.

"I—I say," gasped Tom Merry, "better cut—there's three of them!"

"You watch me!" said the little man.

He put up his hands as the three ruffians came rushing down upon him.

Tom Merry watched him, breathless.

It passed like a dream—he had no time even to go to the aid of his rescuer.

The little man seemed to move on springs. He met the towering ruffian Ginger with an upper-cut that might have been delivered by a sledge-hammer, to judge by the force of it, and Ginger went down into the road with a crash.

The other two ruffians started back, startled; and Tom Merry's rescuer took the offensive, prancing up to them, and hitting out.

Biff! Biff!

Crash! Bump!

Jem and Cracker were in the dust beside their leader, and the little man danced round them in a state of great excitement, calling on them to get up and have some more.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "It must be a blessed prize-fighter!"

The footpads did not seem inclined to have any more. Cracker crawled away into the ditch, and his comrade Jem wriggled into the darkness and disappeared. Ginger did not move. He lay in the road, with one hand clasping his damaged jaw, groaning.

"They don't want any more!" grinned Tom Merry.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 284.

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"Thank you very much for helping me, sir. You're a jolly hard hitter!"

The stranger grinned.

"Going to Wayland?" he asked.

"Yes."

"See 'em I. I'll walk with you, in case these coves should give you any more trouble. You shouldn't be in the wood alone after dark, kid!"

"I know that—now!" said Tom Merry.

And he walked by the side of his new acquaintance, leaving the unfortunate Ginger still lying in the dust, groaning and muttering threats of vengeance.

"I'm much obliged to you, sir," Tom Merry said, as they went down the road. "Blessed if I should have thought you could handle those chaps like that!"

The other chuckled.

"Keep my hand in," he said. "That was nothing to me, sonny. But you'd better go home another way!"

"There'll be a party of us going home," said Tom Merry. "I'm going to meet some chaps at the Wayland Empire, you see; they started first."

"Oh, you're going to the Wayland Empire, are you?" said the stranger.

"Yes—the first house," said Tom. "It's twice nightly, you know."

The other chuckled again.

"I ought to know. That's where I'm going myself. I'm there every night for both houses!"

"You must be jolly fond of the place!" said Tom Merry, in surprise.

Another chuckle.

"There's a good turn there, though," said Tom Merry. "I don't know that I care about the singing and the trick cycling very much; but there's a good boxing turn."

"Good!" said his new acquaintance, with great interest. "Have you seen it yet?"

"No, not yet; but I've heard about it, and I want to see Tiny Tim, the Bantam," said Tom Merry. "You've seen him?"

"Lots of times," said the young man cheerfully. "He's a terror; he could have handled those coves just the same as I did!"

"You handled them well enough," said Tom Merry, with a laugh.

"Ere we are, at the Wayland Empire," said the other, as they entered the lighted street. "Good-bye, kid, and glad I happened along."

"Didn't you say you were coming in?" asked Tom.

"Not at the front entrance, though," said his new friend, with another of his chuckles. "My way's to the stage-door."

"You belong to the company?" asked Tom breathlessly.

"Just a few! You see, I'm the Bantam!"

"My hat!"

And the Bantam chuckled again, and went his way, and Tom Merry entered the brilliantly-lighted vestibule of the Wayland Empire.

CHAPTER 5.

At the Empire.

HERE you are, Tommy!" Monty Lowther was waiting in the vestibule for his chum.

"I've missed a turn waiting for you," he said. "We've got the seats all right—all in a row in the stalls. Stalls are cheap here—a shilling a time. Where did you pick up all that dust?"

"I had a scrap coming here," said Tom Merry. "Let's get in."

They made their way into the auditorium.

The third "turn" was about to commence when they joined the rest of the party from St. Jim's in the stalls. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Tom Merry.

"So you got here all wight, deah boy? You got wid of Knox?"

"Yes," said Tom, laughing. "But I got some more knocks coming—worse than the Knox at St. Jim's."

"Been in a row?" asked Blake. "Grammar cads?"

"No. Footpads."

"Bai Jove! I remarked to you, Blake, that there would be some trouble if I didn't look after you. I considah—"

"It's all right," said Tom, in answer to his chums' anxious looks. "I was set on by three roughs on the footpath. I oughtn't to have come that way, really. But a chap chipped in and did them brown. Who do you think it was?"

"St. Jim's chap?" asked Manners.

"No fear! The Bantam."

"Great Scott!"

"Tiny Tim, who's doing a boxing turn here," said Tom Merry. "You should have seen the way he knocked them out! He's got an upper-cut that's a real daisy! I should like to have the gloves on with him. We'll give him plenty of hands when he does his turn here—what?"

"Yaas, watah! It was wippin' of him!"

"Silence!" said the audience. And the chums of St. Jim's ceased to talk as the next turn started.

It was Miss Belle Bouncer, soprano, and she described with powerful lungs how she wanted to return from a far-off shore, and a distant strand, to the green and grassy moor, in the loved home-land.

Miss Bouncer, having heroically struggled up to her top-note, and almost reached it, the audience clapped and cheered, the St. Jim's juniors joining in heartily.

"Trick cyclists next," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, consulting the programme. "I am watah curious to see them. They are stunnin' in the pictures on the posters, you know! I was thinkin' that I could do it myself."

The trick cyclists were very good.

There were two of them, and they rode machines forwards and backwards, and made them stand still, and dance to the band, and they rode them upside-down, and they crawled through under the bars while whirling round on the machines, and altogether astonished the unsophisticated natives of Wayland with their dexterity.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy kept his eye-glass upon them all the time, watching them eagerly. The thought was evidently working in the mighty brain of the swell of St. Jim's that he could play that trick.

"Bai Jove! It's wippin'!" said D'Arcy, when the trick cyclists finally rode off the stage, with their feet in the air, and working the pedals with their hands. "I watah think I could do it, though. I'll show you fellows in the quad. to-morrow."

"Better make your will first!" grunted Herries.

"Weally, Hewies—"

"Hallo! Here's Curll!" said Blake. "He's going to sing 'Flanagan.'"

Monty Lowther uttered an exclamation.

"Curll! By Jove!"

"Seen him before?" asked Tom Merry.

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"I should jolly well say so! Do you remember once I wanted to go on the stage?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

"Yaas, and you was away from school with a musical comedy company," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely.

"I did not approve of that procedin' at all, Lowthah."

"Well, that chap Curll was a member of the company," said Monty Lowther. "He was a tenor, and he drank like a fish and sang like a rook. He undertook to teach me musical comedy bizney, and I dare say he would have done it if the Head hadn't made me come back to school. He's on the halls now, it seems. I believe that's supposed to be a come-down in his profession. You get more money and less kudos. We'll go round and see Curll after the performance. He will be glad to see an old friend—especially if we fill him up with beer."

"Won't be any time," said Manners. "We shall have to miss the last turn, anyway, to get home to St. Jim's in time for bed."

"We'll miss the last two, and see old Curll first," said Lowther.

"Shurrup! He's starting."

Mr. Curll was a tenor—the programme said so—but he sang so flat that, as Monty Lowther remarked, he would have been more accurately described as a fiver.

But, as the song was a comic one, that did not matter. Mr. Curll would rather have sung about aching hearts and Cupid's darts, and forests dark, and hark! the lark. But the public preferred Flanagan's Sunday trousers for a subject, and so Mr. Curll had to sacrifice art to utility, as so many great artists have had to do.

And certainly Mr. Curll had a very good reception when he described how Flanagan had to send cheques to his tailor because his tailor sent him checks. And the folk in all the houses stared at Flanagan's new trousers.

"Vewy funny!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Though I weally don't approve of makin' fun of a fellow's twousahs. That is a serious subject."

"Now for the boxers!" said Tom Merry.

And the audience were all very keen.

It was clear from their looks that the boxing turn was the great draw of the evening's entertainment at the Empire.

When the curtain went up again, and the stage was disclosed with a roped ring, and two men in scanty attire and boxing-gloves, there was a cheer.

The Bantam—Tom Merry's kind rescuer—was there, and

the Limehouse Slogger—a much bigger man, with a very determined-looking jaw.

Tiny Tim, who was not much bigger than one of the juniors, though he was twenty-five years old, looked like a mass of muscle and sinew. He stripped well, and the juniors looked at him very admiringly. Strength and pluck appealed to them.

"This is going to be a jolly good turn!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, watah!"

And it was! In the first round it was evident that the boxing-match was not a put-up affair, and that both the boxers were really trying.

Mr. Bowkoe, the manager of the Wayland Empire, was keeping time himself, resplendent in evening-clothes and a gorgeous shirt-front, in which blazed a gigantic diamond.

The Slogger was a good man, but bigger as he was, he did not seem to be quite up to the form of the Bantam.

He was evidently trying his hardest to get the better of his wiry, nimble little adversary. But Tiny Tim was too quick for him.

There was an angry gleam in the Slogger's eyes as the rounds went on.

The well-padded gloves prevented much damage from being done, but a good deal of punishment was given and taken, and the audience cheered every sounding "biff!" There were eight rounds, and at the end the Slogger was very groggy, and could hardly keep his feet.

The Bantam was cheered loudly.

He ducked his head to the audience gracefully, and catching Tom Merry's eye in the stalls, nodded to him cheerfully, thereby conferring great honour and distinction upon the St. Jim's junior.

The boxers retired amid a round of cheering, and then Monty Lowther rose.

"I'm going round," he said.

"The next turn is a contvalto, and she's singin' 'Come and Kiss Me, Honey,'" said Arthur Augustus.

"Well, you can go and kiss her, honey. I'm going to see Mr. Curll."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Yes, let's go round," said Tom Merry. "I'd like to see the Bantam off—the stage. He's a jolly good little chap! If they'll let us behind, let's go."

"Very well, dear boys."

And the St. Jim's juniors left the auditorium.

An attendant in a gold-laced cap, upon the information that Lowther was an old friend of Mr. Curll's, and upon receipt of a tip of half-a-crown from Arthur Augustus, took a message to the immortal renderer of "Flanagan's Sunday Trousers."

He returned in a few minutes with a civil invitation to the juniors to follow him, and they followed him willingly, and were duly introduced into the gentleman's dressing-room behind the scenes.

CHAPTER 6.

Behind the Scenes.

MR. CURLL greeted Monty Lowther very affectionately. He shook hands with Lowther, and with all his friends in turn, in the most cordial way in the world, and so did Tiny Tim, the Bantam.

The accommodation for the artistes at the Wayland Empire was not extensive, and all the gentlemen shared a single dressing-room.

It was a big room, with white-washed walls and furniture of the barest description.

The Brothers Bung, who performed comic duets and tumbling feats on the stage, and still greater feats with pots of porter off it, were there smoking pipes and refreshing themselves after their labours.

Tiny Tim had changed into his ordinary clothes, which were of a cut that made Arthur Augustus secretly shudder, and decidedly loud in design.

But the boxer was good-nature itself, and very cheery to the juniors.

Mr. Curll was inclined to be despondent.

He apologised for his surroundings, and hinted that this was not in the least what he had been accustomed to.

Indeed, as Lowther afterwards remarked, Mr. Curll was one of those gentlemen who dream that they had dwelt in marble halls.

"On the halls at last, Master Lowther," said Mr. Curll, with a shake of the head. "Had to come to it in the long run. Everybody's doing it. Irving would have come on the halls at last if he had lived. The legit. is played out in this country."

"The what?"

"The legit!" said Mr. Curll. "The legitimate drama, you know."

"Oh!"

"The halls have cut the drama out everywhere," said Mr. Curll sadly. "If Shakespeare had lived in these days he would have been asked to condense 'Hamlet' into a lively sketch to last ten or fifteen minutes. There's no room for the legit. That's why you find me on the halls, Master Lowther. You wouldn't have thought of it, would you, when you used to see me playing to crowded houses, and the whole house rising to it?"

Lowther didn't remember having seen that touching spectacle; but he was too polite to say so.

"But you're making a big success in this line, Mr. Curll," he said.

"Mr. Curll looked despondent.

"To such base uses may we come!" he sighed. "Imperial Caesar, dead and turned to clay, may stop a hole to keep the draught away, as Shakespeare puts it. And an operatic tenor who has seen duchesses—yes, sir, duchesses—weep when he sang 'La Donna e Mobile' has to come out in a check suit and sing 'Flanagan's Sunday Trousers.'"

"Too bad!" said Lowther sympathetically.

"But they liked it, didn't they?" said Mr. Curll.

Lowther grinned. Although Mr. Curll appeared to be very much ashamed of having come down to the halls, he was very keen for the admiration of the audience he affected to despise, and inordinately proud of every "hand" that his performance received.

"Liked it!" said Lowther. "I should say so! You simply knocked them!"

Mr. Curll shook hands with him again.

"They rose to it, didn't they?" said he eagerly.

"I should think they did!" said Lowther.

"Even this kind of thing can be done well," said Mr. Curll. "I do it well; that makes all the difference. Boy!"

The shabby urchin in attendance upon these gentlemen of genius put his shock head in at the door.

"Another of the same!" said Mr. Curll.

This mysterious direction was apparently understood by the urchin, for he grinned and darted off.

He returned in a few minutes with a 'dirty tray upon which were a glass containing rum, and a jug of hot water, a slice of lemon, and sugar.

"I suppose you young gentlemen don't indulge?" said Mr. Curll.

"Thanks, no!" said Tom Merry.

"You don't need it," said Mr. Curll. "Keep off the drink, my boys, that's my advice to you, and I know. Never touch it."

Mr. Curll touched it himself as he spoke. Evidently he was not the kind of person who follows his own wise counsel.

The rum-and-water brought a new flush to Mr. Curll's cheeks and a sparkle to his eyes.

"You should have seen me in 'Rigoletto,' in the old Karl Tulip Company," he said. "We used to knock them. I did! You never saw me play the Duke, did you?"

"Never!" said D'Arcy.

"They were the days!" said Mr. Curll pathetically.

"Every night a new triumph, young gentlemen; crowded houses cheering till you'd have thought the roof would come down. And now—now I'm on the halls! Another of the same, Billy."

Billy waited.

Mr. Curll turned a fishy eye upon him. It was pretty clear that Mr. Curll had already had a good many of "the same"—more than were good for him.

"Well, why don't you hop it?" he said.

"Miss Nosser says I'm to take the money, sir," said Billy stolidly.

"Filthy lucre!" said Mr. Curll, with a sigh, going through his pockets. "I suppose none of you young gentlemen has half-a-crown lying round loose?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir, if you would do me the honah to accept—"

"Merely as a loan!" said Mr. Curll. "I will call upon you to-morrow and return it. Cut off, Billy, and give Miss Nosser my compliments, and say a little more rum this time, and no need to be quite so liberal with the water."

Billy grinned and vanished.

The next dose of the "same" made Mr. Curll more affectionate, pathetic, and confiding than ever. Tom Merry and Blake and Herries were talking boxing with the Bantam, but Mr. Curll confided to the other fellows, who listened very respectfully, great stories of his early triumphs in that famous Karl Tulip Company, now defunct.

"We gave 'em grand opera in English," sighed Mr. Curll. "You should have heard me sing in those days, young gentleman. People go to the cinematograph now

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 284.

instead, or to the music-halls. There was a time—ah, there was a time—"

Mr. Curll slid off his chair, and Lowther caught him and set him upon it again.

The tenor was getting very hazy now.

He blinked at Monty Lowther, and apparently taking him for some manager with whom he had had an altercation in those gloriously old days, he said:

"No, sir! Certainly not, sir! I decline to sing without an accompaniment, sir! I am surprised that you should suggest it, sir! If your pianist is drunk, sir, it reflects upon your management, and I finally and absolutely refuse to sing without an accompaniment."

"Bai Jove! I believe he's gettin' squiffy!" said Arthur Augustus, looking distressed.

"Go hen!" murmured Lowther.

"Blighted ambitions!" murmured Mr. Curll. "If I do take a drop, every now and then, sir, what of it? I repeat, what of it?"

"Here, it's time you travelled," said the Bantam, taking Mr. Curll by the arm and lifting him quite easily from his chair, though Mr. Curll, like most tenors, was a good weight.

"I'm going to see you 'ome."

Mr. Curll passed an arm affectionately round the Bantam's neck.

"Speak to me, Thora," he urged.

"My 'at!" said Tiny Tim. "If the manager sees you like that—"

"I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls," said Mr. Curll dreamily.

"You'll dream you've got the push if Mr. Bowkoo comes in," said the Bantam. "You'd better come and put your 'ead under the pump if you're going to sing in the second 'ouse. Kim on! You young gents goin' our way?"

"Yaas, wathah; I'll help you with poor Mr. Curll," said D'Arcy.

And the Bantam piloted poor Mr. Curll out of the stage door into the street, the juniors going with them.

Mr. Curll's lodging was a short way from the Empire, and the Bantam shared the same "digs." It was evidently not the first time that the good-natured boxer had seen Mr. Curll safe home when he had had too many of "the same."

"Will he be all right?" asked D'Arcy, rather anxiously.

The Bantam grinned.

"Oh, he's always like this!" he said. "He'll put his 'ead in cold water, and come round in time for the second 'ouse."

"Good-evening, young gents, and glad to have met you."

"Good-evening, sir!" said Tom Merry, shaking hands with the boxer. "Good-bye, Mr. Curll."

"Farewell," said Mr. Curll. "Fare thee well, and if for ever, still for ever, fare thee well. Even though unfor-giving, never 'gainst thee can my heart rebel."

"Bai Jove!"

"Addio, mia bella Napoli!" went on Mr. Curll, shaking hands with the Bantam under the impression that he was shaking hands with Monty Lowther. "My kind young friend, adieu. I wish you could have seen me in 'Rigoletto, in the old Karl Tulip Company. Adieu—our, rather, au revoir! I'm coming to see you!"

"Pway do!" said Arthur Augustus politely. "We shall be delighted to see you at St. Jim's, Mistah Curll!"

"Good egg!" said Monty Lowther. "Come over to-morrow afternoon. It's a half-holiday, and we'll have tea in the study. You will come, Mr. Tim?"

"Suttin'ly," said the Bantam, "if you young gentlemen like."

"Pway do!"

"Delighted!" said Blake.

"Rippin'!" said Manners.

"My kind young friends, adieu!" said Mr. Curll, still shaking the Bantam's hand as the juniors went down the street. "Good-bye, if ever fondest prayer—"

"You come in!" said the Bantam.

"Adieu, adieu, my native shore fades o'er the waters blue!" said Mr. Curll.

"When you've done shakin' my 'and, p'raps you'll come in," said Tiny Tim, growing impatient.

"Another of the same, Billy!" murmured Mr. Curll.

The Bantam forcibly released his hand from Mr. Curll's affectionate grasp, and dragged his unfortunate friend into the house.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, as the juniors walked out of Wayland and took the path home. "It's wotten to see a man like that, isn't it? I suppose it's wough comin' down in the world, afah bein' a great operatic singah."

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"I do not see anythin' to laugh at, Lowthah," said the swell of St. Jim's severely.



"Please sit down, gents," said Fisher T. Fish. "What can I do for you?" "You can give me my mouth-organ!" roared Bolsover major. "You can give me my fountain-pen!" said Nugent. "And my fishing-rod!" And similar cries came from all the juniors. Fisher T. Fish stared at them, and the smile of satisfaction left his face. "I don't catch on, I guess," he said. "You fellows haven't popped anything with the company yet!" (An amusing incident in "UNCLE FISH!" the splendid, long, complete school tale of Greyfriars - contained in this week's issue of our companion paper, "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, which all "GEM" readers will specially enjoy. Now on sale. Price One Penny.)

"I shouldn't wonder if he has been a singer," admitted Lowther. "Must have been a jolly long time ago, to judge by his voice. Still, he's a good chap, and we'll give him a good time at St. Jim's to-morrow."

"Only—only I hope he won't have any of 'the same' before he comes over," said Tom Merry rather dubiously. "It might cause trouble."

CHAPTER 7.

Not Quite a Success.

"JOLLY near bedtime!" said Blake, as the juniors, having dropped over the school wall, stood under the shadows of the old elms, in the quadrangle of St. Jim's.

"I twust Knox is not lookin' out for us!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "He may be waitin' at the door to question us as we go in."

"This way!" said Tom Merry.

"That is the way to the New House, deah boy."

"I know it is, fathead!"

"I decline to be called a fathead, Tom Mewwy; and I do not see any use in goin' to the New House when it is nearly time to go to bed in the School House."

"That's because you're what you decline to be called!" Blake grasped D'Arcy's arm, and led him on towards the New House. Figgins & Co. of the New House were talking in the hall when the juniors entered. School House and New House at St. Jim's—or the junior portions, at all events—were deadly rivals—and Figgins & Co. looked warlike at the sight of the new-comers. But Tom Merry held up his hand in sign of pax.

"What are the kids doing out of your House at this time of night?" demanded Figgins. "Come over here to look for a set of thick oars!"

"Weally, Figgay—"

"No," said Tom Merry, laughing; "we want you to walk over the quad. with us, that's all."

NEXT
WEDNESDAY!

"MISUNDERSTOOD!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 284.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
Order Early.

"What on earth for?" asked Kerr.
"Is it a feed?" demanded Fatty Wynn, the Falstaff of the New House. "I'll come with pleasure. It's rather late for a feed, but we can buck up, and—"

"It isn't a feed, Fatty!"
"Oh!" said Fatty Wynn, his interest in the matter limping at once. "What the dickens do you want us to walk across the quad, for?"

"To see us home."
"Oh, don't be funny!" said Figgins. "What do you want us to see you home for?"

"We couldn't go home in the dark," explained Blake. "Knox is looking for us. He has an idea that we've been out of bounds, because we haven't been in the School House for the last hour or two. See?"

"Oh, I see! And if we walk over with you—"
"It will look as if we're coming back from a little party in the New House," explained Tom Merry. "Of course, as a matter of fact, we have been out of bounds."
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If we're asked any questions we shall have to own up, of course; but if we can keep up appearances, it may be all right. Will you come?"

"Like a bird!" said Figgins.
And the School House fellows and their good-natured rivals and deadly enemies walked across the Close in company.

"Bai Jove, there is Knox all wight!" said Arthur Augustus, as they came in sight of the open lighted door of the School House.

Knox the prefect was standing there, talking to Langton of the Sixth, and keeping one eye on the dusky quadrangle. The juniors began to talk loudly as they neared the House, so that the two prefects should hear them.

"Thanks awfully, Figgys!" said Tom Merry. "We've passed a very pleasant evening!"
Which was strictly true.

"Not at all!" said Figgins. "We'll return your visit as soon as you like!"

"Yaas, wathah; we've had a wippin' time!" said Arthur Augustus, entering into the little scheme as soon as he understood it.

"Come in and have some ginger-beer in my study," said Blake hospitably. "There's time to get back before the doors are locked."

"Thanks!" said Fatty Wynn. "We will!"
And the juniors, in the most innocent manner in the world, walked into the House. Knox eyed them suspiciously and doubtfully. He had known that they were out of the School House, because he had looked for them; but if they had been visiting Figgins in the New House there was no fault to be found with them.

"Where have you kids been?" he demanded sharply.
"Us!" said Figgins. "We've been in our House!"

"We've just come from there, Knoxy!" said Monty Lower than blandly.

"Yaas, wathah!"
"Have you been in the New House all the time?" demanded Knox, biting his lip with vexation.

"All which time?" asked Tom Merry.

"All the time you've been out of your own House!" said Knox angrily. "I've already reported you to your Form-master for being out of bounds, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry grinned; he knew that.
"Oh, let them alone, Knoxy!" said the good-natured Langton. "They're only coming back from the other House; you heard what they were saying."

"I believe they've been out of bounds," said Knox.
The juniors went on to the stairs. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was in the passage, and Knox called to him.

Kildare was never "down" on Tom Merry & Co. without reason, and it pleased Knox to make him take official note of their delinquency.

"Kildare," he called, "those juniors have been out of bounds for hours."

"Have you, kids?" asked Kildare, looking round towards the juniors, who had to stop as the captain of St. Jim's called to them. "Where have you just come from?"

"From the New House," said Tom Merry.
"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, all right; cut off!"
"They're lying!" said Knox. "I know perfectly well that they've been out of bounds!"

"We're not lying!" said Tom Merry, flushing. "And you're a rotten—ahem!—you're quite wrong, Knoxy!"

"You have really just come from the New House?" asked Kildare.

"Yes, certainly!"
"Have you been out of bounds at all?"
"Ahem!"
"H'm!"

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"THE PENNY POPULAR"
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"Oh," said Kildare, "you have, then?"
"Well, yes, as a matter of fact, we have," admitted Tom Merry cheerfully. "We've just come from the New House, as I said; but before that—ahem!"

"I told you so!" sneered Knox. "They were lying!"
"Really, Knoxy, you wotah—"

"They were not lying," said Kildare sharply, "and you have no right to say so, Knoxy. They have just come from the New House, and that was what I asked them. As soon as I asked if they had been out of bounds, Tom Merry admitted it. I don't see what you always want to be down on those kids for, Knoxy. The way to question them is enough to make them tell lies, if they were inclined that way."

"So you are going to let them off for breaking bounds after call-over!" said Knox savagely.

"Nothing of the sort. I don't suppose they've been doing any harm, but they'll take a hundred lines each for going out of bounds. You hear me, kids?"

"Yes, Kildare!"
"And you'll do them to-morrow afternoon!" said Kildare.

"Bai Jove!"
"I say, Kildare, we're expecting friends to-morrow afternoon," said Tom Merry meekly. "Could we leave the lines till to-morrow evening?"

"Yes, if you like," said the good-natured skipper. "Only don't let this occur again."

"You are a bwick, Kildare, deah boy!"

The juniors went up the stairs, and Knox looked at Kildare with a bitter expression. As head prefect, Kildare was empowered to deal with the matter as he liked, and Knox could not interfere once the captain of St. Jim's had taken it into his hands.

"So that you keep the juniors in order, is it, Kildare?" snarled Knox.

"Yes," said Kildare; "and I don't want any advice from you." And he turned his back upon the surly prefect.

"I'd have liked the young rascals all round," said Knox savagely to Langton.

"I dare say you would!" said Langton. "But they'd have been none the better for it. You were always a bit of a bully, Knoxy!"

And Langton walked away, leaving Knox biting his lip.

"Where's the ginger-beer?" said Fatty Wynn, as the juniors crowded into Study No. 6. "What a beast Knox is! Sorry you've got lines!"

Blake handed out the ginger-beer from the study cupboard. There was a stop in the passage, and Knox looked in. The bully of the Sixth could never let well or ill alone.

"You New House boys clear out!" he growled. "It's time you were in your own House!"

Pop!
Kerr was opening ginger-beer, and somehow or other—perhaps by accident—the cork shot through the doorway. There was a yell from Knox as he caught it under the chin.

"Ow! You young villain—"

"Awfully sorry!" said Kerr, as the ginger-beer bubbled and foamed into the glass.

"You did that on purpose!" roared Knox, striding into the study. "I'll thrash you till—"

"No, you won't!" said Kerr coolly. "You're not a New House prefect, Knox, and you can't touch us. Hands off!"

Kerr grasped the ginger-beer bottle in a business-like way, and Knox started back in spite of himself.

"Yaas, wathah, Knoxy!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "You are exceedin' your authority in interfewin' with fellows of the othah House—"

"Oh, let him come on!" said Figgins. "I'm quite interested to see whether Knox's napper is as hard as this gingerbeer bottle."

Knox glared at the juniors for a moment, and then strode out of the study.

"Poor old Knox!" sighed Tom Merry. "Always running up against something. Gentlemen, here's to us, and long may we live!"

"Hear, hear!"
And the young rascals drank their own health in ginger-beer with much satisfaction, and then Tom Merry & Co. saw Figgins and Kerr and Wynn off at the School House door; and the New House juniors called out a very cheery good-night to Knox as they departed.

CHAPTER 8.

Not a Night Out!

"HAD a good time?"

It was Levison, of the Fourth, who asked the question, with a sneering grin, as the Fourth went into their dormitory in the School House.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the person addressed, turned his eyeglass upon Levison.

"In what respect, deah boy?" he asked mildly.

"At the Empire!"

"Bai Jove, how did you know we'd been to the Empire?" said Arthur Augustus in surprise. "I certainly nevah mentioned the maffah to you, Levison."

"Oh, Levison knows lots of things!" said Jack Blake with a curl of the lip. "Levison will never be in want of information so long as they make doors with keyholes in them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I do know you went there, and Kildare wouldn't have let you off so easily if he had known," said Levison angrily.

"Better tell him, if you want to set up as a sneak as well as a listener," said Blake, with a yawn.

Blake was a direct fellow—rather painfully direct, sometimes—and he did not waste much politeness on the cad of the Fourth.

"I'm not going to tell him," said Levison. "It's no business of mine, and I'm going myself to-night."

"Bai Jove, you can't go aftah lights out, Levison."

"Why not?"

"It is not wight to bweak bounds aftah lights out, deah boy."

"You've never done so, of course?" Levison sneered.

"Yaas, I have, but always with a vey good reason, deah boy. I do not think it would be good form to bweak bounds aftah lights out to go to the Empire. In fact, I was wathah doubtful about goin' at all."

"Well, I'm going," said Levison.

"I wogard it as a wotten pwoocedin', Levison."

"Thanks. It won't make any difference to me."

"You will verry likely have Knox on your track."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of Knox!"

"Knox won't worry Levison!" growled Herries. "Levison would be able to tell about fetching cigarettes into the school for him, if Knox worried him."

"A pweicious pair of wottahs, I must say," said Arthur Augustus in disgust.

"I shall be in time for the last half of the second house," said Levison. "One of you fellows can let me in, if you like. Some beastly prefect will be sure to find it out if I leave the box-room window unfastened."

"I should certainly wessafe to do anythin' of the sort. I do not wogard your conduct with approval, Levison."

"Go hon!"

Kildare came into the dormitory to see lights out, and the talk ceased.

The Fourth-Formers turned in, and Kildare, after extinguishing the light, bade good-night to the juniors, and quitted the dormitory.

Then Levison slipped out of bed and dressed himself.

"You're really going, Levison?" asked Blake from his bed.

"Yes, rather."

"You'd better not go through the wood. Tom Merry met a gang of footpads there, and was set on, and he'd have been robbed if a chap hadn't come by and helped him."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Levison.

"Bettah get back into bed, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"Rats!"

And Levison quitted the dormitory.

"Silly ass!" murmured Blake, and he went to sleep.

Levison trod softly down the passage with his boots in his hand. He reached the box-room, at the end of the passage where the lights had been extinguished, and there put his boots on. Then he opened the door of the box-room and crept quietly in.

All was pitchy dark there.

Levison groped over the window for the fastening, and he had just undone it, when a sound behind him made him catch his breath.

The door of the box-room had opened again.

Levison caught his breath suddenly.

He looked back towards the door, his eyes gleaming greenishly in the darkness.

He guessed at once that a prefect was on the watch; perhaps Kildare himself. If it was Knox, Levison did not fear, for he had performed too many shady services for the black sheep of the Sixth to be afraid of Knox. But if it was Kildare or Darel or Langton, he knew that he had a liking to expect for being out of his dormitory at that hour.

He gritted his teeth in the darkness as he waited.

Had he been seen?

The box-room door closed again softly, and he heard a sound of breathing in the room, showing him that the unseen person was there—within a dozen feet of him.

The stealthy movement of the unseen one caused a strange thrill to run through Levison's nerves.

He stood quite still, hardly breathing.

There was a faint, almost imperceptible sound of footsteps, as the unknown came towards him. He was coming directly towards Levison—towards the window.

Suddenly he stopped.

Had he caught the outline of Levison's figure, black in the gloom, against the less opaque square of the window?

Levison clenched his hands; he had been seen. But why did not the prefect speak? What did this silence mean?

Levison resolved to make a dash for it. He could shove the unknown aside, and escape unseen in the darkness, and reach his dormitory undiscovered, he hoped.

With a sudden spring, he darted forward.

There was a sudden gasp in the darkness, and a fist struck out blindly, and Levison reeled as he caught it on his chin.

"Ow!"

"Help!" yelled a voice. "Burglars!"

Levison struck out furiously at the shadowy form, and felt his fist come into violent contact with a nose. Then a fierce grasp was laid upon him, and he struggled.

Crash!

The two struggling forms reeled against a box, and sent it crashing from the top of another it was resting upon.

"Help!" yelled the voice again. "Burglars! Help!"

"Gore!" gasped Levison.

"Help!"

"Shut up, Gore, you ass!" muttered Levison, struggling to release himself from the frantic clutch of Gore, of the Shell. "I'm Levison!"

"Eh! Levison! Oh!"

"Quiet, you idiot!"

"I—I thought—" stammered Gore.

"Quiet!"

But it was too late.

There was a heavy footstep in the passage, and the door of the box-room was flung open, and a light gleamed from it. Kildare, carrying a lamp, stared into the room, and his eyes fell upon the two panting, startled juniors.

A grim look came over the face of the captain of St. Jim's.

"Well," he said, "what are you doing out of bed, Gore and Levison?"

"I—I—" stammered Gore.

"I—I—" stammered Levison.

Kildare glanced towards the window, and saw that it was unfastened. His look grew grimmer, and he put up his hand and fastened the catch.

"So you were going out?" he said. "Follow me to my study."

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Gore.

"You idiot!" hissed Levison.

"I—I took you for a burglar," muttered Gore, as they followed the tall form of the captain of St. Jim's. "I—I couldn't see you in the dark. Why didn't you speak?"

"I took you for a prefect!" growled Levison.

"You ass!"

"You idiot!"

And with that exchange of compliments, the two juniors followed Kildare into his study. The captain of St. Jim's set down the lamp, and picked up a cane.

"Where were you going?" he asked.

"I—I was going to—to the Wayland Empire!" stammered Gore.

"So was I!" growled Levison.

"And what on earth did you begin fighting in the box-room for?" asked Kildare in astonishment.

"I took him for a burglar."

"I took him for a prefect."

Kildare grinned.

"Hold out your hands, both of you," he said. "If you want to go to the Empire, you must wait for a matinee, and ask your Form-masters for permission."

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

"Ow-ow-ow!" groaned Gore.

"Gerrtooth!" said Levison.

"Now get back to bed, and if you leave your dormitories again I shall report you to the Head!" said Kildare sternly. "I shall keep an eye open."

And the dismayed breakers of bounds departed.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up in bed as the door of the Fourth Form dormitory opened, and he heard someone come in.

"Is that you, Levison, deah boy?" he asked.

"Yes," grunted Levison.

"I am verry glad you have changed your mind, deah boy, and repented of your w'ong intention," said D'Arcy. "Verry glad indeed!"

"Oh, go and eat coke! Ow!"

"Bai Jove! I suppose you have been caught, deah boy, and licked. I am sowwy, but you must wogard it as a punishment for not havin' listened to the advice of your eldah—Ow!"

A pillow whizzed through the air, and caught Augustus D'Arcy under the chin, and levelled him in his bed.
 "Now shut up!" grunted Levison.
 "Ow! You uttah wotah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I shall wufuse to give you any more advice!"
 And Levison had to get on the best he could without that inestimable blessing.

CHAPTER 9. Levison Has an Idea.

TOM MERRY was rather thoughtful in class the next morning.
 He was thinking of the visitors that were to arrive in the afternoon.

Mr. Curll and the Bantam, and indeed all the other performers at Wayland Empire, were free in the afternoons, and they had doubtless been glad of the invitation to pass a few hours at the school to kill time. For gentlemen of Mr. Curll's lively disposition, at least, there was little distraction in a quiet old place like Wayland. Mr. Curll and the Bantam were coming, and it was "up" to Tom Merry & Co. to give them as good a time as possible.

The chums of St. Jim's were hospitable, and they wanted to see the two gentlemen from the Wayland Empire there, and to make much of them. Tom Merry owed a debt of gratitude to the Bantam, and he was not the kind of fellow to forget a debt of that sort readily. And Mr. Curll was an old friend of Monty Lowther's. But Tom could not help feeling a little worried.

If Mr. Curll should indulge in any of "the same," as he called his little stimulants, on the way to St. Jim's, it might lead to trouble. At St. Jim's, of course, there would be no intoxicants of any sort, and Mr. Curll would have nothing stronger to drink than tea or ginger-beer. But Tom Merry could not help feeling anxious as to the state Mr. Curll might be in when he arrived.

After morning lessons—which were a little more troublesome than usual, owing to the neglect of preparation the previous evening—Tom Merry & Co. prepared for the reception of their visitors.

Funds, fortunately, being in a healthy state, considerable preparations were made for a really stunning "brew" in the study, and Figgins & Co., of the New House, were asked to the feast—an invitation they accepted with alacrity, especially Fatty Wynn. As Fatty Wynn nobly observed, there were times when such things as House rows ought to be "off," and this was one of them.

"I trust poor old Curll will be sobah when he awivies," said Arthur Augustus, who had been thinking over that matter as well as Tom Merry. "Of course, it's wotten bad form to find fault with a guest, but it would attract a lot of attention if he started doin' a song and dance in the quad, for instance."

"I should say so!" grinned Blake. "If he's squiffy, we'll duck his head in the fountain, and bring him round."

"He might object to such a pwoceedin', deah boy. I trust, howevah, he will have too much good sense to be squiffy. And, of course, there will be nothin' in the nature of stwong drink heah, though, undah othah cires, pepwaps it would be up to us to provide him with the kind of wufeshment he pwefers. But it would be imposs, here."

"Go hon!" said Digby. "We could borrow a bottle of gin from Taggles, if you really want to do the right thing by Curll."

"Weally, Dig—"
 "Shurrup!" said Blake. "There's Levison listening with all his ears!"

"Levison, I wogard it as wotten to pay attention to conversations not intended for your eahs!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.
 "So you're expecting a squiffy visitor, are you?" he said.
 "Good! Is that Curll you're speaking of the Curll from the Wayland Empire?"

"Yaas, wathah! A chap who has been a great tenah," said D'Arcy. "Now he is only—"
 "A fiver," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"
 "I've seen the chap in Wayland," said Levison. "He drinks like a fish, and he has him reelng home tipsy in broad daylight. I remember a friend of a St. Jim's chap, especially such whitewashed angels as you chaps! Not that I was ever taken in—I know you are only spoofng—"

Jack Blake introduced his boot into the discussion at this point, and Levison gave a howl and departed.

"It would have been wish not to let Levison know anythin' about it, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head.

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"Well, you did it, you ass!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Let's go down to the gates and wait for them," said Tom Merry. "Then, if Curll has been looking on the wine when it is red, we can take him for a little walk before he comes in."

"Good egg!"

Tom Merry & Co. strolled down to the gates, gathering up Figgins & Co. on the way. The New House juniors were equally interested in the Bantam, if not in Mr. Curll. Several other fellows, too, who learned that Tiny Tim was coming, were greatly interested. They had all heard of his boxing turn at Wayland Empire, and there were few of the St. Jim's fellows who were not interested in the manly art of self-defence.

Levison, of the Fourth, stared after the chums with a peculiar gleam in his eyes. He burst into a sudden chuckle, and walked away, looking for Gore, of the Shell. He found Gore in the quadrangle.

"Well, what are you grinning at?" was Gore's query.
 "I've got a little joke on," said Levison, with a chuckle.
 "Tom Merry and that lot are expecting a visitor. Whom do you think?"

"Blessed if I know or care!" said Gore.
 "It's Curll, the chap who sings at the Wayland Empire."

"I should have seen him last night if you hadn't played the giddy ex!" growled Gore.

"If you hadn't played the giddy ex, you mean!"

"Look here—"

"Order!" grined Levison. "Don't rag now! I've got a ripping scheme on. That chap Curll is a tipsy soaker, and the chaps are in a worried frame of mind lest he should get squiffy here and make a scene."

Gore laughed.

"My hat! That would be funny!"

"Chip in and help me, then, and we'll manage it," said Levison. "They're going to give him ginger-beer to drink. You can guess how an old toper will like that. You know Taggles keeps a bottle of whisky in his lodge?"

"More than one, I believe," said Gore.

"Well, if we could raid it—"

The Shell fellow stared.

"What on earth do you want to raid a bottle of whisky for?"

"Not to drink," grined Levison. "But if we could somehow make Curll a present of it while he's here, and get him squiffy, think of the fun!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gore.

"You'll lend a hand?" asked Levison eagerly. "I'll get Taggles away somehow, while you raid the bottle from his lodge—"

Gore shook his head.

"It would be rough on Tom Merry and the chaps," he said.

"That's what I want! What do you mean? You're up against them as much as I am," said Levison.

"I'd rather not. Tom Merry did me a good turn only a short time ago, and I'm not up against him, as you call it. I'd rather let him alone."

"Look here, Gore—"

"Leave me out!" said Gore. "And I'd advise you to drop it, Levison. It's not playing the game, anyway!"

"Lot you care about playing the game!" sneered Levison. George Gore made no reply to that, but he walked away. Levison was left biting his nails with annoyance. He reflected a few moments, and then looked for Mellish, of the Fourth. He found Mellish in the tuckshop, and expounded his precious scheme to him. Percy Mellish chuckled gleefully over it.

"Jolly good wheeze!" he said.

"You'll help?" said Levison eagerly. "I'll get Taggles away from his lodge, and you can cut in and—"

"No jolly fear!" said Mellish promptly. "Suppose Taggles caught me there?"

"Oh, he wouldn't; I'd keep him away. There's no risk."

"Then I'll tell you what," said Mellish. "I'll get Taggles away, and you can cut in and get the stuff!"

"Ahem! You see—"

"I see that you want me to pull the chestnuts out of the fire, and can't see that I'm jolly well not going to!" grined Mellish. "I'll do what I've said!"

"Oh, all right, then!" said Levison ungraciously. "Go to Taggles with some yarn, tell him Herries's bulldog is loose in the Head's garden—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And while the two cads of the Fourth were elaborating their scheme to take advantage of Mr. Curll's unfortunate weakness Tom Merry & Co. were waiting at the gates for their visitors, in blissful ignorance of Levison's scheme.

They had not very long to wait.

Two figures came in sight in the lane, and they recognised the extremely loud chuck of the Bantam's attire, and the gorgeous waistcoat and somewhat battered silk hat of Mr. Curll.

Much to their relief, Mr. Curll was walking quite straight, and was evidently not under the influence of liquor. Probably the Bantam had seen to that. And the juniors greeted their visitors most heartily, and marched them in at the gates of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 10. With the Gloves On.

QUITE a crowd of fellows gathered in the little tuck-shop kept by Dame Taggles, where Tom Merry & Co. had taken their guests for liquid refreshment in the shape of ginger-beer and lemonade after their walk.

Mr. Curll was decidedly affable, and he told stories cheerfully of his early triumphs in the great days of the famous Karl Talip Company.

But the Bantam was a hero, and it was about the Bantam that most of the fellows gathered. Tiny Tim was a good-natured fellow, and so brimming with health and fitness that he could not be anything else but good-tempered. He rose at once to the suggestion that he should put the gloves on in the gym, and give the fellows a little exhibition of what boxing was really like. And they adjourned to the gymnasium in great spirits.

"Who's goin' to 'ave the mittens on with me?" the Bantam asked, with a grin. "I'll promise not to 'it 'im 'and."
"Powwaps I had bettah," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "It will wequiah a weally good boxah to stand up against Mr. Tim at all."

"Yes, Gussy's the man," grinned Figgins. "Shall we get a bolster for you to fall on, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"I should like to try the gloves on with you, Bantam," said Tom Merry, laughing, "but we'll give Gussy first show."

"Yas, wathah!"

"It's a D'Arcy's place to lead," explained Blake. "Gussy can show us the quickest way to the floor."

"Weally, Blake—"

The "mittens" were produced, and Tiny Tim stripped off his coat and pushed back his sleeves. The splendid development of his arms called forth glances of admiration from the juniors. Arthur Augustus handed his elegant jacket into Blake's care, and confided his eyeglass to Digby. Then he donned the gloves and stepped up to face Tiny Tim. The boxer handled him very gently.

Arthur Augustus, elegant youth as he was, was a very good boxer, but he found that he could not touch the professional at all.

Tiny Tim treated him to a succession of gentle raps on the chest, the nose, the chin, and the forehead, and Arthur Augustus's counters were always in vain.

In five minutes the swell of St. Jim's was in a breathless state, and he had not succeeded in touching the smiling face of the boxer.

The juniors were laughing.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy at last. "I'm afwaid you're wathah too much for me, Mr. Bantam!"

"Extraordinary!" murmured Monty Lother.

Arthur Augustus peeled off the gloves with a shake of the head.

"I should like to see old Kildare twy, if he weren't playin' ewicket," he remarked. "I'm afwaid it's no good any chap here twyin'. I can't do anythin' myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let me try on the mittens," said Cutts, of the Fifth, pushing his way through the ring of juniors.

Cutts, of the Fifth, was something of a boxer, and a great deal of a black sheep. He was pretty well known to have been a witness of secret prizefights in the neighbourhood, with money staked on the results. Tom Merry & Co. were on bad terms enough with Cutts, but they had no objection to seeing the Fifth-Former try his powers against the boxer from Wayland.

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "Not tired, Bantam?"

The Bantam chuckled.

"Not jest yet, Master Merry."

Cutts donned the gloves and toed the line. Cutts was a good boxer, as he soon showed, but a powerful fellow as he was, and considerably taller than Tiny Tim, he did not succeed in making any impression on the Bantam. His face gradually assumed a harsh and bitter look as he strove in vain to break through Tiny Tim's guard, and it was evident that he was putting force into his drives that would have

hurt Tiny Tim if they had reached him. But they did not reach him.

Tiny Tim simply played with the big Fifth-Former, keeping a smiling face, while Gerald Cutts was growing blacker and blacker.

Cutts made a savage rush at last, hitting out fiercely, and Tiny Tim had to deliver a drive, and Cutts sat down with a bump.

"Bravo, Bantam!" yelled the juniors.

"Ow!" gasped the Fifth-Former.

"Go it, Cutts!" grinned Lefevre, of the Fifth. "Don't be licker! That's what I say! Go it!"

Cutts rose rather painfully to his feet.

"I'm done!" he growled; and he peeled off his gloves.

"Ope I didn't 'urt you, sir," said Tiny Tim.

Cutts laughed. He was something of a sportsman, after all, and he did not bear malice.

"Well, you did, as a matter of fact," he said. "But it doesn't matter. If ever I see you in the ring, my man, I shall put my money on you."

"I ope you wouldn't lose it, sir."

"If you're not fed up, I'd like to try you for a round or two, Mr. Bantam," said Tom Merry.

"I could keep this on for howers, Master Merry," said the boxer. "It's only a gentle exercise to me, you know."

"Good!"

Tom Merry stripped off his jacket and waistcoat and tied his braces round his waist, and faced the boxer with the gloves on.

Tiny Tim gave him an approving look.

"You shape worry well, Master Merry," he said. "I bet you're going to give me more trouble than the others."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'll try," he said.

The juniors gathered round with more eagerness now. They knew how fit the captain of the Shell was, and what skill he had attained in the boxer's art. And as Tom Merry led off it was clear that the boxer's judgment was correct, and that he was going to give the Bantam more trouble than the others.

Tap, tap!

It was a postman's knock on the Bantam's nose, and there was a yell from the crowd:

"Well hit, Tommy!"

Neither D'Arcy nor Cutts had succeeded in touching the Bantam. Tiny Tim's look became more earnest. He put forth more strength and more skill, and Tom Merry had all his work cut out to hold his own.

But he held it!

The surprise in the Bantam's face intensified, and he exerted himself more and more. But he did not succeed in penetrating the junior's guard; and when at last he did hit harder than he had intended, and Tom Merry went down with a bump.

"Oh!" gasped the Bantam. "I didn't mean that, kid! Ope you're not 'urt!"

Tom Merry was on his feet in a twinkling.

"Right as rain!" he said cheerily.

"You're a good plucked 'un, anyway," said the Bantam admiringly. "Kid, you was born to go into the ring. When you're my age you'll be able to knock me out of the ring. I tell you. Blessed if I don't half think you could do it now!"

"It passed." "You're good stuff, kid, and you can box. We'll 'ave this thing reglar. Will one of you young gent's keep time? Two-minute rounds and one-minute rests—that's the same as my turn with the Limehouse Slogger."

"Hear, hear!"

Cutts, of the Fifth, took out his watch to keep time. The boxing match was growing to be of more interest now. It was plain that in Tom Merry, of the Shell, the Bantam recognised a foeman worthy of his steel.

"You don't mind a 'ard knock or two?" asked Tiny Tim, rather doubtfully.

"No—if you don't!"

"I've 'ad enough to get used to 'em," said the Bantam, with a chuckle. "But I'm bound to knock you out, you know, being professional."

"Time!" said Cutts.

Tom Merry stood out the round splendidly. He received several somewhat severe taps, now that the Bantam was boxing in real earnest. But he gave as much as he received. The Bantam did not mind the knocks, and at the end of the round he expressed his admiration forcibly.

"You was born a boxer," he said. "Sure you don't mind if I 'urt you?"

"Quite sure!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Time!"

The Bantam was fighting hard now. He was hitting out as he was accustomed to hit out in his contests with the Slogger on the stage at the Empire. Tom Merry received a good deal of punishment which would have been terrible

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
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if the gloves had not been worn. As it was, it was severe; but Tom Merry had told the truth when he said that he did not mind getting hurt. He stood up gamely to the Bantam. Round followed round, and the professional boxer had not been able to wear down his youthful antagonist. In the fifth round came the surprise of the Bantam's life.

**CHAPTER 11.
Mr. Curll Causes Trouble.**

MR. CURLL nodded to Tom Merry with a glassy smile. Blake exchanged a hopeless look with the captain of the Shell.

There was a strong whiff of spirits about Mr. Curll, and his glassy and fishy eyes told their own tale.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tom Merry.

The Bantam uttered an angry exclamation.

"Curll, you fat'ead, this ain't playin' the game!" said Tiny Tim. "You promised me, you know you did, or I wouldn't 'ave let you come. Did you 'ave a flask, you himage."

"Certainly not!" said Mr. Curll, with dignity. "I scorn the insinuation, sir. I fling it back in your teeth, sir. In your tee-heeth!" said Mr. Curll, with a gesture worthy of his best days with the defunct Karl Tulip company.

"Then where did you get it?"

"While you were boxing with our young friend, a kind and liberal young gentleman, sir, treated me to liquid refreshment, sir, of a somewhat exhilarating nature!" said Mr. Curll.

"Was I to decline that graceful stimulation, sir? Perish the thought! Not that I have imbibed to any great extent. I scorn the insinuation! See me walk round the room—Bantam, my boy, and you will see that I am perfectly sober—sober as a judge, sir."

Mr. Curll jumped up in a very great hurry to prove that he was as sober as a judge, and started to walk round the study. But if the straightness of Mr. Curll's walk was to prove his sobriety, he left very much "not proven." For he zigzagged round the study in a way that made the juniors grin in spite of themselves, and finished by catching hold of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy for support.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"Oh, dry those tears!" said Mr. Curll, with both arms round D'Arcy's neck, clinging to him. "Shed not these pearly drops, I thee entreat; behold me kneeling lowly at thy feet!"

"Pway, Mr. Curll—"

"Friend of my early years!" murmured Mr. Curll. "Come to these arms! Weep upon my breast."

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort," said Arthur Augustus indignantly, striving to rid himself of Mr. Curll's affectionate embrace. "Pway dwag him off, deah boys!"

"Ha! Thou spurnest me!" said Mr. Curll tearfully.

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!"

The Bantam caught Mr. Curll by the shoulders, and plumped him into the armchair.

"You sit there!" he said.

"Shober as judge!" murmured Mr. Curll, closing his eyes.

"What utter beast could have been giving him drink?" muttered Tom Merry. "It was a rotten trick to play!"

"They gave him plenty of it, whoever it was!" grinned Figgins. "Never mind; he's going to sleep now!"

"You lie!" came a very distinct voice from the armchair.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

There was a roar!

"Bantam's down! Hurrah!"

There was no doubt about it; the Bantam was down. He sat and blinked at Tom Merry, who smiled breathlessly.

"Well, my 'at!" said the Bantam in amazement. "My honly 'at!"

He jumped ^{up} nimbly enough.

"You're a young scorcher," he said. "Do you know, you could beat the Slogger, you could! He couldn't stand agin you!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I means what I says!" persisted the Bantam. "You would be a match for the Slogger, and you could take my place in the show to-night quite easy. But I don't think you're quite a match for me; by gum, I 'ope not!"

And so it proved.

Tom Merry lived through two more rounds, and then he had to confess that he was "done."

The Bantam was breathing hard as he peeled off the gloves.

"My heyo!" he said. "You've stood up for seven rounds agin me, young gentleman—seven rounds agin Tiny Tim the Bantam. You're good stuff!"

"Yaas, watah! I couldn't have done that myself, Tom Mewwy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fact that the schoolboy had stood up to him for seven rounds did not seem to trouble the Bantam in the least; he evidently admired the Shell fellow's prowess, and his manner was more friendly than ever.

Tom Merry bathed his heated face, and donned waistcoat and jacket, and the juniors cheered him as he left the gym with his friends.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus suddenly.

"Where's Mr. Curll?"

"I say, Curll!" called out Monty Lowther.

"Curll, my boy!" said the Bantam.

But Mr. Curll was not within hearing. He had been at first among the crowd watching the boxing, and then he had disappeared, and the juniors realised rather guiltily that in the keen interest of the boxing they had forgotten their other guest's existence.

"Look for him, you chaps!" said Tom Merry. "It's nearly time for tea. Like to have a look round the school, Tiny Tim, and then we'll go up to the study for tea."


"Wot!" said the Bantam.

And the Bantam was shown round St. Jim's, and then he accompanied the Terrible Three to Tom Merry's study, where they found the other juniors and Mr. Curll.

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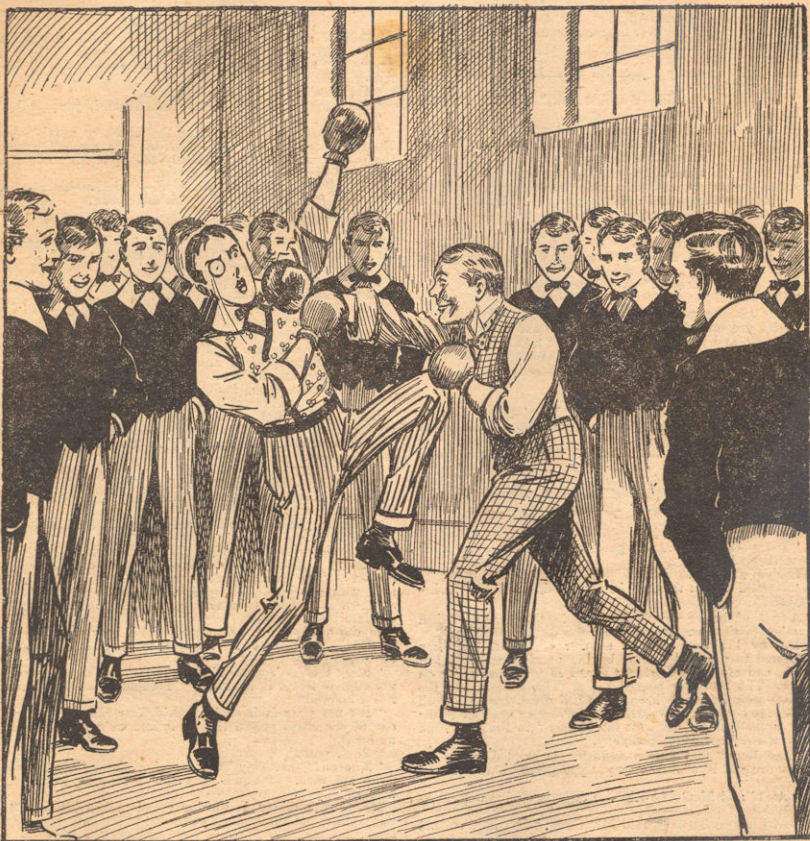
3.



1. GRIMES.

2. BERNARD GLYN.

3. CLIFTON DANE.



In five minutes the swell of St. Jim's was in a breathless state, and he had not succeeded in touching the smiling face of the boxer. "Bal Jove!" said D'Arcy at last. "I'm afraid you're wataah too much for me, Mr. Bantam!" (See Chapter 10.)

After that explicit statement that he was not going to sleep, Mr. Curll began to snore. His voice might be tenor, but his snore was a deep bass; it was not musical, but it was a relief to the juniors to hear it. If Mr. Curll had taken a fancy to wander forth from the study in his present state, it would have been very awkward for Tom Merry & Co.

"If he was sober," said the Bantam, "I'd 'ammer 'im!"
 "Thank goodness he's asleep," said Blake. "Now, tea's ready. I'm afraid our friend Curll will miss his tea. Do you like prawns, Mr. Bantam?"

"Wotto!" said Mr. Bantam.

And in spite of Mr. Curll's persistent snore, the juniors and their guest made an excellent tea.

The study was crowded, but the fellows did not mind standing up.

Tiny Tim was quite at his ease.

He talked cheerfully and incessantly, and told stories of many fights, more in earnest than the "twice-nightly" contest on the stage of the Wayland Empire.

Though that, as he said, was serious enough in its way. The Linchouse Sloggor's ambition was to lick him, but, as the Bantam said, with a chuckle, he couldn't do it. But the

Sloggor's earnest attempts to do it gave the twice-nightly boxing contest its keen interest, which made it the great draw of the evening there. The boxers, who had booked only for a week, had extended their stay to a second week, so great was the draw. In fact, the Bantam, who had all the good opinion of his own "turn" which a music-hall artiste generally has, attributed the presence of an audience in the Empire at all, to the boxing turn between himself and the Sloggor.

"You lie!" said Mr. Curll, waking up suddenly, and turning upon the Bantam a lack-lustre eye.

The Bantam grinned.
 "Oh, you go to sleep!" he said. "I ain't ready to carry you 'ome yet."

"I refuse to be carried home. I call all present to witness that the people in front come simply to hear me render 'Flanagan's Sunday Trousers!'" said Mr. Curll. "Yesterday I heard a gentleman in the stalls say, 'What a voice—what a voice!'"

"Quite right!" said the Bantam. "You could saw wood with it!"

"In my day," said Mr. Curll dreamily, "there wasn't a tenor in England to equal me. People who had heard

Tamagno said he wasn't in it with me. As for Sims Reeves, he was nowhere. Caruso—pooh!" Mr. Curll rose unsteadily to his feet. "Did you ever hear me render, 'Let me Like a Sus-sus-sus F-F-fall!'"

Bump!
Mr. Curll's unsteady legs curled up under him, and he sat down on the rug.

"Well, you've fell like a soldier now," said the Bantam. "Like a soldier in a pub."

Mr. Curll sat up. He caught at the tea-table to assist himself in rising, and got a good grip on the table-cloth.

"Hold on!" roared Tom Merry.

Mr. Curll was unfortunately holding on only too well. He dragged himself up, and the table-cloth was dragged off the table, and tea-things and eatables shot over Mr. Curll in a terrific shower.

Crash, crash! Spatter! Splash, crash!
"Ow!" gasped Mr. Curll. "Avant! Stand back! Who lifts a weapon dies. Slay not the knight who sorely wounded lies!"

"Oh, you awful hass!" gasped the Bantam.
"Bai Jove!"

Mr. Curll staggered to his feet. He looked very queer, with tea and milk flowing over him, jam and butter sticking to his hair, and jelly quivering round his neck. The juniors, dismayed as they were, could not help laughing. Mr. Curll placed one hand on his breast and bowed to them.

"Encore!" chuckled Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen, with pleasure!" said Mr. Curll. "Yes, let me like a soldier fa-hall, upon some open plain; this breast expanding for the ba-hall, to—"

"Shut up!" roared the Bantam. "You'll 'ave a crowd round!"

The study door opened.
"Any charge for admission?" asked Levison, looking in, with Mellish behind him. "I suppose we can come to the show."

Tom Merry glared at him.
"I suppose it was you who gave Curll the spirits, you cad?" he exclaimed.

Levison chuckled.
"He said he was thirsty," he remarked, "so I— Yah— yaroo!"

A pat of butter caught Levison in the eye, and then another in the ear. He slammed the door and retreated.

But by this time quite a number of juniors had been attracted to the study, some by the upraised voice of Mr. Curll, and others by Levison's report of what was going on there. The door was opened again. The Bantam and the juniors were trying to keep Mr. Curll quiet, but Mr. Curll refused to be quiet. He persisted in giving an example of the way he had sung. "On with the Motley" in the grand old days of the Karl Tulip Company.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, in great distress. "I trust this will be a warnin' to you youngsters, nevah take to drink."

"Ass!" said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Laugh PUNCHINELLO," said Mr. Curll, "for the love that is ended!"

"I'll give you larf, PUNCH-AND-JUDY!" growled the Bantam.

"Young gents, I'm sorry this 'as 'appened. I'll get 'im away as quiet as I can."

"Well, tea's finished," grinned Figgins, with a glance at the heap of wreckage on the floor of the study.

"You young gents will get into a row if anybody 'ears 'im," said the Bantam uneasily. "It was a beastly trick to give 'im spirit. Kim on, Curly!"

"Go it!" called out the crowd of fellows, in the passage.

"Pile it on! Give us another verse! Encore—encore!"

"Young gentlemen," said Mr. Curll, "you do me proud. You behold me now on the halls; but time was when I was the star tenor of the Karl Tulip Company, and duchesses wept to hear me sing."

"Enough to make 'em!" said Kangaroo, from the passage.

"Once he was a real turtle!" said Gore sympathetically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do be quiet, Curly!" urged the Bantam.

"Sir, I refuse to be quiet! I insist upon giving an encore—I insist, sir!"

"Give us 'Rolling Round the Town!" said Mellish.

"Cave!" shouted Kerruish of the Fourth. "Here comes Knox!"

"Oh, cwumps," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "now there's goin' to be a wow!"

Knox the prefect, with a frowning brow, stopped in the doorway, and stared into the study.

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CHAPTER 12.

Knox is Disappointed.

KNOX stared at Mr. Curll, and Mr. Curll bestowed a fishy, glazed look upon Knox the prefect.

"What—what— Who on earth's this?" demanded Knox.

"Friend o' mine," said the Bantam.

"Merry, you—you have an intoxicated man in your study!"

"You see, Knox—"

"I see that you are disgracing the school, as usual," said Knox.

"Hallo! Keep off! What do you mean?" roared the prefect, as Mr. Curll suddenly fell upon his neck, and embraced him with tears in his eyes.

"'Tis he—'tis he," said Mr. Curll—"tis he—'tis he. I know him now. I know him by his sable brow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo!" yelled Knox.

"Ah, what delight! Aha, what joy! My long-lost son—my noble boy!" wept Mr. Curll, still clinging to Knox.

"You—you—your drunken beast!" spluttered Knox.

"Gerroff! Merry, I'll report this to the Head! This man shall be locked up! Take him away!"

Tom Merry & Co. surveyed each other in dismay. The fat was in the fire now, with a vengeance.

Knox hammered furiously at Mr. Curll, and that was sufficient to change Mr. Curll's affectionate humour to anger.

He released the prefect, and squared up to him, getting between Knox and the door.

"Draw, wouldst thou, Knave?" said Mr. Curll.

"Dastard—draw! Have at thee!"

"Biff! Biff! Biff! Mr. Curll 'had at" Knox with terrific effect. The prefect was driven round the study, and an upper-cut sent him sprawling in the heap of broken crockery-ware.

Crash! Crash!

"Ow! Oh! Help! Oh!" shrieked Knox.

"Gweat Scott, we must get him away!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Line up, you chaps, and march him out!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The juniors closed round Mr. Curll, and rushed him out of the study. Knox was left struggling out of the broken crockery. The Bantam took an iron grasp upon Mr. Curll, and, with the juniors crowding round him to conceal him as much as possible from the general view, he was hurried out into the quadrangle.

In the quad, Mr. Curll announced his intention of going to sleep in the shade of the old apple-tree; but he was rushed on to the gates.

"Sorry this 'as 'appened," said the Bantam, supporting his unfortunate friend in the road. "I wouldn't a let 'im come if I'd knowed."

"It's not your fault or his," said Tom Merry. "It was one of our chaps played this trick, and we'll make him sit up for it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Kim on!" said Tiny Tim, dragging his exuberant friend round the road. "You'll be gettin' the young gents into trouble."

Mr. Curll persisted in turning round to kiss his hand to the juniors; but the Bantam succeeded at last in getting him away.

Tom Merry turned back into the quadrangle with his chums, all of them looking dismayed.

"There'll be a row over this," said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And there was. Kildare met Tom Merry as he came back to the School House, with the announcement that the Head wanted his presence very particularly in his study. Tom Merry repaired thither, and found Knox of the Sixth in the presence of the Head. Dr. Holmes was looking very severe.

"I have heard a most extraordinary statement from Knox, Merry!" he said sternly. "You have been entertaining someone in your study?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry meekly.

"With intoxicants?" said the Head, frowning.

"No, sir."

"Knox declares that the man was intoxicated, and assaulted him."

"Look at my face, sir!" howled Knox.

"The man was tipsy, sir," said Tom Merry reluctantly; "but it wasn't our fault. He was quite sober, and he's a good fellow; but some-cad gave him spirits, and it's a weakness of his. That's all, sir. It was a rotten trick played on him by a fellow who ought to have known better."

"Ah," said the Head, his brow clearing, "you did not tell me that, Knox!"

"I don't believe it, sir!" said Knox viciously.

Dr. Holmes frowned.

"I believe it, Knox. And you have no reason to doubt

Merry's statement," he said. "I am sure that Merry would not have intoxicated in his study."

"Certainly not, sir!" said Tom Merry. "It was a trick, and it was played to get us into trouble."

"You should not be acquainted with a man who has such a weakness, Merry," said the Head mildly. "But it was very wicked of anyone to give him strong drink, knowing his weakness. Who was it?"

"I—I didn't see him do it, sir," stammered Tom.

"But you know who it was?"

"Well, I can guess, sir."

The doctor laughed.

"I will not compel you to give me the name, Merry. The wicked boy should be punished. However, I presume that this man has now left the school?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"You must never have him here again."

"Very well, sir."

"And you must be more careful another time," said the Head kindly. "Knox, I am afraid you did not wait to make an accurate investigation of the circumstances before acquainting me with the matter. It is now closed. You may go."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom gratefully.

And he left the Head's study. Knox followed him into the passage, and scowled at him savagely.

"You've lied yourself out of that!" he said, between his teeth.

"I haven't lied, and you know it," said Tom Merry coolly. "You know perfectly well that there are no intoxicants in my study, just as I know that there are some in yours."

"You cheeky cub—" began Knox.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Tom.

And he hurried away to rejoin his friends, who were waiting anxiously for his reappearance. They greeted him with a chorus of inquiries.

"It's all right," said Tom. "The Head's a brick. It was a rotten thing to happen; but it was all Levison's fault. The Head says that whoever played that trick ought to be punished. I agree with him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

All the juniors agreed with the Head on that point, as a matter of fact. And they looked for Levison.

They found the cad of the Fourth in his study with Mellish. Levison and Mellish were chucking; but they left off chucking as the juniors crowded in.

"Get out of my study!" exclaimed Levison fiercely.

"You rotter!" said Tom Merry. "Which of you was it that gave the whisky to poor old Curl?"

"Find out!"

"We're going to! Collar them!"

"Hold on!" yelled Mellish, in alarm. "I didn't do it! I only got Tuggles out of his lodge while Levison—"

"Shut up!" hissed Levison.

"While Levison got poor old Taggy's whisky," grinned Blake, "and gave it to Curl. Collar the cad! Are you sorry, Levison?"

"No!" yelled Levison.

"Then we'll make you sorry!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Levison struggled furiously in the grasp of the avengers. But his struggling was of no use. He was whirled off his feet, and bumped on the floor—hard.

He roared.

"You've mucked up our little tea-party!" said Tom Merry. "Give him one for that!"

Bump!

"Yarook! Ow!"

"You've acted like a rotten cad! Give him another for that!"

Bump!

Levison gave a fiendish yell.

"And I believe you fetched Knox on the scene! Give him one for that!"

Bump!

Levison rolled on the floor, yelling. And the juniors, satisfied with the punishment, left him there and departed. Levison sat up, white with rage.

Mellish was grinning.

"Never mind, the joke was worth it," he said consolingly.

"Ow!"

"Doesn't it seem so funny now?" asked Mellish sympathetically.

Levison gritted his teeth, and hit out straight from the shoulder. Mellish gave a roar, and rolled under the table.

"Got any more funny things to say?" demanded Levison.

Mellish hadn't.

CHAPTER 13.

The Wayland Match.

"IT'S all right, deah boys!"

Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The School House fellows were coming out after dinner on Saturday. Saturday was a half-holiday, and the junior eleven was booked for a match at Wayland with the local team.

Tom Merry & Co. were talking and thinking cricket, with the exception of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's was evidently exercising his mighty brain upon some more important matter.

"What's biting you now?" asked Blake kindly.

"Nothin's bitin' me, deah boy. And I weared the question as 'widelous,'" said Arthur Augustus. "You wememah we were in a state of doubt last Wednesday about goin' to the Wayland Empire?"

"I wasn't, so far as I can remember," remarked Monty Lowther.

"You wememah I wasn't quite sure that it would be good form. However, it is all right now," said D'Arcy.

I have spoken to Kildare about it, and we have the Head's permish to attend the last performance there."

"It's the last night of the boxers," said Tom Merry. "They change the programme on Monday."

"Yaas, that's what I was thinkin' of. And we have permish to go. And, as I happen to be in funds just now, I was thinkin' of telephonin' and bookin' seats for the second house to-night. And we shall be able to finish up there afteh the cricket match at Wayland. What do you fellows say?"

"Bravo!"

"Blessed if Gussy isn't talking real, solid, horse-sense!" said Monty Lowther, in a tone of great surprise.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I should like to see Tiny Tim again," said Tom Merry—"to say nothing of Mr. Curl!"

"Poor old Curl! Ha, ha, ha!"

"We shall all be in Wayland. And I'm thinkin' of bookin' seats for all the team, and all the friends who come with us," said D'Arcy.

"Gussy, old man, you're talking like Socrates and Confucius rolled into one," said Lowther enthusiastically. "Never shall it be said that we refused to go to a theatre when the seats were paid for. I'm on!"

"Same here!"

"Jolly way to wind up the evening after the match, if we have permish to stay out after calling-over," said Manners.

"I've awgarded that with Kildare."

"Ripping!"

It was really a pleasant prospect—especially for the juniors who had not been to the local Empire already. And quite a large party of enthusiastic friends accompanied Arthur Augustus to the telephone in the prefect's room to book the seats. Eighteen in all. It was going to be a large party.

"It's all right, they've got the seats," said Arthur Augustus, as he laid down the receiver. "Part of the programme is new; but Tiny Tim and Mr. Curl are both there, for the last time, in the second house to-night. We'll give them a send-off."

"Hear, hear!"

Then the junior cricketers made their preparations for the match at Wayland. Wayland C.C. were a somewhat older team than the junior eleven of St. Jim's; but Tom Merry & Co. were not in much doubt about victory. They seldom were.

A brake carried off the cricketers in a happy crowd with their bags. Figgins and Kerr and Wynn and Redfern, of the New House, were in the eleven, with Tom Merry, Lowther, Kangaroo, Blake, D'Arcy, and Digby, of the School House. Herries and Manners and Clifton Dane and Glyn and Vavasour and Lawrence and Owen made up the rest of the party.

The crammed brake bowled away down the leafy lane. As it turned into the cross-road for Wayland Tom Merry uttered a sudden exclamation. A man was standing by the signpost there, lighting a clay pipe. And Tom Merry recognised the ruffian Ginger, the leader of the gang of footpads who had attacked him in the wood on the occasion when he had made the acquaintance of the Bantam.

The ruffian caught Tom Merry's eye at the same moment.

"Stop!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Bat Jove, what's the mattah?"

"That's the footpad—the worst of the gang!" Tom Merry leaped to the ground before the brake stopped.

But Ginger had already darted into the wood, leaving the ditch that bordered the road. Tom Merry halted.

"No go!" said Blake. "Jump up again, Tommy! We

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD,

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shouldn't have time to take him to the station, anyway! We should be late for the match!"

"Yaas, wathah! I shall know him now," said Arthur Augustus. "And if I come across him again, deah boy, I will give him a feafth thwashin'!"

Tom Merry grinned as he climbed into the brake again. He liked the idea of the elegant swell of St. Jim's giving the powerful ruffian a fearful thrashing. But Ginger was gone now, and there was nothing to be done.

The brake rolled on.

It was a bright, sunny afternoon, and the juniors were in great form for the match. The Waylanders proved to be rather a tough team to handle, and but for Fatty Wynn's bowling the St. Jim's juniors would probably have had to count a defeat on their record for the season.

St. Jim's piled up exactly a hundred in their innings, and the Waylanders had reached ninety-six with two more wickets to fall. As it was a single-innings match, the hopes of the Waylanders were high.

"Bethah put me on to bowl this ovah," Arthur Augustus remarked to his captain. "We musn't let them get another four."

"No fear!" said Tom Merry.

"Four to tie, and five to win," said D'Arcy. "We've simply got to shift them."

"Yes, rather!"

"Then you'll put me on for this ovah?"

"Not much!" said Tom Merry tersely.

"Why not?"

"Because I want to shift them," explained Tom Merry.

"Weally, you ass—"

But without heeding Arthur Augustus's remonstrance, the St. Jim's junior skipper tossed the ball to Fatty Wynn.

"Get 'em out, Fatty!" he said.

"Go in and Wynn!" suggested Monty Lowther, who could never refrain from a pun, good or bad, even when the fate of a cricket-match was trembling in the balance.

"I'll do my best," said Fatty.

Fatty Wynn's best was very good. The first ball of the over brought down a Wayland wicket, and the Saints cheered.

"Well bowled, Fatty!"

"Yaas, Wathah! Bravo! I couldn't have beaten that, Wynn, deah boy!"

"Last man in!"

Last man came in, and took three runs off the next ball. Tom Merry looked grave. One wanted to tie, and two to win. And it was a good bat who was facing the bowling now—one of the Wayland team's best.

But Fatty Wynn was in deadly earnest. He sent down a ball that was stopped, and then another that was stopped, and then—click!

"Burrh!"

The leg-stump was out of the ground, and the St. Jim's fellows roared with one voice:

"How's that?"

"Yaas, wathah! How's that, umpiah?" grinned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Out!"

Wayland were all down, and St. Jim's had won by a single run. The Saints clustered round Fatty Wynn and thumped him joyously on the back till the fat Fourth-Former roared.

But Wayland took their defeat very well. And after the match there was a spread for the visitors, at which Fatty Wynn distinguished himself even more than in the bowling.

When tea was over it had been dark a good time, and as the swell of St. Jim's had foreseen, it would have been too late for the first house at the Empire. But there was a good time to wait before the second house started, and the juniors occupied it in various ways.

Fatty Wynn made for the nearest bunshop to continue the spread ad lib., and some of the juniors accompanied him, feeling that it was up to them to fill Fatty with as many tartis as he could hold, after the noble way he had pulled the match out of the fire.

The Terrible Three strolled through the old High Street, and found a little harmless and necessary amusement in knocking the caps off several Grammar School fellows whom they met, and then strolled down the road.

Tom Merry pointed out to his comrades the spot where Tiny Tim had come to his rescue when he was attacked by Ginger & Co., and the chums of the Shell leaned upon the stile, chatting pleasantly in the summer evening.

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A chime from Wayland Church warned them that it was time to get back.

"Second house starts in half an hour," said Manners. "And we've got to yank Fatty away from the grub. Come on!"

They sauntered down the shadowy road towards Wayland town.

A figure loomed up in the dusk before them, going in the same direction, and Tom Merry uttered an exclamation. "The Bantam, by Jove!"

It was a custom of Tiny Tim, as he had told Tom Merry, to take a walk in the fresh country air between the "two houses" at the Empire.

The chums of the Shell hastened their steps to overtake their old acquaintance. A sudden cry left Lowther's lips.

"Look!"

Three dark figures had suddenly leaped from the blackness of the hedge, only a dozen yards in advance of the Terrible Three, and were rushing upon Tiny Tim from behind. Even in the gloom Tom Merry recognised Ginger & Co.

"Look out, Bantam!" he yelled.

The Bantam swung round.

Crack!

There was a yell of anguish from the Bantam. A savage blow of a cudgel had been aimed at his head, and he had caught it on his arm.

"Out 'im!" yelled Ginger.

The three ruffians had evidently lain in wait for the boxer, to avenge the thrashing he had given them when he rescued Tom Merry from their clutches. And but for the presence of the Terrible Three the Bantam would have been very roughly used. The cudgels were in the air ready to descend when the juniors dashed up. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther did not stop to think. They rushed right on, and flung themselves upon the ruffians without a second's hesitation.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

"Back up!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Pile in!" yelled the Bantam; and his left fist caught Ginger under the chin, and hurled him bodily into the ditch.

The Bantam's right arm hung useless at his side. In a moment the footpads were flying. Two of them fled into the wood, and Ginger, dragging himself out of the ditch on the other side, ran into the darkness of the fields.

"The hours!" gasped Tom Merry. "Bantam, old man, are you hurt?"

Then he sprang forward, with outstretched arms, just in time to catch the boxer as he fell.

CHAPTER 14.

One Good Turn Deserves Another.

"HE'S hurt!" exclaimed Lowther.

The boxer groaned slightly, as he leaned upon Tom Merry's sturdy shoulder.

"Orlright," he murmured. "I got that stick across the arm, that's all. 'Tain't broke—no bones broke. But, crumbs, it 'urts!"

The young man's face was pale with the pain; but he clenched his teeth hard, and kept back any audible expression of it. It had been a cruel blow; but the Bantam was as hard as nails. He stretched up, and tried to grin.

The Terrible Three regarded him anxiously. "Thank you for wot you did, young gents!" said the Bantam. "They was going to lay me out, I reckon. And they'd 'a' done it, too!"

"I'm afraid it was in revenge for the way you handled them when you helped me that night," said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "This is rotten for you, Bantam."

"Let's git along to the light!"

They moved along to a road lamp, and there the Bantam stripped off his coat, and rolled up the sleeve of his right arm. There was a big black bruise there, and the arm was so stiff that he could not move it. The Bantam felt over it carefully with the fingers of his left hand.

"No bones broke," he said again, in great relief.

"But you won't be able to use your arm again yet, Bantam," said Tom Merry.

The Bantam nodded.

"Looks like it," he said. "Wouldn't be so bad if it 'ad 'appened a few hours later. I'm resting next week; but now there's the second 'ouse at the Empire, and an extra big crowd on Saturday night. This is rotten. It means trouble."

"It's a beastly shame!" said Manners.

"I suppose I oughtn't to grumble," said the Bantam. "I should have got it on my 'ead if you young gents 'adn't come by. But it mucks up my show for this evening. And goodness knows wot I'm going to do!"

"You can't box with your arm like that," said Manners.

"No fear! But—"

"You ought to have it seen to," said Lowther.

"I dunno wot to do. You see, the boxing turn is the draw of the evenin', and there is a big crowd to see the last turn," said the Bantam, in great distress. "Bowkoo will 'ave 'is 'air 'arf off."

The Bantam looked very worried.

"The Bantam 'isn't doin' so well as they make out, and old 'Bowkoo don't care to disappoint 'is patrons," he explained. "And there would be a fair row if 'e was to put on Curll, say, with an extra song instead of the boxing turn."

"I should say so."

"The wust of it is that I'm bound to put in a substitute if anythin' should 'appen to me," said Tiny Tim. "But 'ow am I goin' to find a man at the last minute like this—in a country town? It ain't possible. If it was in London or Manchester it would be orlright. But 'ere—my word! 'Course, I ought to have somethin' fixed up in case of accidents—I don't never 'ave no accidents—and I ain't done it. 'Too expensive, you see; they don't pay me a small fortune for my turn. And—and if I don't show up, I lose all the week's screw—that's in the contract!"

"Rotten!" said Lowther.

"Unless I put in a substitute wot can put up an equally good fight with the Slogger," said the Bantam, despondently.

In that worry the Bantam seemed to have forgotten the pain in his injured arm, though his features twitched every now and then.

The juniors were very much concerned.

It was true that their aid had saved the Bantam from still more serious injury; but Tom Merry felt that it lay at his door. It was the Bantam's generous rescue of him that had brought upon the boxer the enmity of the ruffians. The junior could not help feeling that but for him this injury would not have fallen upon the Bantam; though, of course, he had not been to blame.

He would have given a great deal to help the boxer out of his difficulty. He had seen Mr. Bowkoo at the Empire, and he remembered the hawkish features and hard face of the manager. There was little doubt that if the manager was put to loss by the Bantam he would make the Bantam pay for it to the full extent that his contract allowed.

And the loss of a week's pay, to a man in Tiny Tim's position, was a very serious matter indeed; as well as the harm that would be done him in his profession, if it became known that he had left his manager in the lurch on a Saturday night—accident or no accident.

An idea was floating in Tom Merry's mind; but he hesitated to utter it.

"You see, it ain't a spoof boxin' match, it's the real thing—that's what draws the public to see it," said the Bantam. "I could put in a man for the Slogger to knock about—but that wouldn't be the same thing."

"It's jolly close on time, too!" said Tom Merry. "Second house opens in ten minutes now, and you're the third turn, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"And if you don't show up—"

"The turn will have to be cut!" said the boxer, despondently. "Old Bowkoo will 'ave to make a speech explainin', and then he'll take it outer me!"

"Unless you can put in a substitute to box the Slogger."

"He'd 'ave to be a good man—and I couldn't find one in Wayland—not in the time, anyway!"

"Then you'll lose your week's money?"

"Twenty quid!" said the Bantam, with a sigh; "likewise the Slogger. And old Bowkoo will be wild, and he's bound to let the word go round that I ain't reliable to turn up. No good talkin' to 'im about accident. He only thinks of the people in front, and the takin's at the box-office!"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Could I help you, Tiny Tim?" he asked.

The Bantam stared.

"You, Master Merry!"

"I would if I could!" said the Shell fellow. "I stood up to you at the school, in the gym., for seven rounds, didn't I? You said you thought I could stand up to the Slogger."

"So you could, Master Merry," said the Bantam, a new gleam coming into his eyes. "But you don't mean to say that—that you'd—"

"Yes, I do—if it would help you," said Tom Merry steadily. "One good turn deserves another. You've got this through helping me, and I should be a rotter if I wouldn't do anything I could to back you up. Do you think I'm good enough to stand up against the Slogger in your place?"

The Bantam gasped.

"Good enough! I reckon you are, Master Merry! You

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD,

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stood up agin me for seven rounds, and you could stand up agin the Slogger for ten, cert! But you can't do it! You'd get into a row at your school, sir!"

"I'd risk that. Besides, nobody will know. I sha'n't go on in Etons," said Tom, laughing. "I shall borrow your things. I'm nearly your size."

"You're a good sort, kid," said the Bantam, with emotion in his voice. "But—but the Slogger will slog you, you know. He tries 'ard every time to get the better of me, and he won't let a schoolboy wallop 'im. He'll 'it 'ard!"

"Let him!"

"You may be 'urt!"

"I'm not afraid of being hurt. We're not spooneys at St. Jim's," said Tom Merry. "I've been hurt before, and never howled about it!"

"It's a good idea, if you're really willin', Master Merry. It will save the whole bizney for me!"

"You think Mr. Bowkoe won't object?"

The Bantam chuckled.

"Old Bowkoe will welcome you with open arms, if you save 'im from cuttin' the turn. Besides, he ain't no right to object to my man, so long as he gives a good show."

"I'll do my best to do that," said Tom, modestly.

"You can do it alright. You've thought it over, young gent—you really mean it?" the boxer asked eagerly.

It was evident that the Bantam was jumping at the idea, very much like a drowning man catching at a straw.

"I mean it, rather!"

"Then it's a go! Come with me to the Empire now, and I'll put you through."

"Good egg!"

And they walked at a quick pace into Wayland.

"You go and tell the chaps I'm not joining them, Manners," said Tom Merry. "You can explain to them, will you?"

"Right-ho!" said Manners, and he hurried away to the bun-shop.

The Bantam and Tom Merry and Monty Lowther entered the Empire by the stage door, and were soon in the dressing-room.

CHAPTER 15.

The Schoolboy Boxer!

TOM MERRY was very much in earnest. He knew what he was undertaking. He had observed the Slogger, and he had observed that he was by no means a good-natured fellow like the Bantam. It was very probable that the St. Jim's junior would receive some severe punishment in those ten rounds with the Slogger; but he was prepared to face it.

If the news reached St. Jim's, too, that Tom Merry of the Shell had appeared upon the stage at a music-hall, it was very likely to cause trouble for him there. The Head could not be expected to look at the matter as the juniors did.

And it was very probable the news would be taken there. Besides the cricket team and their companions, there were probably other St. Jim's fellows in the audience—perhaps some of the prefects.

But it was a risk that had to be run. Tom Merry felt that it was up to him to stand by the man who had stood by him, and he meant to do it. If there was punishment to follow, he would grin and bear it.

But he dismissed that part of the matter from his mind, and bent all his thoughts upon the business immediately in hand.

In the dressing-room, the Bantam provided him with the boxer's scanty attire, to change into, before he presented him to Mr. Bowkoe. It was better for the manager to see him thus than in Etons. And Tom Merry stripped so well that the Bantam looked at his sturdy limbs, and firm muscles, and clear white skin, with great admiration.

"You'll do, by gum!" he said.

"Do?" growled the Slogger, who was watching them with a far from pleasant countenance. "How long do you think that kid will stand agin me, Tim?"

"Ten rounds!" said the Bantam calmly.

The Slogger snorted.

"Ten seconds, more likely!" he said. "Look you 'ere, Tim, this ain't going to be a put-up job. Boxing is boxing!"

"You pile in your 'ardest!" said the Bantam. "You won't knock my young pal out in such a 'urry, I tell you!"

"I ain't goin' to be soft with him," said the Slogger.

"I don't want you to be," said Tom Merry, with spirit. "If I were afraid of a rap or two, I shouldn't have offered."

"It may be more'n a rap or two!" said the Slogger, with a grin.

"Well, I don't mind."

"That's understood, then?"

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"'Ere's Mr. Bowkoe," said the Bantam, and he began explaining to the manager.

Mr. Bowkoe was inclined to be exasperated.

But a sight of the Bantam's stiff, bruised arm showed even the annoyed manager that he could not possibly box that evening.

"Who's the kid?" asked Mr. Bowkoe.

"Gentleman boxer, sir," said the Bantam. "He's stood up to me for seven rounds, and he'll stand up to the Slogger for ten."

"No spoof, you know!" said Mr. Bowkoe, suspiciously. "The public won't 'ave it. If there's any gammon, there will be trouble in front."

"There won't be any spoof, sir!"

"Well, I leave it to you, Tim, so long as the turn goes well," was Mr. Bowkoe's verdict.

"I'll answer for that," said the Bantam.

The second house was started now, and the first turn was on. The Bantam hung about Tom Merry, helping him prepare, and giving him whispered counsels. To suggestions that he should have his injured arm attended to the Bantam turned a deaf ear.

"My fin will do arterwards!" he said.

"Then send for a doctor, so that he can attend to it as soon as I go on!" urged Tom Merry. And the boxer agreed to that.

"So you're doing a turn, Master Merry," said Mr. Curll, as he dabbed grease-paint upon his florid features. "You've come on the halls, like the rest of us—ha, ha!"

"Yes, Mr. Curll," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Wish you success," said Mr. Curll. "Your young friend Lowther appeared on the stage with me once, when I was in musical comedy. Do you remember 'The Country Girl,' Master Lowther?"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"You remember how I knocked 'em—hey?" said Mr. Curll. "You did, sir," said Lowther, solemnly. "Simply brought the house down!"

Mr. Curll swallowed that whole, and nodded with satisfaction.

Mr. Curll's call came, and he drifted upon the stage, and the loud laughter from the crowded house told that "Flanagan's Sunday Trousers" were as popular as ever with the good folk of Wayland.

After Mr. Curll's song and dance came the boxing turn. Mr. Bowkoe appeared before the footlights, and explained in a little speech that owing to an accident the celebrated Bantam was unable to appear, but that his place was taken by a celebrated gentleman boxer, who would give an exhibition of the noble art as striking as that of the famous Bantam.

The information was received good-humouredly by the people "in front," though it was quite plain that their good humour would not last unless the "turn" was really up to Mr. Bowkoe's description of it.

Especially was Mr. Bowkoe's announcement received with enthusiasm by fourteen young gentlemen in a body in the stalls. Manners had informed the juniors of Tom Merry's intentions, and the St. Jim's juniors were very keen about it. "It's simply wippin' of Tom Mewwy!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy declared. "Pewwaps it would have been bettah to send for me; but I twust Tom Mewwy will give a good show."

"And we'll give him a jolly good reception!" said Figgins. "Yaas, wathah!"

Manners looked round the crowded house rather anxiously. "Good many St. Jim's fellows here," he remarked.

"All the better!" said Kangaroo. "They'll give Tommy plenty of hands!"

"Yes, but—I don't know what the Head would think about it," said Manners. "And there's Knox yonder, in the box with Cutts of the Fifth!"

"Bai Jove! He's sure to spot Tom Mewwy at once, and he'll deport him to the Head!" said Arthur Augustus.

"That means a row!" remarked Blake.

"But the Head can't object to Tommy standin' by a pal in distress," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "If Knox reports him, I will undertake to explain to the Head, and put it to him as an old sport!"

"Good; and then he may lick you instead of Tommy!" agreed Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Here they come!" exclaimed Kerr.

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo!"

The boxers had appeared upon the stage. The Bantam, with his right arm in a sling, came on with them, and Monty Lowther could be seen lurking in the wings. Tom Merry looked very fit and handsome, and he smiled to his chums in the stalls as they cheered him.

There was an exclamation of amazement from the box occupied by Knox and Cutts.

"Look at boxer!" ejaculated Cutts. "That's the giddy gentleman him, Knox!"

"Tom Merry!" exclaimed Knox. "Blessed if this doesn't take the cake—a St. Jim's junior putting up as a boxer on the stage!" said Cutts. "He'll carry it through, too."

"Will he?" said Knox, grimly. "This is where I come in, it's my duty as a prefect to stop anything of the sort." Cutts grinned.

"I fancy you wouldn't be allowed to," he said. "They wouldn't let you in behind the scenes to make trouble. Besides, it's going to be a good scrap; let him alone."

Knox hesitated.

"You can report him, if you like," said Cutts, "but don't interfere. Let's have the scrap."

"He'd have to come off if I ordered him," said Knox. "I'm a prefect, ain't I?"

"He wouldn't, and you'd only make yourself look an ass." "Then I'll report his conduct to the Head."

"No harm in that, but let's have the show," said Cutts. And Knox sat down again.

Tom Merry caught sight of the prefect looking down at him, and Knox's expression told him plainly enough that the prefect meant mischief. But Tom Merry's mind was made up, and he had no time to waste on the bully of the Sixth now.

After one glance at Knox he took no further notice of the prefect.

"Feel fit, kid?" whispered the Bantam.

Tom Merry nodded with a bright smile.

"Fit as a fiddle!" he said.

"I sha'n't forget this," said the Bantam. "It's very good of you—very good and generous. And I 'ope the Slogger won't hurt you too much."

"Never mind if he does," said Tom cheerfully. All was ready now.

Mr. Bowkoe had taken out an imposing gold watch to keep time for the rounds, and the two boxers faced one another, foot to foot and eye to eye—surlily grimness in the face of the Slogger, and steady determination in Tom Merry's.

CHAPTER 16.

Tom Merry's Turn!

"TIME!"

The first round started. There was a call from the stalls.

"Go it, Tommy!"

"Play up for St. Jim's, deah boy!"

"That blessed Slogger means business" murmured Blake unasily. "Look at the way he's got his teeth jammed together! Tommy's in for it."

There was little doubt about that. Although it would have been wiser on the Slogger's part to give his youthful adversary a run, in order to make the fight last the stipulated ten rounds, he evidently meant to finish it if he could. No consideration would induce him to allow a junior schoolboy to stand up against him for ten rounds, if he could help it.

And the Slogger started as if it were a prize-fight rather than a boxing-match.

His age and weight and size of course gave him a great advantage, and Tom Merry was driven round the ring to begin with.

But Tom was taking his opponent's measure, and he did not falter in the least. And the Slogger was suddenly stopped by a straight drive which showed that Tom Merry, though younger, slighter, and less muscular, had quite as much science as the professional boxer, if not a little more.

The Slogger started back, and almost staggered, as the hard glove came with a buff upon his chin.

An extremely ugly look came over his face, and he rushed in, hitting out with all his force.

But Tom Merry countered neatly, and the boxer wasted his strength and his breath in slogging at an adversary who was never there.

"Time!" said Mr. Bowkoe.

And there was a minute rest.

The Bantam clapped Tom Merry on the shoulder. His rugged, honest face was full of delight, and he seemed quite to have forgotten the pain in his arm.

"You'll do," he said. "You'll do. The ten rounds are safe."

In the second round the Slogger was more cautious, putting in more science and less bull-rushing, and Tom Merry received some punishment, but not more than he gave.

There was a cheer now from the crowded house. All the people in front realised that there was something more than a mere exhibition of boxing before them, and the match had something of the excitement of a prize-fight. And, as was natural, sympathy was on the side of the boy who was bravely facing the man.

"Go it, youngster!"

"Bantam!"

"Yas, bwaso, wathah!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Play up, deah boy!"

The rounds succeeded one another. It was so evident that the Slogger was striving to knock his adversary out that interest was at the keenest pitch.

In the professional ring the Slogger could hardly have put more "beef" into his attack. But Tom Merry stood it well.

His eye was steady, and he was never caught napping, and not for an instant did he falter before the heavy drives of the Slogger.

Six rounds were fought through, and the junior of St. Jim's came up smiling and cool for the seventh.

The Slogger was neither smiling nor cool now.

He attacked the junior boxer with a force that made Mr. Bowkoe whisper in alarm, "Go easy—go easy!" But the Slogger declined to go easy. He was thinking only of proving that a schoolboy could not stand against him for ten rounds.

Tom Merry was panting as he dropped on to the Bantam's knee to rest after time was called.

Tiny Tim fanned him, and whispered encouragement.

"You'll do!" he said. "You're all right! Look at the people in front! You're simply knocking 'em! Blessed if they don't take to this more than a reg'lar show! You're doin' me the best turn that ever was done for me, kid!"

And that was quite sufficient to encourage Tom Merry, if he had thought of slacking. But he had not. He had taken the Slogger's measure, and he felt that he could stand up to him so long as he kept cool and collected.

There was no doubt about the enthusiasm of the audience. Many of them were on their feet in their excitement, and in the gallery there was an almost continual roar.

"Time!" said Mr. Bowkoe, smiling, in great good-humour. Anything that pleased the "house" was certain to please Mr. Bowkoe.

Tom Merry stepped up cheerfully for the eighth round.

The Slogger attacked him fiercely. Tom Merry had to give ground before the weight of his assailant, and he had no choice but to hit hard.

A sweeping upper-cut caught the Slogger on the point of the chin, and for that "mittens" the Slogger would have been hors de combat there and then.

As it was he went down heavily, and lay gasping.

"There was a roar of cheering.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Mr. Bowkoe counted. But the Slogger was up before he had counted half ten, and springing at the schoolboy boxer.

Then they were at it, hammer and tongs. The Slogger was wild with rage, and he was hitting furiously, but Tom Merry was cool and keen and hardly one of the fierce drives got home upon the cool, handsome face.

"Time!"

Eight rounds had been fought out, with far more vigour than was customary in the Bantam's boxing turn.

The Slogger was showing signs of "bellying to mend" to a far greater extent than his youthful foe.

The ninth round started, and it was wild and whirling. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 26A.

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Slogger succeeded in getting home this time, and Tom Merry received more punishment than he had experienced so far. All eyes were anxiously upon him. He acted wholly upon the defensive now, but many heavy blows came home, the Slogger keeping at close quarters and hitting hard. But Tom Merry was not beaten. The Slogger, growing reckless, had drawn back his right for a finishing drive, and Tom Merry had a chance of getting in a crashing body blow—and he did not let the chance escape him.

Bump!

The Slogger was down again.

"Bravo!"

"Huwah!"

Tom Merry staggered to the Bantam's knee.

"Well done, kid!" muttered the Bantam. "Only one more round."

Tom Merry's eyes were gleaming. The savageness of the Slogger had put his back up, and he meant business, too.

"I'm going to make it a finish if I can," he muttered.

"Good luck to you!" said Tiny Tim.

It was the last round, and Tom Merry kept his word. He avoided in-fighting, keeping his adversary at arm's length for some time, and then, when the Slogger was far from looking for it, he made a sudden attack. The Slogger's guard seemed to be nowhere, and a right-hander came crashing on his chin, and he staggered, and then came left and right in quick succession upon the red, angry face, and the Slogger crashed down.

Mr. Bowker began to count.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight—"

The Slogger made a desperate effort to rise. But his head was swimming, and he sank back again with a gasp.

"Nine—OUT!"

There was a roar.

"Bravo, youngster!"

"Tom Mewwy wins! Huwah!"

"Hip-pip!"

And there was a storm of hand-clapping.

"Licked to the wide!" chuckled the Bantam. "Slogger, old man, you've got it in the neck."

The Slogger growled painfully. The junior had not only stood up to him for the agreed ten rounds, but he had knocked him out in the tenth.

The house rang with applause.

Tom Merry went off, leaning a little upon the Bantam's uninjured arm, but he had to return four or five times to take his call.

In the dressing-room the Bantam sponged his blazing face and fanned him. Tom Merry was feeling the reaction now. It had been a hard fight, and he was limp enough after it. The Slogger was grunting.

Tom Merry changed into his own clothes, with the assistance of Lowther and the delighted Bantam. Then he came up to the Slogger and held out his hand.

"It was a jolly good fight," he said. "Give us your fist."

And the Slogger, in spite of himself, grinned a rather crooked grin, and shook hands with the schoolboy boxer.

At the stage door Tom Merry's friends were waiting for him. They cheered him as he came out with Lowther, and clapped him on the back.

"It was simply wippin', deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I assuah you that I could not have stood up to him like that!"

"You don't say so!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wataah; it's a fact, deah boy!"

"Now for home, and trouble," said Manners. "Knox was watching you with all his eyes, Tommy, and he'll have things ready for you when you get in, worse luck!"

"The uttah wottah!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I don't care. I owed it to the Bantam, and I've done right. And I'm ready to face the music."

"It's all right, deah boy. Leave me to explain to the Head, and I'll put it to him, as an old sport—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors walked home to St. Jim's.

Knox had arrived there before him, and he had made his report. As soon as the juniors arrived, Tom Merry was informed that the Head wished to see him in his study. And declining D'Arcy's kind offer to accompany him and do all the talking, the hero of the Shell made his way to the presence of the Head.

CHAPTER 17.

All's Well That Ends Well.

D R. HOLMES was looking decidedly stern when Tom Merry entered.

Knox was there, and Knox had evidently made his report in as unfavourable a way as possible for the junior.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 284.

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR"
Every Friday.

Tom Merry faced his headmaster calmly but respectfully. He had done what he thought it was right to do, and if there was punishment to follow he was ready to face it.

"Knox informs me that, while witnessing the performance at the Wayland Empire, Merry, he recognised you in a prize-fight on the stage," said the Head sternly.

"That isn't true, sir," said Tom directly.

"What!"

"It wasn't a prize-fight, sir; it was a boxing-match, with gloves on."

"You admit that you have appeared upon the stage in a music-hall, giving a performance in a glove-fight!" exclaimed the scandalised Head.

"If you will let me explain, sir—"

"The fact speaks for itself," said the Head severely. "You know that this kind of thing cannot be permitted, Merry. The money you have received will be returned—"

"Money!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes; I understand that you were paid—"

"Nothing of the sort, sir!"

"Indeed! Then you acted in this way for nothing?"

"Certainly, sir."

"You can't expect Dr. Holmes to believe that," said Knox, with a sneer.

"I do expect him to believe it," said Tom Merry, "and all my friends who were with me know it is the case. Will you allow me to explain, sir?"

"Go on," said the Head.

"I was set on by a gang of footpads, sir, the other day, and should have been robbed and roughly handled if Tiny Tim hadn't come and helped me. Tiny Tim is the boxer. Well, this evening the same ruffians set on him because he had helped me, and they injured him so that he couldn't do his boxing turn on the stage. I went on in his place. I felt that it was up to me, as he had been injured because he helped me."

"Ah!" said the Head. "You did not tell me this, Knox."

"Knox didn't know, sir," said Tom Merry. "He only saw me from his box."

"You should have ascertained all the facts before making your report to me, Knox," said the Head, somewhat sharply. "This lets in an altogether new light upon the matter."

Knox bit his lip.

"Do you believe his statement, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly I do," said the Head sharply. "Merry, I understand now your motives for acting as you did. It was very—ahem!—irregular, and I cannot approve of it; but considering the circumstances, I fully understand that you felt bound to help the man who had generously helped you."

"I felt I couldn't do anything else, sir," said Tom.

"Quite so, quite so. You must not do anything of the kind again, but under the circumstances I shall excuse you."

Tom Merry's face lighted up. Knox gritted his teeth, but he did not speak. If he had said the things he would have liked to say, the cad of the Sixth would have drawn the doctor's wrath upon his own head.

"Thank you, sir," said Tom Merry gratefully.

Dr. Holmes waved his hand.

"You may go, Merry."

And Tom Merry gladly departed.

He joined his chums in the study, and his sunny face at once relieved their uneasiness.

"All right?" asked D'Arcy.

"Wight as wain!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Head is an old sport," said Arthur Augustus.

"Didn't I tell you fellows that it would be all right?"

"No, you didn't, as a matter of fact," said Monty Lowther.

"Poor old Knox! He's always putting his hoof in it."

"He's done me a good turn," grinned Tom Merry. "It's all out and over now, and it might have come out afterwards by accident and caused trouble. I suggest a vote of thanks to Knox."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All's well that ends well," said Fatty Wynn. "I've got a suggestion to make, too. We ought to have a feed to celebrate this."

"One for 'this,' and two for Fatty," chuckled Figgins.

"Still, it's a good idea. Who says tuckshop?"

And with one voice the Co. replied:

"Tuckshop!"

And thus happily ended the Gentleman Boxer's first and last appearance upon "the balls."

(Next Wednesday's splendid, long, complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's is entitled "MISUNDERSTOOD" by Martin Clifford, and deals principally with the strange conduct of Manners—one of the partners of Tom Merry & Co. Cousin Ethel also plays a part in this splendid school tale, which no "Gemite" should miss. Price One Penny, as usual.)

Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE!

HELPING FATHER.

A preacher, raising his eyes from his pulpit in the midst of his sermon, was paralysed with amazement to see his son in the gallery pelting the congregation with "conkers." But while the good man was preparing a frown of reproof, the young hopeful cried out:

"You tend to your preaching, daddy! I'll keep 'em awake!"—Sent in by Miss Chesterman, Reading.

FAMILIES SUPPLIED!

Two children, brother and sister, were one morning informed that they had a new baby brother. Curious to know who had brought it, the girl ventured to suggest that the milkman had brought it.

"Why the milkman?" asked the boy.

"Why, haven't you ever seen on the milkman's cart 'Families Supplied'?"—Sent in by W. E. Stephens, Shrewsbury.

FATHER'S REASON.

Little Willie: "I was going-fishing on Sunday, but my papa wouldn't let me go."

Minister: "That's the right kind of father to have! I expect he told you the reason why?"

Willie: "Yes, sir. He said that there wasn't enough bait for two."—Sent in by P. James, Southampton.

MISUNDERSTOOD.

A certain gentleman was to have lectured at a big public meeting at a town some distance away from his residence, but the floods having washed away portions of the line, he was unable to go. So he wired: "Cannot come. Wash out on line."

In a few hours' time the reply came back:

"Never mind. Borrow a shirt!"—Sent in by T. Stanbridge, Putney.

DIS' GRACE 'FUL!

A teacher in an American school was informing his pupils that grace should always be said before partaking of their meals. Turning to Tommy, a clergyman's son, she said:

"Now, Tommy, what does your father say before meals?" Tommy: "Pa says, 'Go easy with the butter, kids; it's forty cents a pound!'"—Sent in by J. Stamford, Liverpool.

WHAT NEXT?

A little girl possessed a Teddy-bear which had the misfortune to be cross-eyed, and when a visitor was informed that she called it "Gladly," he naturally wanted to know why.

"Why, we sing at Sunday-school 'Gladly my cross I'd bear,'" she said.—Sent in by R. Walburn, Northallerton.

ECONOMY.

"How to save your gas-bills, by a very simple method. Send a shilling and a stamped addressed envelope." Thus read the advertisement, and in due course it came to the notice of the local miser, who, perhaps, had never parted with a shilling so readily before, as he sent off the application for this wonderful new method of saving money. But he was not quite so happy when the reply came, for it read:

"Buy a penny copy-book, and paste the bills therein."—Sent in by H. Clegg, Oldham.

A GOOD REFERENCE.

Lady (engaging cook): "This reference does not say anything about your capabilities as a cook. To whom shall I apply for that?"

Applicant (without the slightest hesitation): "Police-constable Koppem, O.K. Division!"—Sent in by W. Parker, Sidlisham.

TOO RAPID.

Jack: "Yes, I had a little balance in the bank, but I got engaged two months ago, and no—"

Tom: "Ah! Love makes the world go round."

Jack: "Yes; but I didn't think it would make me lose my balance."—Sent in by F. Cranston, Preston.

AWKWARD!

Cook: "The gas-stove has gone out, mum."

Lady: "Well, can't you light it again?"

Cook: "But it has gone out through the roof!"—Sent in by A. Hartley, Barnoldswick.

HE KNEW!

Mother: "Jacky, I am ashamed of you! Fancy dusting your chair in Mrs. Jones's before sitting down! Little Freddy was watching you, and is sure to tell his mother."

Jacky: "Yes, I know he was; but I'm too old a fish to be caught with a bent pin!"—Sent in by J. Dickenson, Grimsby.

HE HAD HAD SOME BEFORE.

Friendly Constable: "Come, come, sir, pull yourself together! There's your wife calling you!"

Gentleman (who has dined well): "Wha' she call—hic!—calling me—hic!—Billy or William?"

Constable: "William, sir."

Gent: "Then I'm not goin' home!"—Sent in by A. Hulme, Hanley.

IT DIDN'T MATTER.

"I want some patterns of spring suitings for father to see," said the bright youth to the tailor.

"Certainly, sir!" replied the assistant. "What kind does your father prefer?"

"Oh, father is not at all particular as to the kind of pattern, so long as they are strong enough to hold up the garden creeper!"—Sent in by C. Tyler, Walsall.

SURE TO GET ON.

Smith major had left school, and was just saying goodbye to his friends before going into business in the City.

"One thing," remarked one, "you're sure to get on, you're such a good book-keeper."

"How do you make that out?" asked Smith.

"Why," retorted his friend, "you've had my volume of 'The Gem' Library for six months!" Sent in by V. Allwork, Finsbury Park.

POETIC LANGUAGE.

A man entered a certain restaurant and asked for two poached eggs.

"Adam and Eve on a raft!" was the order given to the kitchen by the waiter.

Then the customer altered his mind, and desired the eggs scrambled. The waiter, as soon as he received notice of the change, sprang to the tube and yelled out:

"Wreck 'em!"—Sent in by A. Williams, Sheffield.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED!

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short, Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the senders will receive a Money Prize.

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THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this Competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in otherwise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

THE CHEER-OH CHUMS!



“Come rain or fine or dull or shine, come fair or stormy weather; Whatever comes the Cheer-oh Chums will always stick together— Will always stick together!”
 —The Cheer-Oh Chums Anthem.

A Grand, New, Short Serial Story.

THE FIRST INSTALMENTS BRIEFLY EXPLAINED.

The Cheer-Oh Chums are the greatest of friends. Three of them are girls, whose names are Pat Wentworth, Polly Lake, and Madge Jackson, and all three are under the severe charge of Miss Primmer, headmistress of the Shoremouth High School for Girls. The other half of the Cheer-Oh Chums are three juniors belonging to a college within easy walking distance of Shoremouth. Their names are Jimmy Dunn, Billy Denton, and Dick Brewster. The Cheer-Oh Chums form a sort of secret society with one rule, and that

is, all members must be always merry and bright. They meet in a secret hut quite close to the two schools.

One day the chums arrange an excursion together to the neighbouring town of Cliffbury. A jolly day there ends with a rush to the station. A train is waiting, and the chums bundle in just as it starts. Five minutes later Dick learns from a dressy young man in the carriage that the train goes through to London without a stop.

“Then we’re in the wrong train!” gasps Dick.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Housebreakers.

The dressy gentleman continued to smile softly to himself. “Ah,” he agreed, “that’s more like it. And you’ll have to stop all night in London now. If you want a first-class place to stop at, you ought to go to—”

But Dick did not want to hear any more, and the dressy gentleman suddenly found himself alone.

“He seems quite excited,” he murmured to himself. “Now, a small thing like that would never worry me. Beastly train’s bound to stop at some beastly place, and one beastly place is as good as another. Oh, hang! And he’s taken the matches with him!”

Dick came bursting into the compartment which the Cheer-ohs occupied, and fixed Jimmy with a glassy stare.

“I hope your pater and mater ’ll be pleased to see us all!” he said.

Jimmy stared at him, sighed, and then tapped his forehead. “Poor chap!” he said. “Sit down and get cool. You’ll be better to-morrow!”

“No, I sha’n’t; nor will you! As we’re going to London, and you’re the only one of us who lives there, I s’pose your people ’ll put us up until we know whether we’re going to be sacked or not.”

“He’s absolutely raving!” Jimmy murmured.

“What’s all this gas about London?” Billy inquired.

“Because we’re going there at sixty-five miles an hour,” Dick gasped. “We’re in the wrong giddy train, and it’s all your fault, Jimmy, you freak!”

“Wrong train!” Jimmy repeated blankly. “Oh, my aunt!”

“I guessed it!” Billy cried. “Didn’t I say—”

“London!” Polly gasped. “But—but—”

“Express all the way,” Dick said, schooling himself to be calm. “I suppose we shall get in at about seven, and there won’t be another train back to-night, even if we had the tin. Ever been in a mess before?”

“But I thought,” Jimmy began weakly, “I was certain—”

“Shut up, and go away!” groaned Billy. “I can’t bear the sight of you! We shall be sacked for this!”

“So shall we,” sighed Pat. “Miss Primmer ’ll never overlook it.”

“And the Cheer-ohs’ll have to disband,” said Madge. “No more teas in the hut.”

“No more hunting for Roman relics!” echoed Polly.

“No more—”

No member of the Cheer-oh’s had ever been known to cry; but there were one or two who came very near to it then. Foolishly as Jimmy had behaved, not one of the girls

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 234.

would say a harsh word to him, and this had the effect of making him feel worse than ever.

He tried to think of some way out of the difficulty; but his thoughts were baulked by the knowledge that every elapsing minute brought them more than a mile nearer to London.

Suddenly, the only remedy occurred to him, and, desperate as it was, he sprang up and made for the door. Dick promptly seized him.

"Steady on, old chap!" he expostulated. "What are you up to?"

"Going to stop the train!" said Jimmy hoarsely. "Pull the communication chain. It's the only thing to do."

"Don't be an ass!" said Billy morosely. "They fine you five quid for that. Have you got five quid?"

But Jimmy wrenched himself free and pulled the chain down, letting it fly up again with a jerk.

"Golly," gasped Billy, "that's done it! You've put the lid on it now!"

"Well, the train's stopping, anyhow!" said Jimmy desperately.

The speed was certainly slackening, and down the length of the train they could hear brakes groaning and squealing. The six Cheer-ohs got up on their feet, and braced themselves to take a dash for it.

Jimmy glanced through the window, and saw a high green bank drifting past. The train was evidently running through a deep cutting.

He went to the door and opened it just as the train was on the point of stopping. Heads protruded from the windows all the way along, and he heard the guard leap from his van on to the six-foot way.

"Other door," he whispered. "Then we dodge the guard."

The three boys leaped out as rapidly as if they were diving from a spring-board, and wanted to give a hand to the girls. Then they dashed helter-skelter up the bank, crawled into the shadow of some bushes half-way up, and hid there listening.

They heard footsteps on the stony track, voices, laughter, and explosions of anger from the guard. Then presently the train moved on again.

Jimmy sighed.

"So far so good," he said. "Wish I'd thought of the wheeze before."

"It's a pity someone didn't," Billy remarked. "As it is we're goodness knows where, and at least thirty miles from the coll. If you ask me, we should have been a jolly sight better off if we'd gone on to London."

"Some people are never satisfied," Jimmy growled.

"I bet none of us are," Billy retorted, "unless it's you. Where the dickens are we?"

"Let's climb up to the top of the bank and see," Madge suggested. "Then if you boys can stop quarrelling for a minute or two, we may be able to think of a way of getting back."

The boys looked at each other, and presently all three found themselves grinning.

"You're a silly old ass, Jimmy," said Dick. "But we'll call it pax for the present—eh, Billy?"

"Right-oh!" said Billy.

And peace having been declared, as it were, they climbed up to the top of the cutting, where further progress was barred by a fence-rail, backed by a thick hedge.

Dick sidled along by the fence, and presently whistled.

"It's all right," he whispered. "There's a gap here. Hallo! Look out! Keep down!"

Almost as he warned them, the others saw a figure climbing painfully up the grassy slope from the line. They were still and silent for a moment, fearing that the guard might have remained behind. Then, however, a voice hailed them:

"I say, are you there? We're in the same boat now, by Jove; only I want to get to London, and you don't! Beasley nuisance—what?"

The Cheer-ohs looked at each other in amazement. Dick nodded reassuringly.

"It's the chap who told me we were in the wrong train," he whispered. "It's all right."

They breathed freely with relief. They were in a bad predicament, and somehow it comforted them to know that one older than themselves was in the same boat.

"Here we are!" Dick cried. "How on earth did you get yourself left behind?"

The dressy young man came struggling up the slope until he reached the railings, when he raised his hat to the girls with a little bow.

"May I consider that I have been introduced all round?" he said. "My name is Muffin—Harold Montague Muffin—and I wish I had one or two of my namesakes with me, because I'm beastly hungry. Haven't eaten anything for at least a couple of hours. Well, here we are! What? But

where are we? Anybody notice the name of the last station we went through?"

None of them had, as a chorus of "No's" testified.

Mr. Muffin leaned against the fence railing, and stuck another cigar between his teeth.

"You've got the matches?" he reminded Dick.

"I say," Dick said, tossing him the box, "how on earth did you get left behind?"

Mr. Muffin did not reply until his cigar was well started.

"Beastly guard came round to see who'd stopped the beastly train!" he explained. "He found you'd bunked, but, of course, he couldn't spare the time to chase you, so he went back to his beastly van. Then it occurred to me to make quite certain if the train did get to London, so I went after him to inquire. Before I could get up to the top of the train the beastly thing started, and I slipped trying to climb on, so here I am. Rather a lark—what?"

"Is it?" said Billy. "It's no jolly fun for us, I can tell you. We've got to get back to Shoremouth somehow."

"One beastly place," Mr. Muffin observed, "is just as good as any other beastly place!"

His coolness began to annoy the boys and girls.

"All jolly well for you, I dare say," Jim growled. "But we happen to be at school, and we shall be asked as sure as eggs if we're not back at a reasonably early hour to-night."

Mr. Muffin nodded.

"In that case," he said, "we had better get a move on at once. This gap seems to lead to somewhere. Shall we try it? Cheer up, some of you! Why, we've only got to borrow a car to be at Shoremouth in three-quarters of an hour."

No one asked where the car was coming from. The Cheer-ohs began to suspect Mr. Muffin's sanity. They had a strong feeling that if he were going to be hanged he would stroll smiling to the scaffold, remarking that there was nothing for him to worry about, as a reprieve might come at any moment.

One after another they climbed the fence, and crawled through the gap in the hedge. They found themselves in what was obviously a very large garden. Ahead was a black mass of trees, but through them twinkled a light, evidently from some house.

Madge drew back.

"Oh, look here! I say!" she exclaimed.

"We're trespassing," Polly added. "Hadt' we better go back?"

"Why on earth?" Billy demanded.

"Because," Pat put in, "we're coming straight to someone's house, and we don't want to get into worse trouble than we're in already."

"Someone's house!" Mr. Muffin repeated. "All the better! I'm beastly hungry!"

Billy gasped.

"We—we haven't got time to pay any calls," he said.

"Well—well, we'll see," said the cheery Mr. Muffin.

"Come on!"

They "came on" up the long, wide garden, until suddenly Mr. Muffin tripped over the root of a tree, and measured his length.

He arose quickly, however, and undamped in spirit, before any of the chums could assist him.

"Can it be possible?" he exclaimed, staring at the ground.

"Surely there can't be more than one root like that in the whole of England? Boys and girls, look happy, for I believe I know where we are!"

"Where—where?" came back a whispered chorus.

"Presently," said Mr. Muffin, "we shall come to a cherry-tree, with a branch jutting out at right angles where I used to swing when I was a little boy. Behind yonder shrubs I used to stalk the gardener with my little bow and arrows. Being a child, I used to enjoy it much more than he did. Oh, to be a chee-ild again!"

"Look here," Jimmy exclaimed, "do you really know where we are?"

Mr. Muffin nodded.

"We are in my Aunt Sophia's garden," he said. "I remember her house overlooked the railway. Haven't been here for years; but she'll be glad to see me. You'll like her. She's a dear old thing."

"Oh, good egg!" Dick ejaculated. "Has she got a motor, or anything we could get back to the school in?"

"We will see," Mr. Muffin promised. "Let us hasten to the old homestead. Ah, here is the cherry-tree I told you of! Look, the branch I mentioned has been hewn down!"

"Yes; and it isn't a cherry-tree," Billy said quickly.

"Yes, it is," Mr. Muffin contradicted.

"But—"

"I tell you I used to swing on it, so I ought to know!"

Billy said nothing more; but a doubt suddenly disturbed his comparative peace of mind. He knew sufficient about trees

to be quite sure that plums grew on that particular one. If he insisted on his point he knew that Mr. Muffin would only say that it didn't matter, and that a plum-tree was just as good as any other beastly tree to swing on. In his own mind he suspected that they were not on Aunt Sophia's property after all.

He kept quiet, however, because he did not want to frighten the girls.

They reached the back premises of the house, treading stealthily. There were lights in the kitchen, and in one of the bed-rooms; but the place looked singularly gloomy and depressing.

"We'd better get round to the front and ring," Pat suggested.

Mr. Muffin stared at her.

"My dear young lady," he said, "that would spoil everything. I do not often see my Aunt Sophia, and whenever I do, I like to give her some little surprise. We are going to pretend to be burglars.

"Burglars!" Mr. Muffin repeated. "Professor Moriarty and his naughty knaves!"

"But—won't she be frightened?" Polly exclaimed.

"A little excitement," said Mr. Muffin, "will do the old lady good. She'll be beastly fed up with us at first, but I'll soon talk her round. I tell you you'll like my Aunt Sophia. She's rather like me in some respects."

"But, look here, Mr. Muffin!" Dick expostulated. "Don't you think—"

But that irresponsible gentleman would not listen to reason.

"Be quiet, Richard," he said, "unless you want the honest catch-dog's beastly bark to betray us. Burglars we are!"

The three Cheer-ohs retired a little apart to confer.

"What shall we do?" Dick whispered. "That chap's flean off his dot!"

"Raving!" Jimmy agreed. "But if his Aunt Sophia lives here—"

"The question is, does she?" said Billy. "Look here, I vote we scout and take the girls along with us."

"Where to?" Dick demanded.

There was a silence.

"Look here," Dick continued in a whisper, "We're in for it now. Let's stick to old Muffin. He can't get us into much worse a mess than we're in already."

A pause, and then the heads of the other two nodded. Mr. Muffin was a harebrained sort of person, incapable, it seemed, of taking anything seriously. But somehow he inspired confidence.

"So you've agreed to stand by me after all," he said cheerily. "Wise men! Look at this, my hearties."

He showed them half a brick which he had picked up.

"What's that for?" Billy inquired.

"Instead of a jemmy," Mr. Muffin explained, "Professor Moriarty forgot to bring his burgling outfit with him."

"But—"

Mr. Muffin did not wait to discuss the matter further. He went quietly up to a basement window, behind which no light was burning, and smashed it with the brick.

"My fat aunt!" Dick breathed softly, and the others began to giggle softly.

Mr. Muffin smashed more of the window, and, putting his arm through the aperture, slipped back the catch, and then raised the sash.

"Effective if not neat, and all done by kindness," was his frivolous comment. "I will get in first and assist the young ladies."

A word here explaining why the breaking of the window did not at once arouse the household would not be out of place. It was a basement window, and of the three servants of the establishment not one was belowstairs at the time.

The cook had gone out for the evening, the housemaid was upstairs turning down the coverlets, and the parlourmaid was in the dining-room, where dinner was in progress, waiting at table. Those in the dining-room certainly heard the sound of breaking glass, but they fancied that the housemaid had gone down into the kitchen and broken something.

The Cheer-ohs and Mr. Muffin found themselves in a passage in the basement, the floor of which was covered with oilcloth. They were thankful for this, for it is easy to tread softly on a smooth surface. It was quite dark, and they had to feel their way.

"The stairs," said Mr. Muffin, "are over to the left!"

"They're not!" Dick whispered back. "They're over here to the right!"

"Well," said Mr. Muffin, "they used not to be when I was a little boy."

(A long instalment of this splendid Serial again next Wednesday.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 284.

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR"
Every Friday.

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 correspondence 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."

N. Robin, 25, Nobbs Street, Moore Park, Sydney, New South Wales, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 14.

W. M. Davis, 66, Victoria Street, North Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 14-15.

Miss F. Watts, Cremona, Beaconsfield Parade, St. Kilda, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps and postcards, age 18-20.

J. McBrean, care of M. Beegan, Sydney Street, Kilmore, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 17-18.

E. S. Nielsen, care of Cameron and Sutherland, Box 560, G.P.O., Melbourne, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 15.

Miss M. Minchin, Balkuling, via York, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in the British Isles.

Miss Ethel Gilbert, Lindsay Street East, Coolgardie, West Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age 16-18. S. J. Gilbert, of the same address, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 19-20.

Miss M. L. Carnell, 171, Eureka Street, Ballarat East, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age 18-20.

F. Garth, 134, Edward Street, Perth, West Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 17, living in the British Isles or America.

J. M. Stafford, 2475, Seventh Avenue, New York City, United States of America, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 17-18, interested in postcards.

A. Porter, Cedar Cove Post-office, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, wishes to correspond with girl readers in the British Isles or Australia, age 15-16.

Miss Dulcie Llewellyn, Coronation Street, Pelaw Main, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age 16-20.

R. Stockdale, Oak Dene, Fairfield, near Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in Yorkshire, age 17.

A. Royce, Oranga, Clark Street, Port Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 17, living in England.

C. L. Schultz, junior, White House, Apollo, Bunder, Bombay, India, wishes to correspond with a reader living in the United Kingdom, age 20-21.

V. Hoskins, 137, Grey Street, St. Kilda, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers in Canada, age 16.

Miss M. Tomlinson, 99, Evans Street, Brunswick, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader interested in postcards.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

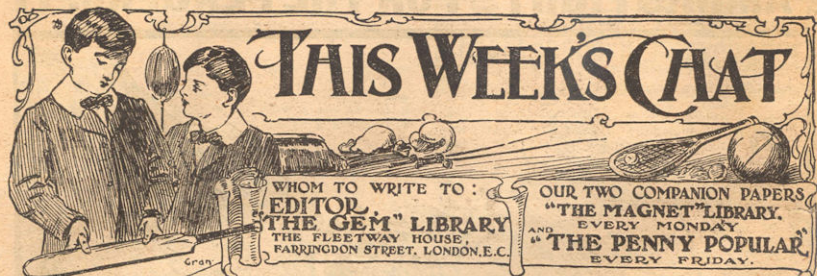
FAMOUS FIGHTS FOR THE FLAG. No. 11



Specially drawn for "THE GEM" Library by C. H. Blake.

The Battle of Chillianwallah—one of the principal engagements of the Sikh War—was fought on January 13th, 1849, and was distinguished by one of the most remarkable feats of personal bravery on record. The 61st Regiment were endeavouring to rush a Sikh battery, which was being fiercely defended, when suddenly from out of the British ranks dashed Ensign Home-Gall. In superb defiance of death, the young officer gained the battery, leaped astride one of the speaking guns, and laying about him with his sword, captured the gun single-handed. With a cheer, the gallant 61st rushed to his support, and the battery was carried.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

WHOM TO WRITE TO :
EDITOR
"THE GEM" LIBRARY
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE,
 FARRINGTON STREET, LONDON, E.C.

OUR TWO COMPANION PAPERS
"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY
 AND EVERY MONDAY
"THE PENNY POPULAR"
 EVERY FRIDAY.

For Next Wednesday.

"MISUNDERSTOOD!"By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

Next week's splendid, long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's, entitled as above, has as its central figure Manners of the Shell Form, one of the partners in the famous firm of Tom Merry & Co. Manners behaves in a way that can only be described as extraordinary in a moment of grave peril, and by his action exposes no less a person than Cousin Ethel to the greatest danger. Fortunately, the girl's presence of mind averts serious consequences; but the juniors cannot forget or forgive Manners' action. Manners has an explanation, of course, but a most unsatisfactory one, and in a subsequent test of his courage circumstances cause his conduct once again to show up in an unfavourable light. Then there is great trouble in store for Manners, and it is quite by chance that a grand opportunity presents itself to him of proving once and for all that he has been grievously

"MISUNDERSTOOD!"**ANOTHER CANADIAN "GEM" LEAGUE.**

Every day's post brings me fresh evidence of the rapid way "The Gem" Library is enlarging its sphere of influence abroad as well as at home. Owing to the splendid co-operation of my readers the "penny dreadfuls" are being beaten all along the line, and the good old "Gem Library," with its two famous companion papers, "The Magnet" Library, and "The Penny Popular," are gaining in strength and influence week by week. The following letter is from a Canadian chum of mine, who is anxious to follow the fashion and establish a "Gem" League in the city of Toronto.

"180, Indian Road, Toronto, Canada.

"Dear Editor,—This is the second time in a few weeks that I have written you. I am getting quite a nuisance.

"My chum, who is an admirer and reader of your papers, and myself have decided to organise a 'Gem' League in this city for readers of both sexes. We want your permission first of all. I know there is a large gathering of readers here. Would you mind mentioning in your paper "Gem" that we are starting one?"

"The stories in 'Gem' and 'Magnet' are fine. Keep up the good work. Hoping you will favour my request, I beg to remain,

Yours sincerely, "L. L. STANTON."

I willingly grant the required permission, Master Stanton, and hope that the publication of your letter will lead to the formation of a prosperous and successful "Gem" League in Toronto.

Master Ernest H. Ludlow, a keen "Gemite," living at 127, Kimberley Road, Nunhead, London, S.E., is anxious to form a concert party consisting of "Gem" readers. He therefore invites any of his fellow-readers who may be interested in his scheme to communicate direct with him at the above-given address.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

I have to thank the following readers who sent me letters, etc., containing very useful suggestions, which I hope to be able to use: "A Reader" (Northants), H. Green (Sheffield), G. and M. D. S. (Brixton), G. Samways (Southsea), L. and

M. Roberts (China), Bert W. (New Zealand), D. Dyer (Australia), S. Jones (Victoria Park), "Loyal Reader" (Notts), J. L. (Carlisle), M. Jameson (Australia), E. R. (S.E. London), H. Hockney (Hull), G. Black (Edinburgh), L. M. Lean (Glasgow), H. C. Gray (Lepton), H. H. Jackson (Camberwell), E. E. Morris (S. Wales), and G. E. Parsons (Birmingham).

Miss Vincent (Oxford).—Many thanks for suggestion, which I will bear in mind.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC DARK-ROOM.

One of the first cares of the amateur photographer is to arrange for a dark-room in which to do his developing.

The usual amateur dark-room is made at the time it is wanted by simply blocking out the light at its various sources with black material. This, naturally, is a great inconvenience, and if possible the amateur should have a room specially reserved for use as the dark-room, so that he can make permanent fittings.

If available a cellar is undoubtedly the easiest to convert into a dark-room, as the amount of light which gains access to it is very small, and is consequently easy to block out.

Besides the cutting off of the supply of light there are two other things to be considered in the construction and fitting out of a dark-room. They are ventilation and water supply. Many amateurs have suffered in health through staying in an ill-ventilated dark-room, chiefly, indeed, through the arising from the use of an oil "ruby lamp."

With regard to darkening the room, no hard-and-fast rules can be laid down here for keeping the light out. If the dark-room is to be permanent the difficulty is lessened, as the window can be fixed up once and for all by simply fastening a piece of black cloth, with ruby-red lining, over the cavity, or by painting the glass first with red paint and then with black so as to exclude all possible chance of light entering. If the room is likely to be used at all during the daytime a space about twelve inches by ten inches, or less, may be left merely covered with the red paint.

If, however, the dark-room can only be another apartment temporarily converted for photographic purposes, the best method of procedure is to construct a light framework of the same size as the window, so that it will fit tightly over the place. When this is covered over with opaque material the light will be effectually blocked out.

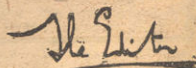
The Ventilation.

To successfully ventilate a dark-room is an extremely difficult matter, as if care is not taken the light is apt to creep in with the air. The usual way is to leave the window open an inch at top and bottom; the slight draught thus created will serve, as the air, but not the light, will get through the cloth, which, although opaque, is not airtight.

Water Supply.

A good supply of clean water is necessary in any dark-room, and in the case of the permanent room the water should be fitted in the apartment, if possible, with a fairly large sink. If this cannot be carried out, however, two pails of clean water should be kept in a handy position.

If convenient, a shelf should be constructed in the dark-room over the table, to hold all the necessary paraphernalia, so that the photographer has all his "implements" ready to hand when needed.



OUR COMPANION PAPER! Don't miss this week's splendid issue of "The Magnet" Library, the cover of which is reproduced below. The title of the grand school tale of Harry Wharton & Co. is "Uncle Fish!" by Frank Richards, and it is interesting and amusing from beginning to end. Get "The Magnet" Library to-day. Now on sale everywhere. Price One Penny.

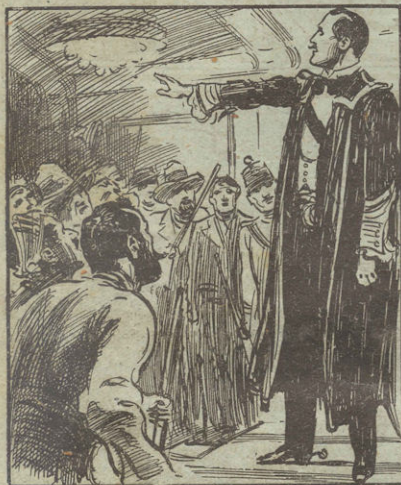


BRISK BUSINESS IN THE SCHOOL "POP" SHOP.

OUR COMPANION PAPER! The grand number of the "Penny Popular," which is now on sale stories of Sexton Blake, Detective; Jack, Sam & Pete, the three famous comrades; and Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's College. Ask your newsagent for this splendid pennyworth of first-class reading matter to-day!

The 1st POPULAR

NO. 40 VOL. 2
EVERY
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An Exciting Incident in "THE PRESIDENT DETECTIVE!"
GRAND COMPLETE SEXTON BLAKE STORY.



A Dramatic Scene in the Story of Jack, Sam & Pete, entitled:
"THE SECRET OF THE PALACE!"



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