THE RIVAL PATRIOTS!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.

— Complete Stories for ALL, and Every Story a GEM. —

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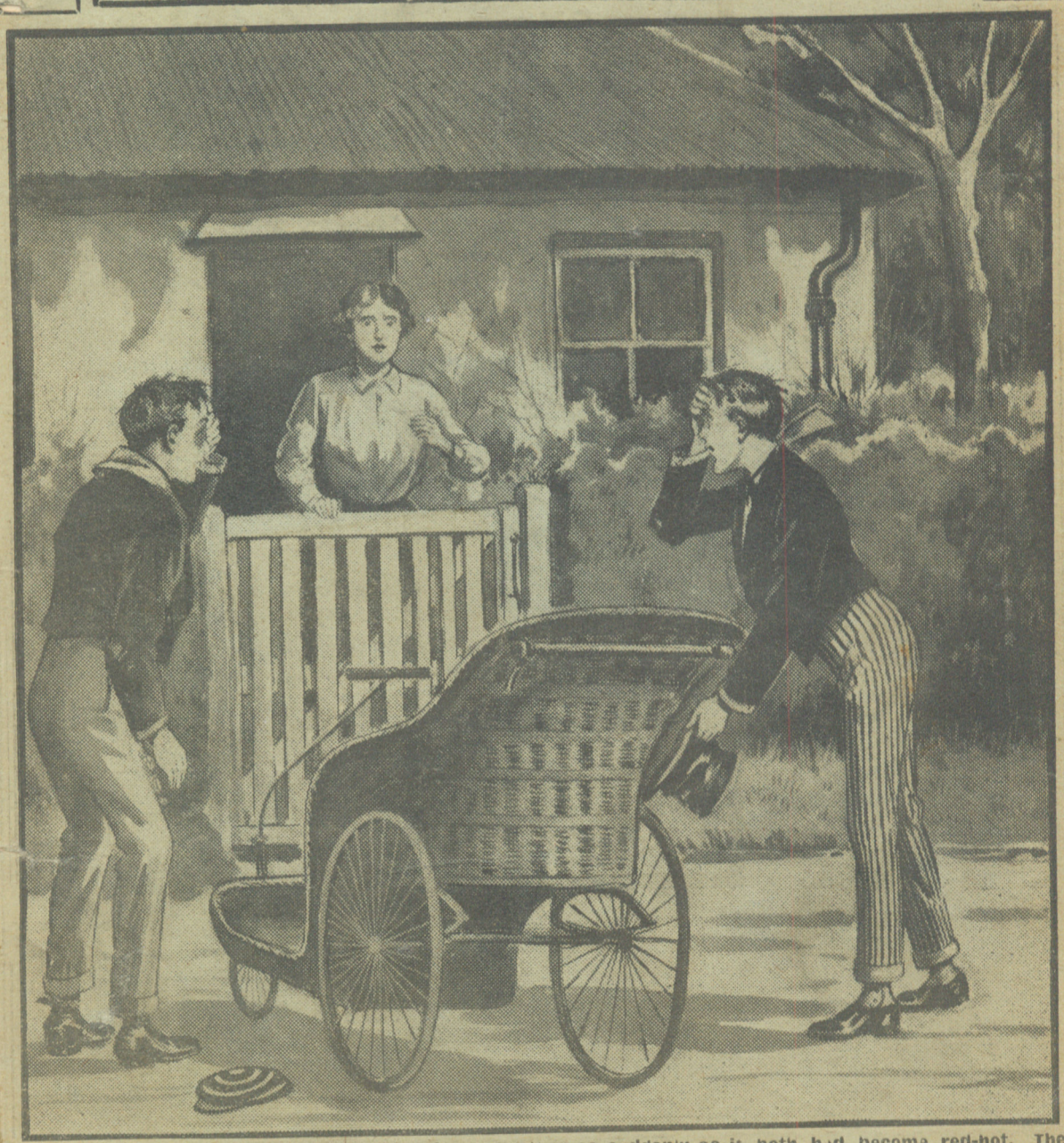

Figgins and Arthur Augustus released one another as suddenly as if both had become red-hot. They blinked at the widow, who had come out of the little cottage, and was looking at them over the gate, in great distress. Arthur Augustus dabbed his nose with his handkerchief, and Figgins caressed his eye. "C-g-good-afternoon!" they stammered. (*An Amusing Incident in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale contained in this Issue of "THE GEM" Library.*)

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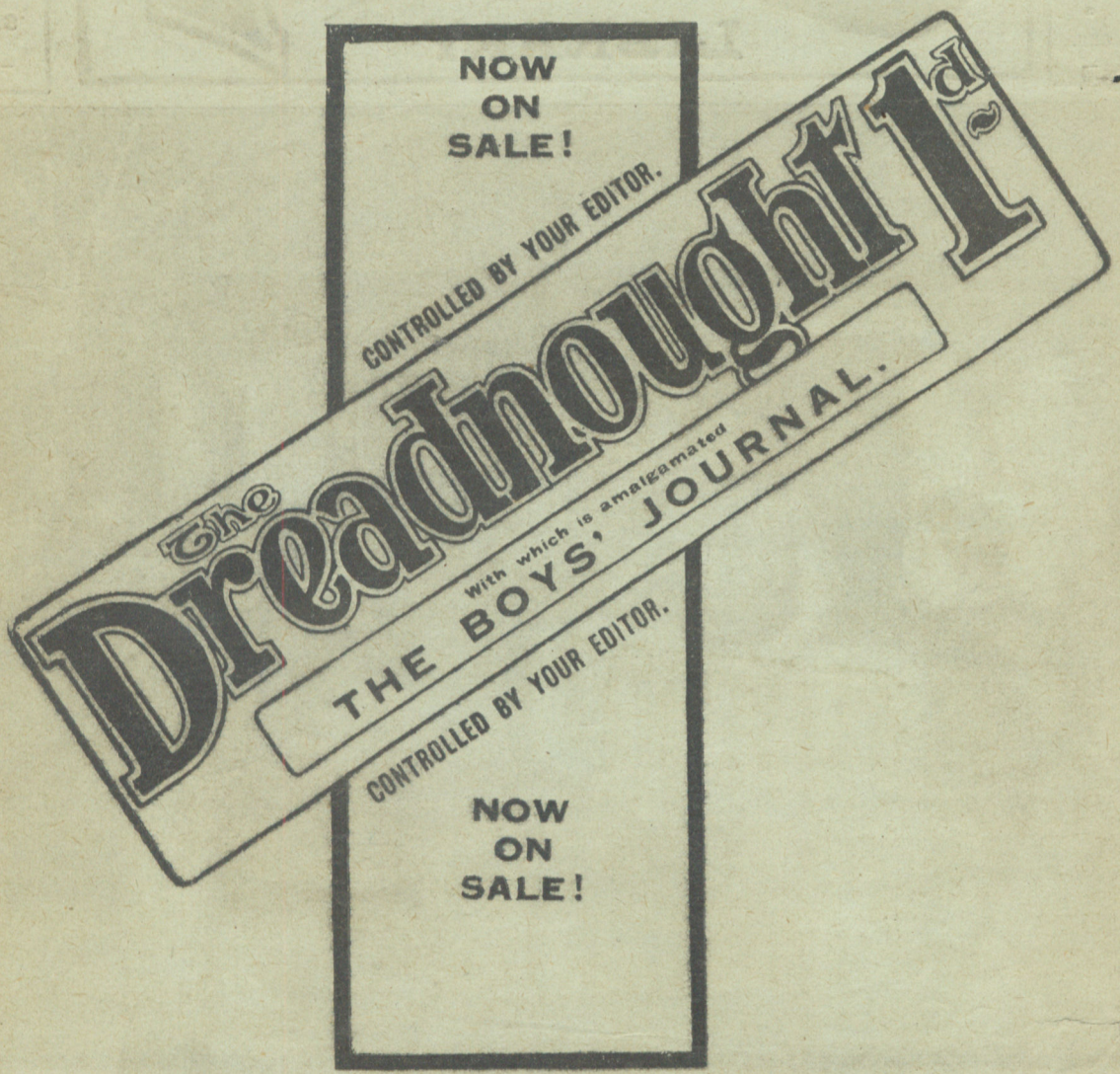

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COMPLETE STORIES FOR ALL, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

THE RIVAL PATRIOTS!

A Grand New, Long, Complete School Tale dealing with the Adventures of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

Arthur Augustus began to thump the unhappy Albert vigorously, as the best way of clearing his throat. Thump! Thump! "Yow-ow-ow!" "You wicked, cruel boy!" shrieked a stentorian voice, as Miss Quecch came rustling up. "You abandoned young ruffian! How dare you ill-treat that child!" *(See Chapter 11.)*

CHAPTER 1.
Detained!

"D'ARCY!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave a start as Mr. Lathom rapped out his name.

He was at his desk, in the Fourth Form-room at St. Jim's, and lessons were in progress; but the thoughtful shade on the brow of Arthur Augustus was not in the least due to a keen interest in his lessons.

His thoughts were far away. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, had addressed him twice, without receiving a reply, and then he rapped out D'Arcy's name in a tone that made D'Arcy jump.

"Ya-a-s, sir!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Sowwy, sir! Did you addwess me, sir!"

All the Fourth were staring at Arthur Augustus, wondering what was the matter with him. Blake and Herries and Digby, his special chums, had tried to attract his attention in vain. The swell of St. Jim's was in a brown study.

"I did address you, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Lathom severely. "I have addressed you three times!"

"Sowwy, sir!"

"You are paying no attention to your lessons, D'Arcy. You have been scribbling on a paper under your desk."

"I—I—I——"

"Bring that paper to me at once!" said Mr. Lathom sternly.

Arthur Augustus hesitated.

"Oh, you fathead!" murmured Jack Blake. Blake had not the least doubt that Arthur Augustus had been making a caricature of the Form-master, the juniors sometimes amusing themselves that way in class when their master was not looking. And the blush in D'Arcy's aristocratic face seemed to confirm his suspicion. And Mr. Lathom evidently shared the suspicion, for his manner was unusually sharp.

"Do you hear me, D'Arcy?"

"Ya-a-s, sir."

"Bring me that paper at once!"

"As a mattah of fact, sir," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "this is a pwivate mattah!"

"What!"

There was a chuckle from the Fourth-Formers. Mr. Lathom stared at D'Arcy over his glasses with a thunderous look. He was a very good-tempered little man, as a rule. But Arthur Augustus's reply was quite enough to ruffle the serenest Form-master's temper.

"It's quite pwivate, sir," explained Arthur Augustus. "I am sowwy I have w'itten it in lesson time, sir; but as a mattah of fact I am anxious to catch the post, and this letter is wathah difficult to w'ite."

"Bring me that paper at once!"

"Oh, vewy well, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, as Mr. Lathom made a clutch at the pointer on his desk. "If you insist, sir."

Arthur Augustus came out before the class with the paper

in his hand. Mr. Lathom, with a thunderous brow, took it from him, and looked at it. Then he stared blankly. The paper was covered with writing, with words crossed out, and rewritten, and again rewritten, until it looked as if D'Arcy had been trying to discover exactly how many pencil-marks he could possibly squeeze into the space. The few words that were distinguishable appeared to be written in French—Fourth Form French.

"Cher garcon—jespere—sente—I' ennemmy—— Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom. "I suppose this is your idea of a joke, D'Arcy? You must not play jokes in lesson-time. Go back to your place, and stay in an hour after lessons."

"Oh, weally, sir——"

"Do you hear?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir. But pway allow me to explain——"

"Go to your place!"

"I should weally like to explain that——"

Mr. Lathom picked up the pointer.

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy!"

"Ba-a-bai Jove! What for, sir?"

"Hold out your hand at once!" exclaimed the Form-master, exasperated. "I shall cane you severely if you argue with me, D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove!"

Swish!

"Wow!"

"Now go back to your place. As for this ridiculous paper, I will put it in the fire."

"If you please, sir——" began Arthur Augustus in dismay.

"That papah——"

Mr. Lathom, whose patience was exhausted, took the elegant junior by the ear and led him back to his place. The Fourth Form looked on, grinning. Arthur Augustus's face was crimson with indignation. He dropped into his seat again, and Mr. Lathom crossed to the fire-place and dropped the valuable paper into the fire.

"Oh cwumbs!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "There's nothin' to gwin at, you duffahs! I have been faggin' my bwains like anythin' ovah that lettah. I——"

"You will stay in till six o'clock and write lines from Virgil, D'Arcy," said Mr. Lathom severely, "and if there is any more of this I shall cane you!"

"Bai Jove!"

"And if you utter ridiculous exclamations in the Form-room, sir, I shall cane you, do you hear?" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, exasperated.

"B-bai Jove—I—I mean, yaas, sir, certainly!"

The lesson proceeded, Mr. Lathom frequently directing a stern glance towards Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He was an easy-going master, but there were limits. Arthur Augustus had reached the limit.

D'Arcy's face was expressive of dismay. When Mr. Lathom seemed fully occupied again, he whispered to Jack Blake.

"I say, deah boy, this is wotten! I'm detained now!"

"What did you expect, fathead?"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead. You do not compwehend. That lettah was awf'ly important——"

"Bow-wow!"

"And—and now I'm detained, and I'm expectin' a lot of parcels this aftahnoon," whispered Arthur Augustus. "I suppose you will look aftah them for me, Bleak, deah boy, and see them taken to the study?"

"Parcels?" murmured Blake.

"Yaas, wathah—sevewal. And pewwaps some of those boundahs might waid them, you know."

"Grub?" asked Blake, interested at last.

"Yaas, there is gwub in some of them——"

Mr. Lathom looked round.

"I think you are talking, D'Arcy. You will stay in till half-past six."

"Oh cwumbs!"

Further communication was impossible. Mr. Lathom was unusually sharp that afternoon. But Jack Blake made his chum a sign that he could rely on him. Certainly if Arthur Augustus was expecting parcels of "grub," his loyal chums would look after them. Blake was already anticipating a feed of unusual magnitude in Study No. 6.

When lessons were over at last, the Fourth Form were dismissed, but the unfortunate Arthur Augustus had to remain in his place. Jack Blake contrived to whisper to him as he left his desk.

"All serene, Gussy. We'll get the things into the study, never fear."

"Yaas, but——"

But Blake was gone. The Fourth Form marched out, and Mr. Lathom, with a very severe brow, set Arthur Augustus his detention task. The swell of St. Jim's resigned himself to his hard fate.

"You will remain here till half-past six, and do your task, D'Arcy," said Mr. Lathom. "At half-past six you will bring it to me in my study. Until then you will not leave the Form-room. You understand?"

"Yaas, sir, but——"

"That will do, D'Arcy."

Mr. Lathom rustled out of the Form-room, and closed the door behind him. Arthur Augustus gave a dismal groan.

"What wotten luck! What beastly wotten luck! I have always wegarded Lathom as a harmless ass, but I wathah think he is a beast, aftah all. If anythin' happens to those parcels—bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus settled down dismally to his task. Ten minutes later the door of the Form-room was cautiously opened about a foot, and Blake put his head in.

"All serene, Gussy!" he called out in a subdued voice. "They've come, and we're looking after them!"

He closed the door hastily and withdrew. And Arthur Augustus, somewhat comforted, went on more contentedly with his detention task.

CHAPTER 2.
A Rift in the Loot.

"HALVES!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, uttered that exclamation together.

Three Fourth-Formers were coming up the stairs simply laden with packages. Jack Blake was in the lead, with a box under each arm, another box in either hand, and smaller packages sticking out of his pockets. Behind him came Herries and Digby, almost as heavily laden. And the three Shell fellows promptly barred the way, smiling. The chums of the Fourth had to halt.

"Halves!" repeated the Terrible Three, grinning.

"Stand and deliver!" said Monty Lowther.

"Your tommy or your giddy lives!" said Manners.

"Now, don't play the giddy ox!" remonstrated Blake. "We're loaded up, and I can't lick you——"

"You couldn't anyway, dear boy," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You're just in time for tea. We're stony, and the cupboard is like Mrs. Hubbard's—quite bare. This is corn in Egypt. As the German Chancellor says when he's out to steal anything, 'Necessity knows no law.' So stand and deliver!"

"Look here——"

"Jam-tarts!" said Tom, looking at the label on one of the boxes. "And cream-puffs! Ham sandwiches! Hurray! Now, we're willing to go halves——"

"You silly asses——"

"New-laid eggs!" chirruped Monty Lowther, scanning Herries' consignments. "Ripping! I'll tell you what! You carry these things into our study, and we'll let you come to tea."

"They're Gussy's!" roared Blake. "He's ordered them all from the village, and they've been delivered here for him. He's detained, and we're looking after them."

"Too much trouble for you kids," said Tom Merry. "We'll look after them for you. Now, as the Kaiser said to Belgium, are you going to let us rob you peacefully? Are you going to be wicked enough to resist?"

The Fourth-Formers glared. They were too heavily laden to resist. The Shell fellows blocked the way, with smiling faces, and Blake & Co. glared over their many parcels.

"Hallo! What's the row?" asked Kangaroo of the Shell, coming along the passage with two or three more Shell fellows.

"Loot!" said Tom Merry. "We have surprised a convoy of the enemy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good egg! Up and at 'em, guards!"

"You silly chumps——" roared Blake.

"S-hush!" said Tom Merry soothingly. "You shall come to tea. Steady, the Buffs! Seize the loot!"

"Rescue, Fourth!" yelled Blake wrathfully.

The three Fourth-Formers made a rush to get through. It wasn't far from the landing to the door of Study No. 6. But the Shell were on the warpath, and it was not easy to get through. In a moment the Fourth-Formers were collared, and they dropped their parcels and hit out manfully. There was a yell as Hammond and Reilly and Kerruish and half a dozen other Fourth-Formers poured out of their study to the rescue.

Form rags were not uncommon in the junior quarters in the School House at St. Jim's, but this rag was really terrific.

In the tussle the parcels, boxes, and packages were kicked right and left, and there was a smashing of eggs and a squashing of tarts, as the combatants staggered to and fro among the damaged loot.

More Fourth-Formers came swarming out of their studies, and the odds were soon heavily on the side of Study No. 6. The Shell fellows were driven back up the passage. Herries dragged open a box, and clutched out the eggs it contained, and opened fire on the enemy. Squash! squash! squash!

"Yaroooh!"

"Oh, crumbs! Grooogh!"

"Hurrah!"

The Shell beat a rapid retreat. Eggs at close quarters were too deadly. But two or three of the vanquished party snatched up dropped parcels and fled with them. Blake & Co. were left victorious, in possession of the field, amid a general wreckage of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's consignment, but greatly elated with their victory. The Shell fellows retreated to Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage, and some of them scuttled off to the bath-rooms to wash off the eggs.

Monty Lowther slammed a parcel down on the study table. Kangaroo landed another. Two prizes at least had fallen to the raiders.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as he rubbed egg from his face with his handkerchief. "Oh, crumbs! I've got the yolk of an egg in my collar! Groo!"

"Never mind, we've got the loot!" said Lowther cheerfully. "Just in time for tea, too! I wonder what's in this parcel?"

"I wonder what's in this one?" grinned Manners.

"They seem pretty heavy," grinned Kangaroo. "Cake, most likely; or, perhaps, tins of sardines. We'll jolly soon see!"

"What-ho!"

Monty Lowther rapidly unpacked his loot. Inside the brown-paper wrapping was a box. The box was opened, and, to the amazement of the juniors, it was packed full of little leather cases.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Kangaroo. "We can't eat those!"

"Great Scott! What the deuce——"

"What the thunder——"

Monty Lowther opened one of the cases. A safety-razor was disclosed. The juniors started at it, dumfounded.

"A—a—a razor!" gasped Tom Merry.

"What the dickens did Gussy buy a razor for?" yelled Manners.

"Goodness knows."

"There's a dozen of them!" gasped Monty Lowther. "He meant to have a jolly good shave while he was about it, I should think."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners opened the other parcel. The juniors scanned it with amazement. They no longer expected to see any tuck, and they were right. The box contained a supply of shaving-soap.

"Well, my only Aunt Jemima Ann!" said Harry Noble, with a whistle. "This beats the giddy band! A dozen safety-razors and about half a ton of shaving-soap!"

"The kid must be off his rocker!" said Tom Merry, in wonder.

"Well, you must be a fathead to loot that stuff!" said Kangaroo. "Thanks! I won't come to the feed. Safety-razors are a bit too tough for me, and I'm not keen on shaving-soap. Ta-ta!"

"What the deuce does it mean?" said Manners, as the grinning Cornstalk quitted the study. "Is Gussy off his rocker?"

"Must be, I should think," said Tom. "We may as well take this little lot back to Study No. 6. We can't eat them."

"Ha, ha! No."

The Terrible Three picked up the boxes and started for Study No. 6. As they drew near that celebrated department they heard the voices of Blake and Herries and Digby raised in astonishment.

"Woollen socks, by gum! Dozens of 'em!"

"Pairs of scissors, by George!"

"Silk mufflers!"

"Cough-drops!"

"Tooth-brushes, by the holy poker!"

The Terrible Three looked in. Blake and Herries and Digby were gathered round the study table, surveying in astonishment the weird assortment of articles they had turned out of the various packages.

"Pax!" said Tom Merry, holding up his hand. "We've brought back the loot. We're rather peckish, but we can't eat safety-razors——"

"Safety-razors!" said Blake faintly.

"Or shaving-soap."

"Shaving-soap!" stuttered Digby.

"What's the little game?" demanded Tom Merry. "Are you going to open a shop in this study, or a general emporium, or what?"

Blake passed a hand dazedly over his brow.

"I don't understand it," he said. "Unless Gussy's dotty, I don't know what it means. Of course, we thought the parcels were for a feed——"

"So did we!" grinned Lowther.

"And—and we've opened them, to have the feed all ready for Gussy when he gets off detention," said Blake. "Some of the things were for a feed. There were eggs and cakes, and jam-tarts, and cream-puffs, and ham-sandwiches. The eggs are all smashed, and the other things have been trampled on. And—and these parcels—look at what was in them! What can it mean?"

The Terrible Three shook their heads. They gave it up.

"They must have cost a lot of money, too," said Herries. "Those safety-razors cost a guinea each, and there are a dozen of them."

"Twelve guineas!" gasped Blake.

"And these silk mufflers. There are a dozen, and they can't have been less than ten bob each."

"Has Gussy been robbing a bank?"

"It beats me!" said Blake. "I—I'm afraid there's something wrong with Gussy. I've noticed for two or three days he's been very secretive, and he's been writing letters and things. I suppose he was sending the orders for these things. He's been awfully thoughtful, and several times I've seen him smiling to himself, and he never explained what he was grinning at. Then in the Form-room to-day——"

"Dotty!" said Herries. "He was scribbling something in French."

"In French!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yes; some rot. And Lathom made him show it up, and he said it was private—told Lathom it was private."

"My hat!"

"He got the pointer, and he's detained till half-past six," said Blake. "He's been so queer the last few days—awfully secretive—I'm—I'm afraid there's really something wrong. He must have drawn money out of the bank to pay for all these things, and what can he want them for?"

The juniors were all looking serious now. What Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could want with safety-razors and shaving-soap, and scissors, and woollen socks and silk mufflers, and cough-drops, and dozens of tooth-brushes, passed their comprehension. The whole consignment could not have cost less than twenty pounds—probably much more. What was the meaning of it?

"He's potty!" said Tom Merry, after a long pause.

Blake nodded.

"He must be! It's extraordinary! I—I say, he must be a little wrong in the head to do this, mustn't he?"

"I should say so."

"Lunatics have to be humoured," said Manners. "Don't jump on him about it. Treat him gently."

"Ye-e-es!" said Blake. "I—I suppose so. Poor old Gussy! He was always an ass, but I never thought he was off his rocker before. He must be ill. People get light-headed and do things that are jolly queer when they're ill, you know. May be a result of his influenza."

"Put 'em out of sight, and perhaps he may have forgotten all about it when he comes in," said Tom Merry. "Blessed if I don't feel quite alarmed about him. If he's ill he must be treated gently."

In a state of considerable anxiety and alarm, the chums of the School House stacked away the extraordinary consignment of goods, and waited for the swell of St. Jim's to come in.

CHAPTER 3.

The Madness of Arthur Augustus.

"BAI Jove! There goes half-past!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jumped up as if moved by a spring as the half-hour chimed out. He gathered up his task and hurried out of the Form-room, and presented himself promptly in Mr. Lathom's study. He found his Form-master quite restored to good-humour, and was dismissed at once. Then, forgetting his usual elegant saunter, which his chums alluded to as Gussy's Piccadilly crawl, Arthur Augustus fairly ran for his study. He heard a murmur of voices in Study No. 6 as he came up the passage.

It died away as his elegant form was framed in the doorway. There were six juniors in the study—his study-mates and the Terrible Three. All the half-dozen were looking decidedly glum.

Arthur Augustus looked quickly round the study.

"Have they come?" he asked.

"Have—have what come?" asked Blake haltingly.

"You told me my parcels had come."

"Ye-e-es, they've come."

"Where are they?"

"Ahem!"

"I—I say, Gussy, are you ready for tea?" asked Digby. "It's rather late for tea, you know. You must be hungry."

"We've brought a tin of sardines as a contribution to the feed, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther, with an attempt at humour. "It's only a little one—a poor thing—but our own, you know."

"Nevah mind tea now," said Arthur Augustus briskly. "I want to examine those parcels, and see if they are all wight. What are you lookin' at me like that for, Hewwies?"

"W-w-w-was I looking at you?" stammered Herries.

"Yaas!" Arthur Augustus jammed his celebrated eyeglass into his eye, and looked round in surprise at the glum-faced juniors. "What's the mattah, deah boys?"

"Matter!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! What are you lookin' like a lot of boiled owls for?"

"Boiled owls!"

"Is anythin' the mattah?" demanded D'Arcy, in growing astonishment. "I twust nothin' has happened? Have those disgustin' Pwussians been bombardin' any more seaside wesorts?"

"Nunno!"

"I twust there is no bad news fwom the fwont?"

"N-n-no!"

"Then what are you lookin' like boiled owls for? Where are my parcels? Weally, deah boys——"

"I—I say, do you feel ill, Gussy?" asked Blake.

"Certainly not."

"You—you haven't got a queer feeling in the head, or anything?" asked Blake helplessly.

"Why should I have a queeah feelin' in the head, Blake?"

"Oh, only—only—nothing——"

"I weally fail to compwehend you fellows. It weally looks to me as if you are all off your wockahs!"

"That's a sign!" gasped Herries.

"What! What is a sign? Of what, Hewwies?"

"They always think other people are mad when they're mad themselves!" whispered Herries. "It's an infallible sign."

"What are you whispewin' about, Hewwies?"

"N-n-n-nothing!"

"It's my impwession," said Arthur Augustus emphatically, "that you have all gone dottay. I feel as if I had got into a lunatic asylum."

"Calm yourself, old chap," said Herries.

"What!"

"Try to be calm!"

"You uttah ass, I am perfectly calm! Why should I not be calm?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Are you off your wockah, Hewwies?"

"No, you ass——" Then Herries suddenly remembered that lunatics should never be contradicted. "Yes!" he exclaimed hastily.

"Bai Jove! Well, I'm glad to see you ownin' up," said Arthur Augustus sarcastically. "I weally think you are all off your wockahs!"

"Q-q-q-quite so!" murmured Blake, following Herries' lead.

"If you are twyin' to pull my leg, Blake, I have no time for your wot. Pway hand out those parcels. I want to see if the wazahs are all wight!"

Blake looked helplessly at his chums. It had been agreed that Arthur Augustus was to be humoured. The parcels were handed out, and stacked on the table again. Arthur Augustus looked over them with a great deal of satisfaction.

"Thank you vewy much for unpackin' them for me, deah boys. Bai Jove! These safety-wazahs look all wight, don't they? They are much safah things to have about than the ordinary wazahs, you know. Don't you think so, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ye-es!" stammered Tom.

"You see, suppose a bullet came by while you are shavin' yourself——"

"What!"

"Then you are much less likely to cut yourself with a safety wazah."

"A—a—a bullet!" said Tom faintly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good heavens!"

There was no further doubt on the point now. The madness of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was manifest. It was barely possible that a fellow who was too young to shave might have a dozen razors without being dotty; it was possible, though not likely. But to say that he had ordered safety razors because they were safer to use when bullets were flying—that did it!

"Bai Jove, these are wippin' scissors, too!" said Arthur Augustus. "First-wate for cuttin' your hair, you know, when you're a hundwed miles fwom a barbah—what?"

"Yes!" said Blake faintly.

"It's wathah a pity that there are no safety scissors, the same as safety wazahs," Arthur Augustus remarked.

"W-w-why?" murmured Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs, I should think you could see why. Suppose you are cuttin' your hair with bullets flyin' wound you?"

"Bullets!" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, or shells, you know."

"Oh dear!" said Blake

The juniors were horrified by this time. D'Arcy's complaint was evidently insanity caused by excitement over the war. D'Arcy was keenly interested in the war—his elder brother was with the Territorials fighting in France. He always devoured the latest news with avidity. Evidently the excitement had got on his brain at last.

"And these mufflahs are vewy decent," said Arthur Augustus. "I was wathah doubtful whethah I should get woollen mufflahs or silk mufflahs. I pwefer a silk mufflah myself. They are wathah nobbay. It's howwid to think that befoah vewy long these mufflahs may be stained with blood, isn't it?"

"Gussy!" groaned Blake.

"What's the mattah, deah boy?"

"Get those scissors away from him," whispered Herries.

"What did you say, Hewwies?"

"N-n-nothing!"

"This is a wippin' lot of tooth-bwushes, isn't it?" said Arthur Augustus. "It was wathah thoughtful of me to think of tooth-bwushes, wasn't it?"

"Yes," gasped Blake. "V-v-very thoughtful, Gussy!"

"And these socks are topping."

"Oh, t-t-topping!"

"But where are the othah things?" said Arthur Augustus, looking round. "There should be some eggs, and jam-tarts, and cweam-puffs."

"Ahem! There's been a little accident with those!"

"Oh, bai Jove! You are an awfully careless ass, Blake! Howevah, I can ordah some more to-morrow. Where is the box of clasp-knives? Hasn't that come?"

"Ye-es; but——" Blake had left the box of clasp-knives in the cupboard.

"Well, I want to see them, deah boy." Arthur Augustus stepped to the cupboard. "Oh, heah they are!"

"I—I say, let those knives alone!"

"Wubbish!" Arthur Augustus picked out one of the big clasp-knives, and opened it, and the chums exchanged dismayed glances. "Bai Jove, this is a wippah, isn't it? You could easily kill a Pwussian with this."

"Oh!"

"It's wathah sharp too," said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I'll twy the blade on somethin'. Blake—— What are you dodging away for, Blake?"

"W-w-was I dodging?" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, you were. Hewwies——" Bai Jove, what are you wunnin' wound the table for, Hewwies?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in astonishment.

"I—I—I want a little exercise, that's all," stuttered Herries.

"I begin to think you fellows are pottay. I want to twy the blade of this knife, you know. Dig—— Bai Jove, what's the mattah with you, Dig?"

Digby had made a bound across the study.

"N-n-nothing!" panted Digby.

"Look heah, if you fellows are wottin', you may as well chuck it!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, exasperated. "I'm not goin' to hurt you, you fatheads! I shouldn't wondah if some day this knife dwips with goah——"

"Ow!"

"But I am only goin' to twy the blade now. Tom Mewwy—— You uttah ass, what are you boltin' wound the study for?" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Pway don't wot, deah boys! This is no time for wottin'. I want to twy the edge of this knife. Mannahs, don't dodge behind the armchair like that, you duffah!"

"Keep off!" shrieked Manners.

"What!"

"But I am perfectly calm!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Do you think my hand will twemble when I am usin' the knife? Wubbish! Lowthah——"

Monty Lowther dodged quickly.

Arthur Augustus stood in the middle of the study, with that dangerous-looking knife in his hand, and stared at the juniors, who were as far as they could get from him, and evidently prepared to dodge if he approached them.

"You uttah asses!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "What is the mattah with you?"

"Oh dear!"

"Put the knife down!" groaned Blake.

"I wefuse to put this knife down till I have twied the blade! One of you fellows hold this stick while I twy the blade on it. I suppose you don't think I am goin' to twy it on you, do you?"

"I—I—— We——" stuttered Blake.

Arthur Augustus sniffed, and, holding the stick in his left hand, lashed at it with the knife in his right. Certainly the blade was very sharp. Arthur Augustus looked satisfied.

"That's all wight!" he exclaimed.

Jack Blake was tiptoeing behind him, with the intention of snatching away the knife. Arthur Augustus turned, and Blake jumped back in a great hurry.

"Weally, Blake, this is no time to play twicks——"

"I—I—I——"

Whiz!

A cushion flew suddenly from Monty Lowther's hand, and knocked the knife out of the fingers of the swell of St. Jim's. It clanged on the floor.

"Collar him," yelled Lowther, "before he can get at it again! Quick!"

"Bai Jove! What—— Yawoooh!"

Six breathless juniors piled on Arthur Augustus, and in an instant he was borne in a struggling heap to the floor.

CHAPTER 4.
Not Dangerous.

"GOT him!" panted Tom Merry.

"Hold his hands!"

"Sit on him!"

"Thank goodness!"

"You uttah asses!" shrieked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, struggling madly in the grasp of the juniors. "You fwightful wottahs! What are you at? Leggo!"

The juniors were not likely to let go while sharp knives were lying about. They collared Arthur Augustus D'Arcy most thoroughly. Five of them held him pinned to the floor, and dragged his hands together, and Blake snatched one of the silk mufflers and bound his wrists.

Then they released him. Arthur Augustus sat up on the study carpet, panting for breath, and looking dishevelled and dreadfully excited. For some moments he simply spluttered with wrath. Blake caught up the clasp-knife, shoved it into the box, and planked the box into the cupboard, and locked the cupboard.

"Safe now!" he gasped.

"You—you uttah wottahs! I will give you a feahful thwashin' all wound for this!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Untie my w'ists immediately!"

"Calm yourself——"

"I wefuse to calm myself! You fwightful asses! What do you mean by playin' these sillay twicks?"

"Shush, old chap!" said Tom Merry soothingly. "It's all right."

"All wight! What do you mean?"

"We—we'll look after you," said Manners. "I—I say, you chaps, we'd better call the Housemaster. He ought to be seen to at once."

"Mannahs, you howlin' ass——"

"Don't get excited, old chap," said Blake. "We'll get a doctor to see you as soon as we can. For goodness' sake be quiet."

"I wefuse to see a doctah! Why should I see a doctah, you cwass ass?"

"Oh dear, this is a go!" gasped Digby. "It simply gave me the shivers while he had that knife in his hand."

"He might have hurt himself," said Blake. "That's what I was really nervous about. N-n-not for myself at all."

"Will you welease my w'ists?" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Presently, old chap—presently," said Tom Merry. "Don't get excited. We're only doing this for your own good, you know."

"You—you—you——"

"Poor old Gussy!" said Digby, almost with tears in his eyes. "They always turn on their best friends, you know. He would have been awfully sorry afterwards, when he came to his senses, if——"

"You uttah ass!" shrieked Arthur Augustus wildly. "What are you talkin' about? How dare you insinuate that I am not in my senses?"

"N-n-not at all, old chap! Of—of course you're all right," said Dig soothingly. "We—we know you're quite sane, of course. Only—only a little ill, that's all."

"If you do not welease me at once, you silly, japin' duffahs, I shall lose the post!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Quite mad," murmured Blake. "Isn't it awful, poor old Gussy coming to this? Thinking about the war too much has done it."

Arthur Augustus wrenched at his wrists, but the twisted silk muffler held them tightly bound together.

"I wepeat," said Arthur Augustus, in a sulphurous voice, "that I shall lose the post if you do not welease me. I do not appwove of these idiotic japes. And all those things have to be packed up and taken to the post-office before the post goes."

"What!"

"They've got to be sent off this evenin', you fatheads!"

"S-s-sent off?"

"Yaas, wathah! The soonah they are posted the soonah they will get to the fwont. It takes about six or seven days for them to go to the twenches, anyway."

"Wha-a-a-at!"

A light dawned upon Tom Merry.

"What did you order these things for, Gussy?" he gasped.

"To send to the soldiahs at the fwont, of course, you silly ass! I suppose you don't think I want safety wazahs myself?"

"My hat!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"You—you—you ordered these things to send out to the soldiers?" gurgled Blake.

"Of course I did! Evewybody is sending things to the boys at the fwont. There was a lettah in the papah the othah day sayin' that a chap couldn't get his hair cut, and askin' for scissahs. And they want safety wazahs, too; they are much safer to use when the bullets are flyin'."

"Oh!"

The chums of the School House looked at one another with sickly expressions.

"Then—then you're not mad, after all?" ejaculated Herries involuntarily.

Arthur Augustus gave him a ferocious look.

"Hewwies, you idiot——"

"You—you see, we—we thought you were mad——"

"You insultin' duffah——"

"Well, what were we to think?" demanded Blake, greatly relieved in his mind, but at the same time extremely exasperated. "You never told us you were going to send things to the troops, you silly fathead!"

"There was no weason to tell you youngstahs. It would look like bwaggin' if I jawed about it all ovah the place!" snapped Arthur Augustus. "I've dwawn all my money out of the bank for this, and I didn't want to go wound blowin' my twumpet, you thumpin' duffahs!"

"You ought to have told us, you shrieking idiot!" hooted Blake.

"I wefuse to be called a shwiekin' idiot. Now will you untie my hands, you cwass duffahs!" Dig obligingly untied his chum's hands, satisfied at last that he was not dangerous. Arthur Augustus went on with increasing wrath and indignation: "You sillay asses! So you thought I was off my wockah. You cheeky duffahs! And you were all fwightened out of your wits! Pooof!"

"We weren't frightened!"

"Wats!"

"We—we thought you might hurt yourself, that's all," said Lowther.

"Wubbish!"

"We—we were alarmed about you," said Tom Merry.

"Bosh!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, pway don't talk, deah boys! You were as fwightened as a set of bunnay wabbits. I wondahed what was the mattah with you. You ought to have guessed that I was gettin' these things to send to the fwont."

"How could we guess?" howled Blake. "Why, there were eggs and cream puffs and jam-tarts, and—and ham sandwiches."

"Well, I suppose twoopahs like eggs and cweam puffs and things, don't they?"

"Eh!"

"You were going to send new-laid eggs to the front?" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! Think what a tweat it would be for the chaps in the twenches to have wippin' English new-laid eggs along with their washahs of bacon in the mownin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And it stands to weason they would like some jam-tarts too. But the eggs would have been a weal tweat, if you duffahs hadn't smashed them. I have been in Fwance, and I know what wotten eggs they have there. You have depwived our bwave boys in the twenches of a weal tweat."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake, wiping away his tears. "And what state do you think the eggs would be in by the time they got to the twenches?"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that! Pewwaps they would have got bwoken in twansit," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"Perhaps!" stuttered Tom Merry. "Yes, perhaps! It's barely possible."

"Oh, pway don't cackle, deah boys! Help me to pack up these things, and we can take them down to the post-office and catch the post. Kildare will give us a pass out of gates. You have wasted enough time alweady with your wot!"

Tom Merry looked round.

"It seems that Gussy isn't mad, after all," he began.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Not madder than usual!" growled Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"But he made us think he was, and he's been keeping secrets from his kind uncles, and he's alarmed us—alarmed us for him, of course. I suggest that the silly idiot has a jolly good bumping."

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally you wottahs—yawoooh!—leggo! Ow! Oooooh!"

Bump, bump, bump, bump!

"Now we'll pack up the parcels," said Tom Merry affably, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat and gasped for breath.

"You—you uttah wottahs! I'll—I'll——"

"Shut up!" roared Blake. "Do you want to make us lose the post when we're sending things to the chaps in the trenches? I'm surprised at you!"

"I—I—I—undah the circs, I will ovahlook this, but——"

"Cheese it! Make yourself useful, and don't talk."

And Arthur Augustus suppressed his feelings, and the juniors set to work busily to pack up the various parcels, with great care, for despatch to Tommy Atkins & Co. in the trenches in Belgium.

CHAPTER 5.

The New House Chips In.

FIGGINS came into his study in the New House with a frown upon his brow. His chums and study-mates, Kerr and Wynn, gave him inquiring looks. It was unusual for the good-tempered, genial Figgins to be frowning.

Fatty Wynn, as it happened, was specially happy at that moment. Upon the study-table reposed a huge pie, with a beautifully brown crust. Fatty Wynn had had a remittance that day from his uncle at Llandudno, and he had expended it at Mrs. Taggles' little shop, with his usual judgment. Dame Taggles, under the expert direction of Fatty, had made that pie, and it was a really tremendous pie, the biggest ever seen in the New House at St. Jim's.

Fatty was contemplating that pie with a kind of artistic ecstasy. He was almost reluctant to start on it, so beautiful did it look. He had remarked to Kerr that it seemed a shame to cut that lovely crust.

"Look at it, Figgy!" he murmured.

Figgins looked at the pie, and then he looked at Fatty Wynn, and then he sniffed.

"Might have expected that!" he growled.

Fatty Wynn looked surprised.

"I don't see how you could have expected it, Figgy," he remarked. "I didn't tell you Dame Taggles was making it for me. I meant it to be a surprise to you."

"I don't mean that, fathead! I mean I might have expected to find you guzzling over a pie, and not caring tuppence whether the School House rotters give us the kybosh, and put the New House right in the shade!" said Figgins bitterly.

"Oh, Figgy!"

"Tuck in!" said Figgins sarcastically, and with increasing bitterness. "Don't mind me! Don't mind if our House takes a back seat! Let those School House wasters rope in all the honour and glory. What does it matter so long as you have your pie? Poooof!"

Never had the great Figgins seemed in such a pessimistic mood. Fatty Wynn blushed, and laid down the carving-knife. But his eyes lingered lovingly on the pie.

"I say, Figgy, old man, it's a ripping pie!" he pleaded. "I told Dame Taggles exactly how to make it, and what to put in. And you know how she can make meat-pies. And it weighs ten pounds, Figgy. Heaps for all of us, and a bit left cold to give us a snack before brekker to-morrow. I say, you know——"

"Well, pile in!" said Figgins moodily. "The New House takes a back seat, anyway, and I'll chuck up trying to keep our end up with those bounders over the way."

"Oh, really, Figgy——"

"Oh, come off!" broke in Kerr. "What's the matter with you, you blessed bear? What are you going for old Fatty for? Blessed if you've got any more manners than a Prussian this evening, Figgy."

"Yes, what's the row?" demanded Fatty, a little indignantly. "If the School House bounders are getting their ears up again, I'm ready to drop on 'em after supper."

"Yes, you'll be ready to go on the war-path after supper!" snorted Figgins.

"Well, there's no hurry, is there? That's a topping pie. You see," went on Fatty Wynn, almost pathetically, "I've been thinking about the fellows at the front, you know, and how they sometimes go short of grub in the trenches, and it made me feel awfully down; and then this pie came, and bucked me up. It would be a great comfort to the chaps at the front if they knew that we get ripping pies like this while they're keeping the Germans off, wouldn't it?"

Figgins grinned in spite of his pessimism. Fatty Wynn's sympathy for the brave fellows at the front was certainly taking a curious form. But Figgy's grin lasted only a moment. Then he was pessimistic again.

"Quite a patriotic pie, you see!" said Kerr, with a chuckle. "You'd better send a wire to the front, Fatty, and let the chaps in the trenches know that we're doing all right in pies. It would buck them up no end."

"You'll like it, Figgy!" murmured Wynn.

"Rats!" said Figgins morosely. "Do you know what those School House bounders are doing? I've just spotted them, while you've been thinking about pies. Pies!" said Figgins, with crushing disdain. "Pies! At a time like this! Pies!"

"Well, I thought at first of a pudding," said Wynn. "But, on second thoughts, considering how rippingly Mrs. Taggles makes pies, I decided——"

"Pooof!"

"Look here, you're an ill-tempered beast, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn warmly. "I tell you I'm ready to go on the war-path after supper. What have they been doing?"

"They're going down to the post-office simply loaded up—crammed—with parcels to send to the soldiers," said Figgins. "Of course, we haven't got heaps of money like that fathead D'Arcy! We can't buy a dozen guinea safety-razors."

"My hat!"

"And dozens of woolly socks."

"Well, you are a grousing beast," said Kerr. "If they're sending things like that to the front, you ought to be jolly glad."

"Well, so I am," said Figgins. "I'm glad, as far as that goes. But where do we come in? What have we done for the fellows at the front? With Fatty thinking about pies all the time, we haven't done anything. Of course, the School House wasters have thought of it, and they're getting all the kudos. Old Carrington spotted them taking the parcels, and asked what it was, and made them a speech full of soft sawder—said he was proud to have 'em in his House, and so on. And we"—Figgins snorted—"we can go and take a back seat! All we think about is pies!"

"Well, I—I can't send this pie to the trenches," said Fatty Wynn. "I—I would, you know, I really would, but—but you can't send pies."

"Like their blessed cheek to take the wind out of our sails like this," said Kerr. "But we couldn't keep our end up in that line, Figgy. Gussy can get no end of money from his pater, but we can't afford it."

"No; the New House can go and hide its diminished head," said Figgins gloomily.

"Oh, rats! We can think of something," said Kerr uneasily. "We're not going to be put in the shade. But——"

"I've thought of something," said Figgins. "I was going to suggest it. But as nobody in this study thinks of anything but pies——"

"Cheese it, you ass!" said Fatty Wynn. "Blessed if a chap wouldn't think it was a crime to eat a pie—and such a ripping pie, too! Why, I'd send it to General French if I could. I'll bet he doesn't get any pies like this in Flanders. The French people don't know how to cook—not what I call cook—only kickshaws and foreign muck!"

"What's the idea, Figgy?" asked Kerr. "Go it, old chap! We know that we can depend on you to keep our end up against the School House!"

Kerr was a loyal chum, and an adept in the soft answer that turneth away wrath. Figgins's grim countenance relaxed a little.

"Well," he said, "if you'll listen to me, and if Fatty can take his eyes off that pie for a second——"

"No harm in looking at it," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm not starting on it. Pile in, and—and be quick!"

"Well," said Figgins, "I've found a widow——"

"A—a—a what?" ejaculated Kerr.

"Widow," said Figgins—"a war widow. I dare say you heard that Lomax, the village carpenter, was one of the first to go when war was declared. The poor chap was reported killed in Flanders. His widow still lives in Rylcombe, and she's in pretty poor circs!"

Figgins & Co. went up the garden path to the door. Tom Merry & Co. remained in the dusky garden. The door was opened to Figgy's timid knock by a little chap with a curly head, and a slice of bread-and-jam in one chubby fist. "Hullo, Albert!" said Figgins. "Is your mater at home?" (See Chapter 6.)

"But they have an allowance," said Kerr.

"Yes, I know that; but you don't roll in wealth on an allowance," said Figgins, with a sniff. "With rent to pay, and young kids to clothe and feed, and an invalid father to keep, a pound a week doesn't go far. And after a time—six months or something—it's reduced to seven-and-six, or ten bob, or something, according to the number of kids—or will be, unless people get their backs up, and force those blighted politicians to make it a pound a week permanent. Well, I've just found out about Mrs. Lomax."

Kerr and Wynn looked very puzzled. They were truly sympathetic towards the poor woman whose husband had fallen in the struggle against Prussian barbarism; but they did not quite see what Figgins wanted them to do.

Figgins grunted.

"Well, those School House bounders can send off whole cargoes of safety-razors, and be blowed to them!" said Figgins. "We're going to cheer up a widow a bit—see? That's where we come in. That chap Lomax was a very decent, steady chap; he used to come here to do repairing jobs and things, you remember. Mrs. Lomax has got over the first shock of it, but, of course, she's still awfully down. What people want when they're feeling down is a little kindly sympathy, you know. Well, that's what we're going to shove in—see? F'rinstance, suppose a chap dropped in in the evening, and asked her to accept a really spanking pie, with his kind regards——"

"Oh!" stuttered Fatty Wynn.

"A really first-class pie, that cost a greedy bounder eight or nine bob to make," said Figgins.

"Oh, Figgy!"

"Stands to reason she would be cheered up a bit," argued Figgins, "especially with three blessed kids, with kids' appetites, who don't generally live on the fat of the land. That pie will come in useful, after all!"

Fatty Wynn's face was a study.

"Of course, that's only a beginning," went on Figgins, more cheerfully. "There's other things. F'rinstance, we could take the kids to the cinema——"

"Oh!" said Kerr.

"We could wheel the widow's invalid father out in a bath-chair, now the weather's getting a bit decent at last——"

"My hat!"

"Of course, if you want the School House chaps to do everything that's done, you can let 'em say that the New House ain't patriotic, and——"

"Bow-wow!" said Kerr. "I'm on! What shall we put the pie in?"

"I—I say——" stammered Fatty Wynn.

"Well?" said Figgins, fixing a merciless glare on his fat chum. "Well?"

"I—I—I—all right," gasped Fatty Wynn. "I—I suppose you're right, Figgy. I—I suppose we—we couldn't even cut the pie if—if we're going to give it away?"

"Of course we couldn't," said Figgins.

Fatty Wynn suppressed a groan.

"All right," he said. "Pack it up! P-p-pack it up quick, so—so that I sha'n't see it. I—I'm game!"

Figgins chuckled.

"Pack it in a cricket-bag, you chaps, while I go and ask Monteith for a pass out of gates," he said.

Figgins quitted the study, and Kerr proceeded to pack the

enormous pie in a cricket-bag, Fatty Wynn watching him with a really extraordinary expression on his face. The fat Fourth-Former said no word. He was incapable of speech. It seemed like an evil dream. But when his pie had disappeared from sight, he heaved a deep, deep sigh.

Figgins came back, looking cheerful.

"All serene!" he said. "I've got the pass-out for three. Monteith's quite a brick. Come on! What's the matter with you, Fatty?"

"N-n-nothing!"

"You look as if you were ill."

"Nunno! All right!"

"Then come on, and don't look like a boiled owl!"

Figgins & Co. started, Figgins carrying the bag with the great pie in it.

Kerr was smiling as they went across the quad, but Fatty Wynn's face was clouded. He was quite willing to part with that pie for a patriotic purpose, but it gave him a dreadful inward wrench. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.

But Figgins did not heed the anguish of his chum. He whistled cheerily as he started down the lane towards Rylcombe, and Fatty Wynn did his best not to groan.

CHAPTER 6.

Figgins Says "Rats!"

"Bai Jove! Heah are those New House boundahs!" Tom Merry & Co. had just come out of the village post-office. Their multifarious parcels had been duly registered, and they were feeling cheerful, and they almost ran into the three heroes of the New House in the High Street.

"Hallo! What are you kids doing out of school at this time of night?" demanded Tom Merry severely.

"Yaas, wathah! I twust you are not bweakin bounds, Figgins!"

"What the deuce are you doing with a cricket-bag?" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

Figgins grinned, and opened the bag. The School House party looked at the immense pie in great astonishment.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon Fatty Wynn's treasure. "What a spankin' pie! Where on earth are you takin' it, Figgay?"

"That pie's too jolly good to be wasted on New House rotters!" said Jack Blake. "I suggest collaring that pie!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah! Stand and delivah, Figgins!"

"Pax!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Wats!"

"Sheer off, you silly asses! This pie is for a widow—the widow of a soldier," said Figgins. "We're taking it to Mrs. Lomax. You fellows can come along if you like, and see how the New House does things!"

"Bai Jove! That's quite wippin' of you, Figgay!" said Arthur Augustus admiringly. "I was not awah that the wespected Mrs. Lomax was a widow!"

"Chap killed in Flanders," said Kerr. "It was in the local paper!"

"That's fwightfully wuff on the poor soul!" said Arthur Augustus. "It's up to us to help her if we can!"

"You just keep off the grass," said Figgins. "This is our business. You can come along if you like, but you'll kindly remember that this is a New House wheeze. None of your chipping in!"

"Weally, Figgins——"

"Oh, ring off!" said Figgins.

And the long-legged chief of the New House juniors strode on.

Tom Merry & Co. accompanied him. The whole party of juniors turned out of the High Street into a little, dusky street that led down towards the river.

"Here's the place," said Kerr.

It was a little four-roomed house, with a little strip of garden in front. Arrived at their destination, Figgins & Co. hesitated a little.

"Pewwaps you had bettah leave it to me, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "I will pwesent the pie with a gwaceful little speech——"

"Bow-wow!" said Figgins.

"I wefuse to answah that absurd wemark, Figgins! You see, it wequires a fellow of tact and judgment to do these things. One has to be careful to show that there is no suspish of chawity about it. It's enough to get anybody's back up to be the wecipient of chawity. It must be made quite plain that it is a fwiendly offewin' fwom a sympathisah!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins. "They say charity covers a multitude of sins, but the beastly word makes me sick. You fellows can stay here—can't crowd the house out with a lot of bounders!"

"Weally, Figgins——"

Figgins & Co. went up the garden path to the door. Tom Merry & Co. remained in the dusky garden. The door was opened to Figgy's timid knock by a little chap of about seven, with a curly head, and a slice of bread-and-jam in one chubby fist. Figgins bestowed a friendly grin on the little fellow.

"Hallo, Albert!" he said. "Is your mater at home? Ahem!"

Figgins perceived that there was another visitor in the humble home. The door opened upon a little passage, from which another door opened on the sitting-room. The three juniors could see into the sitting-room, where a paraffin lamp was burning.

An aged man, evidently a martyr to rheumatism, lay back in an armchair. Two children were standing behind his chair, with awed expressions on their faces. A somewhat worried-looking woman was talking to the visitor, who was standing in the doorway of the sitting-room.

The visitor was a lady of uncertain years, dressed in black, with iron-grey hair tightly pulled back under a hideous hat. The lady had a pointed nose, and a square, determined jaw. Figgins recognised her. It was Miss Queech, a district visitor, whose activities in the district had always been remarkable, but had been more energetic than ever since the outbreak of the great war. Miss Queech was a managing lady. She could manage anything. She insisted upon managing everything. There was hardly a humble home in Rylcombe which Miss Queech did not manage more or less.

Figgins & Co. stood at the outer door, not quite knowing what to do. Evidently they could not go on with their business until Miss Queech had finished hers. Miss Queech gave them a careless glance, and went on talking. She was evidently managing Mrs. Lomax, and the poor woman did not seem to be enjoying it.

"You are still receiving your full allowance, I understand?" Miss Queech was asking.

"Yes, ma'am!"

"Now, I am going to speak quite plainly to you, Mrs. Lomax," said Miss Queech condescendingly. "I always speak quite plainly to the poor. I find that it is the better way."

Miss Queech's voice was very strident and determined, and was quite audible as far as the garden gate now that the front door was open. Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another very uncomfortably.

"Yes, ma'am!" said the widow. "Thank you, mum!"

"What are you doing with your allowance?"

"I—I—— Spending it, mum."

"Spending it!" exclaimed Miss Queech, in a rising voice, as if that was about the last crime she would have deemed even one of the "poor" capable of. "Spending it!"

"Yes, mum."

"But not all of it!" exclaimed Miss Queech, in horror.

"Yes, mum."

"Now, my good woman," said Miss Queech, in a patient tone that made Figgins feel like hitting her—"my good woman, you must manage. That is the great fault of the poor, that they can never manage. You are aware that, in the course of time, you will not be receiving the full allowance. Owing to the generosity—the great generosity—of the authorities, you receive the full allowance for a certain period after your husband's death——" The poor widow winced, but Miss Queech did not notice it. "But after a certain period your allowance will be reduced to seven shillings and sixpence a week, with certain allowances for each of your children in addition. Now, if you spend the full amount every week now, how are you going to live when you have only half as much?"

Miss Queech asked that question quite triumphantly. She felt that the widow was cornered now. Even one of the "poor," with all their artful ways, couldn't get out of that.

"I'm sure I don't know," said the widow, with tears coming into her eyes. "There is talk of an allowance of a pound a week for all widows, and perhaps the gentlemen in authority will let us have it."

"Nonsense!" said Miss Queech. "That is mere nonsense! Nothing of the kind is probable. Why, it would cost an immense sum—as much as the salaries of all the members of Parliament put together, if not more. Don't think anything of the kind. Now, I am going to advise you."

"Thank you, mum!" faltered the widow.

"Not at all; it is my duty to advise you. You must be economical, Mrs. Lomax. You must not indulge in the extravagances to which the poor are so fatally prone. You must not spend more than ten shillings a week. Do you see?"

"But—but we cannot live on ten shillings a week, mum!"

"Then what are you going to do when your allowance is reduced to that amount?"

"I'm sure I don't know, mum!"

"You—don't—know!" said Miss Queech, in measured tones "Bless my soul! But it is your duty to know, my good woman. Fortunately, there are always ladies to advise. Now, I am going to give you some good advice."

"You're very kind, mum, but——"

"What is in that saucepan?" asked Miss Queech.

"Mutton, mum."

"Mutton!" said Miss Queech. "You are boiling mutton at a time when mutton is so dear! I do not wish to pain you, my good woman, but I am shocked; I must say plainly that I am shocked! You could make a very nourishing stew with a beef bone; and you could buy a beef bone very cheaply at the butcher's. Now, I hope that the next time I visit you, my good woman, I shall not find mutton here."

The widow did not reply; her lips were trembling.

Figgins's blood was boiling by this time. If Miss Queech had been Mr. Queech, Figgins would certainly have delivered one of his famous upper-cuts before this. But upper-cuts could not be bestowed upon Miss Queech, so Figgins had to let his blood boil.

At that moment Miss Queech caught sight of little Albert. The boy still had the half-devoured slice of bread-and-jam in his little hand. Miss Queech looked at it, and seemed almost overcome with horror.

"Jam!" she said faintly. "Do my eyes deceive me, or is it bread-and-jam that that child is eating?"

"Yes, mum," said the widow.

"This is past all bearing," said Miss Queech. "I am shocked! I—I really hardly know what to say! In your circumstances you buy jam—JAM—for your children! My good woman, I cannot call this mere thoughtlessness; it is wickedness—downright wickedness! I must speak to the vicar about this. Jam!"

Figgins could contain himself no longer.

Miss Queech jumped.

"What—what—did you—what——"

"Rats!" howled Figgins. "How dare you talk like that, you—you——" Figgins choked. "If you weren't a woman, ma'am, I'd say something! How dare you come here and rag a poor woman who's worth fifty of you—what?"

"Dear me!" said Miss Queech faintly. "Insolent young rascal! Rag! Bless my soul! You—you are a St. James's boy, I perceive! I shall report this insolence to your headmaster! Rag! Bless my soul!"

And, without waiting to bestow any more good advice on the widow, Miss Queech flounced away.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy! "Bai Jove, Figgay, deah boy, you put that vewy nicely. I couldn't have expressed that bettah myself, bai Jove!"

CHAPTER 7.
The Presentation Pie.

FIGGINS came in, taking off his cap very respectfully. Mrs. Lomax looked more worried than ever. Probably in her heart she fully agreed with Figgy's estimate of her terrible visitor. But Miss Queech was so formidable that she exercised a sort of mesmeric influence over her victims, as a serpent is said to do.

"Excuse my intruding, ma'am," said Figgins, whose face was very red. "We—we——"

"We——"

"You see——" remarked Fatty Wynn.

The widow smiled faintly. The kind, honest faces of the St. Jim's juniors were a great change after Miss Queech.

"Pray come in, young gentlemen," she said.

"Thank you! We—we just looked in!" stammered Figgins. "I—I hope granfer's rheumatism is worse—I mean, I hope it isn't worse——"

"Bettah leave it to me, deah boy," came a whisper from the front door.

Figgins did not heed. There was a slight scuffle in the garden, which seemed to hint that Arthur Augustus was being suppressed by his comrades.

"And—and the kiddies, I hope they'll all well," went on Figgins.

"Quite well, thank you, Master Figgins."

A breezy voice came from the old gentleman in the armchair.

"It's as bad as ever, sir!" Wheeze! "The rheumatism is somethin' crool. If a man could get out 'twouldn't be so bad. Grooooh!"

"You ought to be wheeled out in a bath-chair, sir," said Kerr.

Granfer grunted.

"Where is the likes of me to get a bath-chair?" he demanded. "And who's to wheel it? I ask you that!"

"Be civil to the young gentlemen, granfer," said the widow. "Master Figgins means kindly. He isn't like——" She stopped.

"That's all right," said Figgins. "I—I was thinking—a—a friend of mine—ahem!—could lend granfer a bath-chair on a fine afternoon, and give him a little run, you know. And—and I'd wheel it with pleasure!"

"Deary me!" said the widow; and granfer simply gasped.

"But—but what we've come for now," said Figgins, "is—is to hand you—ahem!—we—we've brought you a little present, ma'am, which we hope you'll accept with our kind regards. Open that blessed bag, Kerr!"

Kerr had the bag open in a twinkling.

The widow looked in astonishment at the tremendous pie as it was planted on the table. The three children looked at it, too, with wide eyes full of anticipation.

"It—it's a jolly good pie," said Figgins.

"It's a ripper, ma'am," said Fatty Wynn. "We—we hope you'll like it, ma'am!"

"You are very kind," said the widow—"very kind indeed. I don't know how to thank you. Things have been very hard since——" She choked a little. "He used to earn two pounds a week always, and—and we feel the difference now, though I suppose we shall get used to it in time. Thank you very kindly, young gentlemen!"

"Not at all!" said Figgins cheerily. "And—and perhaps you'd let one of us come some half-holiday and take young Albert to the cinematograph. Now we'll get off, ma'am. Good-night!"

And Figgins & Co. hastily retreated.

The poor widow was left with tears running down her cheeks. After Miss Queech, the kindness of the schoolboys almost overcame her.

Figgins was snorting as he went down to the gate. The juniors took their way back to St. Jim's in silence.

Arthur Augustus broke the silence at last.

"It's wotten!" he remarked.

"What's rotten?" asked Tom Merry.

"The way that poor widow was bein' wagged by that howwid old cat," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "If she had been a man, I should have given him—I mean, her—that is to say, him, a feahful thwashin'. Why shouldn't the poor kid have some jam? We have plenty of jam, and our patahs haven't been killed in Flandahs. I'm quite suah that Miss Queech has as much jam as she wants. I wegard her as a howwid old cat!"

"And she's going to complain to the Head about Figgy," grinned Blake.

"I don't care," growled Figgins. "I wish that poor woman had given her a jaw. But they get under the thumb of those cats, and they can't help themselves. Let her complain to the Head, and be blowed!"

"I'm jolly glad we took that pie," said Fatty Wynn, after a long silence. "The family must have needed bucking up after Miss Queech."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Taggles the porter opened the gates for the juniors, looking unusually amiable. He knew why they had been out after locking-up, and for once he did not resent having to come out of his lodge to let them in.

"Good-night, you chaps!" said Figgins, as the juniors parted in the quadrangle, and he playfully knocked off Arthur Augustus's handsome topper, and started for his own house.

"Bai Jove! You wottah, Figgins——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus made a clutch at his topper, and breathed wrath and vengeance as he picked it out of a puddle.

"Gweat Scott! Look at that! The awful wuffian! I—I'll——"

Words failed Arthur Augustus, and he made a rush in pursuit of Figgins & Co.

"Come back, ass!" yelled Blake.

"Wats!"

Figgins & Co. had nearly reached their house, when they heard Arthur Augustus's rapid footsteps in pursuit. They looked back and chuckled.

"Run for your lives!" gasped Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three juniors dodged into the New House, and fled for their own quarters. But Arthur Augustus was not to be escaped so easily. A minute later he came swooping up the steps of the house, and bolted in.

"You wottahs! You—— Oh!"

Crash!

Arthur Augustus collided violently with a thin, elderly gentleman in a gown, and sent him staggering.

"Grooogh! Oh! What—what!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House. "What—what——"

Arthur Augustus reeled back from the shock.

"B-bai Jove!" he gasped.

Bump! Mr. Ratcliff sat down violently, after trying in vain to keep his balance. Arthur Augustus made a wild spring back into the quadrangle, hoping that Mr. Ratcliff had not recognised him.

"Boy!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff.

Arthur Augustus fled.

"Oh, you fathead!" murmured Blake, as his chum bumped into him in the dark quadrangle. "Oh, you frabjous ass, you've done it now!"

"Bai Jove! I—I didn't see Watty!"

"Let's hope he didn't see you," chuckled Tom Merry. "Hook it!"

The juniors bolted for their house. They reached that haven of refuge, and as soon as they were inside they assumed a calm and serene manner, as if they were not in the least hurry in the world.

"Hallo, you bounders! Got back?" said Kangaroo of the Shell, meeting them in the hall. "What's the matter with your nose, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus rubbed his nose ruefully, and dabbed it with his handkerchief.

"I had the misfortune to bump into Mr. Watcliff," he said. "I was pursuin' that wottah Figgins, and Watty got in the way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is weally not a laughin' mattah, deah boy. Watty went down in a heap, and I feah he was hurt. Howevah, I did not stop to inquiah, as I am pwetty certain that he did not wecognise me. I should have stopped to apologise, of course, only Mr. Watcliff's tempah is so extwemely unweliable——"

"Shurrup!" whispered Kangaroo.

"Wats! You are perfectly well awah that Watty's tempah is unweliable."

Kangaroo was making extraordinary faces at the swell of St. Jim's, whose back was to the door. Arthur Augustus did not understand till a rasping voice made him whirl round. Mr. Ratcliff had come in.

"So it was you, D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove! I—I—I——"

"I have just heard you say so to Noble!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Ahem! I was weally expwessin' wegwet for the unfortunate occuwwence, sir," said Arthur Augustus, "and I twust, sir, that you will not make use of a wemark ovahheard by chance, sir. I twust——"

Arthur Augustus had no time to state further what he trusted. Mr. Ratcliff's grasp fell on his shoulder, and he was marched into the School Housemaster's study. When he emerged he was rubbing his hands ruefully, and he confided to Blake that in some things the School Housemaster was very nearly as big a beast as Ratty.

CHAPTER 8.
Carried Unanimously.

TOM MERRY came along the passage on the following afternoon with his overcoat on over his football clobber. It was a half-holiday, and a sunny afternoon, and as the weather had been unspeakable until quite lately, the juniors were looking forward to the football match due that afternoon.

Tom looked into Study No. 6 in passing. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was seated at the study table, with a sheet of impot paper before him, a pen in his hand, a worried frown on his brow, and a smudge of ink on his aristocratic nose.

"Cher garcong," he was murmuring absently.

"Hallo!" said the captain of the Shell. "Forgotten the footer match?"

"Pway don't wowwy now, Tom Mewwy. I'm busay."

"Why, you ass," exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly, "it's kick-off in a quarter of an hour, and you know how long it takes you to change! Buck up!"

"We're ready," said Blake, coming along with Herries and Digby and Manners and Lowther. "Get a move on, Gussy!"

"Undah the circs, deah boy, you'll have to leave me out this aftahnoon," said Arthur Augustus. "I simply must w'ite this lettah. I had it all sk-tched out yesterday, and Lathom dwopped it into the fiah. It was all wasted, aftah I had fagged my bwain on it like anythin'."

"You're writing in French!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in amazement.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Well, your French chum, whoever he is, can wait for the next post. You're wanted. You see, Talbot's gone out this afternoon. He's taken Miss Marie to see her father in camp. And young Hammond's hurt his silly ankle, and Reilly has a bad cold, and Dane and Glyn have gone off somewhere together like a pair of duffers. So we simply can't spare you from the team."

"I'm afwaid I must wequest you to excuse me," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I weally can't keep this chap waitin' any longah."

"Bow-wow!" said Blake. "You can't keep us waiting! Come on!"

"Wats!"

"Gussy, old man, we can't possibly beat the New House without you!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"I pwesume not," said Arthur Augustus, with a nod. "Howevah, you often say you can, so you can twy it this time. I weally cannot come."

"We'll see about that," remarked Blake. "Gentlemen, I put it to the meeting—if that silly ass can't walk down to the footer, shall he be carried there?"

"Carried unanimously!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You hear that, Gussy? Get a move on!"

"Wats!"

The juniors wasted no more time in words. They laid hold of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and whirled him away from the table.

"Welease me, you wottahs!" yelled D'Arcy. "You don't undahstand—— Yawoooh!"

The Swell of St. Jim's clutched at the table for support, and dragged it over, and the precious letter went to the floor along with the inkpot.

"Oh, you fwightful asses! Now I shall have to w'ite it all ovah again!" wailed Arthur Augustus. "Welease me at once!"

"All hands to the mill!" said Blake.

"Oh, you wottahs! Gwoooh!"

With six pairs of hands upon him Arthur Augustus was whirled out of the study. On the shoulders of six sturdy juniors, he was rushed down the passage, with his voice raised loudly in protest.

"You uttah wottahs! Oh, cwumbs! Welease me! I shall give you a feahful thwashin', Tom Mewwy! Oh, deah! Blake, you beast—— Yawoooh!"

In a struggling crowd the juniors plunged downstairs. Arthur Augustus made a clutch at the banisters and held on.

"All together!" panted Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus was jerked away from the banisters, and the juniors rushed him downstairs. The rest of the School House junior team were waiting below, and they stared in amazement at the sight of Arthur Augustus's flying arms and legs.

"What the thunder!" ejaculated Kangaroo.

"Gussy thinks he isn't going to play this afternoon!" gasped Blake. "We think he is! I think we're right! Lend a hand! Collar him somewhere. You take his other ear! I've got this one!"

"'Ear, 'ear!" chirruped Lowther.

"Oh, cwumbs! Yawoooh! You're hurtin' my yah!" howled Arthur Augustus.

"You take his hair, Lumley!"

"Yawoooh!"

"Now, then, all together!"

Arthur Augustus was hushed bodily out of the School House. The juniors bore him in triumph down to the football-field. They carried him into the dressing-room, and plumped him down.

"Now change!" said Tom Merry sternly. "We'll come back for you in five minutes, and if you're not changed, we'll change you."

"Oh, cwumbs!"

The door was closed on Arthur Augustus. Outside, the School House team joined Figgins & Co., who were all ready for the match.

"What's the little game?" asked Figgins.

"My outside-left wants to be left outside," explained Tom Merry. "We put it to the vote, and carried him unanimously."

"And if he doesn't change, we'll change his clothes, and change his blessed features!" said Blake, breathing hard through his nose. "Cheeky ass, to think of missing a House match while he writes a silly letter!"

The juniors waited five minutes. Then Blake kicked the door of the dressing-room, and shouted:

"Ready, fathead!"

There was no reply from within.

"I'll give you one more minute!" howled Blake.

The minute elapsed, and there was no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy coming forth. Tom Merry & Co. returned to the dressing-room in a body with grim looks. Tom threw open the door.

"Now, you slacking bounder—why—what—where——"

The juniors stared round the room. It was empty. The window was open.

"Stole away!" gasped Blake. "My—my hat!"

Blake bounded through the window. But there was no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy outside. The swell of St. Jim's had evidently left the dressing-room five minutes ago at least.

"After him!" yelled Blake. "If we have to carry him again, we'll give him the frog's march, by Jove! After him!"

Figgins & Co. chuckled as the School House team started running for the School House at top speed. The juniors rushed into the School House, and dashed up the stairs to the Fourth Form passage.

Blake wrenched at the door of Study No. 6. But the door did not open. It was locked on the inside. From within that famous study there came the sound of a chuckle.

"Twy again, deah boys."

"Open this door!" roared Blake.

"Wats!"

"You've got to play!"

"Wubbish!"

"We'll squash you!"

"Wot!"

Bang, bang, bang! The juniors thumped and kicked on the door in a state of great exasperation. As a rule, it was a matter of no great importance if Arthur Augustus elected to stand out of the junior team. But this afternoon there was no one available to replace him effectually. So the footballers were wrathy. They expended their wrath upon the study door. But it did not open.

"Pway wun away, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus's voice from within. "I'm awf'ly busay witin' a lettah, and how can I gwapple with Fwench verbs when you are makin' that feahful wow! Wun away and play!"

Thump, thump, thump!

"Let us in, you frabjous fathead!" roared Tom Merry.

"Oh, wats! I say, Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes, fathead?"

"What is the subjunctive of 'battre'?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I am wathah weak in subjunctives, and I want this Fwench chap to undahstand. What is the subjunctive of 'battre,' third person singular?"

"You—you jabberwock!" gasped Tom Merry. "I'll give you subjunctives! I'll give you third person singular! You—you——"

Bang, bang! Thump!

"A little less noise there!" roared Kildare's voice from downstairs. "Do you want me to come up there with a cane?"

"Ahem! No, thanks, Kildare," said Blake meekly. And the assault on the door of Study No. 6 ceased as if by magic. Blake hissed through the keyhole:

"Are you coming, you frabjous dummy?"

"Imposs, deah boy. Can you tell me the subjunctive——"

Blake did not stay to tell Arthur Augustus the subjunctive. He marched off, breathing hard through his nose. The rest of the footballers followed him.

"I'll put Levison in," said Tom Merry, "and after the match we'll rag that blithering idiot baldheaded!"

Levison of the Fourth was called, and he was glad enough to play. Levison put up an unexpected good game that afternoon, too, and the School House held their own. After a gruelling match, the scores tied, and the rivals of St. Jim's retired from the field with a goal each.

And after they had changed, Tom Merry & Co. came in to see Arthur Augustus. They had some quite important things to say to him.

CHAPTER 9.
"By Gum!"

"MY hat, it's still locked!"

Blake made that remark in a sulphurous tone, as he tried the door of Study No. 6.

"Gussy!" called Tom Merry through the keyhole.

"Hallo, deah boy!"

"Open the door."

"I haven't finished yet, Tom Mewwy."

"Do you know it's tea-time?" howled Blake.

"I'm awfaid I haven't time to think about tea now, Blake. You can wun along and have tea with Tom Mewwy. Don't bothah. I'm faggin' my bwain like anythin' ovah these blessed subjunctives, and they don't sound wight, somehow."

"We've got to get the door open," said Blake. "Hallo, here comes Talbot! Talbot, old man, open this door for us?"

The handsome Shell fellow stopped, with a surprised look on his face. He had just come in, and had his overcoat on.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"Gussy's locked himself up in the study," explained Tom Merry. "He's been taken with a fit for doing French exercises, and he's cut the footer-match. We're going to chop him to small pieces, and boil him in oil, and then bump him."

Talbot laughed.

"The door's locked on the inside, Talbot," said Blake. "Can you manage it?"

Talbot coloured, and Blake looked a little uncomfortable after he had spoken. Talbot of the Shell, who had been the Toff before he came to St. Jim's, had a skill in dealing with locks that was almost weird. It was agreed on all hands that the fellows never made any reference to the "shady" past of the popular Shell fellow; but Jack Blake had spoken without stopping to think.

"Ahem, excuse me, Talbot, old man!" murmured Blake, as he caught the Terrible Three glaring at him, and realised that he had put his foot in it. "I—I didn't mean——"

"No harm done," said Talbot quietly, though his cheeks had burned for a moment. The one-time "cracksman," now a cheery, careless schoolboy, had not lost his old skill, and a locked door presented no difficulties to him. "I can open it quite easily."

"You ass, Blake!" murmured Tom Merry.

"I—I'm sorry!" stammered Blake. "You—you see, Talbot, we want to get into the study to have tea, and that frabjous ass——"

"It's all right," said Talbot. "Lend me your pocket-knife."

"Oh, it doesn't matter! We——"

"Rats! Give me your knife."

There was a click, and the study door was unlocked. How Talbot did it the juniors hardly knew. The Toff nodded to them and passed on, leaving the study door unfastened. Blake threw it open.

There was a yelp of astonishment from the swell of St. Jim's as the juniors crowded into the study. D'Arcy was sitting at the table, which was almost covered with what looked like French exercises, considerably smudgy, most of them. He jumped to his feet at once.

"Bai Jove! You boundahs, cleah out!"

"Now, you fathead!" said Blake grimly. "Now, you ass! Now, you duffer! Now, you burbling jabberwock! Now you're going through it!"

"I wefuse to go thwough it! Leggo!" yelled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

But the incensed footballers did not let go. They bumped Arthur Augustus down on the floor, and gathered round him, debating his fate. It was agreed that he was to be ragged baldheaded, but for the moment they could not think of anything quite severe enough for him. Something lingering, with boiling oil in it, was Monty Lowther's suggestion.

"Get out the gum, Dig," said Blake. "We'll gum him all over, and stick his blessed French exercises over him like flypapers."

"Good egg! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottahs——"

"Buck up with that gum!"

"I wefuse to be gummed!" shrieked Arthur Augustus wildly, struggling in the grasp of the footballers. "I uttahly wefuse! I will thwash you all wound! And if you dare to touch my lettahs, I will—— Gwoooooogh!"

"Here's the gum!" said Digby, handing a big bottle out of the cupboard. "Crumple up the blessed exercises——"

"You uttah wascals——"

"Hold him!"

Arthur Augustus resisted manfully. But half a dozen juniors held him fast, and Blake poured out the gum into a saucer, and proceeded to dab it over Arthur Augustus's face and hair with a large brush. The expression of D'Arcy's

face during that operation was extraordinary. He opened his mouth to yell, but the gum-brush dabbed into it, and he spluttered and gurgled instead.

Meanwhile, Dig was crumpling and tearing the precious sheets of impot paper upon which Arthur Augustus had spent a valuable afternoon's labour. As soon as plenty of gum had been ladled upon the swell of St. Jim's, the fragments of paper were plastered on him.

The aristocratic features of Arthur Augustus disappeared under them. His carefully-parted hair was a mass of gum and torn paper now.

From the midst of the gum and paper fragments that hid his face, came a gurgling voice:

"Ow, you wottahs? Wow, you beasts! Gwoooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Looks a pretty picture, don't he?" said Blake, surveying his handiwork with artistic satisfaction. "'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,' as Shakespeare says——"

"Ha, ha! Keats, you ass!"

"Rats! I don't care whether it was Shakespeare or Keats! Gussy is a thing of beauty now, and he will be a joy till he gets that little lot off. How do you feel now, Gussy?"

"Gwooh!"

"Are you sorry you cut the footer?"

"Wow!"

"Will you lock fellows out of their own study again?"

"Yow-wow-ow-w!"

"Blessed if I can understand him," said Blake. He must be talking Japanese, or Polish, or something. Any more gum?"

"You uttah wottah——"

"That's the lot," said Digby regretfully. "There's some ink."

"Good! Hand over the ink! No good sparing expense on an occasion like this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Welease me, you wottahs! You—you uttah wascals! I shall wefuse to tweat you as a fwiend aftah this, Blake. I wegard you as a Pwussian. You—you howwid beasts; now my lonely soldiah will have to wait till I wite it all out again."

Blake paused, with the inkpot in his hand.

"Your what?" he ejaculated.

"My lonely soldiah, you ass!" sputtered Arthur Augustus. "You—you feahful beast! I have been gwapplin' with the subjunctive all the aftahnoon, and now you have wasted the wesult of all my labahs, and the lonely soldiah will have to wait for his lettah. You—you unpatwiotic beast!"

"Must be off his rocker," said Tom Merry, in wonder.

"You haven't been writing to a soldier in French?" said Manners. "What's the good of writing to a soldier in French?"

"It's a Fwench soldiah, you chump!"

"Eh? You don't know any French soldiers."

"I did not say that I did, you fwabjous ass!"

"Well," roared Blake, "are you writing to a soldier you don't know?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, he's being funny!" said Tom. "Give him the ink!"

"Wow-wow! Keep that ink away, you wottahs! I will explain—— Wow!"

"Buck up, then!" growled Blake. "I'm getting tired of holding this inkpot. Now, what do you mean by babbling about a lonely soldier?"

"Gwooooh!"

"Explain, you fathead!"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead——"

"Oh, give him the ink!"

Splash!

"Yawoooh!"

Arthur Augustus rushed to the door.

"Hold on!" yelled Blake. "There's some more ink!"

Arthur Augustus did not hold on. He darted out of the study doorway, and the second splash from the inkpot just missed him. However, it was not wasted, as Monty Lowther caught it with his ear. There was a yell from Lowther.

"Why, you idiot——"

"Sorry!" gasped Blake. "Ha, ha—I mean sorry. What did you get in the way for?"

Monty Lowther dabbed furiously at his inky ear with his handkerchief. The laughter in Study No. 6 suddenly died away as a voice was heard in the passage.

"Who—what—what is that? Stop! Who is it? What does this mean?"

"My hat! It's Carrington, and he's spotted Gussy!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Phew!"

Blake peeped cautiously out of the doorway. Mr. Carrington, the new master of the School House, stood gazing at Arthur Augustus, with a horrified expression on his countenance. The swell of St. Jim's presented an extraordinary sight, and he was quite unrecognisable.

"Boy!" gasped the Housemaster. "What does this mean? How dare you go about the house in that—that dreadful state—that disgusting state?"

"Gwoooh! I—I——"

"If you please, sir," murmured Blake meekly, "it it wasn't D'Arcy's fault, sir."

"What!"

"A—a bottle of gum got upset over him, sir, somehow," said Blake, "and—and those papers got stuck to him, somehow. He really didn't mean it. Ahem!"

The Housemaster frowned

"So that is D'Arcy—that—that disgusting object?"

"Wow!"

"Go and clean yourself at once, D'Arcy. You are a—a revolting sight! Not a word! Go and get yourself cleaned, and then come to my study."

And Mr. Carrington rustled away. Arthur Augustus shook a gummy and inky fist at Blake, and rushed away to the nearest bath-room. It was a good hour before he presented himself in Mr. Carrington's study, and then, in spite of soap and hot water, there were still traces of ink and gum about him.

CHAPTER 10.

A Very Charming Letter.

STUDY No. 6 presented quite a festive appearance when Arthur Augustus came back at last. The Terrible Three and Talbot and Kangaroo were there to tea, and Blake and Herries and Dig were doing the honours. They were discussing the House match, and what ought to have happened in that match and hadn't; and also discussing a really handsome spread. They all looked affably at Arthur Augustus when he came in with a grim brow.

"You're late for tea," said Blake cheerily. "Never mind; we've got a nice rasher warm for you."

"Weally, Blake——"

"And we've left some of the cake," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"You needn't apologise," said Monty Lowther airily. "You played the giddy goat, and we put you through it, and we're willing to let bygones be bygones."

"Hear, hear!"

Arthur Augustus glared speechlessly at the cheery tea-party. He had certainly not come there to apologise.

"There's still some tea in the pot," said Herries.

"And there's some jam," said Dig.

"You uttah wottahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus, finding his voice at last. "I wegard you——"

"Oh, sit down, old chap, and have your tea!" said Lowther. "I repeat that you needn't apologise."

"Lowthah, you fathead——"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I came back heah," said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard through his nose, "with the intention of administewin' a feahful thwashin' all wound——"

"Mercy!" ejaculated Kangaroo.

"As you are strong, be merciful!" urged Lowther. "Hit one your own size, you know. Fair play's a jewel."

"Cawwington has given me a hundwed lines——"

"Then you've got off cheap," said Blake. "You ought to have been licked for showing yourself to your Housemaster in such a disgusting state."

"Wha-a-at!"

"I did the best I could for you," said Blake. "But I must say that I felt ashamed of letting Carrington see a chap belonging to my study in such a revolting state. It will give him the impression that we are not clean in this study."

The widow looked in astonishment at the tremendous pie as it was planted on the table. The three children looked at it, too, with eyes full of anticipation. "It's a ripping pie, ma'am," said Fatty Wynn. "We hope you'll like it." *(See Chapter 7.)*

"It was rather thick," remarked Herries.

"Still, we'll look over it," said Digby magnanimously. "I'm glad to see that you're a bit cleaner now, Gussy. Don't try to excuse yourself——"

"I was not goin' to twy to excuse myself!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I wegard you——"

Words failed Arthur Augustus. He dropped into his chair, and sat down to tea with a morose brow. The crowded tea-party all smiled benignantly. They passed Arthur Augustus things, and showed him a lot of little polite attentions, and the swell of St. Jim's had to thaw, in spite of himself.

"We'll whack out the lines," said Blake, in a burst of generosity. "Can't say fairer than that. It will only come to a dozen each then."

"Hear, hear!"

"Vewy well. Undah the circs, I will excuse you, and ovahlook your wotten conduct!" said Arthur Augustus. "I shall have no time for lines, as I have to w'ite my lettah. My lonely soldiah will be feelin' neglected if he doesn't get my lettah!"

Blake tapped his forehead, with a significant glance at the other fellows.

"Poor old Gussy!" murmured Kangaroo.

"I am goin' to explain," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "If you boundahs spent a little less time in playin' twicks, and a little more in lookin' aftah our bwave boys at the fwont, I should wegard it as more patwiotic. It will be a vewy gweat pleasuah to my lonely soldiah when he gets my lettah in the twenches!"

"What on earth is he talking about?" asked Tom Merry, with a puzzled look.

"It was in the 'Evenin' News,'" said D'Arcy.

"What was?"

"About the lonely soldiers, you know. You see, there are some chaps at the fwont who don't get lettahs, and the 'Evenin' News' hit on a wegular wippin' scheme. They get the names of the lonely soldiahs, and send them to chaps who have plentay of time to w'ite lettahs, you know; and then you w'ite the lettahs, you see, and cheeah them up!"

"By Jove!"

"But it's no good writing to Tommy Atkins in French!" howled Blake. "That's what you were doing."

"Wats! There are lonely Fwench soldiers as well as lonely Bwitish soldiahs. The 'Evenin' News' sends you which kind you like."

"You pays your money and you takes your choice!" remarked Lowther humorously.

"There is nothin' to pay, fathead. You see, it's up to fellows who know Fwench well to ask for the name of a lonely Fwench soldiah. That is backin' up the Ongtong Cordiale, you know. There are lots of people in England who don't know Fwench, and they can w'ite to Tommy Atkins. So I asked for the name of a Fwench soldier, and I am w'iting to him in Fwench—see?"

"And why couldn't you tell us all that long ago?" demanded Tom Merry.

"If you had been sufficiently patwiotic, you would have known all about it," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "It was in the 'Evenin' News,' and anybody might have discovahed it there. Pway cleah the table, deah boys, so that I can get on with my lettah. I had it neahly finished, and you have wasted it. My soldier is named Pierre Plon, and he is in the hospital at Havre, wounded by a beastly Pwussian. It will cheeah him up no end when he gets my lettah in Fwench!"

"What a ripping wheeze!" exclaimed Lowther. "Nothing like making a chap laugh when he's down on his luck!"

"I do not see any weason why he should laugh, exactly, Lowthah."

"Aren't you going to write in French?"

"Yaas."

"Then you can depend upon it he'll laugh," said Lowther, with conviction.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wubbish! My Fwench will be all wight, exceptin' that I am not quite suah about puttin' in the wight accents, and I am wathah weak in the subjunctives."

Arthur Augustus drew pen and paper towards him, and started on his famous letter, the other fellows watching him with smiling interest. They had no doubt that Pierre Plon would laugh when he received a letter in Fourth-Form French. He was bound to if he had any sense of humour at all.

"'Cher garcon——'" began Arthur Augustus.

"Is that the right way to begin?" asked Blake.

"Certainly. It means 'deah boy.' 'Jessperr que vous alley vous guerir de votre——' What is the Fwench for wound, deah boys?"

"Hold on! What does 'jessperr' mean?" ejaculated Talbot.

"That means 'I hope,'" said D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows——"

"Better spell it j-espere!" grinned Kangaroo.

"Are you sure that is wight?"

"Ha, ha! Quite."

"Vewy well. I don't claim to be vewy stwong in Fwench spellin'. I wegard the whole system of Fwench orthogwaphy as wathah widiculous. What is Fwench for wound?"

"Blessyer," said Digby.

"Weally, Dig, this is no time for widiculous ejaculations!"

"Fathead, I was telling you what to say!" howled Dig, who was a great French scholar, and very keen on that language.

"Wubbish! What's the good of sayin' 'Bless you' to a Frenchman? He wouldn't undahstand!"

"Blessyer!" roared Dig. "That's French for wound."

"Bai Jove! Is it? What an extwaordinawy expwession! But the whole language is vewy extwaordinawy—not at all like plain English. How do you spell it?"

"Blessure!" said Talbot, laughing.

"Thank you, deah boy. We are gettin' on nicely. 'J'espere que vous allez——'"

"Z, ass!" said Dig. "It's the second person plural!"

"'J'espere que vous allez vous guerir de votre blessure,'" said D'Arcy. "That means, 'I hope that you go to cure yourself of your wound.' It's a vewy widiculous way of puttin' it, but Fwench is like that. It is wathah odd that the chaps undahstand what it means themselves, but I have heard Fwench people babblin' away in it just as if it was a weal language. Now, I had wathah a good sentence to follow that—yaas! 'Le journal de soir "Evening News" m'a envoye votre nom, et je m'empresse de vous ecrire——'"

"But what——"

"That means that the 'Evening News' has sent me his name, you know, and I impress myself to write to him," explained Arthur Augustus. "That is their way of puttin' it—in the pwopah style of the Fwench idiots, you know!"

"The French what? Oh, idiom! Good! Pile on!" said Blake.

"The next is wathah difficult," said Arthur Augustus. "I am not suah that it is quite wight, because I have a feelin' that I ought to put in the subjunctive somewhah. Howevah, a chap can only do his best. 'Je suis un ecolier Anglais.' That means I'm an English schoolboy."

"Go hon!"

"'Et je pense toujours des brave Allies en Flandre qui vont se battre avec les Bosches.' That means, I'm always thinkin' of the brave Allies in Flandahs who go to fight themselves with the Germans—that's the Fwench idiom!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I wouldn't sweah——" began Arthur Augustus.

"Not in this study!" said Blake severely. "I'm surprised at you!"

"You uttah ass! I mean, I wouldn't sweah that that is expwessed quite cowwectly, but I have no doubt Plong will undahstand it all wight."

"Next lap?" said Lowther.

"'Je voodray bang——'"

"Wha-a-at!"

"'Je voodray bang que——'"

"What's that about a banker?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in surprise.

"Nothin' about a bankah, you ass! It means, I wish vewy much——"

"'Je voudrai bien!'" chuckled Talbot.

"Well, I told you I wasn't vewy strong on this beastly Fwench spellin'! 'Je voudrai bien que j'etais deja homme pour alley combattre les Bosches!'"

"That's French?" asked Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah—pwetty good Fwench, too! It means, I wish I was already gwown-up, so that I could go and have a smack at the Germans!"

"Bravo!"

"'Je vous demande d'escrire—no, de m'escrire'—they always put the cart befoah the horse in Fwench, you know—'de m'erire en ami et dire commey vous alley——'"

"That means something, too, I suppose?" asked Lowther, with an air of friendly interest.

"Weally, Lowthah, you ought to know enough Fwench to know that that means that I'm askin' him to w'ite to me and say how he's gettin' on!"

"That will cheer him up no end," said Lowther, with a nod. "Cut away!"

"'Jowray grande plaisir——'"

"Which?"

"'J'aurai,' you mean!" howled Dig.

"It's much the same, deah boy. I dare say there are lots of Fwench people who can't spell that awful language vewy well. 'J'aurai grande plaisir de vous ecouter——'"

"What in the name of Ollendorff does that mean?"

"It means I shall have gweat pleasuah to heah fwom him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cacklin' at, deah boys?"

"Ahem! I don't think they put it quite like that!" grinned Talbot.

"It might cause his wound to open, or something, if he has a fit in the hospital," remarked Lowther. "I shouldn't put it quite like that. Might be dangerous!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, I think that will do vewy well. 'Ecrivez s'il vous plait,'" went on Arthur Augustus. "'Si vous avez besoin de quelquechose, dites s'il vous plait,' and—I mean, 'et—et je vous envoyerai——'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to cackle at. 'Je vous envoyerai ce que vous desirez.' You see, that means if he has need of anything, he's to write and tell me, and I'll send it along!"

"Hurray!"

"Now, how do you sign these things in Fwench?" asked Arthur Augustus. "I believe they have a lot of wot at the end of a lottah—somethin' about pleasing to weceive most wespectful salutations and things. However, I shall put it plainly. He will guess, anyway, that this is w'itten by an English chap——"

"Probably."

"Votre Vraiment!" concluded Arthur Augustus.

"Wh-a-at!"

"My hat!"

"That means yours truly——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't cackle, deah boys, while I am gwapplin' with a vewy difficult language! I think that is wippin' myself. That's all wight. Now I've only got to post it. Of course, I've w'itten this wathah quickly, but I have weally expended a gweat deal of thought on it alweady. You see, I have been wathah deep in dodgin' the subjunctives. I wegard that as a wippin' letter, and it's bound to cheah up old Plong."

"Certain!" said Blake. "If he doesn't split his sides over that letter, he must be a stuffed dummy!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Put in a postscript," said Lowther.

"What shall I say in the postscwipt, deah boy?"

"Tell him to pin this letter up on the wall of the hospital, so as to cheer up the whole place," said Lowther. "Why, you could make all Havre cackle from end to end with that letter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to put in a postscwipt, Lowthah!"

And Arthur Augustus triumphantly sealed up his famous letter, and addressed it, and sallied forth to post it, leaving Study No. 6 rocking with laughter.

CHAPTER 11.

A R'pp'ng Afternoon.

"FIGGINS, you boundah——"

"Gussy, you ass——"

"Look heah——"

"Look here——"

It was Saturday afternoon. It was a bright and sunny afternoon, and the juniors of the two Houses at St. Jim's had agreed to play over again that House match which had resulted in a draw. But there was a vacancy to be filled in each team.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was once more conspicuous by his absence from the School House side; but that did not matter this time, as Talbot was playing. On the side of the New House the great Figgins was missing from the ranks.

While the rivals of St. Jim's were preparing for the footer match, the two missing players had departed from the school very quietly.

Now they had suddenly encountered one another.

Outside the garden gate of Mrs. Lomax, in the little street leading down to the river, Figgins and Arthur Augustus came face to face. Figgins was wheeling a big bathchair, and Arthur Augustus was twirling a light cane. They came to a halt outside the gate, and glared at one another over the bathchair.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Figgins truculently.

"What are you doin'?" returned Arthur Augustus.

"I know your little game!" growled Figgins. "You're after my widow!"

"I wefuse to wegard that lady as your widow, Figgay!"

"Look here, you monocled ass——"

"Look heah, you long-legged duffah——"

"You can go and send off some more safety razors, if you want something to do," said Figgins warmly. "I'm not going to have any School House bounders putting a finger in my pie! This household belongs to the New House. We've taken them up. They're under our wing. I've been in a row already about it, owing to that cat—ahem, I mean Miss Queech, complaining to the Head! Now you want to edge in and collar my widow!" exclaimed Figgins indignantly.

"She isn't your widow——"

"She is my widow!" roared Figgins. "Why, you wouldn't have known anything about her at all if I hadn't put you on the scent! I've hired this blessed bathchair to take granfer for a run this fine afternoon."

"Vewy well. And I've cut the footah match and wisked lettin' the New House win to take young Albert to a cinematogwaph——"

"I'm going to take him!" growled Figgins.

"Wats!"

"Look here, you keep off the grass, you—you Uhlan!"

"I wefuse to be called a Uhlan——"

"You blessed spoofer! I tell you it's my widow, and I'm not going to have the School House wedging in!" exclaimed Figgins excitedly. "Mind, I mean it! You clear off!"

"Wubbish! Pway modewate your tone, Figgins!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I have no intention of poachin' on your pwoserves——"

"Then buzz off!"

"But I wegard widows as common pwoperty——"

"Rats!"

"If you say 'wats' to me, Figgins, you will force me to give you a feahful thwashin', you New House boundah!"

"If you don't clear off this minute, I'll squash your silly topper over your head, you School House spoofer!"

"I tell you——"

Biff!

Figgins had lost his patience, and the beautiful silk topper was swept from Arthur Augustus's head by a doughty swipe. The swell of St. Jim's uttered a shout of wrath, and rushed upon Figgins.

In a moment they were locked in a deadly embrace, and staggering wildly round the bathchair in combat.

"Take that, you wastah!"

"Yow! Take that, you tailor's dummy!"

"Gwooh!"

"Dear, dear!" said a gentle voice from the garden. "I hope you dear boys are not fighting!"

Figgins and Arthur Augustus released one another as suddenly as if both had become red-hot. They blinked at the widow, who had come out of the little cottage, and was looking at them over the gate, in great distress. Arthur Augustus dabbed his nose with his handkerchief, and Figgins caressed his eye.

"Oh!" gasped Figgins. "G-g-good-afternoon, ma'am!"

"G-g-good-afternoon!" stammered Arthur Augustus. "I—I was just showin' Figgins a—a little twick in—in gymnastics——"

"Ju-jitsu," said Figgins.

"Ya-as, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus collected up his topper, and brushed it.

"I twust you are well this aftahnoon, ma'am?" he said.

"I have taken the liberty of callin'——"

"I've just looked in——" stuttered Figgins.

"I twust you will allow me to take young Albert to the cinematogwaph, ma'am? I—I am goin' there, you know."

"I—I've brought round a bathchair to give granfer a little run, if he'll come out, ma'am," said Figgins.

"I'm sure you are very kind!" said the widow, evidently in a state of great surprise, but genuinely moved. "Granfer will be very glad, Master Figgins, and Albert will be happy, Master D'Arcy. He is very fond of the cinematograph, and he has not been able to go since—since—— Thank you very much!"

"Send him out, ma'am!" said Arthur Augustus.

The widow returned into the house. Arthur Augustus and Figgins eyed one another in a rather doubtful manner.

"I shall have to let you off that licking, you School House chump!" breathed Figgins.

"You mean you will get out of a lickin' yourself, you New House boundah!"

"Why, you howling ass——"

"You lankay wastah——"

"I'll——"

"Bai Jove, and I'll——"

Fortunately, the widow reappeared at that moment, leading out granfer. The two juniors ceased exchanging compliments, and Figgins backed the bathchair into the garden, and the old gentleman was lifted into it. He settled down with a grunt of satisfaction, and Figgins wheeled him away towards the towing-path, giving Arthur Augustus a final glare as he went.

Arthur Augustus had to wait for Albert. But in ten minutes or so Albert came out, looking as spick and span as a new pin. He was looking delighted, too. Evidently cinematographs met with Master Albert's approval. He gave Arthur Augustus a chubby hand, and D'Arcy raised his topper gracefully with the other to the widow, and trotted off with Albert. The widow looked after him with a smile upon her face.

Arthur Augustus started quite cheerfully with his extremely youthful charge, but he found himself somewhat at a loss for conversation. He was not accustomed to chumming up with little chaps of six or seven.

Half-way to Wayland Albert announced that he was tired. Arthur Augustus halted, and surveyed him in some dismay through his eyeglass.

"Tired, deah boy?" he said.

"Yes," said Albert.

"Bai Jove! Quite imposs to get a taxi heah!" said Arthur Augustus, looking round. "It—it's only anothah half-mile, kiddie! Ahem!"

"Carry me!" said Albert.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Ise tired," said Albert plaintively.

"Vewy well, deah boy, I'll cawwy you."

Arthur Augustus hoisted Albert in his arms and marched on. Being somewhat unaccustomed to carrying "kids," he unfortunately allowed Albert to slip wrong end upwards, and there was a formidable yell from Albert.

"Pway excuse me, deah boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus, upending Albert promptly. "That's all wight now.

"Bai Jove, he's goin' to cwy!" gasped Arthur Augustus in consternation. "Pway take it calmly, deah boy. Bai Jove!"

"Yowowowowwwwwl!"

"Oh, gweat Scott! I—I say, deah boy, look—look at my watch!" gasped D'Arcy, remembering to have read somewhere that watches were objects of great interest to youthful minds. He jerked out his celebrated gold ticker with his free hand, and opened the case, and Albert ceased to howl as he blinked at the whirring wheels. He promptly inserted a forefinger into the watch. Arthur Augustus suppressed a groan, and allowed Albert the timekeeper to keep him quiet. The watch amused Albert for quite a long time, and by the time he had finished with it, it had long ceased to tick.

However, Albert was an enterprising youth, and he soon found a new amusement in clawing D'Arcy's silk topper. Scratching up the nap with his chubby fingers seemed to afford him a great deal of innocent pleasure. Arthur Augustus did not venture to resist. He was afraid of a fresh howl. The beautiful silk topper strongly resembled a busby by the time he arrived in Wayland.

Albert ceased operations on the topper, and his face lighted up at the sight of a confectioner's window. Arthur Augustus put him down, and trotted him into the shop, only too glad to find a new means of keeping him contented. With a huge stick of toffee in each hand, Albert smilingly accompanied Arthur Augustus to the cinema.

Albert was pleased to approve of the entertainment, which also interested Arthur Augustus, showing extensive views of French and Belgian towns ruined by the modern Huns. Albert went to sleep at last, leaning a somewhat sticky face

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on Arthur Augustus's arm. When the show was over, Albert's first word, as Arthur Augustus led him out, was "Toffee."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. And two more huge sticks of toffee were soon in Albert's chubby hands, and they started walking home to Rylcombe.

"Tired," said Albert presently.

Arthur Augustus sighed, and lifted him to his shoulder. Albert was gleaming with toffee now, and he had transferred a very considerable portion of it to Arthur Augustus. The elegant junior shivered as he felt a piece slide down his neck. He had brushed his topper while in the cinema, but Albert soon reduced it to its busby form again, adding a considerable amount of sticky toffee to it.

"Bai Jove," murmured Arthur Augustus, "I weally wish he would get to the end of that toffee! I am feelin' fwightfully stickay. My hat must be lookin' a wegulah howlah by this time. I twust I shall not meet anybody. Bai Jove, heah's that howwid person, Miss Queech!"

Miss Queech was coming down the lane. She bent a grim eye on the swell of St. Jim's. Little Albert clung round D'Arcy's neck tightly at the sight of the charitable lady. Evidently her face worried him. There was a sudden gulp and a gurgle from Albert, and he began to splutter and grow red in the face.

"Bai Jove!"

"Gurrrrrrrrrh!"

"My only hat! He has swallowed a lump of toffee! He's chokin', bai Jove! Whatevah shall I do?"

"Gurrrrrrrhrhrhrrr!"

"Oh deah!"

Arthur Augustus set down his burden, who was choking and spluttering frantically, and began to thump him on the back as the best way of clearing his throat. He had heard of that method. Thump, thump, thump!

"Yah! Yow! Yow-wow-wow!" roared Albert.

"Bai Jove, he's gettin' bettah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. Thump, thump, thump!

"Feel bettah now?"

"Yaroooooool!"

Thump! Thump!

"Yaroooooool!"

"Oh deah, this is simply fwightful! Pewwaps I ought to thump him a little hardah."

"Yow-ow-ow-owl!"

"You wicked, cruel boy!" shrieked a stentorian voice, as Miss Queech came rustling up. "You abandoned young ruffian! How dare you ill-treat that child in that manner?"

Arthur Augustus spun round.

"Bai Jove, I assuah you——"

"You wicked hooligan!" shrieked Miss Queech. "How dare you, I say, beat that child in that brutal manner in the public street?"

"B-b-but I was not beatin' him!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"I saw you! Come to me, my child!" said Miss Queech.

But Albert refused to come to Miss Queech. He only howled more loudly. He put his chubby fists to his eyes and roared.

"Oh cwumbs!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

"Wicked, wicked young ruffian!" exclaimed Miss Queech. "I will speak to the vicar about this. Wretched, brutal, abandoned——"

"Bai Jove, dwaw it mild, ma'am! I was twyin'——"

"Enough! Hold your tongue! If there were a policeman near, I would give you in charge!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Albert, come to me," said Miss Queech, seizing the child in her bony hands.

Albert roared as if he were about to be massacred.

"Pway let him alone, deah madam!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I weally think your face fwightens him—I—I mean——"

"Insulting young rascal! I—— Albert, my dear——"

"I won't come!" roared Albert. "Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" And Albert, with black ingratitude, dodged Miss Queech, and ran to Arthur Augustus, who picked him up triumphantly.

"There you are, you see," chirruped Arthur Augustus. "He isn't afwaid of me, Miss Queech. My face doesn't wowwy him. Come on, Albert! Good-aftahnoon, ma'am!"

Arthur Augustus marched on in triumph, leaving Miss Queech looking as if she would like to bite him. At the corner of the street where Albert's residence lay Arthur Augustus came upon Figgins, wheeling away the empty bath-chair, having finished his run with grandfer and taken him home. Figgins almost fell down at the sight of Arthur Augustus.

"M-m-my hat!" he gasped. "Wha-a-at have you been doing to your topper? What's the matter with your face and your clothes? Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to laugh at, Figgins. I am wathah stickay!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Had a ripping afternoon—what?" roared Figgins.

"Yaas," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I have had a vewy wippin' aftahnoon. But I'll tell you what, Figgy, you can take Albert in, as his mothah may think I have not had a wippin' aftahnoon if she sees me like this."

Figgins chuckled, and obligingly relieved the swell of St. Jim's of Albert, and took that cheery young gentleman in. Arthur Augustus found himself the centre of admiring glances as he went down the street, and his colour deepened with every step. He jumped into the station hack at the earliest possible moment, and ordered the driver to get to St. Jim's as quickly as possible, and pulled down the blinds.

When he arrived at the school he hurried in, hoping to get into the School House unnoticed. Taggles gave a gasp at the sight of him. The footballers were coming off the field, and Arthur Augustus fairly ran into them. They stared at him. His ruffled topper, his hair and face plastered with toffee, and the marks of Albert's muddy boots all over his elegant clobber, made them stare.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What the deuce——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I have been takin' young Albert to the cinema," explained Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to cackle at. I have had a weally wippin' aftahnoon—weally wippin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus rushed through the grinning footballers, and disappeared into the house, followed by a yell of laughter. When he reappeared—some time afterwards—he persisted with great firmness that he had had a ripping afternoon. But when he met Figgins he remarked in a very cordial manner:

"Figgay, deah boy, I've been thinkin' ovah that mattah, and, upon the whole, I don't think it would be right to poach on your gwound. On futuah occasions, you may take young Albert to the cinemah."

Figgins chuckled.

"I've been thinking over it too," he remarked, "and, upon the whole, I feel that you are right, Gussy, and I'm willing to leave entertaining Albert entirely in your hands."

"But weally, Figgins, I am not goin' to encwoach upon your wights."

"Don't mench," said Figgins. "You're perfectly welcome. I'm going to see grandfer again on Wednesday, and I'll mention that you're coming for Albert."

"Pway don't twouble!"

"No trouble at all," said Figgins. "Rely on me."

And Figgins walked away chuckling, leaving the swell of St. Jim's with quite a thoughtful expression upon his face.

CHAPTER 12.

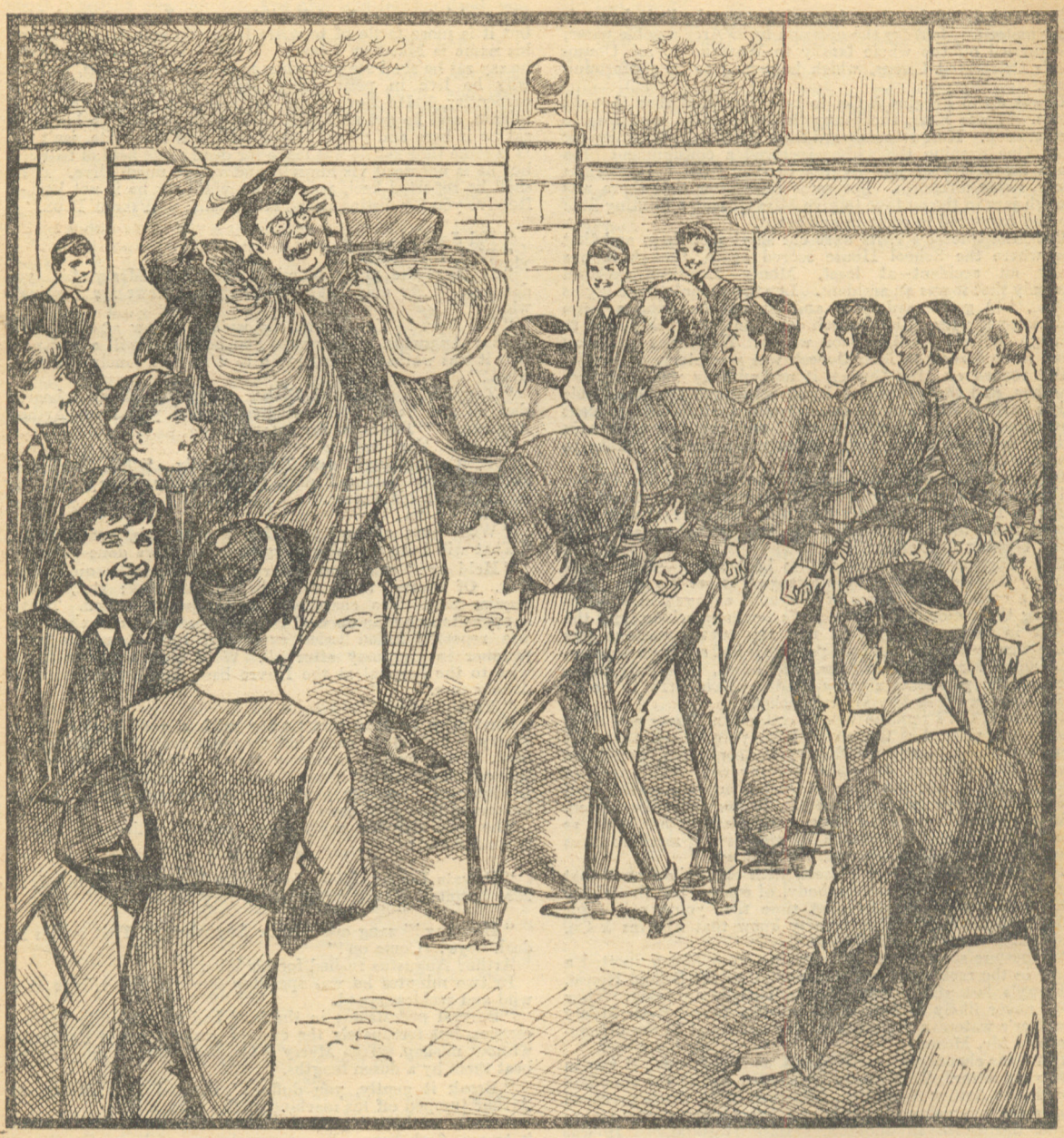
Great News!

"LETTER for Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

It was a week or two after Arthur Augustus's visit to the cinema.

During that week the patriots of St. Jim's had been in keen rivalry on the subject of Figgins's widow.

New House and School House had always been in rivalry, but as a rule their rivalry had taken the form of contests on the football and cricket fields, and of japes and rags upon one



Harry Wharton & Co.'s German Prisoners!

An amusing Incident in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale contained in the Great Bumper Number of our New Companion Paper, "The Dreadnought," Now on Sale. This Special issue is filled from cover to cover with entirely new features, and your friend, the Editor expects every loyal Gemite to support this new venture.

another. Now it had taken an entirely new form. Tom Merry & Co. on one side, and Figgins & Co. on the other, sought to outshine their rivals in kindly attentions to the war widow of Rylcombe.

Which party was getting the better of the contest it was difficult to say. Figgins had certainly scored with his bath-chair for granfer. On the other hand, D'Arcy had taken Albert to the cinema. Kerr had presented Albert with a football, but Manners had given his elder brother a camera and shown him how to use it. Fatty Wynn, with heroic self-denial, had presented another pie, even larger than the first pie; but Monty Lowther had presented the little girl of the family with a gorgeous sunshade. True, a sunshade wasn't the most appropriate gift possible in February, but the little girl was delighted with it, and proceeded at once in a bold attempt to eat it.

Figgins & Co., seeking fresh worlds to conquer, as it were, had gone down on a half-holiday armed with a rake, a spade, and a garden-fork. The little garden of the cottage had been neglected ever since poor Lomax went away, and Figgins & Co. spent a whole laborious afternoon gardening; and when they had finished the garden certainly looked very nice, though the three juniors had collected so much mud that they were scarcely recognisable when they returned to St. Jim's.

Figgins & Co. had scored there, and the School House juniors had to admit it. They had held a consultation, and Arthur Augustus recklessly proposed to spend an afternoon "scrubbin'" the house down. But the swell of St. Jim's was restrained from that heroic exploit. Blake pointed out sagely that Mrs. Lomax would probably not be pleased if half a dozen juniors invaded her house and started scrubbing it down. But the School House party were not to be beaten.

The next half-holiday they descended upon the little house in a big motor-car, lent for the occasion by D'Arcy's noble pater, and carried off the whole family to Wayland to see Chumgum's Celebrated Circus, which happened to be performing there.

It was up to Figgins & Co. to beat that, and they thought it out. It was Kerr, the canny Scottish junior, who rose to the occasion. Kerr remembered little Albert's predilection for jam. One evening the widow received a consignment of a dozen large jars of jam by the carrier, from a mysterious donor, name unknown. For some time after that there was enough jam in the cottage to give Miss Queech a fainting-fit if she had happened to come in and see it.

But Miss Queech's visits were cut short just then, and that was where the School House scored again, though it was really an accident—at least, Monty Lowther declared solemnly that it was an accident. Lowther, emulating Figgins & Co., had gone gardening, and he was handling a huge watering-pot when Miss Queech came on her weekly visit to manage matters for the poor widow. How that watercan came to be turned on Miss Queech was a mystery.

But turned on Miss Queech it undoubtedly was, somehow or other, and though Monty Lowther begged the formidable lady's pardon in the most dulcet tones, that did not prevent Miss Queech from catching a cold, and she had to remain indoors for quite a long time, which was a kind of holiday to the poor of Rylcombe.

Figgins & Co. admitted that Lowther had put the lid on. All their efforts in favour of their protegee had not effected so much as Lowther's accident with the watercan. To be preserved from the weekly visits of Miss Queech was a boon and a blessing to anybody.

Still, Figgins & Co. were not to be beaten. After school one day they dropped in at the cottage "to see the kids," and found a certain Mr. Moses of Wayland engaged in superintending the removal of the widow's sewing-machine, and the widow in tears. It appeared that the sewing-machine was a hire-purchase article, and the payments had not been kept up, whereupon Mr. Moses had swooped down, cheerfully disregarding the payments already made, which were to be so much clear profit in Mr. Moses' pocket.

Figgins & Co.'s impulse was to collar Mr. Moses and duck him in the river, but the canny Kerr pointed out that that step, though eminently satisfactory to themselves, would not benefit the widow at all, rather the reverse. So, instead of ducking Mr. Moses, the juniors inquired into the matter, and paid up what was due, and sent Mr. Moses away discomfited. The poor woman thanked them with tears in her eyes, as she explained that by means of the sewing-machine thus rescued she was able to eke out her allowance.

Figgins & Co. felt very pleased with themselves over that incident. They didn't tell anybody, of course, but the widow told Arthur Augustus the next time that youth called for Albert, so the School House party knew that Figgins & Co. had beaten them to the wide that time.

So matters stood when one morning Tom Merry spotted a letter in the rack addressed to the swell of the School House.

Figgy's last stroke was, they admitted, a corker. They were never likely to have a chance like that. Even Monty Lowther's watercan performance was not equal to the discomfiture of Mr. Moses.

But their chance was coming, and, as it happened, it was in that very letter. Tom Merry whisked it out of the rack and tossed it to Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's surveyed it in some astonishment. It bore a French postmark—Havre—and the words in addition, "Base Hospital." It was addressed rather curiously—to "Monsieur Arthur Agostos D'Arcy, Mister Esquire."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "That must be fwom my lonely soldiah!"

"Better get Monsieur Morny to help you read it, then," suggested Blake.

"Wats! I can wead Fwench all wight."

Arthur Augustus opened the letter, and the juniors read it all together. It was not in French. It was in English—of sorts.

"Cher Dear Monsieur Friend,—It shall be wiz grand pleasure I go to receive your kind letter. I have never in all life laugh so much wiz pleasure. I show him to the comrades, who shall laugh wiz same pleasure. Because so polite of you to write in my langue, I go write you also in English, whom I shall learn when it is that I am in England have been. Much thank you for to write. Little choses zat I want is not many, but if you shall send some small tobacco, zat shall be receive wiz grand pleasure. You please to hear zat I have in next bed English shum. He talk to me in French so queer, and when zat I talk to him in English he smile. This one is very goos shum. The Bosches shall wound him in head, and he shall be without some sense for long time. I shall say his name wich is verree hard English name. I cannot speak him, but it is more facile of to write him. So you shall know zat his name is Matthew Lomax. When I tell him of zis letter, he say zat he shall see you when in Angleterre he was, because why he live in petit village near zat school. He was carpentier. He have some wifes in zat village and little infants, and he get no letter, so he zink you say to his wifes zat he is here and go on verree well, and she write, isn't it? It is some time zat he was leave for dead on ze field of bataille, but he is not dead viz himself, and verree much alive. If he shall be reported keel, you tell his wifes zat he is not keel.—Receive you my distinguished salutations, PIERRE PLON."

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, that beats it!"

"It takes the giddy biscuit!" said Tom Merry, his eyes dancing. "My only hat! What ripping news for Figgins's widow!"

"Bai Jove! You know, she isn't a widow at all!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps you boundahs will admit now that it was wathah a good ideah to w'ite to a lonely soldiah—what?"

"Topping!" exclaimed Blake, giving his chum a hearty slap on the back, which elicited a wild yell from Arthur Augustus. "Top-hole, my infant!"

"Yow! You wuff ass——"

"Oh, it's wipping!" said Tom gleefully. "The English is about as good as the French you sent him, Gussy, but the meaning is a bit clearer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll buzz off and tell Mrs. Lomax this," said Blake. "That will beat anything Figgins & Co. have done—what?"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "Better make quite sure first. Of course, there can't be any mistake; still, better inquire first. The chap has been reported killed. That's happened more than once. I remember reading of a chap who was reported killed twice over, and turned out to be a prisoner in Germany after all. We'll club together for a wire to the hospital at the Havre base, and make assurance doubly sure."

"Yaas, wathah!"

That wire to Havre ran away with a good deal of Tom Merry & Co's spare cash, but they did not mind that in the least. They waited anxiously for the reply. Of course, in the course of time, a notification would have come from headquarters, but the juniors were very anxious to be the bearers of that good news to the widow.

The next day the reply came, and it settled the matter beyond doubt:

"Private Lomax, 35799, Loamshire Regiment, wounded, in base hospital, Havre, progressing very favourably."

"Huwway!" sang out Arthur Augustus. "That settles it, deah boys! Come on!"

Arthur Augustus rushed for his bike.

In two minutes he was speeding down to the village at a wild and reckless speed.

"Several pedestrians in the lane had marvellously narrow escapes, but fortunately the excited junior reached Rylcombe without mishap. Tom Merry & Co. had followed him, but he beat them by a dozen lengths.

"Break it gently, you duffer!" shouted Tom Merry, as Arthur jumped off his machine at the garden gate.

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "You leave it to me, deah boys. You can wely on a fellow of tact and judgment."

He knocked at the door.

The widow opened it, and Arthur Augustus was shown into the little sitting-room. The delight in Gussy's flushed, handsome face attracted attention at once. Granfer blinked at him, and the children gathered round in wonder.

"Pway excuse my wushin' in, ma'am," said Arthur Augustus. "I have some news for you."

"News for me," said the widow. "You are very kind, Master D'Arcy. I don't know how to thank you and your friends for what you have done already."

"Wats—I—I mean, don't mench. I have weceived a telegwam fwom Fwance," said Arthur Augustus, proceeding to break it gently, in order not to give the poor woman too great a shock. "I have been w'iting to a lonely soldier, you know."

"Yes!"

"And—and it appeahs," said Arthur Augustus cautiously, "that owin' to the confusion in wunnin' aftah the Germans, you know, a little mistake might be made, you know."

"Ye-es!"

"The fact is," went on D'Arcy, "that it has happened more than once that a chap has been weported killed, you

know, when he was only knocked over and left for dead, you know."

The widow started, and her face became very pale.

"Master D'Arcy!"

"It's happened sevewal times," said Arthur Augustus. "These chaps are found aftahwards, you know, and latah on they're identified, and—and then the Wah Office lets you know. You haven't heard fwom the Wah Office yet, ma'am?"

"No, no!"

"Howevah, it's a fact all the same. I'm bweakin' it gently, you know," explained Arthur Augustus. "Suppose poor old Lomax wasn't killed aftah all, you know——"

The widow sank into a chair, trembling in every limb.

"It's all wight!" chirruped Arthur Augustus. "I'm only breaking it gently. Lomax is all wight, ma'am—only wounded—and gettin' on wippingly. I twust I have not told you too suddenly," added Arthur Augustus, in distress, as the widow burst into sobbing. "Pway don't blub, ma'am. There's nothing to blub about, you know. I've got a telegwam fwom the hospital at the base. Heah it is; wead it, you know."

The widow caught the telegram from his hand, and read it through her tears. Then, to Arthur Augustus's astonishment, she kissed him on both cheeks.

"You dear, good, kind boy——"

"Bai Jove!"

"My husband—alive!" sobbed the widow—a widow no longer. "May I keep this telegram, my dear boy? I can't hardly believe it; I should like to keep the telegram to look at——"

"Yaas, wathah, ma'am. Bai Jove! I weally wish you wouldn't cwy. Howevah, you will soon be feelin' all wight. They'll send him home, you know, and we'll give him a weception, wathah!"

The poor woman could not speak, and Arthur Augustus rather hurriedly retired, leaving the soldier's wife sobbing, but the tears she was shedding now were tears of joy. Arthur Augustus had a lump in his throat when he rejoined his chums in the garden.

He coughed violently.

"Bai Jove, you know!" he remarked. "I'm jollay glad we got that news, you know. I wathah think we have beaten Figgins & Co. this time—what?"

"Hear, hear!"

And Tom Merry & Co. rode back to St. Jim's feeling elated; and they left happiness behind them.

CHAPTER 13.
The Conquering Hero.

"HEAH he is!"

It was a considerable time after the events related in the foregoing chapter, when one fine afternoon a man in khaki, with his arm in a sling, stepped out of the train from London at Wayland Junction.

A crowd of St. Jim's juniors were on the platform, and they made a rush and surrounded the man in khaki at once.

"How do you do, deah boy?"

"See the conquering hero comes!" chirped Monty Lowther.

"Hurrah!"

The man in khaki blinked in amazement at the fellows who were shaking his hands and clapping him on the back.

"What the thunder——" he began.

"It's all wight, Mr. Lomax—Pwivate Lomax, I mean," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We've come to meet you and see you home."

"My word!"

"And we've got the parental motor-car outside," grinned Figgins. "This way, Lomax, my boy!"

The astonished soldier was marched out of the station in the midst of the crowd. Outside, the magnificent car of D'Arcy's noble pater was standing, decorated with flags in a really imposing manner. Flags waved from very nearly every inch of it. The car, decorated by Tom Merry & Co. for the occasion, would have done credit to Chumgum's Circus.

"Well, bust my buttons!" said Mr. Lomax. "Wot's the little game?"

"We're the giddy escort!" said Figgins. "Trot in!"

"I'm goin' in that car?"

"Yaas, wathah!! My patah has placed it at your disposal for the aftahnoon, explained Arthur Augustus. "Pway allow me to assist you, my deah sir."

"My word!" said the dazed man in khaki. "I say, I'm going home, you know. The missus is expecting me."

"Pwecisely! We've come to take you home," said Arthur Augustus, assisting the wounded hero into the car. "Vewy glad to see you lookin' so well!"

"What's all those blessed flags for?"

"They're for you, deah boy."

"But why?"

"Because you are a weturnin' hewo, of course."

"Well, my word!" said the returning hero. "This beats it!"

However, he settled down comfortably in the car. Certainly that topping motor, with its soft cushions, was better than the local train. The beflagged car had attracted a great deal of attention, and there was a crowd round it. The St. Jim's juniors were there in force, too. The rivals of St. Jim's had sunk all differences on that great occasion, and joined forces to do honour to the returning hero. The only person present who didn't regard Mr. Lomax as a returning hero was Mr. Lomax himself. He was evidently very much surprised.

"You may start the engine, Wobinson," said Arthur Augustus.

Whirrrrrrr!

The crowd round the car gave a cheer. Tom Merry & Co. were mounting their bicycles to escort the car. Arthur Augustus raised his silk hat in acknowledgment of the cheer for the man in khaki.

"Gentleman——"

"Hooray!"

"Gentleman, I call for thwee cheeahs for our fwiend Mr. Lomax, who has come home wounded fwom the wah, aftah helpin' to lick the beastly Pwussians and punish them for murdewin' women and childwen."

"Hip-pip-hooray!"

"My word!" said the hero.

"Dwive on, Wobinson!"

Robinson drove on.

The car glided away, followed by cheers, and surrounded by a host of cyclists. Mr. Lomax grinned and lighted his pipe. Arthur Augustus coughed. The hero smoked very strong shag, and Arthur Augustus found it a little trying at close quarters.

"Gwooh! Pway excuse me! I twust you have finished off a lot of those Pwussian beasts, my deah boy. Gwooh!"

"Only three, that I know of," said Mr. Lomax regretfully, "But you never know how many you pot when you're blazin' away, you know. And now I'm out of it for good. That's rotten. But I'll be jolly glad to see the missus and the kids again. But what are you making all this fuss for?"

"Because you are a hewo, deah boy!"

"Oh, bosh!" said Mr. Lomax.

"Ahem!"

"It's very kind of you," said the gentleman in khaki, as Augustus's countenance fell a little. "But don't pile it on, you know. I've done just the same as the others, and we've all done our little bit as well as we could. My word, though, this is a change after the trenches and the hospital. I'm glad to be back, after all!"

There was a further demonstration awaiting the astonished hero when the car swept into the little street in Rylcombe. A crowd of his neighbours were waiting to greet him, and a loud cheer rang out as the big car rushed up. A happy-faced woman was waiting at the garden gate.

"Heah he is, ma'am!" sang out Arthur Augustus.

He helped the wounded warrior to alight.

"Matthew!"

"Hallo, old girl!"

And the wounded warrior, leaning on his wife's arm, and with three children clinging to him, passed into the little home, followed by a tremendous cheer.

"I wathah think this has been a successful aftahnoon," Arthur Augustus remarked, as the juniors returned to the school after dismissing the car. "The curious thing is that the chap doesn't seem to know that he is a hewo at all. Howevah, I suppose that twue hewoes are always vewy modest."

"Modesty is my great weakness," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"I'll tell you what!" said Fatty Wynn. "An occasion like this ought to be celebrated. We can't do better than pass round the hat and have a really stunning feed in our study. We'll have a pie——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A really whacking pie!" said Fatty Wynn, his eyes glistening. "Who says pie?"

"Pie!" said all the juniors together.

And in Figgins's study that evening the chums of St. Jim's gathered in great force to celebrate the great occasion, and the pie—which was really whacking—was done full justice to by the Rival Patriots.

THE END.

(Another grand tale of the chums of St. Jim's will be published in next Wednesday's "GEM" Library. Order in advance at your newsagents', and make sure of getting it!)

THE FIRST CHAPTERS OF OUR GRAND NEW SERIAL STORY.

OFFICER AND TROOPER.

An Enthralling New Story of Life in the British Army.

Specially Published for Patriotic British Boys.

By BEVERLEY KENT.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS INSTALMENTS.

Bob Hall, a fine, strapping young fellow, succeeds in joining a famous hussar regiment, known as the Die Hards, where he incurs the enmity of his no'er-do-well cousin, Captain Lascelles, who makes several attempts to do Bob an injury, but is unsuccessful. Alf Payne, a new recruit, surprises everybody by claiming Lascelles as an old friend. Bob suspects that Lascelles is in the man's power, and he determines to find a solution to the mystery. The Die Hards are ordered to Ireland, and on the voyage Bob learns that his cousin is indeed in Payne's power, and that he is himself connected with the affair in some way. When the regiment reaches Dublin a ball is held. Bob succeeds in rescuing a lady whose dress has caught afire, and, on calling on her father, the Earl of Dalkey, it is found that Bob is connected with the family, and the earl promises to have investigations made. Lieutenant Haines, of the Die Hards, has entered his horse Firebrace for the Irish Grand National, and Bob Hall is to ride it. As Captain Lascelles stands to win a lot of money on another horse called Wild Cat, he hires two men to get rid of Bob, which they do by throwing him, bound, into the river.

(Now go on with the story.)

A Gallant Race.

Derby Day in Ireland! Such is Punchestown, when, by road and rail, all Dublin flocks to the historic racecourse. In four-in-hands, in drags, on outside cars, and in gigs, in drays and donkey-carts, on horseback and afoot, the laughing, jovial Irish crowd throng the broad road, and wheel on to the narrow laneway, where joking, fighting, pushing, squeezing, they force their way on to the green plain with its large stands, its myriad tents and booths, its sylvan scenery, and its human hive of eager, happy faces.

A sudden pause, a shout, a prolonged cheer, and through the dense crowd ride sober-clad policemen and a bodyguard of red-coated, hard-hunting sportsmen, escorting in triumph the Viceroy of Ireland, whose arrival is greeted with enthusiasm in honour of the King he represents.

The Viceroy takes his place upon his private stand, the band in the enclosure plays the National Anthem, the white numbers go up on the board, a dozen thoroughbreds canter down to the starting-post. There is a moment's tense silence, till far away a thin wreath of smoke curls up in the air, and as the sound of the report is borne across with the breeze, a dozen horses spring forward, galloping neck and neck, and a hoarse yell arises:

"They're off! They're off!"

The day's fun has begun.

From sport to luncheon, and back again to sport. And now strange rumours began to get afloat, and laughter died away, and grave faces were seen on stands and in the enclosure and out amongst the throng who surged against the barricades.

The hour for the great race drew near, and officials hurried to and fro, and the officers of the Die Hards, standing on their drag, looked down glumly on the upturned faces raised to them in expostulation and threats.

"Where is Firebrace? Why isn't he going to run? What has happened? Have you chaps played us false?"

Out in the ring raucous voices bawled the name of Wild Cat, and in the members' enclosure men feverishly hedged their bets. The people became unmanageable; policemen on horseback and on foot struggled vainly to keep them back. They burst on to the course and across to the drag, where Haines stood pale and gloomy, and there they shook their fists and yelled. From the Vice-Regal box a uniformed aide-de-camp pushed his way forward to ask for an explanation on behalf of the Viceroy. The crowd grew still, and Haines was allowed to speak.

"I'm awfully sorry!" he gasped. "I came down here hoping against hope. There's been foul play! Firebrace was all right yesterday, but last night he disappeared, and his jockey has vanished too!"

A mocking jeer was followed by a bloodcurdling yell of rage. Men swayed to and fro, threats of imprecations were hurled at Haines, who faced his accusers pluckily and unflinchingly. The crowd surged back ominously, gathering in strength; then like a torrent it was about to dash forward, and sweep officers and drag before it in a devasting burst of fury, when Hamshaw's resonant voice boomed forth like a mellow bell, silencing the multitude into startled hope and peace.

"Look there—look there!" he shouted, gripping Haines by the arm, and pointing across the plain. "We're safe, by Jove; Hall and Firebrace are in time!"

The subaltern stared ahead. Out over the greensward and far away across the fields two hundred soldiers, yelling and waving their caps, were running in a throng, and in the centre cantered Bob on the gallant steeplechaser, wearing Haines's colours, and ready to begin the race!

On came Bob, the Die Hards racing alongside, whilst the huge concourse on the racecourse burst into a swelling roar of cheering, that rolled like a thunderclap away to the high mountains behind. Out over the fields, across the course, and through the thousands of sightseers he guided Firebrace, and reined up next the drag, where Haines and Hamshaw stood in silent wonderment.

The Die Hards formed a circle six deep around Firebrace and the officers, and kept back the eager, excited crowd.

"What happened, Hall?" Haines inquired breathlessly. "How is it that you vanished with the horse last night, and that you've turned up in this extraordinary fashion?"

"Foul play, sir," Bob replied coolly. "Dent and Hosty suspected that something was in the wind when they saw a seedy-looking cove hanging around the barracks last night. They followed him, and got to the stables just as I was being roughly handled and Firebrace was being led away. If it wasn't for them I wouldn't be here now."

"This is monstrous!" Hamshaw thundered.

"Have you any suspicion as to who the scoundrel is?"

Bob was drawing in his stirrup-leather a hole.

"I'll be able to tell you more later on," he replied grimly. "There goes the bell! Which is the way to the weighing-room?"

Five minutes later he was cantering to the starting-post, amidst a ringing cheer from the crowded stands as he swept past, Firebrace, with long, swinging strides, covering the ground magnificently. He lined up with a dozen other jockeys, the horses curveting frantically, and mad to be off.

The flag fell. With a thud of hoofs like the roll of a drum

the steeplechasers shot past the starter in a bunch, a glorious picture of colour and movement, and raced for the first fence. Holding grimly on to the reins, with knuckles well down on the pommel of their saddles, now pulled out of the pigskin as the noble racers strove to get their heads, now settling themselves again back in the saddle, swaying with the easy balance of perfect horsemen, mastering their powerful mounts by sheer pluck, the dozen light figures perched on high seemed to lift their horses in the air and throw them clear of the double bank that rose high and forbidding before them. They landed on the far side without a flaw.

Off like lightning again they scurried round a bend on to a straight gallop of a few hundred yards, and thus to a hedge rising to the horses' withers. Every young face was drawn hard as steel, every eye was stern and glittering; with teeth clenched and knees rigid, reckless of danger, resolute to fight to the very last, they dashed at the hedge without pause or glance of fear, packed so close together that a false step, a stumble, would have hurled all—horses and riders—in a heap to the sward beyond.

Up and over! Up and over! They were out on a long stretch of grass once more, every gallant steeplechaser now strung to mad delirium by the rush and clamour, galloping madly and blindly, guided only by the light form, the strong hand, the cool, quiet voice from above.

Away in the distance a noise like the wail of a gale grew louder and more human as the racers turned into the straight.

The sullen roar changed into a paralysing yell of human abandonment as the horses swept past the surging crowds on stands and in enclosures, and out to the right amidst booths and waggonettes and tents.

On to the end of the straight, up to a high bank, without pause, and down to the grass again, Firebrace taking the huge jump clean through the air, amidst a yell of exultant admiration, the racers took to the country for the long three-mile gallop which still lay before them.

And now the jockeys settled down resolutely, whilst each rider cast a hurried look before and behind to see who was ahead, and whom he had to fear in the rear. A bay horse still led the way, going as if the race was already over. Five more followed close on his heels, and Bob, riding seventh, looked back to watch for Wild Cat. He was coming along thirty yards behind, the noble animal still fighting for his head, and his rider grimly holding him in.

"That's Claptrap leading," Bob muttered. "He's stable companion to Wild Cat, and he's making the running so as to tire out the field. He'll be dead-beat before another mile, but he'll have done the work he's been put to. Whoa, there, my lad! We wait for Wild Cat. You and I ain't going to be drawn."

Bob patted his mount's neck, and driving his feet well into the stirrups, he curbed his impatient horse in his frantic attempts to get up with those ahead.

Out and round, in a long, swinging circle, the chasers galloped, and once more the roar of Punchestown sank away and died. Over the jumps Bob put Firebrace steadily, gradually drawing up on the spent racers who had shot their bolt. At last he drew past Claptrap, and now he was leading. Away behind, the competitors had stretched out in a long string; before him was a clear run, if Firebrace could only last.

Bob looked back again. Wild Cat was still coming along steadily, moving freshly, and kept in hand by his jockey.

"He's marking time," Bob growled. "He's got the drop on me there. He knows to a nicety how Firebrace is feeling the gallop, and whether he can give him rope or not. It rests with him to decide when he'll make a rush for it. I wish I'd been able to keep behind him."

It was too late for regret now, though, and Bob, riding Firebrace as lightly as he could, did all he knew to help him along. The gallant horse still moved splendidly; but a mile and a half was yet to be covered, and Wild Cat might draw up at any moment, or wait till approaching the last fence so as to have a short finish, if that suited him better

Bob feared to attempt to ride away. He did not know what staying powers Wild Cat might possess.

Up and over! Up and over! At every jump Firebrace gathered himself together and crossed the hurdles easily. He had plenty of wind still—that was certain; and it made Bob hopeful. Another mile was left behind, and Bob began to tremble with excitement. Away in the distance the black acres of human heads once more became evident. He was nearing the winning-post, and Firebrace still had some powers in reserve.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

Wild Cat was drawing up. For the first time Bob gave Firebrace the spur, and the racer jumped forward as if stung. He dashed away, the thud of hoofs behind still beating loudly. Bob crouched up on the saddle, the wind whistling with a new, shrill shriek, the jump ahead rising clearly into view as Firebrace rushed, snorting, towards it.

One second to steady the horse, to grip his ribs more tightly, to change his feet for the take off, one touch of the spurs, a strong shout of encouragement, a hard hold on the reins to prevent him from swerving, and Firebrace rose like a deer, grunting with the effort, and crossed over the jump. A wild, tattered figure arose from the ditch on the far side, a reckless hand clutched the racer's hind hoof, a man was hurled away on his face, and Bob and Firebrace crashed to the sward.

The lad rolled over and over; sparks flew before his eyes. He heard a distant, muffled shout; he saw the wide nostrils of Wild Cat on the far side of the jump. He lay against the grass tightly, stricken with a sudden terror, as the noble animal hurtled through the air; he felt a shock that shook the ground. For one instant he was covered by a pall. Then light came forth again, and he was unhurt still, and Wild Cat bounded in front.

He tried to rise; but time was not given him. A powerful arm gripped him in the middle, and he was lifted on high as if he was a child and landed on the back of Firebrace. Haines was there—yes, surely he was!—holding the racer by the bridle.

Bob, half stunned, instinctively clung to his saddle. He saw a strong face, a tall figure, a hand uplifted. A cane whistled through the air, and fell on the steeplechaser's quarters, and the vibrant voice of Hamshaw thundered in his ears:

"Ride like the dickens! Get home anyhow!"

Firebrace was off like a rocket, the reins hanging on his neck, Bob, sick and dazed, clinging like a monkey to the saddle. A hundred yards wild galloping, a tremendous jump, which the noble animal cleared without hint or touch, a heavy bump to his rider as he landed, and Bob was in the straight and on the heels of Wild Cat.

"A race! A race!"

The lad heard the yell, and once again consciousness came back clearly. He saw all, knew all, remembered all. Clutching the reins, straightening himself out, with the stirrups dangling on either side, raising the whip, which he had gripped even in his fall, he rode a finish like one demented.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, he drew up on Wild Cat. For five seconds they raced level, straining every muscle, then Firebrace shot forward. There was an unearthly yell that sent a shiver down Bob's spine; he saw the stands, saw a white box, saw redcoats gathered in a cluster, heard his name bawled out trumphantly, flashed past rows upon rows of wildly-gleaming faces, took the jump at the far end of the straight again, and passed once more from pandemonium into peace

That steadied him. He knew the race was over, and he could think. He turned Firebrace round, and rode back slowly to hear whether he had won or lost.

The course was black with an ever-increasing throng. Men surged from stands and enclosures and from the open plain, in one great fellowship of sport and comradeship, down towards the lad as he walked his panting horse back to the winning-post again. They crowded on, waving their hats, cheering deliriously, all carried away with enthusiasm for the jockey who, having lost the race through bad luck, won it again by sheer nerve and courage. They swept around Firebrace and yelled themselves hoarse with delight.

In triumph Bob guided his heaving mount into the paddock and up to the weighing-room. Haines had seized the horse's bridle, and now he held him whilst the lad loosened the girths.

"Then I won?" Bob asked.

"Rather!"

The lad grinned.

"I don't remember much about it. Who was it who flung me on to Firebrace again?"

"Captain Hamshaw."

"Lucky you were both there, sir. What's happened to the scoundrel who brought us down?"

"We lugged him along till I met Captain Lascelles. I wanted to go on and lead Firebrace in, so he said he'd take charge of the villain. The ruffian will get hard labour for his cowardly trick."

Bob looked curiously at Haines.

"What's up?" the latter demanded.

"Oh, nothing, sir; only——"

Lascelles pushed his way forward and gripped Haines by the arm.

"I'm awfully sorry, old chap, but that ruffian has bolted!" he began hurriedly. "I was looking round for a policeman, when suddenly he twisted himself out of my grasp, and disappeared in the mob—got swallowed up, in fact. But we know his appearance, and before long——"

"Thought so," Bob murmured, as he stepped into the weighing-room. "You're his accomplice, you cur, and you had precious good reason for helping him to escape!"

"All right!"

The clerk of the scales passed his verdict. Bob's weight was correct, and he stepped out into the paddock again the winner of the Irish Grand National.

Renewed cheering burst forth. The Viceroy stepped forward and congratulated him heartily, and for some seconds the lad's hand was grasped in turn as vigorously as if it was a pump-handle. But, whilst he nodded his thanks, he had no eyes for his admirers, for his gaze was concentrated on Lascelles, who had gone white to the lips when Firebrace had been officially adjudged the winner of the race, and the rascally captain realised that all was lost.

In Camp and on Manœuvres.

Bob returned to Dublin with his chums, resolved forthwith to track out and expose the foul conspiracy against his life, which some instinctive feeling warned him had been instigated by Lascelles. Had it not been for Dent and Hosty, as he had hinted to Haines, he would have been drowned for certain when the ruffians at Chapelizod had flung him into the Liffey. In the nick of time the two soldiers had perceived him, and, plunging after him, they had dragged him back to safety; but they had not succeeded in capturing his assailants. The scoundrels had fled on their approach, leaving Firebrace, whom they had been decoying away, behind them safe and sound.

But no sooner had the lad returned to barracks than he became aware that for some time, at least, his investigations would have to be postponed. The order for the yearly manœuvres had gone forth, and the Die Hards were to proceed the next day to the scene of the encampment.

All at once was bustle and excitement. When an infantry battalion goes under canvas there is much to be done, but the labour thus involved is as nothing compared to the work necessitated by the movement of a cavalry regiment. Forage for the horses, all the equipment, saddlery, and stable paraphernalia for six hundred troopers, provision for the proper care of the animals themselves, together with the food supplies for the men, the tents, the mess utensils, the officers' luggage, all combined to make up an herculean undertaking—usually, too, at short notice—which taxes to the full the resources and capabilities of the regiment.

But the life is a change from barrack routine, and as such is heartily welcomed. The journey to the camping-ground, through fresh scenery and country surroundings, the pleasant nights spent en route when billeted out at the various villages, the movement and stir, the relaxation from daily discipline, all go far to keep the troops in high fettle, provided the weather holds fine. And as the Die Hards rode out of Dublin and shaped their course for the plains of Kildare a bright sun, tempered by a refreshing breeze, seemed to promise a long spell of settled weather. All were in the best of spirits, and in the keenness of the new life Bob forgot for the time the grave thoughts which had been uppermost in his mind.

Two days they were on the road—days which brought to light the deficiencies of the regiment in the way that astonished all who so far had had no experience of service conditions.

To the amazement of the troopers, their horses in several cases began to suffer from sore backs, girthgals, and lameness. Those troopers who hitherto had been most highly commended for the care they gave their chargers now fell into disrepute, and wondered dismally what had befallen them. The farriers and saddlers had their hands full, and Hamshaw and a couple of other senior officers gave practical and surprising instruction at all odd moments when they got the chance.

Bob, with several others, learned for the first time that lolling in the saddle, resting the hand on the butt of the carbine, or using short stirrups, innocent as these practices seemed, were apt to lame a horse badly, and so destroy the soldier's efficiency. It was in a chastened spirit, and with the knowledge that they had yet much to learn, that the gallant Die Hards rode into camp and settled down to their training.

Two other cavalry regiments were on the ground, together with a couple of machine-guns, a company of the Ordnance Store Department, and a field hospital, making in all a cavalry brigade, the colonel of the Die Hards acting as brigadier-general and early on the morning after their arrival the whole camp began its course of drill. The work was fatiguing, the hours of duty long, the various manœuvres perplexing, and what with machine-gun and carbine practice, outpost duty, sentry-go, and stable sentry, Bob found that his time was fully occupied whilst daylight lasted, and that barrack life was child's play to the sterner lessons in the field.

But if the work was hard, the life had its corresponding recompenses. In that wide stretch of country health and hearty appetites came with each gust of the invigorating breeze. No day was too short, no duty too wearisome to prevent the troopers from enjoying some sport during the odd half-hours of relaxation. At night-time, when the camp-fires blazed brightly, impromptu concerts arose from every quarter; at fixed intervals there were races, competitions, and organised vocal and dramatic entertainments. The free life in the open air created merriment and good fellowship, and jokes and laughter rang throughout the camp from reveille to tattoo.

"Two Troops of D Squadron Die Hards have been detailed for practice in outpost duty. The force will parade at six o'clock to-morrow morning in full marching order, and a day's rations is to be served out. The destination will be made known at starting to the commander."

So ran the order, and, therefore, as the day broke the following morning, the trumpet rang forth the command to boot and saddle, and the troopers rode out to the parade-ground and formed up. Captain Dyball was in command, with Haines as his lieutenant, and, having made a careful inspection to see that horse-blanket, corn-sack, nosebag, ammunition and emergency ration, and all the other items in each of the troopers' heavy equipment were complete, Dyball formed his command and rode out of the camp.

When clear of the lines he broke the seal and opened the envelope containing his instructions. He and Haines had a hurried consultation, then an advanced guard and flankers were thrown out, and the half-squadron shaped its course for the Dublin mountains.

For several hours the troopers jogged steadily ahead, pausing for a few minutes after the first few miles to tighten girths and inspect the horseshoes, and it was drawing towards noon when at last they reached their destination, and halted at the foot of the mountains. The chargers were handed over to the reserve, and the guard and flankers were posted as temporary vedettes. Then a patrol was sent to move across the front.

Manœuvres are mimic warfare, and a half-squadron often represents a full brigade. Consequently Dyball had a long chain of ground to cover, as if in advance of a large army, and facing one equally formidable. It behoved him, therefore, to use single instead of double vedettes, and to post his men at wide intervals. He took up his position, therefore, in the centre, and whilst Haines marched his men to the right Sergeant Baxter took command of the picquets on the left. The sentries were posted about a hundred yards apart, and all the other available men were told off into three reliefs of dismounted sentry and patrols. Bob was told off under Baxter and marched off to his post. Baxter left his men, one at a time, stretching out in a circle at the foot of the mountains, until Bob was the last trooper remaining to go on duty. The sergeant walked with the lad to the farthest post, and on the way he gave him instructions.

"Some blokes think as this is all play-acting, Hall; but I've been on active service, an' I know the diff. If a chap doesn't train his hearing and eyesight at work like this he's not of much use when he's at the real thing," the soldierly sergeant began. "Now, see here! We've been sent to this spot to take part in a manœuvre of which we know nothing; that's always the way. It's not hard to plan out what the idea is, though. We're the advance guard of an army, you can take that from me. Another lot of chaps, unbeknownst to us, have left the camping-ground, and they're making a wide detour to come down facing us as the enemy; that's about the game. It's our business to stop 'em. If they slip through we're disgraced, and we'll get it hot when we get back to the lines. Do you follow?"

"Rather!"

"Well, I've brought you here as the last post on the chain, 'cos I feel I can trust you. Don't let 'em through, and, above all, don't let 'em get away round you on the far side where there's no other sentry. They'll try that, like as not. If you see 'em coming, fire off your carbine. Give us plenty of notice, so as the reliefs can get here in time to be of use. You've got to die at your post like a hero," Baxter added, with a grin; "so don't eat your rations too quick, and, for goodness' sake, keep your eyes skinned. Dyball is sure to remember the man as heads off the blessed enemy!"

Baxter tramped back the way he had come, and Bob was left standing at duty. It was pleasant to get away for a time from the noise and bustle of the camp, pleasant to be alone, gazing out on the beautiful scenery, inhaling the mountain air, a free man for the nonce—free to think, with nothing around him but the blue mountains and the heather, and the green fields rolling back to the sea, and the horses and cattle dotted over the plain. He looked around and drank in the strong, pure air; then he took his bearings, and accustomed his eyes to gazing at long distances.

He set himself certain landmarks in the distance, and made sure at the start that they were stationary. Boulders were strewn about in profusion, and there was plenty of cover for

intelligent troops coming stealthily along with the wish to rush him or slip past unseen.

Close at hand was a small ruin, a mud cabin probably, once the home of a cottager, but now deserted, with the small patch of ground around the dwelling covered with weeds and tangles. Bob wished that he had been posted there; it would be difficult to see anyone who dragged himself along the ground and concealed himself behind the crumbling walls.

He lay down, the better to hide himself, stretched out luxuriantly on the bracken, and gazing keenly ahead as he rested on one elbow. A seagull, crying eerily on its way back to the sea, soared over his head, flapping its wings feverishly. Else all was silence, and Bob, contented with himself and with appetite sharpened by his ride, drew forth his rations and began to munch them. They tasted a trifle bitter, at which he grumbled, but the pangs of hunger were on him, and, under the circumstances, he was not over-fastidious. He devoured his sandwiches ravenously, and wished he had more.

Somehow, after a while his hunger left him. He lay quietly gazing ahead, a delicious feeling of comfort stealing over him. The soft wind fanned his face, the shrubs around rustled melodiously, the insects droned, the birds twitted, and the purple heather nodded encouragingly. His thoughts wandered away; he forgot where he was, only realising that his surroundings were pleasant, and slowly and without knowledge of the cause he sank off into a peaceful sleep. His head slipped from his hand, and he lay motionless, drawing his breath evenly and quietly. He had committed an unpardonable military offence, for which he fully deserved punishment if there was not some exceptional explanation. In his case there was, though; the lad had been treacherously drugged!

Checkmated!

From out of the ruined cottage two sinister-looking ruffians crept cautiously and approached the sleeping lad.

For a full five minutes they lay behind him, then one lifted a large stone and hurled it against a rock close by where he slept.

Bob did not stir, so the scoundrel, with a quick gesture to his confederate, stepped boldly forward and lifted the lad by the shoulders. The other seized his legs, and between them they bore him swiftly away. Inside the ruined walls were a horse and cart, and, lifting Bob on to the board and covering him with sacking, they mounted the dray and drove swiftly away. They had kidnapped a soldier of the King!

An hour passed, and then down the face of the mountain came a dozen khaki forms, stealing silently along. They moved slowly, dodging behind boulders. At last they reached the ruin, and, chuckling heartily, they entered. One waved a flag towards the mountain's summit, and two score more soldiers answered the signal by moving forward rapidly. Two others lying in the ruin lit their pipes and began to laugh.

"We've fooled 'em! Won't Dyball be mad?" one trooper grinned. "And the joke is, too, that they're our own crowd."

"That's what I'm chuckling at, Dent," another soldier assented. "Dyball's command has been outmanœuvred by the other half of his own squadron. Did you mind how the Light Bobs wanted to be sent skirmishing? I'm glad they weren't allowed, for it would have gone bad with us all if they'd caught the Die Hards napping. We'd never have heard the end of it."

"True for you, Hosty, my son. That don't matter, when it's a sort of family business between men of the same regiment. Still—ha, ha, ha!—I wonder who's the bloke who's to blame? He'll catch it hot."

Other soldiers now came running at the double into the ruin. Lieutenant Groves, his face flushed with excitement, leading them by several yards.

"Get ready, you men!" he cried in a tense voice. "I'm going to round up the lot. Follow me. We'll work behind and cut 'em off from the main body, which they are supposed to be guarding."

Silently and eagerly the soldiers dashed after the subaltern, who made a wide detour so as to escape detection. Dent, however, paused for a moment, for something lying in the ruin had caught his eye. He stooped and picked up the object, uttering an exclamation of astonishment as he recognised a silver locket. Then he cast an anxious glance around. Cart-tracks were in the soft mud, and the blurred footprints of large boots. He noted this, and followed with his eye the fresh tracks the dray had made as it had been driven away. There was no time for further investigation, though; so, shoving the locket into his tunic pocket, he broke into a run after his comrades.

Captain Dyball—lying on the ground, smoking a cigarette, and wishing the hour had come when, according to his instructions, he was to take his command back to camp—was suddenly startled by the approach of quick footsteps. Before he could rise an athletic figure bounded though the bracken, panting and laughing, flung itself full on his chest, and yelled with delight.

"Dyball, you old ass, you're my prisoner!" the youngster shouted gleefully. "Give us a cigarette and look happy, if you can!"

For answer the gallant captain hurled his captor to one side, and jumped, flushed and startled, to his feet.

"That you, Groves? What monkey tricks are you up to now?" he cried. "Why ain't you with your men? Why——"

"My men are here. They're standing between you and your rearguard. We've outflanked you. No humbug!"

Groves flung himself on the heather, and Dyball, glaring around, saw the second half of D Squadron grinning at his discomfiture. Behind them two squadrons of the Light Bobs were forming up, and they had actually trained a machine-gun in his direction. He bit his lip till the blood came; but, like the good soldier he was, he managed before long to master his wrath and humiliation, and he grinned, but none too cheerfully.

"Checkmate!"

He nodded his head gloomily as he spoke, and then he turned to take a look at the mountains.

"Which way did you come? Yes, you'll find some grub in that haversack. You can have the lot, for I'm not hungry."

"We came down the mountain by the left there. Forgive a suggestion, old chap, but I think you ought to have thrown your picquets farther out." Groves's mouth was full, and his voice was muffled. "We'd a clear view before us, and we made for an old tumbledown shanty. If you'd had a man anywhere there we couldn't have got through, for farther on the road was impassable."

"But I had that very spot watched carefully!" Dyball growled in perplexity. "I purposely sent more'n half my men in that direction. Baxter! Where's that fool of a sergeant? Hi, there, Baxter, work's over for the day! We've been outwitted, so call the men in, and let 'em rest before we start on the march."

(A further instalment of this ripping serial next Wednesday. Order your copy of "THE GEM LIBRARY" to-day!)

THIS·WEEK'S·CHAT

Whom to Write to —

EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
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OUR ·· THREE ·· COMPANION ·· PAPERS!

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY — EVERY MONDAY
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For Next Wednesday—

"THE SECRET OF THE TOWER!"

By Martin Clifford.

An immensely exciting adventure, such as seldom falls to the lot of the juniors of St. Jim's, is described in next week's magnificent tale of Tom Merry & Co. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy suddenly finds himself in clover, for his cousin, Captain Cleveland, while recovering from a slight wound, rents an historic mansion known as the Towers, and invites a party of youthful guests to attend the ceremony of "housewarming." Then things begin to happen. The gallant young officer suddenly disappears, and the search that ensues is positively dramatic in its development; but the quick-witted juniors proceed to thrash the mysterious affair out to the bottom, and great indeed is the satisfaction and relief when

"THE SECRET OF THE TOWER"

is a secret no longer.

THE EARLY BIRD.

I feel pretty certain that "Gem" readers are not, as a whole, slackers. Nevertheless, there may yet be a few who are not accustomed to tumbling out of bed until the day is well advanced; and it is to these few that I would chat for a while on the subject of early rising.

Of course, if one gets up early in the morning one must go to bed correspondingly early at night, and miss a good deal of fun. Then, again, it is possible to get up too early. An old writer says, "Sleep until you are done." It is not a very nice expression, being somewhat suggestive of cooking; but you can see what the dear old fellow means. A great many of us are too prone to turn night into day, and day into night.

Boys on the short side who write to me and ask how to grow taller should get up as early as possible in the morning—with the milk, in fact. One never enjoys the feeling of one's existence so completely as on a fine morning. At least, this has been my experience, although my early morning peregrinations are confined to a somewhat bleak garden in the suburbs.

He who neglects the early hours wastes the youth of life. If you want to get fit, if you want to make body and brain hard and strong and keen, you must thrive on the strong, fresh air of the early morning.

I suggest to those of my readers who feel that they are not getting the best out of themselves, that they are not so high in class as they ought to be, that they are not earning the salary that they might earn, that they are doing none too well at footer—to all of these I say: "Rise early!"

A NORWOOD CHUM'S ENTERPRISE.

A well-conducted "Gem and Magnet" League is something which even a harassed and hard-worked Editor may enthuse over; and I know my reader-chums will excuse me for devoting the space set apart for my Weekly Chat to a brief account of one of these organisations with whom "Loyalty" is a watchword.

Some time ago a keen Gemite, hailing from West Norwood—Mr. William Pike—took upon himself the task of forming a League; and his efforts in this direction have already been crowned with success, for he set to work at the outset with an enthusiasm which does him great credit, and which I love to see.

It has been my pleasure to have a personal insight into the workings of my chum's League, and it is a very fine concern indeed, holding high promise for the future. There are ten members at present, and Mr. Pike assures me that he has room for ten more; so I have no doubt that twenty loyal Gemites will soon be banded together for the good of the cause.

My suburban chum seems undismayed by the strenuous programme which lies before him; for he has not only established his League, but an official organ thereof in the form of a monthly magazine. It would be better from all points of view, therefore, for the ten Gemites required to complete the League to be possessed of literary ability, in order that Mr. Pike may be well supported in his duties as an amateur Editor.

It need not be necessary for these ten members to live in Norwood. Applications may be sent in from any part of the British Isles, and Irish readers should make a special note of this fact.

All applications relating to the League or the magazine should be addressed to:

THE PRESIDENT,
GEM AND MAGNET CLUB,
127, Knights Hill,
West Norwood, S.E.

and in each case a stamped addressed envelope should be enclosed for reply.

The youthful president and his co-members have my sincerest wishes for success in their undertaking. I am very proud to include Mr. Pike's name in the roll of loyal Gemites; for it is to the generous help and good influence of fellows such as he that this popular little journal owes a large share of its great and unparalleled success.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

Gertie and Rennie (Portsmouth).—You may have noticed that the juniors of the Second and Third Forms were excluded from the St. Jim's Jingles; but your request may be granted at a later date. Very best wishes.

Jack Lockitt (Crewe).—A story of Tom Merry & Co. has already appeared in threepenny-book form. Talbot, as you have doubtless seen, returned to St. Jim's a short time ago. "Tom Merry's Weekly" is the official organ of the Shell. With regard to the books you require, I regret that our "Back Numbers" Column has long since been closed, and I am therefore unable to help you.

W. Wall (St. Helens).—You are certainly correct. Fatty Wynn, although a terrific gormandiser, is behind Bunter in this respect. Wynn's weight is 12st.

Miss Calgary (Calgary).—Your excellent suggestion is already under consideration. Send your amateur artistic efforts along for criticism. Many thanks for your welcome letter.

"Smile" (Swindon).—There is no scholar named Harris at St. Jim's. The Christian name of both Redfern and Manners is Harry. Glad to hear the "Gem" continues to flourish in your popular Wiltshire town. Best wishes.

"Two-Yearer" (Hounslow).—Many thanks for your letter. Buck Finn has not left St. Jim's. Lowther's Christian name is Montague. I am sorry I cannot supply you with No. 241, as it is out of print, and therefore unobtainable.

J. W. H. (Blyth).—Kildare's Christian name is Eric, and his age is seventeen.

"Old Reader" (Cambuslang).—The best way to learn book-keeping other than by attending classes is by studying from a good book on the subject. You should write to Messrs. Glaisher & Co., of 32, Charing Cross Road, W.C., who can supply you with one.

THE EDITOR.

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A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.

Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

A GOOD BITE.

"The worst winter I remember was when we were besieged," said the battle-scarred veteran. "We only had one bite a day for two weeks, and that was horseflesh."

"I remember," returned his tramp companion, "living for a month on one bite, and that was out of my own leg."

"You old cannibal! Do you expect me to believe that?" roared the old soldier.

"It's quite true, believe me or not," remarked the tramp. "A dog took a bite out of my leg, and the compensation kept me like a lord for a month."—Sent in by Harry Watson, St. Mary Cray.

TIT FOR TAT.

Jones was a very enthusiastic golfer, and one day he was complaining bitterly to his friend Smith about the bad manners of some of the club members.

"Look at Brown, for instance!" he said. "The ass actually crossed my tee just as I was going to drive. What would you have done if you had been in my place?"

"Well," said Smith, "seeing that he crossed your tee, I should have dotted his eye."—Sent in by T. Witter, Liverpool.

WHAT HE WANTED.

The young fellow approached the bookstall, and asked:

"Can you let me have a copy of the GEM for a week back?"

"Certainly!" said the bookstall clerk. "But don't you think it would be better to try a porous plaster?"

And that is how he lost a customer.—Sent in by Miss P. Ballyn, Newport Pagnell, Bucks.

ANY END.

Archibald: "Father, which end of a dog is the West End?"

Pa: "Don't be silly, my lad! A dog has no West End."

Archibald: "Yes, it has. It says in the paper that a man shot a dog in the West End."—Sent in by Geo. Kendall, Morley, near Leeds.

SIMPLE ARITHMETIC.

Mrs. Gallagher wished to be weighed, but had grave doubts as to the capability of the machine.

"Phwat'll I do, Mike?" she asked her husband. "The machine only goes up to one hundred and fifty pounds, "and Oi'm two hundred if Oi'm an ounce!"

Mr. Gallagher replied:

"Get on twice, Bridget, and add up the totals."—Sent in by M. Routledge, Coxhoe, S.O.

BEFORE MEAT.

The teacher was instructing the class on the subject of "grace."

"Now, Tom," she said, "tell me what your father says every morning before breakfast."

Tom stood up and said:

"My father says, 'Go steady on the bacon, kids! It's one-and-twopence a pound!'"—Sent in by H. Francis, Newport, Mon.

NOT AVAILABLE.

Two ladies were returning home from the opera "Carmen" in a tramcar. Whilst the conductor was collecting their fares, one lady remarked to her companion:

"Oh, I do love 'Carmen'!"

The conductor, overhearing the remark, said to the lady:

"I'm very sorry to disappoint you, miss, but I'm married already."—Sent in by H. A. Ferguson, Egremont.

HOT STUFF!

A West Indian negro explained to his overseer what happened before the war in the following words:

"Jess befo' de war, sah, de Kaisah he sent a bag ob rice to King George, and he tell him: 'King George, I'se got as many soldiers as dere is rice in dis bag.' And King George he sent de Kaisah a bottle ob peppercorns, an' 'e tell him: 'I'se got as many soldiers as dere is peppers in dis bottle, but jess yo' bite one and see how yo' like him!'"—Sent in by George Read, Saltaire, Bradford.

A WEIGHTY MATTER.

Two anglers were drawing the long bow longer and longer. Said one:

"I caught a large trout once. It weighed nearly nine pounds. I had a very stiff struggle with it, and had almost got it to the bank, when it broke my line, and got clean away."

"How did you know how much it weighed if it got away?" asked the other.

"Why—er—I saw the scales on its back, you know."—Sent in by W. H. Bowers, Leicester.

NOT HIS AFFAIR.

Mrs. Smith was repeatedly reminding her meek and mild husband that she owned the furniture, that the house was her property, and so on, and so on, until the unfortunate Mr. Smith thought it was time he did something desperate.

One night Mrs. Smith woke, to hear strange noises downstairs. Digging her husband in the ribs, she said:

"John, get up! There are burglars in the house!"

"Eh?" inquired Mr. S. dreamily.

"Burglars! Downstairs!" whispered Mrs. Smith excitedly.

"Burglars?" murmured the oppressed one, as he turned over. "Well, I don't mind. I don't own anything."—Sent in by W. Blackwell, Grantham, Lincs.

DISTINGUISHED.

Billy Broughton once stopped at a swell hotel in Scotland, and on looking through the visitors' book, he saw that nearly all the names had some letters written after them, such as M.D., J.P., R.A.

Not wishing to be left in the shade, he wrote his own name as follows: "Billy Broughton, B.B.B.B.B.B.B.B."

"What ever does this mean?" roared the hotel proprietor, when he saw it. "Is it a joke?"

"Oh, no!" replied Billy proudly. "It means 'Best Blooming Bugle Blower Belonging to Burnley Brass Band.'"—Sent in by F. Jones, Pontardulais, S. Wales.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the sender will receive a Money Prize.

ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED—The Editor, "The Gem" Library, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

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.