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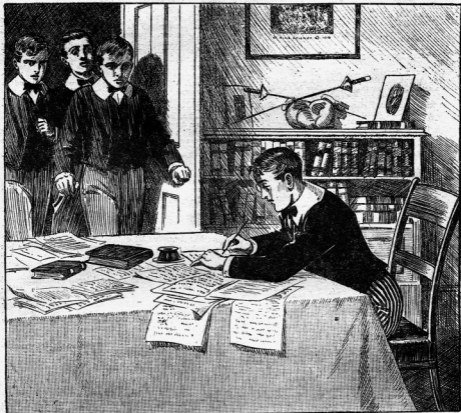
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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



"What on earth are you up to, Gussy?" demanded Blake, surveying the growing pile of written sheets of paper. "Has the House-master given you ten thousand lines by any chance?" "Wats! This is my lecture," exclaimed D'Arcy. (See Chapter 2.)

CHAPTER 1.

Very Important Indeed!

SCRATCH! Scratch! Scratch!

In Study No. 6, in the Fourth-Form passage, a pen was working away at express speed.

Somebody was hard at work.

Tom Merry of the Shell, passing the study with his bat under his arm, paused to look in with a sympathetic glance.

It was a glorious summer afternoon, and lessons were over, and nearly everybody was on the playing-fields of the river.

So Tom Merry naturally felt sympathetic when he heard that busy pen driving away in Study No. 6. He could only conclude that Blake or Herries or Digby or D'Arcy had "lines." No other reason was likely to keep a junior grinding away in his study when the sun and the breeze were calling him out of doors.

Next Wednesday:
"THE RIVAL WEEKLY!" AND "THE CITY OF FLAME!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who was working at the table. He was alone in the study; Blake and Herries and Dig were out.

Arthur Augustus was very busy.

Three or four sheets of impot paper were already covered with his elegant handwriting and lay about the table, and his pen was going fast. With his eyeglass jammed in his eye and a wrinkle in his brow D'Arcy was working away as if his life depended upon it.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry.

"Hallo, deah boy!" responded Arthur Augustus, without looking up.

"Busy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hard lines!"

"Oh, it's all wright!"

"Not coming down to the cricket?"

"No."

"Can I help you?"

"No, thanks!"

"How many have you got to do?"

"Eh?"

"How many lines?" asked Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy paused for a moment in his labours and glanced at the Shell fellow in the doorway.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, how should I know?"

Tom Merry regarded him in astonishment. A fellow generally knew how many lines he had to do.

"Don't you know how many lines you're doing?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Not till I've finished, deah boy. It is a mattah of no consequence."

"Oh," said Tom. "Then it isn't an impot?"

"Wats! No."

"What the deuce is it, then? If it's an article for the 'Weekly' I warn you on the spot, as chief editor, that it won't go in unless you cut it down to about a tenth. We can't publish a special D'Arcy number, you know."

"It isn't for the 'Weekly,' Tom Mewwy."

"Not writing to the 'Times'?" asked Tom humorously.

Arthur Augustus, when dissatisfied with the progress of the war, had sometimes hinted that he would have to write to the "Times" about it.

"Wubbish! No."

Arthur Augustus bent over his work again, without explaining what it was. He rubbed his aristocratic nose, apparently as an aid to thought, and inadvertently left a smudge of ink upon it. Then his pen drove away again. Scratch! Scratch! Scratch!

"Better chuck it and come down to cricket," advised Tom Merry.

"Wats!"

"Jolly important—what?"

"Awf'ly!"

Tom Merry grinned and stepped into the study. He was curious to know what was the literary work of such awful importance that it kept the swell of St. Jim's indoors when everybody else was enjoying the open air.

D'Arcy did not cease to write. Tom picked up one of the sheets from the table and ran his eye over it. Then he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"My only hat! Heligoland—Germans—disgusting Huns! What the thunder—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dropped his pen and jerked the sheet away from the captain of the Shell.

"Pway run away, Tom Mewwy. You are intewwuptin' me! You intewwupt the thread of my reflections. I shall nevah get my spech done at this wate."

"Speech?" yelled Tom Merry.

"Yaas!"

"Speech! You are writing a speech?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And do you think anybody's going to listen to all that?" shrieked Tom Merry. "Why, it's yards long already!"

"It's a vewy important subject, deah boy. I'm goin' to address the fellahs in the common-room atah tea. It isn't exactly a speech, it's a lecture."

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A—a—lecture?" said Tom Merry faintly. "You're giving a lecture?"

"Yaas."

"I see nothin' whatevah to cackle at, Tom Mewwy. I am goin' to deal with a vewy important subject, which has appawntly been ovahlooked by the Government—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway wetire fwoom my studay, Tom Mewwy. I cannot be intewwupted in my labahs by iwwelevant cacklin'."

Tom Merry yelled. He could not help it. Arthur Augustus, in his great wisdom, had several times expressed dissatisfaction with the way things were done in Government circles. He was good enough to approve whole-heartedly of Lord Fisher, and he declared that General French was IT. But there were various shortcomings upon which Arthur Augustus looked with a disapproving eye. Apparently the spirit was now moving him to deliver a lecture to St. Jim's on the subject. Ergo, he was writing out the speech—though whether anybody would listen to it was another matter.

Arthur Augustus rose wrathfully to his feet.

"I weward you as an uttah ass, Tom Mewwy!" he exclaimed. "Go and play cwicket, while I attend to more important mattahs. I have no time at present to be a flannelled fool at the wicket or a muddled old at the goal. I wefuse to listen to your diswepctful cacklin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus reached for a cricket stamp.

"Yow!" roared Tom Merry, as the business end of the stump collided with his ribs, and he dropped the bat from under his arm.

"Yawwooh!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, as the heavy end of the bat clumped upon his elegant boot.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwoogh—wooh—wooh!"

Arthur Augustus clasped his injured foot, dancing on one leg in anguish. His eyeglass fell from his eye, and floated at the end of its cord.

"Ow! You uttah ass! You howmid wuffian! Bai Jove, I will give you a feafsh thwashin'! Gwooch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus let go his damaged foot and seized the stump again, and Tom Merry snatched up his bat and fled. He sprinted down the passage with the wrathful swell of St. Jim's sprinting after him, brandishing the stump.

Tom Merry slid down the banisters in hot haste, and D'Arcy halted at the head of the stairs, still brandishing the stump.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" called out Tom Merry cheerily as he landed in the hall, and he sauntered out of the School House. Arthur Augustus limped back to Study No. 6, where he forgot the pain in his toe as his pen started again at top speed, filling up sheet after sheet of paper with the lecture that was to be delivered to an admiring and spell-bound audience—perhaps!

CHAPTER 2.

Loyal Chums.

BLAKE and Herries and Digby of the Fourth Form came off the cricket-field with ruddy faces, and strolled away to the School House. It was past tea-time, and the chums of Study No. 6 were hungry.

"Gussy hasn't been down to the cricket," Blake remarked. "Let's hope he's got tea ready in the study."

"Hear, hear!" said Herries and Digby feelingly. The three juniors entered the School House and paused as they observed a number of fellows gathered round the school notice-board.

"Something up?" asked Blake, addressing nobody in particular.

Reilly of the Fourth looked round, with a grin. "Sure, it's Gussy again!" he said.

"Good old Gussy!" chuckled Kangaroo of the Shell. "He's going it again. It's a lecture this time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy—a lecture!" said Blake, puzzled. The three juniors elbowed their way cheerfully through the

crowd, and read the notice in the elegant calligraphy of their noble chum. They whistled as they read it. They were always prepared for almost anything from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; but this surprised them:

"WAR NOTICE!

"St. Jim's fellows, both seniors and juniors, are requested to attend in the common-room after tea, when A. A. D'ARCY will deliver a Lecture on the subject of HELIGOLAND and the DUTY of the Government. A very important resolution will be put to the meeting. All Patriotic Fellows are expected to come."

"Well, my hat!" said Jack Blake. "If listening to Gussy's lecture is a test of patriotism, you can put me down as unpatriotic."

"Same here," said Herries.

"What-ho!" said Digby. "Let's go and have tea."

Blake & Co. proceeded to Study No. 6, leaving the juniors chucking over the important announcement of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Some of the seniors had paused to look at it, and they smiled broadly. Kildare of the Sixth was heard to chuckle. D'Arcy had generously invited seniors as well as juniors to the lecture. Possibly he imagined that the great men of the Sixth and Fifth might come to a lecture delivered by a Fourth Form junior. If so, it was pretty certain that he imagined a vain thing.

Scratch! Scratch! Scratch!

Arthur Augustus did not look up as his chums came in. He was too busy. Since Tom Merry's visit to his study the pile of written sheets had grown. The table was swarming with them now, and several had fluttered upon the carpet. Arthur Augustus's pen was driving on without cessation. Evidently his thoughts were flowing freely, and he was in the vein of composition. Equally evident he found plenty to say about Heligoland and the duty of the Government.

"What on earth are you up to, Gussy?" demanded Blake, surveying the growing pile of written sheets of paper.

"Pway don't intewwupt!"

"Has the Housemaster given you ten thousand lines by any chance?"

"Wats! This is my lecture."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway dwy up."

"It's tea-time," said Herries.

"Wubbish!"

"We're hungry," remarked Digby.

"Pway shut up a few minutes, deah boys. I am vevy neahly finished."

"I'll give you till I've lighted the fire," said Blake.

Scratch! Scratch! Scratch! Arthur Augustus was apparently getting to the end of his composition. It was about time, if there was not to be a famine in ink and foolscap in Study No. 6.

Blake knelt down before the grate and lighted the fire, gathering up some of the sheets of written paper that had fallen to the floor, for that purpose. They came in handy to light the fire, and so far as Blake could see they weren't of use for any other purpose. Half a dozen sheets were crumpled up in the grate and lighted, and then the wood crackled away merrily. This meant a serious gap in D'Arcy's lecture, but it could not be helped. The fire had to be lighted.

Blake jammed on the kettle and rose to his feet. Arthur Augustus rose at the same moment. Fortunately, he was finished.

He drew a long, deep breath. He was feeling tired.

"Bai Jove! I'm quite fagged," he remarked. "However, it is a wippin' lecture. I was wight in the vein, you know, and it flowed as freely as anythin'. Pway don't touch my papahs, Dig."

"We want the table, fathead."

"I will gathah them up. Pway don't touch them. Have you seen the notice on the board, deah boys?"

"Yes, ass."

"I twust you are comin' to the lecture."

"Catch us!"

"Weally, Hewwies, it's up to you to back up your own studdy. Besides, this is a vevy important mattah."

"Bow-wow! Clear the table."

Arthur Augustus gathered up his valuable manuscripts very carefully and began to put them together.

"Bai Jove! I ought to have numbared the pages," he exclaimed. "It will be wathah difficult to get these pages in ordah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"However, I can sort them out ovah tea. Bai Jove, you know, I am quite hungwy."

"Have you got the things in?" demanded Blake.

"I have had no time to attend to such a twiffin' mattah, Blake."

"Fathead! We're famishing."

"Wats! However, I will wun down to the shop and get the eggs."

"Back up, and I'll get the fryin'-pan ready."

"Wight-ho!"

Arthur Augustus was glad of a little run in the open air after his long confinement in the study. He departed, and Dig laid the cloth, and Herries got out the crockery, and Blake extracted the fryin'-pan from the coal-locker. The fryin'-pan was in a decidedly greasy state, having lately been used for fryin' rashers of bacon, and it required cleanin', especially as a certain amount of coal-dust was adhering to it.

"Give us something to rub this blessed pan out with," said Blake.

"Here you are!"

Herries obligingly passed him a fistful of D'Arcy's manuscripts. Blake crumpled them in his hand and proceeded to rub out the fryin'-pan. Then he helped himself to some more.

By the time the fryin'-pan was quite clean the length of D'Arcy's lecture had been considerably cut down.

Arthur Augustus came back with a bundle in his hand. Jack Blake broke the eggs into the fryin'-pan and proceeded to cook.

"Pway back up with tea, you chaps," said Arthur Augustus. "I want you to be earlay, you know. In fact, I shall wequah you on the platform to back me up."

"Pass the butter here," said Blake.

"It keeps light jolly late now," Herries remarked. "We shall be able to get some more cricket after tea."

"My lecture is takin' place aftah tea, Hewwies."

"Oh, blow your lecture!"

"Weally, you ass—"

"You can tell us over tea, if you like," said Blake. "Then it won't be necessary for us to come. You see, if we come, we shall be all the audience you'll get, so you might as well pile in now."

"Yes, we'll stand it over tea," assented Digby.

"Pway don't wot, deah boys. Unless you back me up in givin' my lecture I shall wegard you as unpatriotic."

"Horrid!"

"And I shall wefuse to wegard you as fwends."

"Hear hear!"

"I put it to you, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, with great self-restraint. "I particularly wequest your presence at the lecture. I am suah you will not wefuse to come."

Blake groaned.

"After all, it won't be so jolly long," remarked Digby, with a glance at the considerably diminished pile of manuscript. "We might stand it for a quarter of an hour, as Gussy makes a point of it."

"I am goin' to delivah all I have witten there, Dig, and it will take two hours at least."

"Have you ordered an ambulance to be in attendance?" asked Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"If you haven't you'd better telephons for one," said Blake seriously. "There are bound to be casualties."

"Pway don't be funny, Blake. I wequire you to come and back me up, and I wely on you as my pals."

Blake and Herries and Dig groaned dismally; but there was no resisting that appeal, and they manfully consented to come. Arthur Augustus rose from the table with his tea barely finished.

"I am goin' ovah to the New House now," he remarked. "You fellahs get to the common-woom and wevice the audience."

Blake and Herries and Digby looked at one another when the swell of St. Jim's had quitted the study.

"We're in for it," yawned Blake. "But if we're going to listen to that giddy lecture, that giddy lecture is going to be a short one. Gimme that manuscript."

There was quite a cheerful blaze in the grate as Blake fed the fire with D'Arcy's lecture.

CHAPTER 3.

Getting an Audience.

FIGGINS & Co. of the New House were just finishing tea in their study when an eyeglass gleamed in at the doorway.

"Comin', deah boys?"

Figgins and Kerr did not reply; but Fatty Wynn rose to his feet at once. Fatty Wynn had just finished tea, but he was quite ready for another.

"Feed?" he asked.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"No, deah boy, a lecture."

"WHAT?"

"A lecture in the School House."

Fatty Wynn sat down again. He was ready for a feed, or any number of feeds, but a lecture was quite a different matter.

"Catch us coming over to old Lathom's geological lectures!" said Figgins. "We don't have to."

"I am not wefferin' to Mr. Lathom's geological lecture, deah boy. A wah lecture."

"Oh," said Kerr, looking interested. "Who's giving it?"

"I am."

"You?" ejaculated Figgins.

"Yans, wahhah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! It is a vevy curious thing that crew silly ass bursts out eacklin' the moment I mention my lecture," said Arthur Augustus. "I trust you will come, deah boys. It is a mattah that concerns the whole school, and I requial the support of the New House."

"Sorry," said Figgins solemnly. "we're got another engagement."

"I wequest you to put it off."

"Can't be did!" said Kerr. "We're going to do some practice for our amateur theatricals, you know. I am going to make up, and Figg and Fatty are going to help me."

"We are!" said Fatty Wynn.

"We is!" assented Figgins.

"I put it to you as patriotic chaps," said Arthur Augustus. "There is going to be a vevy important resolution put to the meetin', and I want the New House to ofiah its support."

Arthur Augustus was very earnest. Figgins & Co. grinned at one another. They did not take the important matter at all seriously. But Figgins was always good-natured.

"Oh, we'll come!" he said. "I suppose laughter in court is allowed. We'll give you a look in, Gussy."

"Thank you vevy much, deah boy. You see, the resolution passed at the meetin' is goin' to be forwarded to the Government."

"Wha-a-nt?"

"Howevah, I am goin' to undahtake that. All you are wequiald to do is to support it. Pway bwing all the fellahs you can with you. The more the mewwier, you know!"

Arthur Augustus quitted the study, leaving the chums of the New House gasping.

"Good old Gussy! We'll go."

"Ha, ha! Yes, we'll go!"

"We'll take a crowd," said Figgins generously. "We'll give Gussy a chance. Go round and tell the fellows to come, and tell 'em not to forget their peashooters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A little later quite an army of New House juniors marched over to the School House. Figgins & Co. were followed by Redfern and Owen and Lawrence and Pratt

and Thompson and Clampe, and a dozen others, at least. So far as the New House was concerned, the lecture was to be backed up.

The New House party found Blake and Herries and Digby in the common-room. They were all the audience, so far.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "What do you New House boudners want?"

"Please, we're come to the lecture," said Figgins.

"Great Scott!"

Hampson of the Fourth came in about the same time. He was a devoted follower of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and was willing, even, to hear him lecture. The rest of the School House fellows seemed a little shy.

Arthur Augustus looked in. He had a wad of foolscap in his hand. It was much smaller than when he had left it in Study No. 6, but he had not yet noticed the difference. His powerful mind was fully occupied.

"Bai Jove! Where are the fellahs?" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're giving the lecture a wide berth, I expect," said Blake. "You'll have to be satisfied with us, Gussy. Wire in and get it over!"

"Wubbish! I have to numbah these pages, Blake. Pway, wun wound and gathah in the fellahs while I am doin' it. Pewwaps they have not seen the notice."

"Bet you they have!" said Digby. "That's why they're keeping away from the common-room."

"Pway, don't be an ass, Dig. I shall not begin till all the fellahs are heeh. Pway, wun and fetch them while I am numbahin' my pages."

"Anything for a quiet life!" groaned Blake.

The three juniors walked out in search of an audience. Arthur Augustus sat down to number his pages. He found it an extremely difficult task. Somehow or other, the pages did not seem to dovetail, as it were. He could not get them into order. That was accounted for by the fact that two-thirds of the pages were missing, and what remained, naturally, could not be expected to run consecutively. But this fact had not yet dawned upon the compiler of the great lecture.

Blake and Herries and Digby manfully set about the task of shepherding an audience into the common-rooms. They hadn't the heart to fail their chum in a matter which was evidently of great importance—from Arthur Augustus's point of view. They found the Terrible Three in their study.

"You're wanted," said Blake.

"Not the lecture?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"Sorry—another engagement."

"Awfully sorry," said Monty Lowther. "Tell Gussy we're seriously ill, and not expected to recover."

"Tell him to go and eat coke!" remarked Manners.

"Better come," said Blake persuasively. "We're agreed to get in an audience. The lecture won't be so jolly long—I've burnt more than half of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come and help us recruit," urged Digby. "Gussy wants an audience, and he won't be happy till he gets it. Besides, his face will be worth watching when he finds the pages missing!"

That appeal was irresistible. The Terrible Three rose to the occasion and came. They kindly helped in the recruiting, and Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn were "roped in," so to speak; and Talbot and Skimpole and Gore, and quite a crowd of other fellows. Some came from good-nature, and some to watch Gussy's face when he tried to piece his lecture together. The lecture itself probably attracted few.

But two dozen fellows, at least, followed the chums of No. 6 back to the common-room, and the New House crowd there greeted them with a cheer.

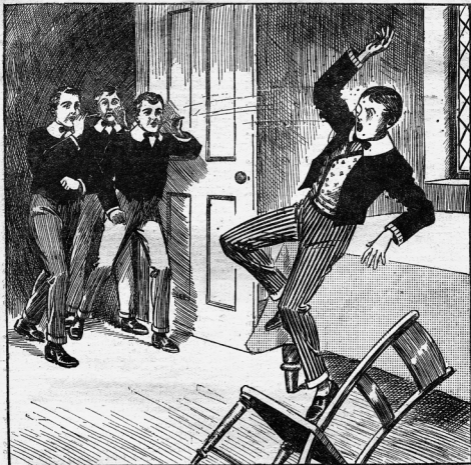
"Bravo!" said Figgins. "More lambs coming to the slaughter, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! This is vevy puzzlin'!"

"Well, your lecture would naturally be a bit puzzling," said Monty Lowther. "It's rather a puzzle what you're doing it for. Go ahead with it!"

"The pages do not seem to wun together, somehow."

"Now, what can be the reason of that?" exclaimed Blake, in wonder.



Arthur Augustus fairly danced as the shower of peas volleyed upon him, and he missed his footing and slipped off the chair. "Oh, owumps!" he gasped. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins & Co. (See Chapter 4.)

"Some of them seem to be missin'!"

"Missin'? How?"

"I weally do not know. Now I come to think of it, there do not seem to be so many pages heah as when I left them in the studay."

"Some literary rival has boned them!" said Lowther.

"It's vewwy odd. Pewwraps I had bettah go and look in the studay—"

"There won't be any audience left when you come back," said Herries.

"We're getting fed up already," remarked Gore.

"Weally, Goah—"

"Pile in!" said Talbot encouragingly.

"Yaas; but some of it is missin', and that makes the lecture wathah disconnected, you know."

"Go it like that old Johnny, the Last Minstrel," said Lowther. "You remember how Scott puts it:

"Each blank, in faithless memory void,

The poet's glowing thought supplied?"

"Yaas; but I'm not suah I can wemember it all."

"Well, the less you remember the better, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Pile in!" said Figgins. "Get it moving! Cut the cackle and come to the hosses." Stamp! Stamp! Stamp!

There was a tramp of feet on the floor. The audience were making known their impatience in the time-honoured way.

Arthur Augustus rose, still looking very perplexed.

"It's all right Gussy!" said Blake. "You meant that lecture to be useful, didn't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, it was useful. I had nothing else to light the fire with—"

"What?"

"And it came in handy for cleaning the frying-pan!"

"Why, you—you—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wotah!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, in great wrath. "Blake, I wegard you as a disgustin' Hun, and worse than a Pwussian!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!" shouted Tom Merry, as the exasperated

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE RIVAL WEEKLY!"

Gussy made a rush at Blake, who dodged promptly behind Kangaroo of the Shell.

Three or four juniors grasped Arthur Augustus.

"Weelace me!"

"Order!"

"This ain't a dog-fight, Gussy; this is a lecture," said Tom Merry severely. "I'm surprised at you!"

"Hold him off!" said Blake. "Keep him off! Gussy, how can you terrify an old pal in this way? See how I'm trembling!"

"You uttah wottah?"

"Is that lecture coming off?" asked Figgins politely. "We've come over from the New House to jeer the lecture—I mean to hear the lecture."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you let me get at that wottah?" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Here, I'm off," said Reilly.

"Fway—don't wan away, Weilly; I am just goin' to begin—"

"On the bawl, Gussy."

"Blake, I will thrash you later. Gentlemen, I trust you will excuse any little drawbacks in my lecture, as that uttah wottah has barned some of the pages, and the west is consequently a little disconnected."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll prompt you, Gussy," said Monty Lowther. "Whenever you come to a blank, I'll whisper a good gag to fill up."

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus shook his fist at Jack Blake, and vengeance was postponed. The swell of St. Jim's mounted upon a chair.

"Gentlemen, pway give me your attention! Wynn, I trust you have no intension of usin' that pea-shootah heah. I should wegard such a pwoceedin' as vevy bad ferm!"

Fatty Wynn generously put back his pea-shooter into his pocket. Arthur Augustus cleared his throat with a little preliminary cough and began. The audience all had their eyes fixed on the lecturer. There was plenty of audience, and plenty of attention; the only drawback being that all the audience were grinning instead of displaying the gravity due to the occasion. But that could not be helped. Arthur Augustus flattered himself that his oratory would soon reduce them to a proper state of seriousness.

CHAPTER 4.

The Lecture.

"GENTLEMEN, you are aware that we are at wah with Germany."

"Not really!" ejaculated Kerr. "Is that official?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Kerr—"

"We haven't come here to listen to any wild rumours," said Kerr. "I want to know whether that is official and passed by the Censor. I admit I've heard something of the kind already."

"I regard you as an ass, Kerr! Gentlemen, you are aware that we are at wah with Germany. The state of things is vevy sewious! Befoah the wah we were undah the impression that Germany was a civilised country. We have found out our mistake. The sinkin' of the Lusitania and the use of poison gas, and othah dirty twicks, pwove conclusively that the Germans are weally disgustin' savages, only pwetendin' to be civilised."

"Hear, hear!"

"At the beginnin' of the war," resumed the lecturer, "I should have been willin' to gwant the beastly Huns honourable terms of peace. Aftah lickin' them, and givin' them a lesson, I should have been willin' to let them off lightly. The revelation of their disgustin' chawactah, howevah, wendahs this impos."

"You won't do it now?" asked Kerr.

"The Kaiser's done it now," remarked Monty Lowther. "Gussy means him to get it in the neck."

"Gentlemen, I am speakin' for a large and influential body of public opinion," said Arthur Augustus, referring to his notes. "The howwible outwages committed by THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 388.

the filthy Huns has convinced all men capable of clesh thinkin' of the stern necessity of wipin' out the Pwussians."

"Hear, hear!"

"You are aware that these wetches have poisoned our gallant twoops with their howwid gas. You are aware that they have drowned women and children by the hundwed. Gentlemen, I put it to you that these sewoundels, from the Kaisah downwards, must be pwvented from evah goin' to wah again and bethevin' the whole world in this way."

"Off with his head!" said Lowther.

"Undah the cires, gentlemen, a great dangah awises on the howizon. It is a well-known attribute of the Bwittish people to go easy with a beaten enemy. You will wemembeh that aftah the South Afrikan wah we gave the Boers pwactically all they had been fightin' for, and some more ovah. That was quite wight, because the Boers were a brave and honourable foe, quite worthy of meetin' our twoops on the field of battle. Bwawe enemies can respect one anothah and become good fwends."

"Hear, hear!"

"Blessed if Gussy isn't getting quite eloquent!" said Blake admiringly. "I'm willing to give him another ten minutes."

"But the Germans are not an honourable foe. They are disgustin' twicksters. They poison men they cannot meet in battle; they drown women and children; they bwack twenties; they bombard seaside weorts; in fact, they play every dirty twick they can think of. When we have licked them, they will begin plannin' anothah wah at once and take us by surprize again. Next time they attack us we may not have a Fishah and a Fwench to see us thwough, and we may be in a bad box. I submit that it should be placed out of the powah of the wottahs to attack us any more!"

"Hear, hear!"

Monty Lowther jumped up.

"Gentlemen, one word. I cannot refrain from expressing my hearty agreement with the honourable speaker. I put it to the meeting, therefore, that after the war the whole of Germany shall be annexed to the cricket-ground of St. Jim's, and governed by a mixed committee appointed from the Shell and the Fourth Form."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lowthah, you uttah ass, I wequest you not to intewrupt my lecture with your wotten jokes. Gentlemen, I am now comin' to the point. Aftah the wah it will be necessary to—to take a survey of the events leadin' up to the present state of affahs—bai Jove, that's wrong!—there's a page missin'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fway, don't cackle, deah boys!—I shall have to speak from memow, as that fathead Blake has destroyed most of my notes! Gentlemen, there is a feahful dangah awisin' on the howizon!"

"Tremble!" murmured Lowther.

"The dangah is this: the well-known desiah of the Bwittish people to make things easy for a beaten foe. Unless we are vevy much on our guard, we are likely to make things too easy for the Huns, and give them a chance of wepeatin' their wascally conduct. I suggest, therefore, that we should take for our motto, 'Wemembeh the Lusitania.'"

"Hear, hear!"

"The wottahs must be placed in such a posish that they will nevah be able to bwreak out again. Now, gentlemen, I am comin' to the important point. Such of you as have studied geogwaphy are aware that there is an island in the North Sea—"

"Only one?" asked Lowther.

"An island called Heligoland—or Helgoland, as the wotten Huns call it. Gentlemen, I have made a most remarkable discovery concernin' this island."

"Oh!"

The juniors were really interested now. If Arthur Augustus had made a remarkable discovery concerning the island of Heligoland, it was certainly worth hearing.

"The othah day," resumed Arthur Augustus, "I came across an old geogwaphy book, which was used at St. Jim's befoah our time. It was used, in fact, at the time

when my patah was at St. Jim's. To my astonishment, I found the island of Heligoland coloured wed in a map in that geography book."

Arthur Augustus paused to allow this announcement to sink in.

But the audience were not so impressed as he had expected.

"Well, what is there remarkable in that?" demanded Kerr. "Heligoland was coloured red, of course, as it used to belong to Britain."

"You were awah of that, Kerr?"

"Isn't everybody aware of it?" ejaculated Kerr.

"I was not awah of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Kerr. "You've come here to lecture us about Heligoland, and you've only just found out that it used to belong to Britain!"

The audience chuckled gleefully. That remarkable discovery of D'Arcy's showed a lamentable ignorance on the subjects of geography and history.

"To resume," said Arthur Augustus, rather hastily. "Gentlemen, Heligoland is a British island. The island occupies a commandin' posish in the North Sea, and the Germans have fortified it, and made a naval base of it, and it protects their fleet, and enables them to skulk away so that Lord Fisher cannot get at them. Gentlemen, we are accustomed to stupidity in our politicians. I do not wish to be unweasonable. I do not expect a statesman to have as much sense as a gwocah or a carpentah. That would be expectin' too much. But, gentlemen, the ewass stupidity of the statesman who gave Heligoland to the Germans constitutes weally a wecord!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Howevah, the harm is done, and it is no use ewyin' ovah spill milk. The important thing now is to set the mattah wight. Gentlemen, when we have beaten the Huns they will begin to whine, and good-natured duffahs in England will begin to talk about lettin' them off lightly, and forgettin' all about the poison gas and the drownin' women and children. It is the duty of ewery Bwiton worthy of the name to set his face against any such wot. Heligoland belongs to Bwitain, and Heligoland must be taken back at the end of the war."

"Good!"

"I am glad to see that you agree with me. The Union Jack must float evah ovah Heligoland, and it must be coloured wed on the map once more. But I have gwreat misgivings on the subject. I fear that this vewy important mattah may be ovahlooked. I weward it as the duty of private citizens to keep the Government up to their bizness. I weward it as the duty of St. Jim's to show the way."

"Oh!"

"Gentlemen, I shall therefore put a wewolution to the meetin', that at the end of the wuh the weally Bwitish island of Heligoland shall be wewotted to the Bwitish Empire, and wewelieved of the digustin' pwesence of the howwid Huns!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Passed unanimously!"

"I further wewcommend that this wewolution shall be widdened down, and forwarded to the Pwime Ministah."

"Great Scott!"

"Probably, in the wuh and stwess of the wuh, the Pwime Ministah has forgotten all about it, you know. Besides, I don't suppose he knows that Heligoland is weally a Bwitish island. This fact must be impressed upon his mind."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to cackle at. This is a vewy important mattah. Gentlemen, I wewuire you to sign your names to this wewolution. Bai Jove! Where are you gear boys, deah boys?"

The deah boys were starting for the door.

Fully as they agreed with Arthur Augustus in principle, for some reason or other they did not seem to desire to have a hand in forwarding a wewolution to the Premier.

"Tom Mewry, don't wun away. Figgins, deah boy—Kerr—Noble—Talbot—Goah, pway wemain! Weally, I wewuire your signatures. Gentlemen, I have the wewolution heah all ready. Lowthah—Mannals—Blake, you wottah, pway come and sign your name!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The audience crowded out of the common-room. Arthur Augustus shrieked in vain. Figgins & Co. paused in the doorway, and D'Arcy's hopes rose. At least, he would get some signatures to the wewolution. But alas! the New House juniors only paused to bring their pea-shooters into play.

Whis, whis, whis!

"Gwreat Scott! Yawwooh! Oh, deah! You wottahs!"

Arthur Augustus fairly danced as the shower of peas volleyed upon him, and he missed his footing and slipped off the chair.

Bump!

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. marched away, howling with laughter. Arthur Augustus sat up on the floor of the common-room, breathless and dusty, his eyeglass in one hand, and his resolution in the other.

His audience were gone.

"Oh, bai Jove! The wottahs! The boundahs! I weward them as unpatwiotic beasts! Oh, deah!"

Arthur Augustus scrambled up. Much of his lecture, even in its reduced state, still remained to be delivered. But it was evidently useless to deliver it to an empty room. His audience being gone, Arthur Augustus decided to go, too, and he went.

CHAPTER 5. The N.H.J.A.D.S.

FIGGINS'S study was crowded.

It was a meeting of the N.H.J.A.D.S.

That imposing array of initials was interpreted by Monty Lowther of the School House to mean "New House Jabberers and Duffers Society."

But it really stood for the New House Junior Amateur Dramatic Society—a most important society, and a great rival of the School House Junior Dramatic Society. Kerr of the Fourth was the leading spirit, Kerr being a born actor, and a very clever stage-manager.

Figgins & Co. were planning a new play. Under the influence of the war spirit they were giving William Shakespeare a rest, and presenting—or, rather perpetrating—a war play.

Kerr had written most of the play, but many of the society had had a hand in it, and it was agreed on all sides that it was a stunning play, and would take the shine out of anything the School House could do in that line.

The play was entitled "Secret Service," and it dealt chiefly with the adventures of a certain Lieutenant Lynx, who made the most marvellous discoveries in the most facile manner, and succeeded in the last act in covering the enemies of this realm with confusion.

Francis George Kerr, of course, was Lieutenant Lynx. It was agreed by all that Kerr should be the lieutenant. There was nobody in the society who could make up as Kerr did, to the extent of making his figure, his features, and his voice quite unrecognisable. In the guise of Lieutenant Lynx, Kerr's own pater would not have known him.

But about all the other "parts" there was dispute, and it waxed warm. Figgins declared that it was a foregone conclusion that he should be Lord Kitchener—that celebrated soldier being introduced into the play. Redfern agreed that Figg should be Kitchener if he—Reddy—was General French. But Fatty Wynn warmly claimed the role of General French, adding that Reddy could be the Crown Prince of Prussia if he liked. Redfern replied, with a sniff of contempt, that he would not willingly be found dead as the Crown Prince of Prussia.

Nobody, in fact, was anxious to take the part of the notorious Kronprinz. Kerr had written up a really telling scene, in which the Kaiser's hopeful son was depleted filling his pockets with silver spoons in a French chateau. But there was a prejudice on the subject; nobody wanted to represent that interesting combination of Royal prince and sneak-thief. Everybody was willing to leave that to somebody else. But

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE RIVAL WEEKLY!"

there was a rush for the parts of Lord Kitchener and General French.

The argument on the subject was warm, and grew louder.

In the buzz of a dozen voices the New House juniors did not notice a tap at the study door.

"I tell you you'd better leave Kitchener to me," said Redfern. "A part like that requires a fine-looking chap."

"Exactly my reason for taking it," said Figgins.

"It requires a stern, unbending character," said Diggs of the Fourth—"a sort of commanding presence. Better leave it to me."

"Now, don't be funny, Diggy!"

"Why, you ass—"

"We've got to settle the parts this evening," said Figgins. "Rehearsals begin to-morrow. Next week we're going to knock the School House boundaries with this play."

"Look here, Figgy!" roared Redfern.

"Shush! They'll hear you in the School House, and they're not to know anything about it till we announce the play."

"Fathead!"

"Chump!"

"You ass!"

"You burler!"

The door opened, and Tom Merry of the Shell looked in. But the argument was now so warm that he was not observed.

"Shut up, you two duffers!" shouted Kerr. "I'm stage-manager, and I'm going to appoint the parts for 'Secret Service.'"

"Well, that's all right if you appoint me for Kitchener," said Redfern.

"And me for General French," said Lawrence.

"Cheeky, ass!" said Figgins. "I'm Lord Kitchener, and Fatty is General French!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Generals ain't as broad as they're long!" said Redfern. "You can make Fatty into a fat German general!"

"I'm jolly well not going to be a German!" said Fatty indignantly.

"Figgy in Lord Kitchener," said Kerr autocratically, "and Fatty is General French!"

"Good!"

"Rate!"

"Rubbish!"

"Redfern is going to be the Crown Prince!"

"Never!"

"You can make up very well as a slinking sort of rotter, Reddy!"

"Won't need much make-up for that!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Why, you fat worm—"

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry in the doorway.

The excited voices in the study died away at once. The New House Junior Amateur Dramatic Society glared at the School House junior.

"School House worm!" howled Figgins. "Lot of good trying to keep it dark, with a School House waster wedging in!"

"Kick him out!"

"Bump him!"

"Sorry!" said Tom Merry politely. "I knocked, but you didn't seem to hear. I thought there was a dog-fight going on by the row—"

"You cheeky fathead—"

"I just looked in to ask you—"

Tom Merry got no further. It was only too clear that that chance visit had made the plans of the Dramatic Society known to the enemy, and the amateur dramatists were exasperated.

They did not wait to hear what Tom Merry had come for.

They made a rush at him, and the captain of the Shell was seized on all sides by many hands.

"Here, hold on!" roared Tom Merry. "I came to—ow!"

"Kick him out!"

"I say—yaroooh—oh, my hat! Leggo! Yow!"

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With a rush the New House juniors bore the Shell fellow from the study. They rushed him breathlessly along the passage. Figgins looked quickly over the banisters; there were no prefects in sight.

"Sling him out!" he exclaimed.

"Look here—I-I came—oh—ah—"

Tom Merry was rushed down the stairs.

In a few seconds more he was rolling down the steps of the New House, to find a resting-place in the quadrangle.

Monteith of the Sixth came striding along the passage, and the juniors melted away like snow in the summer sun.

Tom Merry picked himself up dazedly.

He was rumped and torn, and dishevelled and out of breath.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Ow! Oh dear! My hat!"

He limped away to the School House.

Lowther and Manners and Talbot were awaiting him in the study, and tea was ready on the table.

"They stared blankly at Tom Merry as he limped in.

"What the deuce—" exclaimed Talbot.

"Been through a sausage-mill?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Is Figgins coming to tea?" Manners inquired.

Tom Merry sank into a chair and gasped.

"Yow-ow-ow! I haven't asked him! Blow Figgins! Oh dear!"

Tom Merry pumped in breath. His cheeks regarded him with grinning faces. Tom had been over to the New House to ask Figgins & Co. to tea. He did not look like a fellow who was returning from a friendly visit.

"The silly asses!" gasped Tom at last. "The howling duffers! They're getting up another of their rotten plays, and I came on them and heard them arguing—ow! A rotten play called 'Secret Service.' About the war, I suppose, as they've got Lord Kitchener and General French in it. Ow! I didn't have time to ask the silly idiots to tea! Ow! Ow! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle, you duffers! I'm hurt!" growled Tom Merry. "Catch me going over to ask them to tea again. Look here, we'll jolly well rag that play when they give it. They were going to keep it dark, the duffers, till they had it ready—and they were shouting loud enough for all Sussex to hear. Ow! Look at my collar!"

"It does look a picture," agreed Monty Lowther. "School House collars can't be treated like that with impunity. We'll give Figgins & Co. a lesson: Gentlemen, I suggest that the New House play be ragged bald-headed when those duffers inflict it upon a long-suffering school!"

"Hear, hear!"

In Figgins's study the discussion was still proceeding. By that time Figgins had Redfern's head in chancery, and it had not yet been decided who was to be Lord Kitchener.

CHAPTER 6.

Kerr Has An Idea!

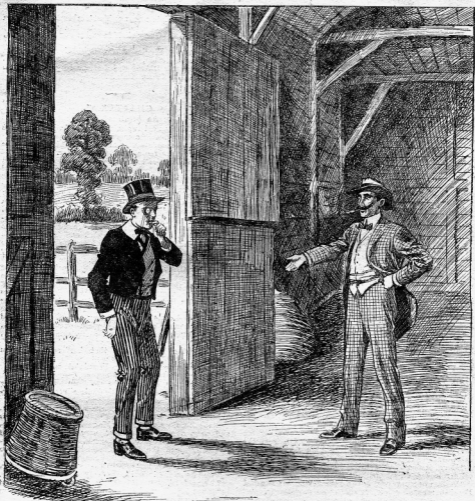
"A T it again?" granted Blake. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not deign to reply.

He was seated at the table in Study No. 6 when Jack Blake came in. A neatly-written sheet was before him—it was the famous resolution concerning the ultimate fate of the once-British island of Heligoland; now held in the unclean clutches of the Huns. Arthur Augustus had sought in vain, for several days since his striking lecture, for signatures to that resolution. His own graceful signature sprawled across the sheet of impot paper, but it sprawled alone. But Arthur Augustus was not to be beaten.

He was addressing a large envelope when Blake spotted him. And the address was Mr. Asquith, Prime Minister, 10, Downing Street, London.

Evidently Arthur Augustus meant business.

Blake stared at the envelope, and stared at his noble chum.



"Come in!" said Lieutenant Lynx. "You have not been followed?" "No," said Arthur Augustus, advancing into the barn. "You are sure there are no spies about?" "Quite suah," answered D'Arcy. (See Chapter 9.)

"You don't mean to say you're sending that along?" Blake demanded. "Oh, you ass!"

"I refuse to be called an ass, Blake. I regard this as a matter of duty. I am suah that these politicians have forgotten the vewy important matter of we-annexing Heligoland at the end of the wah, and I am goin' to remind them."

"But we haven't beaten the Germans yet!"

"I suppose you have no doubts about that matter, Blake. The fact that the wascals are takin' to usin' poison gas, and dirtay twicks like that, shows that they can feel it comin'."

"Don't you think the Government might possibly get along without your assistance?" queried Blake humorously.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"These politicians are so careless," he explained. "If

one of them was duffah enough to give Heligoland to the Germans, another might be duffah enough to let them keep it at the end of the wah."

Arthur Augustus carefully folded up the resolution, slipped it into the envelope, and sealed it. It was plain that he was past argument. Blake looked at him with feelings almost too deep for words. When Gussy had an idea fixed in his noble brain it was impossible to get it out again. He considered it judicious to give the Premier the benefit of his valuable advice, and wild horses wouldn't have dragged him from his determination.

"You see, it would be an undyin' disgrace if any British tewwitoway was allowed to remain in the hands of those wottals," said Arthur Augustus. "And politicians always have to be kicked into doin' things. I think this resolution will probably have some effect."

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE RIVAL WEEKLY!"

"Oh, you thumping ass!" said Blake. "It will be dropped into the waste-paper basket without being read."

"Wats!"
 "Don't you know that all sorts of cranks write to the Prime Minister? He keeps a special man to shove their rot into the waste-paper basket."

"I wufuse to be called a cwank!"

Arthur Augustus took up his letter and started for the door. Blake debated in his mind whether he should seize it by force of arms and burn it in the grate. But he decided to give Arthur Augustus his head. After all, there was no great harm in the swell of St. Jim's adding a little to the national supply of waste-paper."

Arthur Augustus walked out into the quadrangle with his letter in his hand, his noble nose high in the air. As he crossed the quadrangle towards the letter-box in the school wall Figgins & Co. saluted him cheerfully. Figgins had just posted a letter, when Arthur Augustus came up.

"How's the resolution going?" asked Figgins affably.

"It's goin' now, deah boy."

"Heaps of signatures, I suppose?" grinned Kerr.

"Wats I weward all the fellahs as fallin' to play the game, in wefusin' to back me up in a mattah of this importance. Howevah, if you fellahs care to put in your signatures I will open the envelope now."

"You're really posting it?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at! If those disgustin' Huns are allowed to keep our island aftah the wah it will not be my fault!"

Arthur Augustus slipped the big letter into the slit in the box. It fell with a thump upon the letters inside.

"That's done!" said Arthur Augustus with satisfaction. "I trust I shall receive a favourable weply frowm Downin' Street!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Figgins.

"You see, the Pwemiah must be vevy busy now, and he will probably be glad to be weminded of the important mattah that may have escaped his attention. I have a greet wespert for Mr. Asquith—I weward him as bein' a vevy wvainy man for a statesman. I shall probably get a vevy polite weply."

"He may offer you a place in the Cabinet," remarked Kerr. "They've been making changes, you know, and—"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus walked away, and the chums of the New House grinned.

"The blithering ass is expecting a reply—from the Premier!" ejaculated Figgins. "I think that takes the cake, even for Gussy."

"It do, it does!" chuckled Fatty Wynn.

Kerr looked very thoughtful.

"Well, what have you got in your noodle now?" asked Figgins, regarding his Scottish chum inquiringly.

"Why shouldn't Gussy get an answer?" asked Kerr.

"Eh?" said Figgins, in astonishment.

"I don't see why he shouldn't get an answer."

"Why, you're as big a duffer as he is!" exclaimed Figgins. "Do you think the Prime Minister reads a tenth part of the letters the cranks write to him?"

"Oh, no! But Gussy might get an answer, and he might get an interview from an official."

"Wha-a-at!"

"Potty!" asked Fatty Wynn. "What the deuce are you thinking of, Kerr?"

Kerr chuckled.

"I was thinking that this is a chance for Lieutenant Lynx," he explained.

"L-l-lieutenant L-l-lynx?"

"Yès. It seems a shame to disappoint Gussy. He was born to have his leg pulled. Why shouldn't we pull it?"

Figgins burst into a roar as Kerr's scheme dawned upon him.

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy shall have his answer! Ha, ha, ha!"

That evening Figgins & Co. might have been seen in deep consultation, punctuated by many chuckles. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was destined to get a reply to his letter to the Prime Minister!

CHAPTER 7.

An Affair of State.

DURING the next two or three days Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in a somewhat restless state.

As he explained to his chums in Study No. 6, he was awaiting his reply from the Premier.

Blake and Herries and Digby chuckled, and told him to wait.

According to Arthur Augustus, the Premier could not fail to be struck by the important resolution passed by the juniors of St. Jim's. It would, as it were, fill a long-felt want. Arthur Augustus fully expected an official acknowledgment of his important communication.

Every day he scanned the letter-rack, in the expectation of seeing a letter there. He found letters there from time to time—from his pater, and from his Aunt Adeline, and from his elder brother, who was with the Territorials at the front—but the letter from Downing Street seemed a long time coming.

But one afternoon Arthur Augustus's aristocratic face lighted up as he spotted a square, official-looking blue envelope in the rack.

"Bai Jove, that's my letter!"

Blake and Herries and Digby stared at the letter as D'Arcy took it from the rack. It was a thick blue envelope, and certainly looked very official. The address was typewritten, and it was plain enough: "A. A. D'Arcy, Esq., School House, St. James's, near Rylcombe, Sussex."

"What the dickens can that be?" said Blake, in wonder.

"Probably my weply frowm Downin' Street."

"Bow-wow!"

"You will see, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus opened his little silver-handled pen-knife, and slit the official envelope. A typed letter was inside. The swell of St. Jim's drew it out and unfolded it.

Blake & Co. watched him. He read the letter through, and gave a start and looked very serious. Then he pursed his lips, but he did not speak.

"Well?" said the three Fourth-Formers, with one voice.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's in the letter?"

"Ahem!"

"What is it?" asked Blake, puzzled. "Why don't you show it to us, fathead?"

"Ahem! It is strictly private."

"You mean it's a private letter?"

"Yaas."

"Then it's not your reply from Downing Street?" grinned Blake.

"Yaas."

"What?"

"I am sowwy I cannot take you chaps into my confidence in this mattah," said Arthur Augustus mysteriously, "but I am bound to respect the wishes of Mr. Asquith."

"Who?" yelled Blake.

"This lettah is the weply I was expectin', but I am sowwy I cannot show it to you. I am required to use diswecation."

"Great Scott!"

"In mattahs of State, deah boys, it is impos to be too careful," said Arthur Augustus impressively. "Mr. Asquith trusts to my diswecation."

"Mr. Asquith does?" said Blake dazedly.

"Yaas, wathah! Under the cires, it is impos for me to take you youngstahs into my confidence."

And Arthur Augustus walked away with his letter,

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leaving his chums almost overcome. Blake and Herries and Digby looked at one another in silence for some moments.

"Well?" said Blake at last.

"Well?" said Digby.

"Well?" said Herries.

"Somebody must be pulling his leg," said Blake. "It's impossible that his fatheaded letter has been read and answered."

"Yes, rather!"

"It must be a jape of some sort," said Blake, with conviction. "Some giddy joker is playing a little game. Gussy came into the world specially to have his leg pulled, but they're not going to jape our study. We'll see that letter, and find out who's written it, and rag him for his cheek."

"Good egg! Come on!"

The three chums followed Arthur Augustus to Study No. 6. They arrived just in time to hear the key turn in the lock.

Blake shook the door-handle and thumped on the panels.

"Gussy, you ass!"

"Pway wun away, Blake!"

"Let me in!"

"I am wathah busay!"

"Fathead! We want to see that letter!" shouted Blake.

"Imposs!"

"It's a jape of some sort."

"Wats!"

"We want to find out who's written it, and bump him!"

"Wabbish!"

"Will you open the door, fathead?" yelled Herries.

"No!"

The three exasperated juniors thumped on the door and bestowed terrific kicks on it, but Arthur Augustus did not even speak again. Blake made sulphurous remarks through the keyhole without eliciting a reply. Arthur Augustus was not to be drawn.

"What's the row?" asked Tom Merry, coming along the passage, and pausing as he found the three juniors assaulting their own door.

Blake gave a snort of wrath.

"That champion ass has a letter in answer to his fat-headed resolution. Some worm is pulling his leg, of course."

"Wats!" came from within the study. Arthur Augustus had evidently heard Blake's explanation.

Tom Merry chuckled. Manners and Monty Lowther followed him along the passage, and Tom gave the humorist of the Shell a look of severe inquiry.

"Lowther, you ass!"

"Was it you?" demanded Blake wrathfully.

"Not guilty, my lord!" said Monty Lowther regretfully. "I never thought of it. I didn't know Gussy had posted that resolution, or I might have answered it. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Oh, rats!" growled Blake. "Somebody is pulling his leg, and I want to know who it is. I'm not going to have my study japed. Gussy, will you open this door?"

No reply.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

"What's that row about?" came Kildare's voice up the stairs. "Do you want me to come there with a cane, you young sweeps!"

Blake reluctantly relinquished the attack on the door. The juniors retired from the spot, breathing wrath. Inside the study, Arthur Augustus smiled. Left in peace at last, he read and re-read his valuable letter.

The letter was typewritten, and it was of an extremely interesting nature. It ran:

"Sir,—I have been instructed to reply to your communication of the 30th inst. The matter to which you refer had not previously been considered by us, but we are now giving it our closest attention. You would confer a great obligation upon us if you could make it convenient to meet a representative of our Secret Service, Lieutenant Lynx.

"I need not impress upon you the strict necessity for discretion in this matter. Please do not show this letter

to any person whatever, and do not breathe a word upon the subject until you have seen Lieutenant Lynx. It is impossible to be too careful in matters of State.

"Lieutenant Lynx will see you on Saturday afternoon. It would not be judicious, in view of the need of secrecy, for the lieutenant to come directly to the school. He will wait for you in the barn near the stile in Eyzombé Lane at half-past three on Saturday afternoon. Afterwards you will be taken in a motor-car to see some personages whom I need not name here. Please do not utter a word upon the subject till after you have seen the lieutenant, and do not allow this letter to be seen. The matter is of more importance than you can guess.—Yours faithfully,
N. O. BODDEY."

Arthur Augustus simply gloated over that letter. Greatly did he desire to show it to his unbelieving chums. The mere sight of it, of course, must have convinced those doubting Thomases on the spot. But the injunctions of Mr. N. O. Boddey had to be obeyed. Evidently Mr. N. O. Boddey was one of the secretaries at Downing Street, and this letter had been typed at the dictation of the Prime Minister himself.

Who were the "personages" whom D'Arcy was to be taken to see? Personages of great importance, evidently—probably the Premier and other Cabinet Ministers, perhaps Lord Kitchener himself.

Arthur Augustus almost trembled with happy anticipation. He was more than glad that he had not yielded to the counsel of his chums, and put that famous resolution in the study fire. This typed letter showed the importance that was attached to it in Government circles.

"Bai Jove! I'm awfully sorry I can't show this to Blake!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps I can tell him latah. Aftah all, it wouldn't do to admit those youngstahs to affairs of State. I shall have to cut the cricket-match on Saturday—that can't be helped."

Arthur Augustus paced the study in deep thought.

That the matter was important, he had been convinced all along; but it had not occurred to him before that secrecy was so desirable. But that Mr. N. O. Boddey regarded secrecy as very important was quite clear. The official letter was not even written on official paper! It was typed from beginning to end. Nobody was mentioned by name—excepting Mr. N. O. Boddey himself!

It was quite thrilling to feel that he was taking a hand in an affair of State. It would be one up for Study No. 6 when it all came out.

But in the midst of his satisfaction there was a worry on Arthur Augustus's mind. Blake & Co., with their ridiculous idea that his leg was being pulled, were resolved to see the letter, and he could not always keep them locked out of the study.

Arthur Augustus debated the matter seriously in his mind; and, finally, he slit the lining inside his jacket, and concealed the letter therein. There it was safe from inquisitive eyes.

Then the swell of St. Jim's unlocked the door of the study, and awaited more placidly the arrival of Blake & Co. to tea.

CHAPTER 8.

A State Secret!

THE Terrible Three came in to tea with Blake and Herries and Dig. The Shell fellows were smiling, but Blake was frowning. If Arthur Augustus's noble leg was pulled, it detracted from the prestige of Study No. 6; and Jack Blake was determined that that should not be!

Blake's brow cleared a little, however, as he found the tea-table set, and a really handsome spread prepared. It was a sort of peace-offering from the swell of St. Jim's, and as the juniors had come in hungry from the playing-fields, it was a very acceptable peace-offering, and helped to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"Tea's weady, deah 'boys," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully.

"Where's that letter?"

"What letter, deah boy?"

"That spoo' letter," growled Blake.

"I have not received any spoo' letlah, deah boy. I have

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received a letter from Downin' Street in acknowledgment of my suggestion to the Preamble."

"What does Asquith say?" asked Monty Lowther blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am sorry I cannot take you into my confidence. It is necessary to use discretion in the affairs of State."

"In which?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Affairs of State!" replied Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Can't you see that somebody's pulling your leg, you fathead?" shrieked Blake.

"I refuse to believe that the Prime Minister would indulge in the exceedingly absurd proceeding of pulling my leg."

"You—your champion ass—"

"Pway let us have tea, Blake. Please do not continue this discuss—it is weally impos for me to show you the letter."

"I tell you—"

"Can I help you to a washah, deah boy?"

"Look here—"

"A nice gammon washah, deah boy?"

"You fathead—"

"And fwied eggs?"

"You jabberwock—"

"And toast?"

Jack Blake granted, and gave it up. It was evidently useless to talk to Arthur Augustus, and Blake was not impervious to the attractions of gammon rashers, fried eggs, and toast. He was hungry.

So Study No. 6 had tea.

The talk ran on the Grammar School match on Saturday, and the subject of the official letter was dropped.

But after tea, when the gammon rashers and the fried eggs and the toast had been duly disposed of, Blake reverted to the subject.

Arthur Augustus was moving to the door, executing a strategic retreat, as it were, when Blake put his back against the door.

"Hold on!" he remarked.

"Pway allow me to pass, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus mildly.

"I want to see that letter."

"Wats!"

"I put it to all the fellows present," said Blake. "I an't Gussy's silly leg being pulled by some practical joker?"

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather."

"Oughtn't we to make him show up that letter, so that we can wear the boulder bald-headed for japing this study?"

"Hear, hear!"

"You hear the verdict, Gussy? Now we want that letter."

"Wot!"

"Are you going to hand it over?"

"Nevah!"

"Very well. You know what the German Chancellor says, when he's out to pinch anything—'Necessity knows no law,' and 'Macht geht vor recht,'" said Blake—

"'Might goes before right,' you know. But in this case we've got right as well as might on our side. We're going to save you from having your fatheaded leg pulled. Hand over that letter!"

"Wubbish!"

"That's the ultimatum."

"Wats!"

"Go for the silly idiot!" said Blake.

Arthur Augustus jumped back.

"Weally, deah boys, I pwotest— Yawwooh!"

Bump!

"It's for your own good, Gussy," said Tom Merry as Arthur Augustus descended upon the carpet with a loud concussion.

"Yow!"

"Will you hand over that letter?"

"Wats! Nevah! It is an affair of State—"

"Oh, you ass! Hold him by the ears while I get it!" said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You awful wottah, Hewwies! Leggo my yahs! Tom Merwuy, get off my legs, you are wainin' my twousahs! Dig, you awful beast, leggo my hair! Ow!"

"Hold him!"

"Gewwoof my chest, Lowthah! I shall give you a feahful tawashin'! Blake, if you go through my pockets, I shall wegard you as a pickpocket."

"Right-ho!" said Blake cheerfully.

And he proceeded to go through his noble chum's pockets.

Every pocket was turned inside out, in turn, while the swell of St. Jim's wriggled vainly in the grasp of the grinning juniors.

But the letter did not come to light.

The very deep precaution taken by Arthur Augustus stood him in good stead now. The letter was well hidden in the lining of his jacket, and was not to be found.

"Oh, the silly ass!" exclaimed Blake, exasperated.

"He's hidden it somewhere. Turn out his desk, Dig!"

"Digby, I refuse to allow you to touch my desk!"

Digby grinned, and turned out the desk. He turned it out by the simple process of inverting it, and pitching out all the contents on the carpet. But the letter did not come to light.

"Is it in the study?" demanded Blake.

"Find out, you bonndah!"

"Will you tell us where it is?"

"Nevah!"

"Bump him!"

"Weally, Blake— Weally, deah boys— Leggo— yawwooh!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

"Yow-wow-wow!"

"We're only doing this out of friendship, Gussy," Lowther explained benignly. "You ought to be jolly glad to have such devoted pals."

"Ow, you wottahs!"

Bump! Bump!

"Yow! Help! Wescue!"

"Will you hand over that letter?" shrieked Blake.

"No!"

The chums of the School House regarded Arthur Augustus with intensely exasperated looks. What was to be done with him? The noble mind of Arthur Augustus was made up, and he would not have yielded if they had bumped him through the ceiling into the room below.

"I suppose he's got to have his way," growled Blake at last. "Though you bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his folly depart from him. Though you bump a silly ass till you wear out the carpet, yet will he remain an asinine fathead!"

"You uttah duffah!"

The juniors released Arthur Augustus. He scrambled to his feet in a very rumpled state, crimson with wrath.

"We've done our best," said Tom Merry. "Gussy won't be able to say afterwards that we didn't do our best."

"You uttah wottahs!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I refuse to wegard you as fwends any loughah. I wegard you with despoision—I mean contempt."

And the dishevelled swell of St. Jim's strode from the study, and banged the door after him in a manner that was quite unworthy of the caste of Vere de Vere.

Blake looked helplessly at his comrades. The Terrible Three were chuckling.

"What's to be done?" growled Blake.

"Give him his head," said Monty Lowther. "He was born to have his leg pulled, and who are we to interfere with the decrees of Destiny?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake clenched his fists.

"I wish I knew the rotter who's written that letter," he said. "I'd alter the shape of his features for him. We're not going to have our prize idiot japed. It's up against this study. We're not going to have Study No. 6 called a home for idiots!"

"Why not?" asked Monty Lowther blandly. "You know the proverb—'Great is truth, and it must prevail.'"

"Oh, don't give us any of your silly gags!" said Blake

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crossly. "Keep all that for the 'Weekly.' Go and eat coke!"

The Terrible Three departed chuckling. Blake and Herries and Digby consulted whether they should administer an entirely new series of bumpings when Arthur Augustus came back to the study.

But Arthur Augustus did not come back.

He did his preparation that evening in the next study, with Hammond and Reilly and Kerrouish, and his chums did not see him again till bed-time.

When they met in the dormitory, Arthur Augustus was not genial as usual; he gave his study-mates the "marble eye."

Arthur Augustus was on his dignity, and he did not intend to bestow the pleasure of his conversation upon his chums any more, until Study No. 6 tendered an apology.

CHAPTER 9.

D'Arcy Has Another Engagement.

TOM MERRY clapped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the shoulder, in the friendliest possible manner, on Saturday afternoon.

Since the little dispute in Study No. 6, Arthur Augustus hadn't addressed a word to his chums, and the Terrible Three came in for their share of the marble eye.

But Tom Merry seemed to have forgotten that there was anything the matter, as he greeted the swell of St. Jim's in the quad.

"Ripping weather for cricket!" he remarked affably.

Arthur Augustus jerked his shoulder away.

"Yaas," he said icily.

"I think we shall beat the Grammarians this time, what?"

"I doubt it."

"Eh! Why shouldn't we beat them?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I shall not be playin', deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see nothin' whatever to cneckle at in my remark, Tom Mewwy."

"Now, look here, Gussy, you can't stand out of the match, simply because we've been doing our best to keep you from being japed," said the captain of the Shell. "Don't be sulky."

Arthur Augustus's eye gleamed behind his eyeglass. He wasn't sulky; he was simply on his dignity. It was simply exasperating to have his dignity mistaken for sulkiness.

"I am not sulky, you ass!" he exclaimed warmly. "I am quite incapable of such an absurd thing as sulkiness, as you are vewy well awah. A fellah must have some wegard for his personal dig."

"And that's your gratitude for what we've done for you!" said Tom Merry indignantly. "It isn't every chap who'd take the trouble to bump a fellow for his own good."

"Wats?" said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, that is not the reason why I am standin' out of the match this aftahnoon. I have another engagement."

"Another engagement?" chimed in Monty Lowther, as he joined them.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, Gussy!" said Lowther reproachfully. "I'm surprised at you! Who is it this time?"

"I wefuse to tell you who it is."

"Let's see if I can guess," said Lowther reflectively. "Is it the girl in the bunshop at Wayland?"

"Eh?"

"She is a nice girl, but too old for you, Gussy."

"You uttah ass!"

"It can't be Mary, the housemaid," said Lowther. "Mary is engaged to a soldier. Is it the cook?"

"You uttah duffah, Lowthah! You know vewy well that I was not weferrin' to that kind of engagement."

"Behold, he blusbeth!" said Lowther. "Alas! What is it the poet says:

In the spring a liveller iris changes on the burnished dove,

In the spring a duffer's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

Arthur Augustus elevated his noble nose and walked away.

"What is the chump standing out of the cricket for?" asked Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Blessed if I know—unless it's another affair of State."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Arthur Augustus evidently meant what he said; for when the cricketers gathered on Little Side, the swell of St. Jim's was conspicuous by his absence. Hammond of the Fourth took his place in the junior eleven.

Arthur Augustus was very busy while the junior cricketers were beginning the match with Gordon Gay & Co., of the Grammar School.

In order to be quite sure of being early for his appointment with Mr. N. O. Boddey from Downing Street, Arthur Augustus quitted St. Jim's before three o'clock, and walked down the lane towards the stile, and arrived a quarter of an hour early at the old barn.

The appointment having been made in the barn near the stile showed that the local topography was well known in Downing Street. That was a little point which did not occur just then to the unsuspecting mind of the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus's heart was beating high as he crossed the field towards the barn.

It was an unusual honour for a junior schoolboy to take a hand in affairs of State, and Arthur Augustus could not help feeling flattered by the consideration shown him by the great men in Downing Street.

He had always had a somewhat low opinion of the intelligence of political gentlemen; but they were rising in his estimation now.

Early as he was, he was not the first on the scene.

As he stepped into the open doorway of the old barn he spotted a figure seated within upon a bench.

It was that of a young man, apparently, with a thick, black moustache, and a deep-brown complexion, and heavy, bushy eyebrows.

He had a large, unlighted cigar in his mouth. He was not—somewhat to Arthur Augustus's disappointment—in uniform. D'Arcy had expected khaki. But the stranger was dressed in tweeds, of a somewhat loud check pattern.

He rose to his feet as Arthur Augustus appeared.

"Master D'Arcy?" he asked.

"Yaas! You are Lieutenant Lynx!"

"I am!"

"Vewy glad to see you, deah boy!"

"Come in!" said Lieutenant Lynx. "You have not been followed?"

"No."

"You are sure there are no spies about?"

"Quite suah."

Arthur Augustus advanced into the barn. Lieutenant Lynx looked out of the doorway, and scanned the fields in all directions, with great caution.

Then he turned towards the swell of St. Jim's.

"At last!" he said dramatically.

Arthur Augustus was duly impressed. If he had doubted the importance of that affair of State, he would have been convinced of it by the mysterious manner of Lieutenant Lynx.

"You are early!" said the lieutenant.

"Yaas!"

"That is all to the good. We shall have time to get our work done before the car arrives. It will not be here till a quarter to four."

"Yaas? What are we goin' to do?" asked Arthur Augustus, a little puzzled.

"It was you who wrote the letter to the Premier?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You who made the remarkable discovery that Helligoland was once a British island, and was handed over to Germany in a weak moment by an incapable statesman?"

"Pwecisely!"

"Pray explain how you came to make this discovery."

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"I found the island was coloured wed in an old geography book," explained Arthur Augustus.

"Marvelous!"

Arthur Augustus felt more flattered than ever. It was not every fellow whose perspicacity was regarded as marvellous by a Secret Service agent from Downing Street.

"Yas, I was vewy much surprised myself when I made that discovery," he said. "It struck me at once what an idiotic thing it was to give Heligoland to those disagreein' Huns, and let them fortify it against our Fleet, you know. And I realised what a vewy serious thing it would be if that island was left in their dirty hands aftah the war."

"Wonderful!"

"So it came into my bwain, you know, to hold a meetin' of the chaps, and send a resolution on the subject to the Premiah."

"Amazing!"

"The othah chaps refused to sign the resolution, but I sent it all the same," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I regard it as the duty of every patriotic citizen to help to keep the Government up to their bisney."

"Quite so!" said Lieutenant Lynx. "Now—I cannot mention names—walls have ears, you know, and one cannot be too careful in affairs of State, but it is necessary for you to have a personal interview with certain personages."

"I am quite weady."

"But the matter must be kept strictly secret. The Prime Minister, of course, would not care to have it known that he was consulting with a schoolboy."

"I quite undahstand. You can rely on my discretion, Lieutenant Lynx."

"I am sure of that. Your letter showed plainly enough the exceedingly discreet young gentleman you are. You are prepared to make the journey as soon as the car arrives?"

"Yas, wathah!"

"And to observe the profoundest secrecy?"

"Certainly!"

"Good! It will be necessary for you to go in disguise."

"Bai Jove!"

"Otherwise your visit would attract too much public attention, and if the reporters should learn of it—you understand?"

"Oh, yas!"

Lieutenant Lynx opened a bag.

"I have here everything that is necessary. Of course, in my line of business I have had great practice in making up disguises."

"No doubt."

"It will not take me long to effect a complete change in your appearance. You will place yourself completely in my hands?"

"Entiahly!"

"Good!"

And Lieutenant Lynx turned out his bag and started.

CHAPTER 10.

In Deep Disguise.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was almost trembling with excitement by this time.

The idea of a visit in disguise to "certain personages" was very thrilling. What would the doubting Thomases of Study No. 6 have said if they could have heard Lieutenant Lynx at that moment? D'Arcy wondered.

A visit in disguise to the statesmen who swayed the fortunes in that thrilling hour of the greatest Empire in the world—his advice to be asked and acted upon by grey-haired politicians! St. Jim's would simply gasp when they heard of it all later, when strict secrecy was no longer requisite!

Arthur Augustus placed himself in the hands of Lieutenant Lynx without the least misgiving.

The lieutenant was soon at work.

From his bag he had turned out clothes, disguises, and make-up. Arthur Augustus donned a suit of clothes, too large for him, over his own. The clothes were of a cheap and ready-made variety, of a check pattern that was positively glaring, and colours that were dazzling, and Arthur Augustus could not help feeling a slight inward misgiving as he donned them.

"Bai Jove, this clobber looks wathah—wathah stwikin', doesn't it?" he asked.

"All the better," said Lieutenant Lynx.

"But it will attract attention."

"That does not matter so long as you are not recognised. The contrast to your usual attire will make the disguise more effective."

"Oh, yas! I nevah thought of that."

"Now this opera hat—"

"Gweat Scott!"

D'Arcy looked somewhat dismayed as Lieutenant Lynx took an opera hat from the bag and opened it. It was a very old opera hat, and looked as if it had seen better days, and seen the last of them. It was at least four sizes too large for the swell of the Fourth. When the lieutenant placed it on his head it slid down at once to the bridge of his nose.

"Oh, deah!"

"That is all right; a little padding inside will set that right."

"But—but can a chap weah an opawah hat in the daytime?" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Why not? Remember, your object is disguise."

Lieutenant Lynx stuffed several folds of paper inside the hat, and fastened them there with pins. Arthur Augustus tried on the hat again. It fitted him now with the padding inside. But the enormous hat over his boyish face gave him so remarkable an aspect that Lieutenant Lynx had to turn away his face.

The lieutenant began to cough violently.

"Bai Jove! I wish I had a glass heah!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Are you suah it looks all wight?"

"Ahem! Exactly as I wish!" said the lieutenant.

"Now for the make-up!"

"Gweoh!" said Arthur Augustus, as the lieutenant started with grease-paint on his face.

As he had no looking-glass, the swell of St. Jim's could not see the result of the making-up.

If he could have seen it he might have doubted whether the lieutenant's object really was to disguise him.

For he was given crimson cheeks, of a startling crimson, and white ears, of a chalky whiteness, and blue and green spots on his forehead.

Then a false beard was attached to his chin, and the beard was of a fiery red. His upper lip was adorned by a long, curling moustache of a yellow colour.

The "tout ensemble" was striking.

The loud check clothes, the enormous hat, the flaming cheeks and beard, made a picture that would have attracted attention anywhere.

"I suppose I may weah my eye-glass?" ventured Arthur Augustus.

"Certainly."

Arthur Augustus felt somewhat comforted as he jammed his monocle into his eye.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"Yes," said the lieutenant, surveying him. "I think that will do. It is nearly time the car was here."

"Is the car takin' me to London?"

"Ahem! No." The exalted personages you are to see are nearer than that. I cannot tell you more; strict secrecy is necessary. I am sure you will not ask me indiscreet questions."

"Wathah not!"

FOR NEXT WEEK:

THE RIVAL WEEKLY!

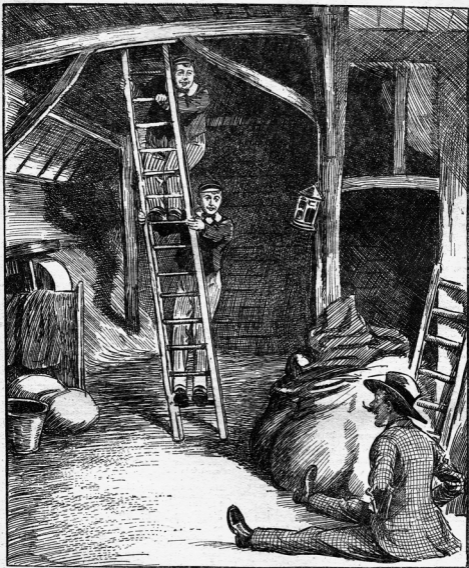
Another Splendid Long, Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

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Order in Advance.

PRICE ONE PENNY.



"Ha, ha, ha!" came in an echo from the left over the barn, as Figgins and Patty Wynn of the Fourth came down the ladder. "Is he gone?" shrieked Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 10.)

"You will be driven away in a closed car. You will be safe from all observation, as the blinds will be down."

Arthur Augustus was relieved to hear it. Although he could not see the picture he presented, he could not help feeling that his appearance was somewhat striking.

"You will not even look out of the car. I require your promise to that effect."

"Honah bwight!"

"When the car halts, you will alight. The car will be immediately driven away."

"And then?"

"Then you will see the personages you are being taken to see. The rest is left to your own judgment. You had better leave your topper here. I will see that it is sent back to you."

"Vewy well."

Hoot-toot-toot!

A motor-horn sounded across the fields.

Lieutenant Lynx looked out of the barn towards the road. A taxi-cab had halted by the stile.

"The car is here," said the Lieutenant. "Are you ready?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come, then!"

Arthur Augustus followed the lieutenant from the barn, and they crossed the field to the road. The driver of the taxi-cab touched his cap to the lieutenant, and as his eyes fell on Arthur Augustus he seemed to suffer from some internal convulsion.

But Arthur Augustus did not observe that. He was being pushed into the taxi by the lieutenant.

The blinds were down, and it was very dusky inside the vehicle.

"Remember!" said the lieutenant impressively. "not a word to the driver! He knows where to take you!"

"Yaas."

"You will not look out of the windows. You will alight immediately the car halts. You will remember?"

"Certainly!"

"Good-bye!"

Lieutenant Lynx closed the door.

He paused to speak a few words in a low tone to the taxi-driver, unheard by the occupant of the car. The taxi-man, for reasons best known to himself, was chucking almost convulsively. The car drove up the road, and Lieutenant Lynx hurried back to the barn.

When he reached it his proceedings were peculiar.

He threw himself upon the ground, and kicked up his feet, and howled with laughter.

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

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in an echo from the loft over the barn, and Figgins and Fatty Wynn of the Fourth came down the ladder.

"Is he gone?" shrieked Figgins.

"Ha ha! Yes!"

"We watched you through a crack in the roof!" moaned Fatty Wynn. "I nearly burst a button trying not to laugh! Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lieutenant Lynx sat up weakly, and wiped away his tears.

"This was worth missing the match for!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "I'd have missed a dozen matches for this! He's gone—really, really gone—in that rig!"

Lieutenant Lynx gurgled. In his merriment his moustache had come off, and so had his bushy eyebrows. He proceeded to rub off the sunburnt complexion. A quarter of an hour later Figgins, Kerr and Wynn left the old barn, Kerr carrying a bag; and they walked, chuckling, to St. Jim's.

Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was whirling away in the taxi.

True to his word, he did not look out from the blinds, and he remained in complete ignorance of where he was going.

It did not occur to him that he was being taken up one road and down another, with the mere object of expending time. He had the impression that he was covering long distances at a great speed.

The car turned into a gateway at last.

Arthur Augustus had been half an hour in the taxi.

But now he had evidently reached the end of his journey. The car was grinding up a drive. It halted.

Arthur Augustus drew a deep breath, opened the door, and alighted.

CHAPTER 11.

A Surprise for St. Jim's—and for Arthur Augustus!

"WHAT the deuce—"
"What the thunder—"
"Oh, crumbs!"

Tom Merry & Co. had finished their innings, and a crowd of juniors had adjourned to the tuckshop for refreshment in the shape of ginger-beer.

St. Jim's had done well in the innings, in spite of the absence of Arthur Augustus, and, what was more serious, the absence of Figgins & Co.

Why the New House trio were standing out of the match was unknown; but Tom Merry had plenty of

good reserves to play in their places, and the St. Jim's eleven was keeping its end up well against the visitors from the Grammar School.

Figgins & Co. had joined the cricketers in the tuckshop when they came in. They were interested to hear how the match had gone so far. But they were still more interested in something else, evidently, for they kept their eyes on the quad.

Figgins & Co. seemed to be expecting something to happen!

And it happened!

The sight of a taxicab driving up towards the School House was nothing novel, and it caused no attention. But when the taxi halted half-way to the house, and the door opened, there was a general yell from everybody who was within range of vision.

For the figure that alighted from the taxi was an astounding object.

There were amazed exclamations on all sides, and fellows came speeding from far and near to see what the commotion was about.

The cricketers turned out of the tuckshop in force, and others came running from the cricket-ground—and all the loungers in the quadrangle gathered round.

All eyes were turned upon the stranger, who stood beside the cab in the drive, and blinked round him in a dazed sort of way.

"Who is it?" gasped Tom Merry.

"What is it, you mean?" chuckled Gordon Gay, the captain of the Grammarian team.

"It's the giddy Wild Man from Borneo!"

"Something escaped from Barnum's!"

"Where did he get that hat?"

"Where did he get that complexion?"

"And that clobber?"

"Oh, scissors!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was reason for the amazement of the St. Jim's fellows. Truly, the old quadrangle of St. Jim's had never before beheld so astounding a sight as that of the stranger who had alighted from the taxicab.

The cab had turned, and was whizzing away towards the gates, after depositing its passenger there, in the middle of the quadrangle. Evidently the driver had his instructions.

The crowd gathered round the stranger, staring, chuckling, and exclaiming.

He was a person of uncertain age, dressed in glaring check clothes of the most atrocious cut. He wore an enormous opera hat that completely overshadowed his face. His cheeks were bright crimson, his ears were chalky white, his forehead was spotted with blue and green, his beard was fiery, and his moustache was long and yellow.

The funniest of funny men in a music-hall had never succeeded in looking quite so funny as this new arrival at St. Jim's.

He hardly seemed to know where he was. He blinked round him through his eyeglass in a dizzy sort of way.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where did it come from?"

"What is it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Must be a funny merchant come to do a comic turn!" said Jack Blake. "Go it, my man—give your performance! We'll pass round the hat!"

"Not that hat!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "That hat would hold a thousand pounds in coppers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

That was the first ejaculation of the stranger, who seemed as astonished to find himself there as were the St. Jim's fellows to see him.

There was a howl of amazement as the well-known voice was recognised.

"D'Arcy!"

"Gussy!" yelled Blake.

"Gussy!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Gussy!" sobbed Figgins. "Oh, Gussy! Where did you get those clothes?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I am vewy surprised to find myself heah!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "The taxi-man must have made a mistake."

"Is it a fancy-dress costume?" demanded Manners.

"Wats!"

Blake seized his chum by the arm and shook him.

"What are you got up like that for, in broad daylight?" he yelled.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Do you know what you look like?" bellowed Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Get a glass, somebody, and let him see!" moaned Lowther.

A pocket-mirror was produced by a junior, and held up for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to inspect himself.

Arthur Augustus started back in horror at the sight of his reflection.

"Oh deah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do I—do I weally look like that?" gasped Arthur Augustus, scarcely able to believe the evidence of his eyes. "This is not a disguise. This is a cawicature!"

"What did you do for?" roared Blake.

"The uttah wottah! He has fixed me up like this, and had me driven to St. Jim's!" stuttered Arthur Augustus. "I uttally fail to comprehend it. Lieutenant Lynx must be quite pottay!"

"Lieutenant which?"

"It is simply amaxin'! What on earth did he let the man dwive me heah for?"

"Ha, ha, ha! So that we could all see you!" yelled Redfern. "Who's been pulling your leg this time, Gussy?"

"Oh deah!"

A dreadful suspicion forced itself into Arthur Augustus's mind. Lieutenant Lynx could certainly not have rigged him up in that remarkable way for serious purposes of disguise. That was impossible. He had deliberately made Arthur Augustus look as ridiculous as possible, and ordered the taxi-driver to take him to St. Jim's and strand him there, in the middle of the quadrangle.

What had Lieutenant Lynx done that for?

It was only too clear now that Lieutenant Lynx could not possibly be a Secret-Service agent specially sent from Downing Street to interview the swell of St. Jim's.

Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could not entertain a doubt of the obvious fact that Lieutenant Lynx was a sponfer and a practical joker.

D'Arcy was dumb with dismay and wrath.

Around him the crowd thickened, and the howls of laughter rang over the quad. The resumption of the cricket match was completely forgotten for the moment both by St. Jim's fellows and Grahamarians. They couldn't think of cricket just then. They could only think of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his remarkable aspect.

Blake shook his noble chum again forcibly.

"Who did this?" he demanded ferociously. "You didn't get yourself up like this on purpose, I suppose?"

"Oh, deah! The wottah! He must have been pullin' my leg."

"Who?" shrieked Blake.

"Hallo, here comes Kildare!" chirruped Monty Lowther.

"Oh, my hat!"

The captain of St. Jim's shoved his way through the crowd. Kildare almost fell down as he caught sight of the disguised swell of the Fourth.

"What's that?" he gasped.

"Ha, ha! That's Gussy!"

"The one and only!" sobbed Lowther. "Gussy, of course! Is there anybody else who does these things?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare stared at the unhappy swell of St. Jim's.

"D'Arcy!" he exclaimed. "Is that D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus feebly.

CHAPTER 12.

Not An Affair of State.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS cast a longing glance towards the School House.

He was anxious to get out of sight. But the crowd round him was too thick, and they did not make room for him to pass. They were enjoying the scene, even if the principal actor in it was not.

"What does this mean?" asked Kildare, in a gasping voice. "D'Arcy, how dare you appear in public, in the quadrangle, in that ridiculous rig!"

"Oh, deah!"

"Why have you painted your silly face and put on a false beard, you young ass? Is it a game?"

"Oh, ewikey!"

Kildare shook him by the shoulder.

"Answer me, you young duffer! What have you done this for?"

"Weally, Kildare, I did not do it."

"You must have allowed it to be done, then!" snapped the captain of St. Jim's.

"Yaas; but undah a wotten misappwehension. I have been the victim of a beastly practical joke!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

"Tell me who fixed you up like that?"

"The wottah called himself Lieutenant Lynx!" moaned Arthur Augustus. "I presumed that he was a Secret Service agent sent from Downin' Street to interview me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare stared.

"Is he out of his senses?" he ejaculated.

"Weally, Kildare——"

"So that's it?" exclaimed Blake. "That's what the letter was about, was it? Didn't we tell you your silly leg was being pulled, you chump?"

"Oh, ewumbs!"

"Give Kildare the letter, you fathead!"

Arthur Augustus, quite overcome, fumbled for the famous letter from Downing Street, and handed it to the wondering captain of St. Jim's. Even Arthur Augustus could not believe any longer that the letter was genuine, and that it had been dictated to Mr. N. O. Boddey by the Prime Minister. His affair of State was vanishing in smoke.

Kildare looked at the letter. Blake, between gasps, explained about the resolution that had been forwarded to the Prime Minister. Kildare very nearly doubled up. He tried to look severe, but he could not; the effort was too much for him. He shrieked.

"And that young ass believed that this letter came from Downing Street!" he gasped. "Oh, dear! Ha, ha, ha! Of all the young idiots——"

"Weally, you know——" said Arthur Augustus feebly.

"Can't you see how it's signed?" shouted Kildare. "N. O. Boddey! Can't you see that that means 'Nobody'?"

"Gweat Scott! I nevah thought of that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And—and you went to meet a supposed man from Downing Street!" ejaculated Kildare. "You were silly ass enough to think——"

"Weally, I—I—I——"

"Oh, my word!" moaned Tom Merry, wiping his eyes. "Oh, Gussy, how could you! Why were you born such a humorist?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"But why did you let the man, or whoever he was, fix you up in that utterly ridiculous manner?" exclaimed Kildare.

"The wottah pretended that he was disguisin' me. You see, there was no lookin'-glass there, and I could not see what he was doin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But why were you to be disguised?" demanded Kildare.



"Because it was to be kept a gwent secret that I was goin' to see Asquith and Kitchener, you know."

The juniors shrieked. Kildare roared. He could not help it. The head prefect roared with merriment as unrestrainedly as the littlest fag.

Arthur Augustus's cheeks could not get any redder, so his blushes could not be seen. He was longing at that moment for the quadrangle to open and let him disappear from view.

But the old quad was not likely to oblige him in that way. The swell of St. Jim's had to go through with it.

"Pway let me pass, you boundahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you wottahs, I want to get this wubbish off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hide inside your hat, dear boy!" said Redfern. "It's big enough!"

Arthur Augustus snapped the big opera-hat shut and hurled it away. It was promptly fielded by Kerr. That opera-hat was a part of the property of the N.H.J.A.D.S.

"Let him pass!" exclaimed Kildare, in a choking voice. "Go and clean off that paint, you young idiot!—ha, ha, ha!—and get rid of those clothes! Ha, ha, ha! And I advise you not to let your Housemaster see you!"

"Oh, deah!"

The shrieking juniors allowed Arthur Augustus to pass at last. He tore away towards the School House, followed by yells of laughter. The juniors were almost in hysterics.

That Arthur Augustus should have believed that his valuable assistance was wanted in an affair of State was funny enough, but that the affair of State should have turned out in this way was simply execrable.

The swell of St. Jim's tore into the School House, only anxious now to get out of sight.

He rushed up the stairs at top speed, sped into Study No. 6, and slammed the door. There he dragged off his disguise, and hurled the beard, the moustache, and the clothes upon the floor and danced upon them.

"Oh, the wottah! I wondah who it was? The villain! Who could it have been? I know verry well it wasn't a weal lieutenant now! Oh, cwumbs! It must have been some St. Jim's chap japia' me—some New House boundah, pewpaws. Oh, cwikey! I will give him such a fearful thrashin'! Oh, deah! Bai Jove, the uttah asses are yellin' like anythin'! I can't see anythin' to cackle at!"

Through the open study window came the yells of laughter from the quad. The juniors had not returned to the cricket. They couldn't. They were simply doubled up.

"The uttah asses! I weally do not see any joke in the mattah at all!" gasped D'Arcy. "The silly chumps! I wegard this as a wotten tick! Oh, deah!"

Then he gave a start as he saw a handsome silk topper on the study table. In his excitement he had not noticed it at first. He recognised his own silk topper—the beautiful head gear he had left in the old barn, and which Lieutenant Lynx had promised should be returned to him.

Evidently it had been returned, and it had arrived at St. Jim's before D'Arcy himself, for here it was in his study.

In great amazement, Arthur Augustus picked up the topper and regarded it. There was a little note inside, and he read it mechanically:

"With kind regards from the New House.

"(Signed) FIGGINS & Co."

Arthur Augustus stared at that note as if it mesmerised him.

He could guess now who "Lieutenant Lynx" was!

His feelings were too deep for words. Dumbly he tore up the note, jumped on his discarded attire once more, and then sought a bath-room to wash the make-up off his burning face.

Arthur Augustus performed his ablutions with great care, and not a trace of the grease-paint was left upon his noble countenance. But when his chums came in after the cricket match, they found his cheeks still crimson. But this time it was natural colour.

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CHAPTER 13.

The Light That Failed.

THE "affair of State" was not soon forgotten.

All St. Jim's howled over it; even the serious and sedate Sixth chuckled gleefully over it when they heard the story.

For several days Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the most celebrated person at St. Jim's—the cynosure of all eyes.

He could not appear in public without fellows asking him about Lieutenant Lynx, and whether he had been called in to a Cabinet Council in Downing Street, and how he was getting on with Mr. Asquith.

Arthur Augustus was soon fed up with the subject, but the other fellows, naturally, did not tire of it so soon.

When it came out that "Lieutenant Lynx" was the leading character in the play planned by the New House Junior Amateur Dramatic Society, Arthur Augustus's feelings were almost homicidal.

Figgins & Co. had scored over Study No. 6, there could not be any doubt about that; and though Blake & Co. laughed as heartily as anyone over the joke on Gussy, they felt that the prestige of the study was seriously endangered.

"It's our Achilles' heel, you know, the one vulnerable spot having a born duffer in the study," Blake remarked on that subject.

There was a sniff from Arthur Augustus as Blake made that remark, but Herries and Digby nodded full assent.

"They've made this study look idiotic," went on Blake. "It's up to us to get even somehow, or the New House will never leave off cackling."

"I have a great mind to give them all a fearful thrashin'," said Arthur Augustus.

"Bow-wow! They're giving their silly play to-morrow," said Blake. "Now, as Lieutenant Lynx has dished this study, it is up to this study to dish Lieutenant Lynx."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The only question is, how's it to be done?" said Blake. "Those New House bounders have got to be put in their place; you can all see that."

"Hear, hear!" said Digby. "What price raiding them when they're giving their silly play, and mucking up the whole show?"

Blake shook his head.

"Can't be did! They're giving it in the common-room in the New House, and we can't raid them there. That's why they're keeping it in their house. If it was in the lecture-room we might have a chance."

"There'd be a host of fatheaded prefects on our necks at once," said Herries. "That's N.G."

"They've had the cheek to ask us over to see it," said Blake. "As if we want to see their duffing theatricals! We have the real thing in this House; the New House variety is only a spurious imitation. We'll hold a giddy consultation about it. They ought to be dished somehow, for the honour of the House."

The Terrible Three were called in to the consultation. As a matter of fact, Tom Merry & Co. had already been thinking that matter out. They had already made up their minds to "dish" the New House theatrical performance.

"We're on," said Tom Merry, with a nod. "It's important to put those cheeky kids in their place—not so important as an affair of State, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We must keep it dark, of course," said Lowther, "as dark as a State secret!"

Arthur Augustus jumped up.

"Will you let that mattah drop!" he demanded. "I refuse to listen to any more wotten jokes on that subject, you duffahs!"

"But I'm not joking," protested Lowther. "If they guess what we're up to they'll be on the watch for us, so we must be as secret as an affair of State."

"You uttah ass!"

"I suggest that Gussy is the man to deal with them," went on Lowther.

Arthur Augustus's frowning brow cleared.

"Yaas, there's somethin' in that," he remarked.

"Because Gussy is such a ripping hand at disguising himself," added Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly duffah!" shouted Arthur Augustus, in exasperation. "If you have come here for a thick yah, Lowthah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus retired from the consultation and slammed the door.

"Now, how are we going to dish the beasts?" said Blake. "That's the question before the meeting. They've been cackling themselves black in the face over Gussy's affair of State, and we want to give them something else to cackle over."

The six juniors put their heads together.

The grave question was debated with great earnestness. Figg's precaution in selecting a New House apartment, for the play baffled them. In the Form-room or the lecture-hall they would have had more scope for their peculiar activities. But in the stronghold of the enemy there was no chance of a raid or a ragging.

Certainly they could keep away, and loftily ignore Figg's play, but that, as Blake remarked, would be set down by the New House fellows to jealousy, and it would be confession of impotence. Besides, lots of School House fellows would go, and, anyway, Figgins & Co. were sure of getting an audience. Fellows would go if only to see Fatty Wynn made up as General French, and Piggy as Lord Kitchener.

"The bouncers know we're on the warpath, you see," said Tom Merry. "That's why they're keeping it in the New House, instead of using the lecture-hall. And I hear that Monteith and some more of the New House prefects will be there. Not much chance of a ragging. They'd be all over us."

"Unless—" said Monty Lowther thoughtfully.

All eyes were turned upon Monty Lowther. There was a glimmer in the eyes of the humorist of the Shell. Evidently he had an idea.

"Unless—" repeated Blake.

"What's the wheeze?" asked Manners.

Monty Lowther proceeded to explain. There was a chuckle in Study No. 6 when he had finished.

The idea seemed to catch on.

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "We'll turn up in force, and pass the word round to all the fellows. And keep it dark—awfully dark!"

"What-ho!"

The consultation broke up, the council of war evidently satisfied with Monty Lowther's solution of the difficulty, whatever it was.

The next day was the one for the great performance by the N.H.J.A.D.S., and that day, after lessons, Figgins & Co. were very busy.

They had not much time to bestow upon the School House fellows, or they might have noticed all sorts of whispers and chuckles among those cheery youths.

Every fellow in the School House who could be relied upon to keep the secret had been admitted to the plot. Even Arthur Augustus, who had frowned almost incessantly of late, was seen to smile.

Figgins had issued invitations to everybody to come and see the play, and as there was no charge for admission, the N.H.J.A.D.S. felt sure of a good audience. All the New House juniors, at least, were certain to turn up. But naturally the N.H.J.A.D.S. wanted an audience from the other House.

They were gratified by the response to their generous invitations. More than half the juniors of the School House announced their intention of being present.

The accommodation of the "theatre" was likely to be taxed to the utmost.

Tom Merry mentioned to Figgins that he was coming over with most of the Shell. Blake undertook to lead an army of the Fourth, and Wally of the Third, D'Arcy minor, was booked with a horde of fags.

Figgins & Co. could not help feeling flattered. Perhaps Kerr had some slight suspicions. Kerr was a very canny youth.

"It's because it's a war play," Figgins remarked. "You see, it's only patriotic to crack it up."

"They know they'll see some good acting over here," observed Fatty Wynn.

"Might be some little game on," said Kerr.

Figgins shook his head.

"They can't do anything over here," he said. "It's in our House, you see, and if they began any larks they'd be mobbed on the spot. Besides, we're getting three prefects in the audience. Even those cheeky bouncers wouldn't have the nerve to begin ragging with three prefects present."

"No, I suppose not," admitted Kerr. "I don't see what they can do."

"Oh, it's all right!" said Figgins. "The play will go with a bang, and they'll jolly well see that the School House hasn't a look in with us, when it comes to real acting."

Kerr nodded. He was not quite satisfied, but if there was anything "on," even Kerr could not guess what it was. In their own stronghold the New House fellows were certainly equal to dealing with any attempts at a rag. Any fellow venturing to disturb the gravity of the proceedings would be forthwith ejected on his neck.

After a hurried tea the N.H.J.A.D.S. were busy in the common-room, importing chairs and forms, and exporting all other articles, to leave as much room as possible. The stage was arranged at the upper end of the room, with a curtain that would really go up and down, Kerr, the expert stage-manager, seeing to that. The green-room, which also served as a dressing-room, was curtained off from the back of the stage. The performance was fixed to begin at seven, and before seven o'clock all was prepared, and the members of the caste of "Secret Service" were engaged in making up for their parts.

While Kerr was transforming himself into Lieutenant Lynx, Figgins into Lord Kitchener, Fatty Wynn into Field-Marshal French, and the rest into their respective parts, the audience streamed in.

The New House juniors were there to a man—or rather a boy. They were quite prepared to deal with any attempt at disorder on the part of visitors from the School House.

The School House juniors came in swarms. Tom Merry, and a crowd of Shell fellows were first on the scene, Study No. 6 and an army of Fourth-Formers marched in with a crowd of fags of the Third. A hundred School House fellows at least were soon packed in the room.

But there was not the slightest sign of disorder. The School House audience seemed to be in the best of humours.

Monty Lowther was not present, as it happened. Perhaps Lowther had business elsewhere. But his absence was not noted. In such a swarm it was not likely to be observed that one fellow was missing.

All the available seats were filled, and there was a crowd standing at the back. Tom Merry generously resigned a seat, and stood up against the wall. Perhaps it was by chance that he stood close to the switch of the electric-light. There were both gas and electric-light in the room, but the latter was used, the gas only being there in case of emergencies.

Monteith and Baker and Webb of the Sixth came in, and took the front places that had been specially reserved



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for them. Probably the prefects were not very keen about "Secret Service," but more concerned in preventing a "House row" between the different parts of the audience.

By the time seven rang out from the clock-tower the room was packed. The curtain was still down. As happens only too often with amateur dramatic societies, the company were not quite ready.

At ten minutes past seven, as the curtain had not risen, there were signs of impatience on the part of the audience.

Stamp! Stamp! Stamp!

The curtain went up.

Then there was a murmur of applause. The "scene" was a Belgian village, recently captured by the Huns. Redfern, as the Crown Prince, was ordering to execution a crowd of unhappy peasants, after the manner of the German generals. Prussian soldiers, in spiked helmets, which perhaps were a little too obviously made of cardboard, carried out the sentence, with real rifles belonging to the school cadet corps, and blank cartridges, of course. The din was terrific, and there was a round of applause.

The second scene was greeted with laughter. His Royal Highness the Crown Prince was depicted in a chateau, where he had taken up his quarters. At an alarm that the British were coming, his Highness was seen cramming silver forks and spoons into his pockets, and he escaped out of a window with a clock under his arm. The scene, which was both humorous and true to life, was loudly applauded.

In the next scene Lieutenant Lynx of the Secret Service appeared.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy frowned, and jammed his eye-glass a little tighter into his eye, as Kerr appeared in the guise of the "gentleman from Downing Street," who had met him in the barn.

"The rattah wottah!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Old friend of yours, Gusey," said a New House junior cheerily.

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus craned round his neck to look at the School House fellows standing at the back.

"I say, Tom Mewwy—"

"Silence!"

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy, when are you goin' to begin?"

"Shurrup!"

"Order!"

Blake stamped on Arthur Augustus's foot.

Attention was turned on the stage now. While the scene was proceeding Tom Merry was also busy.

Almost concealed by the crowd of School House fellows who was standing round him, he was dealing with the electric-light switch.

The scene was growing intensely dramatic now. Lieutenant Lynx, in the course of obtaining information for the use of General French, was captured by the Huns, and the Crown Prince was ordering him to be instantly shot. Shooting was a great feature in the play.

Lieutenant Lynx was facing the music heroically; but at the critical moment, when the deadly cadet rifles were about to be discharged, there was a rush of British Tommies on the stage, and the murderous Huns were bowled over like skittles. Behind the scenes sounded "Tipperary" on a mouth-organ. It was a really thrilling scene, and the audience rose to it. Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, in the midst of the excitement, the light went out.

Darkness rushed upon the stage and the auditorium. There was a babel of voices at once.

"What's the matter?"

"Put the light on!"

"Some rotter's turned it off!"

"Yah! School House cads!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monteith jumped up.

"Keep your seats!" he shouted. "Whoever has turned the light off, turn it on again at once—do you hear?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where was Lieutenant Lynx when the light went out?" chuckled Blake.

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Britain's Best Bicycle

"In the dark! Ha, ha, ha!"
"Don't scramble there!" shouted Monteith, as there came sounds of scuffling in the darkness, which seemed to indicate that School House and New House were coming to close quarters. "Order! Do you hear! I will put the light on!"

The scuffling did not cease, however. Monteith angrily shoved his way through the crowd in the darkness, groping for the door.

The juniors made way for him.

Monteith made his way to the switch, and turned it on. But there was no light to show.

"Put the light on!" yelled Kerr from the stage.

"Buck up, Monteith!"

"Scrag that rotter who turned it out!"

"Yah! School House rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why don't you put the light on?"

Monteith was trying to put the light on. But the light would not come on. The prefect uttered an angry exclamation.

"It's no good," he exclaimed; "the wire's cut!"

"Oh, crabs!"

"School House cads! It's a rotten jape."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kick them out!"

And the scuffling in the darkness increased. School House and New House were fairly on the warpath now.

CHAPTER 14.

Tit for Tat.

"KEEP your seats!" shouted Monteith angrily.

"Order!" howled Baker.

"Silence!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Wush the stage, deah boys!"

"Keep your seats!" bellowed Monteith. "Light the gas, some of you!"

"Yes, there's the gas! Light it!"

"Light away!" murmured Tom Merry.

Matches were struck on all sides. Thompson of the Shell reached up and turned the gas on, and applied the match to the burner.

But there was no light.

The match burnt out, and Thompson dropped it as it scorched his fingers. No gas was proceeding from the burner.

"It's cut off!" shrieked Thompson.

"Turned off at the meter, by George!"

"By Lowther you mean!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther slipped into the darkened room,

"Going strong?" he inquired.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of voices in the room. Everybody was on his feet. The darkness was only broken by the striking of matches. Already a dozen or more of the rivals of St. Jim's were pommelling one another furiously.

"Keep order!" shouted Monteith. "Some young rascal has turned off the gas at the meter. I will go at once and turn it on. Keep your seats."

The prefect hurried away.

"Pile in, deah boys!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Yah! Kick those School House cads out!"

"Down with the New House!"

"Go for 'em!"

There was a rush for the stage. All the dramatic company were crowded there now, in the dark.

They were in a state of dismay and fury.

It was only too plain to the members of the N.H.J.A.D.S. that this was a scheme of their old rivals to "muck up" that famous war play, "Secret Service." They had no right to complain, as it was exactly what they might have done to the School House Amateur Dramatic Society, but it was exasperating all the same.

"It's all right," grunted Figgins. "We'll get the gas on in a few minutes, and then we can go on. It's only an interruption."

"Go for 'em!"

"Look out!" yelled Kerr. "They're coming!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Back up!"

There was a wild rush upon the stage in the darkness.

From all sides came the School House raiders, in swarms. They fairly flooded the stage.

The members of the caste were swept before them like chaff on the tide. They went over like skittles, with grievous damage to their make-up and their costumes, not to mention their noses.

Figgins & Co. put up a terrific fight. But the numbers were too great. They had no chance. In the darkness it was difficult to distinguish friend from foe, and there were all sorts of mistakes. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Manners tackled one another, each under the firm impression that the other was Figgins, and they pommelled away with great earnestness. Blake had Dig's head in chancery, and Figgins was hammering Kerr for all he was worth. The din was deafening.

"Oh, ewombs! Leggo, you wottah!" panted Arthur Augustus, as his adversary got him down and rubbed his noble nose on the stage.

"Great Scott! Gusey!"

"Why, Mannahs, you ass——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fwabjous idiot, I thought you were Figgins——"

"Yaroo!" roared Manners, as a rush of juniors stumbled over him, and he was flooded with falling combatants.

"Oh, ewombs! Gewwoff!"

"Go for 'em! Down with the New House!"

"Back up!"

Bump! Bump! Bump! Crash! Yell! The excitement was tremendous, and the damage was great. "Scenes" were hurled in all directions and trampled on.

Chairs and forms were overturned, and struggling juniors rolled among them, pommelling one another.

Tom Merry's voice rang out at last, ordering retreat. It would not have done for the raiders to be on the spot when the lights came on.

"Clear!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Yah! Kick them out!"

"Collar the bounders!"

Tom Merry's order was obeyed, and a mass of School House fellows struggled for the door. They crowded out, and marched away down the passage and into the quadrangle. It was a masterly retreat, but it would not have been carried out so successfully but for the darkness.

"Looks like a win for us!" panted Blake, when they were safe in the quadrangle. "I rather fancy that Figgins & Co. won't feel like going on with the play."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Watah not!" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Lieutenant Lynx must be in wags by this time. One good turn deserves another."

"Hurrah for us!"

And Tom Merry & Co. marched away across the dark quadrangle, satisfied that the New House juniors had been thoroughly downed and put in their place.

They were right.

When the gas was turned on at last, and light once more shone in the common-room, it revealed a scene of desolation. It looked almost as if the Prussians had been there.

Forms and chairs were scattered, the scenes were upset and trampled, and the actors were in tatters and gasping for breath.

Figgins & Co. gazed at one another, on the wrecked stage, with feelings that were difficult to express.

"Oh, the rotters!" groaned Redfern. "Look at us!"

"Oh, what an evening!" mumbled Fatty Wynn. "The beasts ought to be scragged!"

Kerr grinned feebly.

"It's only tit for tat!" he said. "We've raided them often enough, and we mucked up their last rotten play. Blessed if I thought of that dodge of turning the lights out. Oh, the spoofers! That's why they came in such thumping crowds to see the play!"

"I—I—I say, are we going on?" mumbled Lawrence.

Figgins snorted.

"How can we go on, fathead, in this state? Chuck it!"

There was no resource but to "chuck it." Most of the audience were retiring to bathe their eyes and noses—which needed it.

The N.H.J.A.D.S. retired disconsolately from the scene. The performance of "Secret Service" had come to a sudden, dramatic, but quite unexpected end.

Monteith was inclined to visit vengeance upon the rioters. But in the darkness it had been impossible to see who was rioting and who wasn't. Figgins & Co. loyally failed to recognise anybody; they apparently hadn't the faintest idea who was who and which was which. So the prefect, after ordering them to restore the room to order, let the matter drop. Indeed, afterwards, sounds of laughter were heard from Monteith's study, which seemed to indicate that the prefects took a humorous view of the disastrous conclusion of the histrionic effort of the N.H.J.A.D.S.

Figgins & Co. had been done, and done most thoroughly; and the person who rejoiced most was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form. For his adventure was now no longer the latest joke; and the disaster of the N.H.J.A.D.S. was now the general topic, instead of Arthur Augustus's Affair of State.

THE END.

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THE CITY OF FLAME

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THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Hal Mackenzie, Jim Holdsworth, and Bob Sigbee, while cruising in a yacht, the *Iris*, in the Red Sea, discover information relating to a mysterious City of Flame, and forth themselves into an expedition for discovering it.

After many exciting adventures, they at last reach the land of Sho, and, after crossing a great desert, reach the Temple of the Sun. There they meet Patrick O'Hara, a tall, red-headed Irishman, who is being kept prisoner by the natives, and regarded as a saint. The comrades then come into collision with Argolis, the chief priest, who wishes their deaths.

A few days later the temple is visited by Queen Clytemna Sho, with an enormous retinue. She takes the three adventurers and the Irishman under her protection, and in due course they return with the queen's retinue to the City of Flame, and are lodged in her palace.

The priests, under Argolis, as well as other powerful enemies, are still working against the comrades, and one night they find that their rifles have mysteriously vanished.

Queen Clytemna informs the comrades of vast treasures, and asserts that the treasure is rightfully hers, but the priests have conspired to keep it from her.

The comrades decide to find the treasure, and, after many thrilling adventures, succeed in their purpose.

Then they find that the only means of escape from the treasure-trove is by way of a lake of boiling water. They find a boat hidden in a recess, and decide to cross the lake in this, with as much of the treasure as possible.

(Now go on with the story.)

Hal's Peril.

"Pity we haven't a bag of some sort to put the jewels into," said Hal. "Stuffing our pockets full of them'll be a nuisance. It puts a stopper on one's activities, when there's a chance of a thousand pounds' worth of precious stones shooting out of one's pocket at every jump or stumble."

"I'll find me shirt," said O'Hara, "for, be me sowl, I can aisy do without ut!" The stakeholder at a tramp-steamer in the Red Sea would be cool to this cave. Just tie up wan ind av the shirt, an' it'll be an illigant bag."

O'Hara's offer was accepted, and the shirt-bag loaded up. It was carried down to the boat, together with some of the rarer specimens of gold utensils. Then they shoved off and paddled for the opposite side of the lake, which they had not yet seen. They had taken it for granted when they found the boat that there was a landing-place on the far side, and a way out to the upper world.

They were not disappointed. A broad shelf of rock formed an excellent landing-place, opposite to the wide mouth of a tunnel. Had the lake been bridged there would have been a straight, continuous road from the caves.

"We'd better leave the stuff here," Hal suggested, "until we've explored a bit further."

"What! In the boat?"

"No; I've spotted a better place than that."

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He pointed to a boulder of rock just inside the tunnel-mouth, and behind it they found a large, cup-shaped hollow. As a temporary receptacle and hiding-place for the gold and jewels, it was just the thing, for there were some small boulders of rock about, one of which could easily be rolled over the top of it.

"But cess to me thick head!" exclaimed O'Hara, when his shirt had been emptied of its precious contents. "I've left me rations an' the flask av dhrink over in the cave!"

"Then we must sure go back and fetch 'em," declared Sigbee. "We're short of food and drink as it is, and before we win clear a mouthful of each may well be worth all the loot we've collected. The water of this lake ain't drinkable, not even when it's cool."

"You three paddle back," said Hal, "and I'll remain here. You may as well bring another lot of gems over with you while you're on the job."

"I dare say we should have thought of that," laughed Jim. "Nothing like laying in a good stock of anything that's worth having."

They shoved off, keeping time with their paddles to a Canadian river-song, given by Sigbee, who had a fine baritone voice.

Hal sat down on a boulder and looked after the boat until it was lost to sight in the wreaths of vapour which drifted restlessly over the water. The chorus ceased, and he knew they had reached the other side. Then there fell a silence so profound that even the occasional bubbling of the boiling lake sounded quite loud and distinct.

Minutes passed. Hal sat there rather busy with his thoughts, which were pleasant ones, and took him in fancy far enough away from the land of Sho. He was startled out of his reverie by a sound which didn't come from the lake, but from behind him. He turned slowly, and listened.

He could distinguish a faint shuffling noise—very faint, and far away down the tunnel. It ceased, and he puzzled his brain to think what could have been the cause of it.

"Not an animal," he muttered—"at least, not an animal of this country. A man! But there—"

Again the faint shuffling sound reached his ears—a little more distinct, a little nearer. He listened with strained attention.

"Bare feet!" he told himself. "That's what it is. Men with bare feet coming this way, stealthily. Why? Who can know that we've crossed the lake? It isn't possible—"

Yet he knew that in that city of a thousand mysteries, things were possible which in European countries had not yet been imagined.

He couldn't see anything—that is, nothing unusual. But then it wasn't possible, with the dim light of the oil-lamp which had been left him, to see any object more than a few yards away.

Walking down the tunnel a dozen paces, he placed the lamp on a projection of rock, and then returned to his first position. An anxious glance he cast across the lake, but there was no sign of his comrades returning. They seemed to have been gone a long time.

The shuffling of bare feet—there was no mistake about it now—drew nearer and nearer. Hal gripped his spear and waited. All men in that accursed city—or under it, which was the same thing—were possible enemies.

At last in the circle of light an armed man appeared, then another, and another, and another, until at least a score were creeping stealthily towards him. They were men of the city. He knew that by their sullen, savage-looking faces. And he

remembered that many of the inhabitants went about with bare feet, for all the roads were paved with smooth stone. But they meant mischief, this lot, for men don't come creeping along stealthily, and armed, if they're on a peaceful errand.

Hal sent a hail across the lake.

"Ahoj, there! Sigbee, Jim, O'Hara! Come back as quick as you can! Armed men here!"

"There was no answer." He hailed again.

"Can you hear me? Armed men here! Look as if they're going to attack!"

Then it was that Pat O'Hara's voice boomed out a reply:

"We're coming! Armed men, is it? Begorra! I'm spoiling for a fight!"

Immediately afterwards Jim's cheery voice was heard:

"All serene, old chum! We're coming across in double-quick time! Keep your pecker up!"

The welcome sound of the paddles splashing in the water now reached Hal's ears. He turned and faced the foe.

They had paused on hearing his shout, and were grouped in the circle of light. One of them stepped forward, and a throwing-spear whizzed over Hal's head. Then the Shoans came on with a rush, and Hal braced himself for the coming struggle.

Twenty to one—unless his comrades arrived quickly!

Held by the Enemy.

To face the oncoming foe, Hal had to stand with his back to the lake, which he swiftly realised was about as bad a position as he could possibly be in. The sheer weight of numbers against him would force him to give a few paces, and those few paces would take him to the edge of the rock path—and over.

A fall into the horrible cauldron of the boiling lake would be the end of all things for him. And it would be a death of frightful agony.

These thoughts swept through his brain with the quickness of a lightning flash, and in a flash he had changed his position.

In a couple of bounds he cleared the space between himself and the end of the rock wall, then he swung round, with his back against the rock. So long as he could stand he could now keep the attackers in front of him; they would be between him and the lake edge.

The Shoans were savage at this manoeuvre, for it balked them of the spectacle they had promised themselves. Cruel by nature, they took a gloomy pleasure in the torture of their foes. Their intention had been to hurl their victim into the lake.

With furious shouts they rushed at him, but the gallant young Briton held them at bay. In one sense, the Shoans were fighting at a slight disadvantage, so far as their own methods were concerned, for they had no shields with them.

And it was to the shield they trusted entirely for defence, the spear being used only for attack. They didn't understand guards and parries with their favourite weapon, but Hal did. So far as was possible under the altered circumstances, he adopted the tactics he had used in his great fight with Suleman of the Hills. He lunged, and parried the driving thrusts against him with his heavy spear as though it was a rifle with fixed bayonet. Two of his adversaries dropped out of the fight, badly wounded, but there were eighteen left.

They pressed him hard, and he had to rely only on defence. But that couldn't last long. With so many attacking at once, they must soon break through his guard. How long would his comrades be before they came to his assistance?

The crowd of Shoans in front of him, all tall men, prevented him from seeing out on to the lake, and his ears were filled with their savage shouts. He fought on doggedly, desperately.

At last a welcome sound reached him, a terrific roar in Pat O'Hara's deep bass voice. Loud above the din of the conflict it was heard.

"Hurroo for Ould Oireland! Down wid the flat-footed spalpeens! Kape your ind up, Hal, me bhoj! We'll be wid you in two shakes!"

The Shoans were taken by surprise, for they hadn't noticed the approach of the boat. The big Irishman, red of visage and red of hair, cut his way through them with his mighty battle-axe. They recoiled before him in terror. Nor were Jim and Sigbee behindhand with sword and spear. A line of dead and wounded marked the path of the three.

"Thank goodness you've turned up!" gasped Hal, who was bleeding from a wound in the shoulder. "They'd have finished me off in another couple of minutes!"

"We'll finish them off now," cried Jim cheerily, "before they know what's struck them!"

And the victory would undoubtedly have gone to the gallant quartette, for the ten Shoans who were left unhurt were evidently contemplating flight, when a loud shout back in the tunnel heartened the enemy up again.

They stood their ground now, with yells of savage triumph. "More av the bastes!" cried O'Hara, as he swung round his axe, and sent another of the Shoans to his last account.

"A whole swarm of them!" exclaimed Jim. "Great Nelson! The odds'll be twenty to one! Seems as if this is likely to be our last fight. If that's so, we'll make it one that our enemies will remember!"

"By all the saints! Four rale men can bate forty av these cowards!" declared O'Hara.

"On that reckoning there ought to be eight of us," exclaimed Sigbee, "for we are up against eighty, for a pretty sure guess!"

From that moment the four friends had no breath to spare for talking; they required all their staying power and all their strength and skill for fighting. They couldn't hope to win, for, indeed, their foes must have numbered very close upon eighty now that the reinforcements had rushed up, but they might, by a miracle, break through their ranks.

It was a forlorn hope, though.

Shoulder to shoulder, their backs against the wall of rock, they put up a splendid fight. Even the Shoans, raging and savage as they were, gave vent at times to exclamations of admiration or astonishment. Never before had they seen men fight as that brave quartette were fighting.

With axe and spear and sword they cut and thrust and hacked until the bodies of their foes formed a wide semi-circle in front of them. If anyone did more than the others, it was perhaps O'Hara. The tremendous strength, great height and breadth of the red Irishman, and the terrible weapon that he used with such dreadful effect, made him an adversary from whom the Shoans recoiled again and again with cries of fear.

But away in the background there were two men in high authority who continually urged them on to fresh efforts by voice, but not by example. They were leaders who did not lead—that is, they took no active part in the fighting.

They were Anubis and the high-priest.

Hal was feeling the terrible strain, and his strength was giving out, for he had to bear the brunt of an unequal struggle before his comrades came to his assistance. He had been wounded then, and had lost blood. He was no longer able to guard himself effectively, and the spear of his nearest adversary drove deep into his side.

Hal gave a sharp cry of pain, his weapon dropped from his nerveless hand, and he fell to the ground.

"I'm done for!" he gasped.

The Shoan who had struck him down—a man with a twisted lip, who had shown marked hatred of the white strangers when they came to the city—laughed loudly. It was a horrible laugh, for it contorted his face, giving it a more evil expression than Nature had already provided.

Jim sprang to his chum's side. He turned with blazing eyes on the man, who laughed.

"This for you!" he cried.

His sword flashed, and the blade bit deep. The Shoan would never laugh again.

Hal had fainted, and Jim made sure that he was dead. It was not the time for any outward expression of grief, but the loss of his chum filled Jim with a cold fury which made him infinitely more dangerous than he was in his reckless mood, because it was not natural to him.

"The murderers!" he hissed between his clenched teeth. "They shall pay!"

The Shoans were truly little better than murderers, for their attack was unprovoked, and directed against strangers who had never harmed them, and bore them no enmity until their lives were treacherously assailed.

Jim never made vain threats. He exacted payment, and three more of the enemy made up the toll before he dropped by his comrade's side, and the blackness of oblivion veiled all that was going on around him.

But the fight was nearly ended now. Sigbee pitched forward on to his face and lay still.

Pat O'Hara alone remained of the devoted four, and he had been wounded twice.

One wild shout he gave as he whirled the fearsome axe around his head, and then clove the biggest man among the Shoans right through the body.

That was the finish of the fight, for before he could recover his weapon to strike again the crowd of Shoans had rushed in on him, borne him down, and overpowered him. They bound him hand and foot.

"Ye blazing curs!" cried O'Hara. "Let me loose, an' I give me back my axe, an' I'll fight the lot av ye!"

But they were not at all likely to comply with that request. Already they had lost a third of their number in killed and wounded. They had had enough.

Now that the fight was over Anubis and the chief priest came forward. O'Hara had enough breath left to revile them both.

"For you, my friend," said Anubis softly, "there will be death in due course. But it will be slow, for there are many different ways of dying."

He turned to the chief priest.

"These others, Argolis," he added—"are they dead?"

The chief priest bent over Hal, Jim, and Sigbee in turn. "They are not dead," he replied, "but badly wounded. However, I have enough skill to cure them." He paused, and the look of a fiend came into his cruel face. "For to let them die now would be too easy a fate. They must be made to suffer."

"And we must force them to tell us of this plot to gain the treasure," said Anubis, "so that we shall have a hold over the queen."

"That is the principal reason why they must be kept alive—until we have done with them," the chief priest answered. "Clytemna must be crushed."

Life was held cheap in the Land of Shoa, and the burial of the dead was accomplished by the simple method of dropping the bodies into the Black Lake, where they instantly sank out of sight. There were many dark secrets hidden beneath the surface of that forbidding sheet of water.

The wounded, including the four prisoners, were then placed in rough litters, the treasure which Hal and his comrades had risked so much to secure was loaded into convenient receptacles, and the whole party set off along the tunnel to the secret rendezvous where the conspirators met to plot the overthrow of Queen Clytemna.

"I hope they'll be takin' us somewhere above ground," O'Hara muttered to himself, "where we can see the sun an' the stars an' the sky wanst in a while. It'll be aiser to make an' escape from some place on top of the earth, where 'tis nacheral for men to live, than down here, where 'tis loike being buried alive!"

By which it will be seen that Pat O'Hara had by no means given up hope of outwitting the enemy, had as was the misfortune which had befallen his comrades and himself, and also that he was getting heartily sick of underground tunnels.

"Free and Unfettered."

There could be no manner of doubt that the high priest of Shoa was a skillful surgeon, though his methods of treatment would certainly not have met with the approval of medical practitioners of any Western country.

But there was nothing of the witch doctor of the uncivilized African tribes about him. His was more the method of those unscrupulous Oriental savants, who were regarded as wizards by their ignorant fellow-countrymen; but he cured his prisoners of their wounds, and that was the great point.

They might have felt grateful to him for restoring them to health and strength, their own splendid constitutions materially helping their rapid recovery, had they not known the fiendish purpose which was in his mind. O'Hara had taken care to make his comrades acquainted with that.

They had been carried from the scene of the fight through the subterranean tunnel to a building in the heart of the city. At some time in the dim past this had been a public building, where the affairs of what was then a great and populous city had been transacted, but as the population dwindled there was no further need for it, and it was abandoned.

Like so many other great buildings, it was now falling into decay, but the plotters had chosen it as a suitable rendezvous where they could concoct their schemes without fear of interruption.

The prisoners were lodged in two rooms right at the top, and, so far as accommodation was concerned, they hadn't much to complain of. They had plenty of bedding, a good supply of water for all purposes, and enough to eat. O'Hara and Jim were in one room, Hal and Sigbee in another. The rooms adjoined each other, but there was a partition wall of stone between them.

The doors were massive, and bolted on the outside, and the narrow slits of windows—no more than loopholes—were not wide enough to allow a man to squeeze through them.

Hal, Sigbee, and Jim had their limbs free until they had recovered their strength, after which their wrists were secured behind their backs with ropes. But the big Irishman had been shackled from the first by a short chain fastened to a metal ring in the wall. However, one arm only was thus secured, for the chain was a stout one.

There seemed small enough prospect of making an escape, but O'Hara hadn't given up hopes. Each day he strained and wrenched at his shackles until the ringbolt in the wall was so much loosened that one tremendous wrench would drag it free. After that he did no more for fear the guards would notice it. When the time came for action he would be ready.

Meanwhile he suggested to Jim that he might communicate with their comrades by tapping on the wall. This was while Jim was still in a weak state from his wounds, and his hands were free.

"Messif, I don't understand the signalling business," he said; "but I know a message can be sent by tappin', same as they do in a telegraph-office."

"Yes, by the Morse code," replied Jim. "I understand it. But I've got nothing to tap with that'd be any use. On this thick wall it would need something heavy to make a sound which could be heard on the other side."

"I've got something here," returned O'Hara.

He detached a large loose stone from the base of the wall against which he was lying, and rolled it across the floor to Jim.

"Get to work wid that," he continued, "an' rowl ut back to me whin you've done, so's I can put ut in its place again. There's no sintro outside, an' it'll be more'n an hour before they come up wid the grub."

The food was always brought by three armed men, who stood over the prisoners while they ate. Anubis and the chief priest were taking no chances.

So, after several attempts, communication was established between the comrades in the two rooms, though Jim had tapped out several messages before he received a reply. This was due to the fact that Hal and Sigbee had at first some difficulty in finding anything that would do for a sounder. Loose articles, with the exception of their bedding, were at a discount.

The messages interchanged consisted mainly of inquiries after each other's health and discussing possibilities of escape when they were strong enough to overpower the armed guards who came along with the food.

Armed men also accompanied the chief priest on his visits, and many arguments were tapped out by Morse code on the wall, between Jim on the one side and Sigbee and Hal on the other, as to whether it would be better to make the attempt when the armed men came with the food, or when the chief priest made one of his periodical visits in the role of "medicine-man." For his secret always remained outside in the corridor.

"What'll ye be wastin' your breaths over them argyments for?" O'Hara at last demanded impatiently.

"We're not wastin' breath," Jim replied, grinning, "because we don't use up any in tappin' on a wall. We're wastin' a little strength, perhaps."

"Don't do ut," interrupted the Irishman. "Ye'll made it all. Lave this matter to me. I ain't got so much brains as the rest of ye, mayhap, but if me head's thick me arms are strong. An' ut's strength we'll want to get us out of this misfortune. Be patient."

The advice to be patient was good and sound, but it was hard to follow, for on the very next day Argolis decided that they were now well enough to submit to some further restraint. It was then he gave orders for their wrists to be secured with raw-hide thongs.

That order did not, of course, affect O'Hara, and he remained shackled by a chain as before.

"But 'tis need not be for long," the chief priest said to them, in his oily tones. "To-morrow I will talk with you, and if you agree to my terms it will be well."

"Why not name your terms now?" Hal demanded. "To-morrow," replied Argolis softly, "it will be the fifteenth day of your captivity. Yet you will remember that during that time you have been well treated. And fifteen is regarded by us as a fortunate number."

"Who for?"

"For you—if you are wise."

Then he went away.

"Whin he comes to-morrow," said O'Hara, "don't be afther givin' him the answer that'll be on the end of your tongue. Timposse wid him. I want another day. His promises'll be all lies. Didn't I hear the ould basto tell Anubis that so soon as he'd got out of us all he wanted to know, he'd put us to death wid torture? Tap that through to the others, Jim, me boy."

It was late on the following afternoon when the chief priest arrived for the fateful interview. He spoke first with Hal and Sigbee, and he came straight to the point. Never once did he raise his voice. In his softest and oiliest tones he set forth his rascally propositions.

"We know," he said, "that Queen Clytemna sent you four strangers in the land—to gather as much of Sheba's treasure as you could carry away with you. She dared not trust even her own guards for the task. Do you know why?"

"No."

"Because the treasure is sacred. It may not be taken, even by a queen. The guards know that, and they would not have obeyed her. Therefore she had to turn to you—



With furious shouts the Sheans rushed at Hal, but the gallant young Briton held them at bay. At last a welcome sound reached him—a terrific roar in Pat O'Hara's deep bass voice, "Hurroo for Ould Oireland! Down with the flat-footed spalpeens! (See page 23.)

strangers. It was because she wanted to use you for that purpose that she befriended you, caring nothing for your fate afterwards."

"Oh!" That was all Hal said. Sigsbee merely clicked his tongue. The high priest was not getting much change out of those two.

"But we have no proof of this to satisfy the people," he continued. "It is you who can give the proof. You can speak in the public square, at a time I shall arrange, telling her people to the enemies of Shoa—but I will tell you at the right time all that you have to say."

"And what did she mean to do with it?" "To take it with her out of the land, and then to betray her people to the enemies of Shoa—but I will tell you at the right time all that you have to say."

"And having said it," put in Sigsbee, "what will then happen to us?"

"You will be given your freedom, and each as many of the jewels as he can hold in his two hands."

But surely, if the treasure is sacred, you can't give any of it away. It must be returned to the place from which it was taken."

"Having been brought away," replied Argolis, with a cunning smile, "it is defiled, and must not be returned."

"That's cute!" exclaimed Sigsbee. "By ginger, that's a great wheeze!"

"Suppose we don't agree to your terms, what then?" asked Hal.

"Death is always unpleasant," replied Argolis softly, "and there are many forms of death. But why speak of it? You have wisdom, and you will agree."

"It's not a matter to be decided in a hurry," returned Hal. "The queen has trusted us. At this time to-morrow we'll give you our answer."

"You will do well to think only of yourselves," said Argolis.

There was a threat in his softly-uttered words. "The scoundrel!" muttered Sigsbee, when the door had

closed upon the arch-plotter. "If my hands had been free I'd have had trouble to keep 'em from his throat."

The chief priest next visited Jim and O'Hara, with whom a very similar conversation took place. They, too, required time to decide upon an answer.

"Your companions have already agreed to our terms," was the lying statement with which the priest closed the interview.

Of course, neither Jim nor O'Hara believed that, but they were nevertheless left in an unenviable state of mind, as it was no longer possible to signal to the next room to learn from Hal what had passed. For their hands were bound, and the knots of the raw-hide thongs were so cunningly fastened that there was no possibility of undoing them, though the Irishman tried hard on Jim's with his teeth.

It was about four o'clock the next afternoon, as near as they could guess, that they heard the sound of approaching footsteps.

"That thafe av the world is a bit before his toime," growled O'Hara. "But I'm glad. 'Tis toired I am av being chained up to this wall."

Then, with one tremendous wrench, he tore the ring-bolt clean away from its fastenings, and, leaping to his feet, stretched his arms above his head.

"I can't get rid av this bracelet an' ornaminents off my wrist," he added, "but it'll maybe serve for a weapon 'till I find something better."

"If I were only free!" exclaimed Jim.

"Be aisy," said O'Hara, "for a couple av minutes."

The door opened, but it was not the chief priest who entered. It was Anabis, the councillor. He crossed the threshold, and then stopped dead. His mouth opened to shout for the guards, who were in the corridor, but the only sound which came from his throat was a half-choked gurgle. For O'Hara had gripped him.

"'Tis you that's come for our answer!" cried the Irishman. "Shure, you shall have ut. This is the answer we give."

He lifted Anabis off his feet, swung him shoulder-high, and then, putting forth all his enormous strength, hurled him clean through the doorway. The corridor was really a

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semicircular landing at the head of the stairs, with a stone balustrade guarding its outer edge, and over this balustrade the councillor of evil flow, his arms and legs outstretched.

It was then he shrieked out a loud and piercing cry, full of stark terror, for nothing short of a miracle could save him now. And the miracle didn't happen. He vanished from sight, falling down the well of the stairway, a sheer drop of fifty feet into the stone-paved hall beneath.

And in that manner came the end of Anubis the councillor. The three armed men who had formed his escort stood transfixed with amazement and awe. Such a terrible feat of strength they had never before seen, and the fact that one of the prisoners was free added to their astonishment and fear.

They seemed undecided how to act, and O'Hara was quick to take advantage of their indecision. Snatching up a knife which had fallen from the councillor's belt, he swiftly cut through the thongs which bound Jim's wrists.

"Take a hold of this," said O'Hara, giving the knife to Jim. "Then come along, an' we'll make mince-meat av those craythurs outside."

But the armed escort didn't wait to be made mince-meat of. Perhaps they imagined all four prisoners were free, but in any case they only offered a feeble resistance, then turned tail and bolted.

Jim unfastened the door of the chamber where Hal and Sigbee were confined, and while he was cutting through their bonds he explained what had happened. Hal stretched out his arms, and gave a shout of joy.

"Free and unfettered once more," he cried, "and free and unfettered we'll remain. Now to arm ourselves afresh, and then we'll see who'll try to stop us in the open streets of the city."

"To the Palace!"

They descended the stairs, and reached the great entrance-hall of the building, without encountering a living soul. The dead body of Anubis lay where it had fallen, face downwards, the frightened escort not having taken the trouble to remove it. Why he had gone up for the final interview with the prisoners, instead of the chief priest, was never likely to be known to them, but it was an unlucky arrangement for him.

Excited voices could be heard in some other part of the building, and there's no doubt the three men of the escort were telling their companions what had taken place. Possibly Argolis was one of those learning the startling and unwelcome news, and he would make arrangements for the swift recapture of those "pestilent" white strangers, who never seemed to know when they were beaten.

For the chief priest was not the sort of man to let the grass grow under his feet.

There were five doors round the great central hall, which was circular in shape, and in one of the rooms beyond it was possible some weapons would be found.

"Take a door each," whispered Hal; "it'll save time. Leave the black-painted one alone, unless we draw blank with all the others. There's a suspicious look about it."

They opened four doors simultaneously, but there is no need to describe the rooms which three of them led into. The fourth room will be sufficient, and that was the one entered by Sigbee.

One glance round inside was sufficient for him. Then he darted out again, and called his comrades.

"I'm the one that's struck out, sure!" he said, in a hoarse whisper. "Gee! We've got the luck at last!"

"What have you found? Weapons or—"

"Come and see for yourselves. It'll do your eyes good."

They followed him into the room, and that which they saw certainly did their eyes good, and more than that.

First, and most important, there were their three rifles, which had been stolen from them in the palace, and the loss of which had been little short of a disaster. They were standing in a corner.

Jim and Hal made a rush, and grabbed theirs, but Sigbee was more deliberate. He was, so to speak, the master of the ceremonies.

Jim did a silent war-dance, and that being accomplished, he opened the breach of his rifle and pressed a clip of cartridges into the magazine. Hal and Sigbee followed his example—not in the matter of the war-dance, but in loading up.

"Jolly lucky thing we stuck to our ammunition all this time," said Hal, "even though we had no use for it! How many cartridges have we got between us?"

They counted up, and found they had a hundred and forty-five.

"Then I reckon we can't afford to waste any next time

we butt into trouble," observed Sigbee. "We've got to score a hit every shot."

As O'Hara didn't own a rifle, he wasn't taking part in this talk, but there were other weapons in the room, and among them he found his beloved battle-axe. He was on the point of letting out a wild Irish "Hurroo!" but the others suppressed him just in time. Then he waved the battle-axe round his head, to the accompaniment of a noisy jangling of the chain and ringbolt which still hung from his wrist.

"Muffle that blessed bracelet of yours, Pat!" exclaimed Hal. "It's rattling enough to be heard all over the building. Can't you get it off?"

"Not widout a file," replied O'Hara. "Wud I be wantin' to kape the blazin' thing on me if I cud get rid av it!"

Having now completely and effectively re-armed themselves, they turned their attention to the other important find in that lucky room. It was the valuable treasure. As it had been packed in the skin bags by the orders of Anubis and the chief priest when the fight was over and the devoted quartette were wounded and helpless, so it was now. The time had not arrived, apparently, for the chief conspirators to share it between them.

But from the fact of it being in that room unguarded, it was clear that only those were admitted whom the chief priest could implicitly trust. And among a gang of plotters there are not a great many who can be so trusted. The rank and file of the crowd who take part in a revolution are seldom taken into the confidence of the leaders.

Hal pointed this out to his comrades.

"So we may argue from that," he said, "that there won't be a large number of men in this building. Perhaps a score of the most trustworthy ones to form a guard—no more. The others, no doubt, are scattered about the city until the word goes round that they're required."

"We're much obliged to them," said O'Hara, grinning. "for carryin' the treasure this far for us. But we'll not be after puttin' them to any more trouble. 'Tis no more than a moile to the palace, an' we'll manage to get the stuff there widout any help."

"Yes," agreed Sigbee. "I reckon if we can't tote it along the remaining distance, we don't deserve to have any of it."

"The sooner we get away with it the better," said Jim, "though I wish the time was an hour later."

"What for?"

"Because in an hour's time it'll be dark."

"Listen!" exclaimed Hal suddenly.

They became silent, and listened. Men were moving about near at hand. They could hear subdued voices and the occasional faint ring of steel, when a spearhead knocked against the wall.

"You may have your wish, Jim," Hal added dryly; "and it'll be dark before we make a start. We're not going to have a walk-over. Those bags of jewels are worth about two million pounds, and Argolis won't let 'em out of his clutches without putting up another fight for them. Besides, he's got to make a special effort to recapture us for several reasons. Revenge is one."

"We're not going to wait in this room for them," Sigbee rapped out. "It ain't good enough."

"No—outside," replied Hal. "We're not going to be trapped again."

So out they went into the big entrance-hall, and in a courtyard beyond the wide, arched doorway they saw again their bitter enemy Argolis, the high priest, and grouped about him were eighteen picked men of his guard.

"So you got free!" snarled Argolis. "I was too lenient. I treated you too well. When I wanted information which you could give I should have put the question to you with torture. Then—"

"We are going to give you the answer now, Argolis," interrupted Hal. "Already we've given the answer to your fellow-plotters, a man almost as evil as yourself. You have seen him!"

It may be said of the high priest that it was seldom he showed signs of fear; but now, for one instant, a look of fear did leap into his eyes, and his face turned a sickly ashen grey. He had seen Anubis—or that which, once had been Anubis. But he recovered himself.

"For his death you shall be put to added torture!" he replied fiercely.

Sigbee laughed, and his laugh was not pleasant to hear. There was a gleam in his eyes such as his comrades had seldom seen there. It was a savage hatred that was at last roused in him for this miscreant, who was surely a priest of the Evil One himself.

"You talk," said the American. "Waal, here's my answer!"

He brought his rifle to his shoulder and pressed the trigger. But quick as he was, Argolis was even quicker to dive in



Deeds of daring in the Dardanelles are never at a discount, and the Turkish hordes have been reduced almost to a state of subjection by the brilliant exploits of our fighting-men on land and sea. In the above picture our artist shows two of our expert naval gunners shattering a Turkish fort.

among the crowd of his followers. He escaped the bullet, but one of his guards fell.

There followed a sharp skirmish, but against the rifles the Sheiks could make no sort of a stand. The strange weapons, of which this particular party had had no former experience, filled them with terror. They broke and fled. But before that happened Argolis had vanished.

"The skunk!" muttered Sigbee. "He sacrificed one of his own men to save his worthless carcass!"

"That seems to be the fashion among the leaders in this country," said Jim. "Let anybody go under as long as it isn't themselves. Well, we've scored this time, anyway. Nobody hurt our side."

But O'Hara was disconsolate because he'd had no opportunity of joining in the fray. There had been no hand-to-hand fighting.

"All I did," he exclaimed, "was to lunge on me axe an' watch you fellows shootin'. Faith, 'twas hard lones!"

"Don't worry; you've done your share, Pat," replied Hal. "But the coast's clear now, and we'll be off. There's no telling what fresh tricks Argolis may be up to. To the palace! This is our chance."

They shouldered the bags of treasure, which were of a convenient size for carrying, and, passing through the courtyard, gained one of the many spacious squares, at one time favourite promenades, no doubt, but now deserted.

There were people, however, in the streets, and as they marched two abreast, whistling a gay tune, to which they kept step, they were regarded with curious looks—sombre and threatening on the part of the men, but with more favourable glances from the women.

But little enough they cared for the sullen-faced men, though O'Hara and Jim exchanged some light badinage with the girls.

At length they reached the main gates of the palace, and here they were stopped by an officer of the Royal Guard. This seemed strange, as they deemed themselves once more among friends.

"Tell Queen Clytemna," said Hal, "that we have returned."

(Another thrilling instalment of this fine serial story next Wednesday. To avoid disappointment, order your copy early.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 388.

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co., By MARTIN CLIFFORD



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to —
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGTON ST. LONDON, E.C.
OUR "THREE" COMPANION PAPERS!
"THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY" CHUCKLES.
— LIBRARY — POPULAR — 1/2 —
EVERY MONDAY | EVERY FRIDAY | EVERY SATURDAY.



For Next Wednesday—

"THE RIVAL WEEKLY!"

By **Martin Clifford.**

In next week's magnificent, long, complete story of the chums of St. Jim's, Tom Merry, the youthful editor and founder of "Tom Merry's Weekly," is still further pestered with the attentions of the great Grundy. Having failed ignominiously in boxing and cricket, George Alfred strikes out in a new line entirely, and assumes the proprietorship of a rival journal, entitled "Grundy's Weekly." He thus hopes to come, to see, and to conquer in the field of literature; but Tom Merry & Co. have a very pronounced say in the matter, and

"THE RIVAL WEEKLY"

is not long in "shutting up shop."

THE PASSING OF GEORGE PAYNE.

It is not often that I am called upon to chronicle sad news in the pages of "The Gem" Library, but such is my duty this week. George A. Payne, a Canadian "Gemite," who made many chums through the medium of this journal, passed away on May 18th of this year, and the firm for which the lad worked has very kindly sent me the following notification of the sad event:

"Halifax, Canada.

"Dear Sir,—You will pardon us for addressing this letter to you, but our reason for so doing is that we have had in our employ for the past few years a young man by the name of George A. Payne. He was a reader of your paper, 'The Gem,' and through this medium got acquainted and corresponded with quite a few young people in different parts of the world. We regret to say that he was taken ill about four weeks ago, and, while his sickness was not considered serious, he failed very rapidly, and died last Tuesday, May 18th. As we know that he had quite a large correspondence with these different people, and as we have not their addresses, we thought that if we explained the matter to you, you would insert in the next issue of 'The Gem' a notice of his death, so that his friends who take the paper will know why it is they do not hear from him.

"He was a very bright and promising young man, and would have certainly made his mark in this world had he lived.

"He used our post-office box, No. 1137, Halifax, Nova Scotia, and this will be the address that all his correspondents will have. Perhaps it would be as well to mention this in the notice you insert.

"Trusting we are not bothering you too much in this matter, and thanking you in anticipation, we remain, yours respectfully,

"AUSTEN BROTHERS, LIMITED;

"(Signed) Percy G. Austen,
 "Secretary."

I thank Messrs. Austen Brothers very much for their courtesy in acquainting me of this sad affair, and I feel sure that the genuine sympathy of myself and numerous "Gem" readers throughout the globe goes out to the lad's relatives and friends in their bereavement.

I feel sure also that George Payne, during his brief life-time, worthily upheld the highest traditions of the old paper, and lived up in every way to the excellent motto which governs the teaching of "The Gem" Library—namely:

Play the Game!

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

Miss A. Stanley (Dublin).—No storyettes can be considered unless sent in on post-cards, in accordance with the rules of the competition.

R. J. E. (Cardiff).—I wonder you have no better means of occupying your time than by hunting for errors in the pages of "The Gem." Occasional "bloomers" in a weekly journal are unavoidable.—I should say that the two best boxers among the St. Jim's juniors are Tom Merry and Talbot.

J. H. D. (Malling).—Your request is rather cool, but I will see what can be done in the matter.

"A Girl Reader" (Kensington).—You are evidently out of touch with current events at St. Jim's. Mr. Railton has answered his country's call, and his place has been taken by Mr. Carrington—a "good sort." No, Cousin Ethel has not disappeared entirely. You will hear more about her at no distant date.

"Two Schoolgirl Gemites" (Borough).—Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn are each fifteen years of age. Cutts is seventeen.

A. G. Tupper (Battersea).—Many thanks for suggestion, which I will keep by me.

"Bookworm" (Crouch End).—Glad you are so delighted with "The Gem," and that your father approves of the stories.

W. Beament (King William's Town).—I am afraid I cannot put you into correspondence with the boys you name.

H. B. (Slough).—Your surmise is quite correct.

"A Girl Gemite."—Talbot and Tom Merry are fifteen years of age. Glad you enjoy their adventures.

"Musgrave-Venables."—You have guessed rightly. Thanks very much for your good wishes, which I cordially reciprocate.

J. C. Vaughan (Cardiff).—Everyone seemed to enjoy the story in question. Many thanks for your continued loyalty to my papers.

W. J. Bartlett, 35, Finner Street, Bethnal Green, London, E., is anxious to form a concert-party among readers of "The Gem" Library.

P. Smith (Clapton).—The persons you name are not very important, and I can give you no particulars about them. A great story of the rivalry between the various schools is coming along shortly.

"An Ardent Reader" (Crewe).—I hardly care to predict the possible result of a fight between Talbot and Tom Merry.

Chris Williamson (Manchester).—Many thanks for letter and verses.

Arthur Moore.—An encounter between Tom Merry and Bob Cherry of Greyfriars will be described in the "Magnet" Library next Monday. Sorry to hear your cousin was wounded in the recent fighting at the Dardanelles.

S. Brockington (Bridlington).—The Shell fellows asserted their exemption from fagging long ago.

"Australia" (Birmingham).—I shall be pleased to do as you suggest.

William MacNab (Glasgow).—Talbot's Christian name is Reginald. I have already had a Portrait Gallery of "Gem" characters.

G. V. C. (Shanghai).—I should say that both Manners and Lowther can lay claim to being Tom Merry's closest chum. Talbot's regard for Marie Rivers is of a purely friendly nature. I will carefully consider your suggestions. Best wishes.

"A Loyal Reader" (Norwich).—Apply to any of the leading cinematograph firms.

V. S. D. (West Australia).—See reply to William MacNab, printed above.

THE EDITOR.

**LAST
WEEK!**

(See below.)



This may be YOUR PRIZE.

**LAST
WEEK!**

(See below.)

GREAT NEW COMPETITION

FOR ALL BRITISH BOYS.

For full particulars
as to sending in your
efforts, etc., see final
rules printed below.

**5,000
PRIZES**

For full particulars
as to sending in your
efforts, etc., see final
rules printed below.

FIRST PRIZE:

A GRAND BRAND-NEW RUDGE-MULTI MOTOR CYCLE.

THE 4,999 OTHER PRIZES CONSIST OF

Rudge-Whitworth Bicycles, Radium Watches, Cameras, Boxing Gloves, Footballs, Fountain Pens, Roller Skates, Pocket Knives, etc., etc., etc.

IMPORTANT NOTICE.—Do Not Miss Reading This!

This is the final week of our great Competition, and all efforts must be sent in, addressed to:

**5,000 PRIZE COMPETITION,
Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.,**

in time to reach that address by Monday, August 9th.

Lists must be carefully pinned together—not posted, and must be sent flat, not rolled. They may, however, be folded.

The Coupon below must be signed by each competitor, and must be enclosed in the package containing the competitor's effort.

As those taking part in the Competition are aware, the object of the contest is to introduce THE GEM LIBRARY and its companion papers to new readers.

All you have to do is to introduce THE GEM LIBRARY or one of the papers mentioned below to your chum. Show this copy to them and let them read it. Then get them to sign their names on a sheet of paper, and the readers who send in the largest list of names will win these magnificent prizes. Your chum must place the title of the paper he has read against his own name.

This competition is being run together with our companion papers, "Boys' Friend," "Marget Library," "Penny Popular," "Marvel," "Union Jack," "Nelson Lee Library," "Puck," and "Boys' Realm." It must be understood that this is one Competition, and that the decision of the Editor of the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY" must be accepted as final and binding in all matters concerning the contest. It does not matter which, or how many of the papers you get your chum to read. While one chum is reading the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY," get another to read the "Boys' Friend," and so on.

Don't forget the last day for sending in lists is Monday, August 9th.

SIGN THIS COUPON AND ENCLOSE IT WITH YOUR LIST.

I enter the 5,000 Prize Competition and agree to accept the decision of the Editor of the Nelson Lee Library as final and legally binding.

Signed

Address

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

A PROBLEM SOLVED.

A play was being staged at a certain local theatre, in which the king, aged and infirm, was blessed with two sons.

In the middle of one of the acts the king began to pace up and down the stage with a wearied, troubled look, exclaiming:

"On which of my sons shall I bestow my crown?"

"Why not 'arf-a-crown apiece, giv' nor?" was the quick and helpful retort of a youth in the gallery.—Sent in by A. Owens, Cathays, Cardiff.

SWEET SALLY SMILED.

Sir Samuel Shime saw sweet Sarah swimming. Suddenly she started sinking. Sir Samuel stood stunned. Striding seaward, spurning seething surf, Sir Samuel swiftly swam Sarahwards. Sir Samuel skillfully supported swooning Sarah. Swimming shorewards, Sir Samuel successfully saved Sarah. Seeming somewhat shabby, Sir Samuel sampled some spirits—special Scotch. Sir Samuel saw sweet Sarah's sweetness. Sarah saw Sir Samuel's self-sacrificing spirit. Sir Samuel soon sought Sarah, striding slowly. Sarah sighed. Sir Samuel seemed speechless.

"Say something, Sir Samuel," said Sarah.

"Say Sam, Sarah," stammered Sir Samuel.

Sarah, smiling softly, said "Sam."

"Sarah—Sally!" stammered Sir Samuel. "Sweet Sarah! Sweetheart!"

Sarah smilingly surrendered.—Sent in by J. E. Sergeant, Manchester.

BOTH PAIRS ALIKE.

Misses: "Look here, Bridget, those are the wrong boots you have brought down! Can't you see that one is brown and the other is black?"

Bridget (returning after another search): "But sure, ma'am, the other pair are just the same."—Sent in by A. S. McGregor, Dundee.

IN SWEET ACCORD.

Two navvies were observed by a clergyman indulging in a rather heated argument, and, hoping to pacify them, the cleric asked:

"My good sirs, why cannot you both be of the same mind?"

"We are," replied one of the men.

"But you were arguing," protested the clergyman.

"Well, it's like this 'ere, sir," the man answered. "I've just picked up a fiver, and Bill thinks he ain't a-going to get 'arf, and I think the same as him."—Sent in by H. Norman, Leamington Spa.

NOT QUITE SO "LOOSE."

A party of tourists staying at a small village in Coenwall went for a walk with their guide. On their way they met the village idiot.

Now, it was customary to offer the idiot a penny and a expence and as he always chose the penny, he was considered to be "loose" somewhere.

However, one of the tourists, being of an inquisitive nature, asked the idiot why he had not taken the six-pence.

"'Cause they'd give over tryin' me," was the abrupt answer.—Sent in by Herbert Halliday, Hunslet, Leeds.

FORCE OF HABIT.

A certain vicar in the West of England had been showing his patriotism since the outbreak of the war by wholeheartedly supporting recruiting meetings in the district.

One day, however, he was conducting a marriage ceremony in which the bridegroom was a young lieutenant. On coming to the words, "Take thee, Marjorie, to be thy wedded wife," he unconsciously added the following: "For three years, or the duration of the war."—Sent in by J. E. Caldwell, Bolton.

BE NEUTRAL.

Never stoop to taking sides.

Be neutral.

Good 'neath evil often hides.

Be neutral.

If a person, seeming rude,

Mixes poison with your food,

He may do it for your good.

Be neutral.

When you're looking at a fight,

Be neutral.

Do not choose the wrong or right—

Be neutral.

View it with a vacant stare.

Let your mind be blank and bare.

Thus you will be strictly fair.

And neutral.

—Sent in by F. Harrold, Romsey, Hants.

STRICT OBEDIENCE.

Little Willie was struggling manfully through his part during a reading-lesson.

"No," said the captain—"he was reading aloud—" it was not a sloop; it was a larger vessel. By the rig, I judged her to be a bar-a-a-a—"

The word was quite new to Willie, and he faltered badly over it.

"Barque," prompted the teacher in kindly tones.

But still Willie hesitated.

"Barque!" snapped the teacher in a sterner voice.

Little Willie looked as if he had not heard aright, and then, with an apprehensive glance around the rest of the class, he gruffly shouted:

"Bow-wow!"—Sent in by Miss A. Want, Englefield Green, Surrey.

HIS SORROW.

Office-boy: "A lady with a horse-ship called to see you a few minutes ago, sir."

Editor: "With a horse-ship, my boy? What did you say to her?"

Office-boy: "I just said I were sorry you weren't in, sir."—Sent in by R. Russell, Hull.

TIPPING THE TIPPER.

Gent (staying at hotel): "What is your name, my boy?"

Pageboy: "They call me Billiard Cue, sir."

Gent (looking at the boy in surprise): "Billiard Cue?"

Pageboy: "Yes, sir. And I believe it is because I work so much better with a good tip."—Sent in by Boy F. Burns, Royal Flying Corps, S. Farnboro'.

As the "GEM" Storyette Competition has proved so popular, it has been decided to run this novel feature in conjunction with our new Companion Paper,

THE BOYS' FRIEND, 1d.,

Published every Monday,

in order to give more of our readers a chance of winning one of our useful Money Prizes. If you know a really funny joke, or a short, interesting paragraph, send it along (on a post-card) before you forget it, and address it to: The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND and GEM, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, E.C. Look out for YOUR Prize Storyette in next week's GEM or BOYS' FRIEND.