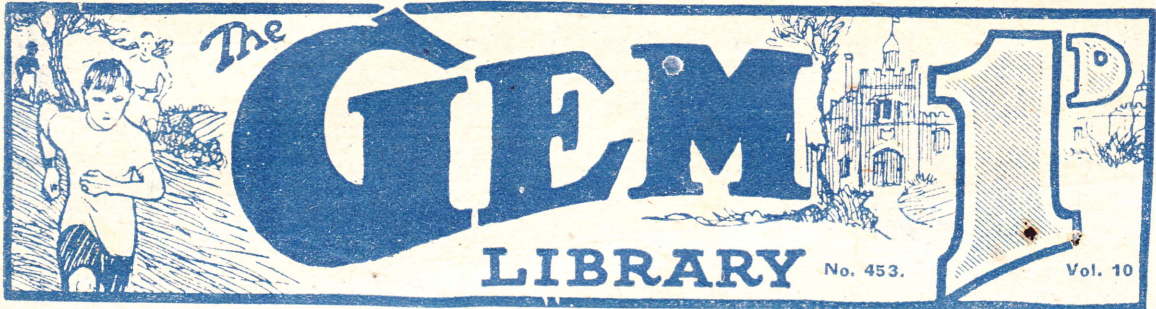


BY COUSIN ETHEL'S WISH!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.



A SCRATCH PACK!

(An Extraordinary Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale in this issue.)



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 :

"ON HIS HONOUR!"

By Martin Clifford.

The great Grundy is to the fore again in this really fine and genuinely humorous story. Grundy still believes that only rampant jealousy keeps him out of the junior footer team. Tom Merry and the rest of the committee cannot convince him that form alone is the thing they consider. He makes up his mind to a very drastic course of action, and proceeds to carry it out to the best of his ability, for, whatever qualities George Alfred may lack, he is at least thorough. The situation develops, and Mr. Railton takes a hand. Under penalty of being recommended for expulsion if he fails, Grundy is put on his honour not to fight for a stated period. Poor Grundy! It is a time of real tribulation for him. Some in fun, others out of sheer spite, help to render his life almost unbearable, for a fellow who cannot fight might almost as well be tied hand and foot, for all that he can do to resist encroachments. How it all ends I shall not tell here; but readers who have followed Grundy's career from the start will be sure that, however hard the struggle may be, he is not the sort to give way easily when

"ON HIS HONOUR!"

OUR NOTICES.

In this number I am trying to work off all—or, at least, as many as possible—of the footer notices in hand, for I know that delay here may mean for some teams being without matches. Of all the various notices we insert, I have most sympathy with those concerning footer and those from men at the Front. I should be very sorry indeed to cut these out, even for a time; but as regards other kinds, I must ask my readers to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the words which follow:

FROM THE DATE OF PUBLICATION OF THIS NUMBER TO THE END OF THE YEAR, THE ONLY NOTICES WHICH WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR INSERTION, APART FROM THOSE SENT BY MEN IN THE ARMY OR NAVY, WILL BE THOSE CONCERNING FOOTER.

This is not sheer caprice on my part. I have thought the matter out carefully, and with every desire to be fair to all my readers alike. There are scores of notices still awaiting insertion, and these will take up most of the space we shall have available during the rest of this year. What is left, I intend to give to the notices which, on the whole, seem best worth it.

"UNDER THE RED ENSIGN!"

A really fine series of articles with this title is just starting in the "Boys' Friend." Everyone interested in

Life in the Merchant Service.

should make a point of getting our green companion paper. Apart altogether from these fine articles it is great value.

THE NEW SERIAL IN THE "MAGNET."

This is a school story, and so many "Gem" readers have written from time to time asking for a school serial that I hope they will do me the favour of getting the current issue of the "Magnet," reading

"THE FOURTH FORM AT FRANKLINGHAM!"

and letting me know how they like it. I have no grave doubt as to the result; but the publication of a school serial is something in the way of an experiment, and upon whether it is a successful one depends largely the question of the running of a similar type of yarn in this paper. So roll up with your verdict, one and all!

NOTICES.

Football.

[In order to get in as many notices as possible, those included have been cut down to the shortest possible limits. It should be understood that the figures in brackets always refer to age, and that "r." means "radius." Where these particulars are omitted they were not supplied by sender of notice. All applications may be taken for home and away matches.]

Matches Wanted by:

- CLAREMONT ATHLETIC F.C. (17).—H. Quick, 36, Malvern Rd., Thornton Heath.
 DINNINGTON CHURCH B.C.F.C. (16-17).—S. Lerigo, 57, East St., Dinnington, Rotherham.
 SILVER STREET UNITED F.C. (17).—Harold Merrison, 200, Fore St., Edmonton, N.
 F. A. Daubery would be glad to hear from other secretaries within a 4-mile r. to arrange matches (14-15).—Address, 21, Horn Lane, Acton, W.
 STALYBRIDGE TUESDAY LADS' F.C. (16)—6-mile r.—Tuesdays only.—A. Knott, Ivy Bank, Mostyn Rd., Stalybridge.
 PARK ATHLETIC (11-14)—2-mile r.; also want three good players who can take any position.—G. E. Mellor, 215, Park Rd., Oldham.
 A Birkenhead junior team will be glad to arrange fixtures.—J. Naismith, 1, Clayton St., Birkenhead.
 HIGHFIELD F.C. (14-15)—Southampton district.—C. Bowyer, Highfield Hotel, Southampton.
 DE BEAUVOIR TOWN F.C. (14-15)—8-mile r. Dalston.—E. Furse, 33, Buckingham Rd., De Beauvoir Town, N.
 EAST SHEEN JUNIORS (14).—E. Sawyer, 424, Upper Richmond Rd., East Sheen, S.W.
 WHITBY CHURCH F.C. (17)—6-mile r.—Fred Brierley, 11, Stafford Gardens, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire.
 CAVENDISH F.C. (17)—6-mile r. Clapham.—A. E. Clark, 158, Wandsworth Rd., S.W.
 30TH NORTH LONDON BOY SCOUTS F.C.—matches with other Scout teams specially desired.—W. E. Merrison, 77, Copenhagen St., Barnsbury, N.
 TANFIELD LEA HIGHER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL—3-mile r.—N. Seth, junior, Sec., Form 2a, T. L.H.E.S., P.T.C., Stanley S.O., co. Durham.
 RED ROVERS F.C. (13).—E. Trafford, Black Lion, Mill Hill, Leeds.
 SOUTHLEA ATHLETIC F.C. (17)—6-mile r.—C. Downing, Scylla, 5, The Grove, South Avenue, Southend-on-Sea.
 HUNTINGDON ATHLETIC F.C. (15-16).—A. Coomber, 64, Huntingdon St., Barnsbury, N.

Other Footer Notices:

- WAVERLEY PARK ATHLETIC (14-16) want players.—Sec., 26, Ivydale Rd., Nunhead, S.E.
 F. Doyle, 21, Lusitania Rd., Walton, Liverpool, wants to join a junior team in district—right or left back.
 S. Kibble (15) wishes to join a footer team. Can play outside-right or right-half. Address, 67, Grosvenor Rd., Canonbury, N.
 J. H. Sanders and G. C. Banks want to join a footer club. Will any hon. sec. in the Birmingham district who has vacancies write to J. H. Sanders, 49, Rifle Crescent, Aston, Birmingham?
 E. Neill, 58, Derwent St., Belfast, wants to form a footer club among "Gem" and "Magnet" readers in his neighbourhood (16-18). Will any other interested please call or write?
 H. B. Braveny, 47, Wood St., E.C., wants to join team (15-17).

Your Editor

PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

BY COUSIN ETHEL'S WISH!

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



The collie made a rush at Arthur Augustus, and pawed half a dozen muddy patches down his waistcoat. (See Chapter 12.)

CHAPTER 1.

The Wayland Rovers in Disgrace.

BAI JOVE!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House of St. Jim's, gave vent to this exclamation in a startled voice as he came rushing up the stairs. His monocle was flying in the air behind him, and he held an opened letter in his hand.

Harry Noble, Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn stared at him in astonishment.

It was not often Arthur Augustus was seen rushing up the stairs like that. As a general thing, the swell of St. Jim's moved with a stately dignity.

"Bai Jove!"

Harry Noble, Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn barred the way at the top of the stairs. They were all staring at Arthur Augustus in greater surprise than ever.

"Kangahwoo, deah boy—"

A cheeky, though sympathetic grin broke out on Harry Noble's handsome, pleasant face. He tapped his forehead significantly.

Next Wednesday:

"ON HIS HONOUR!" AND "CORNSTALK BOB!"

No. 453. (New Series.) Vol. 10.

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"It's come at last, you chaps!"

"Rather!"

"I always said it was only a matter of time," remarked Harry Noble kindly. "I noticed a queer, feverish light in his eyes this morning. Come up to the bath-room, old chap, and let us hold your head under the cold-water tap!"

"You uttah ass, Hawwy Noble!"

"Calm yourself, Gussy! Try to think of something soothing!"

"You waggin' duffahs!" cried Arthur Augustus. "Pway dwy up, and tell me where Jack Blake is, as it is a mattah of gweat importance!"

"I should rather think it was."

"Still, it isn't the first time you've gone off your rocker, Gussy," said Harry Noble pleasantly. "I suppose you think you are Herries' bulldog, or the Queen of Sheba, or someone like that."

"Why is Gussy like the Kaiser?" ventured Clifton Dane.

"Wats!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "You're a wagging lot of wottahs! Skimmay—Skimmay, dear boy, have you seen Tom Mewwy, or Jack Blake, or Figgins of the New House?"

Herbert Skimpole stopped in his meditative walk along the upper passage, and blinked thoughtfully through his glasses.

"Yes, D'Arcy; of course I have seen Tom Merry and Jack Blake and Figgins. I may say I am constantly seeing them—in fact, I was in class with Tom Merry only this morning, and yesterday I met Figgins several times."

"Ass! I mean, have you seen them wecently?"

"Comparatively recently, D'Arcy."

"I wegard you all as a w'etched set of fwabjous asses!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Skimmay I considah in the light of a waging maniac! Kewwuish, deah boy, have you seen Tom Mewwy or Jack Blake or Figgins?"

"Tom Merry, Jack Blake, Figgins! Are they St. Jim's chaps, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You wottah, Kewwuish!"

"No; I haven't seen them," said Kerruish pleasantly, "but I know Manners has a snapshot he took of Tom Merry a couple of terms ago, if that would be of any use to you."

"Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus rushed past the grinning juniors and scudded along the passage at a great pace. He rounded the corner at the end of the passage like a flash.

"Yah! Yaroooh! Ass!"

"Gweat Scott! My only toppah!"

Arthur Augustus thudded full into the chest of another junior coming from the opposite direction. The other junior promptly flung his arms round Arthur Augustus' neck, and they both thumped down to the passage floor.

"Gussy, you shrieking ass!"

It was Talbot who spoke.

Arthur Augustus had bowled the Shell junior over, and Talbot had knocked his head rather badly against the wall. But Talbot only laughed good-naturedly.

"Gussy, you awful duffer!"

"Gweat Scott! I am feahfully sowwy, deah boy; onlay I am in a gweat huwwy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm looking for Tom Mewwy and Jack Blake and Figgins—"

"Well, you'll find them in Study No. 6," grinned Talbot, rubbing his damaged head. "The next time you come along a passage like an express train, old chap, you might sound a whistle or something!"

"Yaas, wathah—I mean, wats, Talbot!"

And Arthur Augustus raced on.

Meanwhile, in Study No. 6 a meeting was being held.

"Awful rot!" snapped Blake.

"Piffle!" said Lowther.

"It isn't British, anyway!" cried Manners indignantly.

"Tom Merry says the Wayland Rovers' secretary wrote an awfully decent letter, and apologised for what happened in the last match. He couldn't jolly well do more than that!"

"Rather not!"

"Jolly decent of him to apologise at all!" exclaimed Blake. "As a matter of fact, all the blame didn't belong to Wayland Rovers."

"What did the Rovers' secretary actually say, Tom Merry?" asked Kerr, in his thoughtful way. "Was it a genuine sort of an apology?"

Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, nodded.

"I didn't see the letter, of course," he explained, "but I was in Kildare's room when the letter came. Kildare read it out to Darrel, and, of course, I couldn't help hearing. It was only a short letter, but it was a jolly decent one."

"Good egg!"

"I don't see what more the Rovers could have done," Tom Merry went on. "The new secretary writes saying

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 453.

that his club regrets the disgracefully rough match which took place on our ground last season, that three of the worst offenders of the Wayland side were suspended and a new captain selected, and that the Rovers are practically a new team. After a letter like that St. Jim's First Eleven ought to play the return match, I say."

"Think what the Wayland people will say if we don't play them!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Wayland Rovers drew on our ground, and everybody'll think St. Jim's is frightened of a hiding. Kildare ought to have thought of that."

"Oh, it isn't Kildare!"

"No; it isn't Kildare," said Tom Merry quietly. "He'd be ready enough to play them again, whether they had apologised or not. It's the masters who have kyboshed the whole thing."

"That's so."

"And St. Jim's will be reckoned funky!" exclaimed Manners.

"Rotten!"

Perhaps it was not quite as bad as Manners of the Shell suggested, for very few school authorities would have allowed the team to play the return match after the disgraceful exhibition which had taken place when Wayland Rovers had visited the St. Jim's ground.

Wayland Rovers had come over confident of victory. They had started well, pressing in great form for nearly a quarter of an hour.

Then Kildare had scored with what could only be described as a very lucky shot.

It had been hard luck for Wayland Rovers, no one could deny that, but it could never have justified their subsequent tactics.

Wayland Rovers had played a viciously rough game, causing the match to degenerate into an exhibition of brute force.

Certainly they had not fouled very much. There had been very little tripping indeed, but there had been an awful amount of unnecessarily heavy charging.

As a result of this Kildare and three more of the St. Jim's side had been crooked, and the match had ended in a draw. Tom Merry remembered the game well.

But the captain of the Shell also remembered something else.

There had been a little section of St. Jim's fellows who had stood on the touch-line, and had done as much as any one else to cause the rough play. Tom Merry was not likely to forget that.

"As a matter of fact, Tresham started barracking the Rovers players before ever there was any rough play," said the captain of the Shell. "And Gilmore and St. Leger were almost as bad."

"Rather!"

"Directly the Rovers came on the field, those rotters, Gerald Cutts & Co., started booing," exclaimed Jack Blake. "They ought to have been ordered off the ground."

"I jolly well believe they tried to spoil the match."

"Just the sort of thing they would do, anyway," said Monty Lowther of the Shell. "As likely as not Tresham had some bets on the match with Banks, that rotten book-maker."

"Quite likely."

"And the others, too."

"I dare say Tresham had some motive in trying to upset the Wayland players," agreed Tom Merry. "But Tresham has left St. Jim's now, and everybody is jolly glad. Tresham doesn't matter, but it jolly well matters if St. Jim's refuse to play the return match. Something has got to be done about that, you fellows!"

"My hat, yes."

"That's why I've called this meeting," went on Tom Merry. "Of course, it's a First Eleven affair; but First Eleven affairs affect the whole school, and if the bigwigs of the Fifth and Sixth don't trouble about St. Jim's reputation on the footer field, we've jolly well got to!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And so something has got to be done," said the captain of the Shell, in a heated voice. "I know Kildare has laid the Wayland Rovers secretary's letter before the Head, and the Head has refused to alter his decision about scratching the return match. That's how the matter stands, and we've got to tackle it baldheaded."

"Rather!"

"Something's got to be done," repeated Tom Merry; "and it's got to be done at once."

Then, unconsciously, the juniors lapsed into brief silence. It was all very well to agree that something must be done, that the return match ought to be played, seeing that Wayland Rovers had apologised so decently, and had suspended their offending players; but what exactly was there that could be done?



Harry Noble made a desperate grab at Fatty Wynn, and threw his arms round the fat junior's neck. Both thumped down. (See Chapter 11.)

The very decent letter from the new secretary put quite another complexion on the whole thing. Wayland Rovers were a very old club, and this attempt to persuade St. Jim's to play the match was plainly an effort on the part of the Wayland officials to regain their lost reputation as sportsmen.

It was hard if they were not to be given that chance.

All the sporting instinct of Tom Merry & Co. went dead against not giving the Rovers another chance; but what they could do in the matter was very difficult to see.

"What about a deputation to the Head?"

"No good!"

"See Kildare, then."

"Worse!"

Tom Merry looked moodily at the juniors as they made their suggestions, and shook his head. Figgins, the long-limbed leader of the New House juniors, jumped to his feet with a cheery laugh.

"Nothing can be done to-night, anyway," Figgins exclaimed, "so we'll just think it over. Some of us New House fellows will have an idea by to-morrow morning."

"School House fellows, you mean."

"Rats!"

"Dry up, asses!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Yes, Figgy, we'll think it over, and think jolly hard, too. I dare say an idea will come to me before long. Hallo!"

A tap at the door interrupted Tom Merry.

"Come in, kid!"

The tapping increased into a violent thumping.

"Pwaw unlock the doah, deah boys, as it is uttahnly imposs foah me to come in until you do."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't waste time, you duffahs, as we have onlay a vevy few minutes befoah the twain comes in! Open the doah, deah boys!"

"It's only that ass, Gussy," laughed Monty Lowther, turning the key. "Come in, Gussy, only we don't want one of your special imitations of a cackling hen. You do it jolly well, but we are fed up with it."

"You uttah ass!"

"Oh, there is no need to apologise," said Lowther airily.

"We quite understand it isn't really your fault."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors laughed, but only for a moment or two. There was a curious expression on the aristocratic face of Arthur Augustus as he came into the study. Talbot followed quietly.

The swell of the Fourth Form sank into a chair and screwed his monocle into his eye. He stared blankly at the roomful of juniors.

CHAPTER 2.

Cousin Ethel's Request.

WHAT'S happened, Gussy?"

Tom Merry asked his question, and stared hard at the letter Arthur Augustus still held in his hand. Arthur Augustus promptly handed the letter to the captain of the Shell.

"A wippin' lettah ffrom Cousin Ethel; but it contains some watah startlin' news."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 455.

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY.

"ON HIS HONOUR!"

"My hat!"

"I might say vewy startlin' news indeed, deah boys."

"My aunt, I should say so," muttered Tom Merry, his eyes glued to Cousin Ethel's letter. "I—I say, chaps, Cousin Ethel is sending us an old soldier by the five o'clock train."

"Sending us a what?"

"An old soldier," repeated Tom Merry, with a short, puzzled laugh. "It seems that an old man got her dog out of the river for her, and afterwards she learned all about him. His name is John Palmer, and he has fought in ever so many wars, and is an awfully decent chap."

"Yaas, he appeals to be a weal bwick, deah boys!"

"And he's coming to St. Jim's?"

"Well, he's coming to Rylcombe by the five o'clock train, Herries," explained Tom Merry. "Cousin Ethel wants us all to meet him, and find him a decent cottage to live in and—generally look after him."

"My aunt!"

The juniors looked at each other with puzzled expressions on their faces. All of them were only too ready to help any one who had done Cousin Ethel a good service; but, as it chanced, funds all round were rather low.

Figgins stuck his hands deep into his pockets, and stared at his boots. Tom Merry was still reading Cousin Ethel's letter.

"Have you come to the part where Cousin Ethel wemarks that Palmah has faults, and is wathah difficult to deal with?"

"Yes; but she goes on to say that, under a rough exterior, the old man has a very fine character. You chaps, we shall have to raise enough tin to see the old fellow through for a bit, anyway," said Tom Merry.

"Rather!"

"Just what I was going to wemark, deah boys," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "We must waise a subscription at once, and then wash off and meet the twain."

"Yes; that's it."

The juniors instinctively turned towards Arthur Augustus.

"Come on, Gussy."

"You are the man with the tin, kid."

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry looked at the elegant junior severely. As a rule, Arthur Augustus was generous to a fault, but there was a very hesitating expression on his face at that moment.

"I should be onlay too pleased, deah boys!"

"Kim on, then," said Jack Blake. "Out with the cash! Say you start the subscription list with a fiver."

"Gweat Scott! A fivah!"

"Well, we shall need an awful lot if we are to keep the old chap in a cottage, as Cousin Ethel suggests," said Tom Merry. "You see that, Gussy?"

"Yaas; I wealise it; but I wegwet to say that I am without a fivah, as I have just paid a tailor's wotten bill!"

"Brrrr!"

"What did you want to pay a tailor's bill for, ass?"

"I didn't want to, Mannahs; onlay the tailor wanted me to!"

"Rotten!"

"Say three guineas, then, Gussy?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I should be onlay too pleased, onlay I wegwet to say—"

"Well, a guinea, ass?"

"Yaas, wathah, I would willingly subscwibe a guinea, onlay I am without even such a widiculously small sum just at pwesent. I wegwet to say, deah boys, that I cannot subscwibe more than half-a-crown, and I shall have to wequest Digbay to pay me the two shillings he owes me in ordah to do that, bai Jove!"

"Then I sha'n't be able to subscribe anything at all!" said Digby.

"My aunt!"

Tom Merry looked at the other juniors in dismay. If Arthur Augustus' subscription was to be limited to half-a-crown nothing very big was likely to be the sum total.

Pockets were hastily turned out, and a calculation made. Roughly, Tom Merry & Co. could raise half-a-sovereign, with a few promises which might or might not materialise. Tom Merry glared indignantly at Arthur Augustus.

"It's all your fault for paying that tailor's bill, ass!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Bow-wow!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's to be done, you chaps?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Bai Jove, it is wathah a stunnah!" said Arthur Augustus doubtfully. "And time is flyin' by, deah boys. The onlay thing I can suggest is that we wash off to meet the twain without first waisin' the subscwption."

Talbot rose to his feet quietly.

"Oh, it might be worse!" he said. "You chaps will be surprised to see how far half-a-sovereign will go towards

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 453.

keeping a man when it is all he has. We shall be able to find rooms in a cottage for old Palmer, anyway."

"It doesn't sound vewy much," said Arthur Augustus doubtfully. "I am afraid Palmah will have to live in a vewy wethah neighbourhood."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And westwict himself to two or thwee wooms at the most."

"Bow-wow!"

"Kim on, chaps!" laughed Blake. "There isn't any too much time, and, cash or no cash, we've got to meet the old chap."

And the juniors hurried from Study No. 6. They were not long in reaching Rylcombe Station, but before they got there the white smoke of the incoming train already showed up against the blue sky.

"He is sure to be a wippin' old boy," said Gussy. "I pwopose we give him a wousin' cheer the moment he steps out of the twain!"

"How shall we know him, ass?"

"I shall know him the moment he steps on to the platform, deah boy. I pwide myself upon being able to wecognise an old soldier at a glance. There is something about our glowious Army which stamps a man with the hall-mark!"

"My hat! He hasn't come!"

"N-no!"

"Bai Jove! Pewwaps he is asleep in the twain, deah boys!"

Only one passenger had alighted from the train, and he was like nothing on earth so much as a tramp, who had seen better days even in the tramping line.

Tom Merry & Co. stared at the man in doubt and dismay. The solitary passenger was staring back at them, with an unpleasant grin on his fat, bearded face. He was a filthily dirty specimen of humanity, dressed in attire which was ragged in the extreme. A not over-clean big toe protruded through a hole in his right boot, and he wore an aged bowler hat, the crown of which had long since gone.

The unsavoury-looking individual came towards Tom Merry & Co., with an oily smile on his face. He removed his battered hat, and the result was not an improvement. His long, uncombed hair was scarcely a crowning glory to his face.

"The young gentlemen from St. Jim's?" he asked.

Tom Merry started.

"Y-yes; we are from St. Jim's."

"And you have come to meet me?"

"Bai Jove!"

"My name is John Palmer."

"My onlay toppah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, and his monocle fell from his eye.

Tom Merry also gasped, but he tried to disguise the gasp as a cough. He wondered if it would be the right thing to offer his hand, but when he looked at John Palmer's right hand the captain of the Shell decided that it was not necessary. Figgins, always loyal to Cousin Ethel's slightest wish, put his own hands in his pockets to help him in resisting temptation.

John Palmer appeared perfectly unaware of the bad impression he had made.

"I thank you from the bottom of my 'eart—I thank you!" he said, with what he meant to be taken for deep feeling. "Miss Ethel said you would welcome me. You've welcomed me nobly—"

"Don't—don't mention it!" murmured Tom Merry.

"No, wathah not! Pway wegard it as a gweat pleasure on our part, Mr. Palmah. I dare say you will be glad to heah that Talbot and Mannahs, two of our fellahs, are awwanging a little tea foah you in a wippin' tuckshop outside the station. I wathah fancy you must be in need of a cup of tea."

"A—a cup of tea!" muttered Palmer. "Is the tuckshop a—a temperance place, then?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The train journey has shaken me up a little, young gentlemen, and perhaps something a trifle more stimulating—"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that! We will huwwy like anything to the tuckshop and ordah coffee instead, as that is a vewy stimulat' and weweshin' dwink!"

John Palmer started. He stared at Arthur Augustus in doubt and alarm.

"Make it tea, young gent!" he said. "I wasn't thinking of coffee, but never mind. Make it tea!"

"Wight-ho, Mr. Palmah! Come on, deah boys!"

"Yes, come on!" said Tom Merry, through his teeth.

"This way, Palmer!"

It was only a few yards to the little cafe where Talbot and Manners had stopped to arrange about tea. And a ripping little tea they had arranged for, too, with some

excellent slices of ham and some new rolls and a solid, sensible-looking cake.

Talbot was standing in the doorway while Manners put the last finishing touches to the tea-table. Taking into account the limited means at their disposal, Talbot could not help feeling rather pleased with the result.

The little party came nearer and nearer, and Talbot began to feel puzzled. He had expected to see the St. Jim's juniors crowding round the old soldier, anxious for his stories of bygone wars; instead, Tom Merry & Co. were approaching in dead silence.

Talbot's astonishment grew. He could not make it out. It was not like Tom Merry to suffer from nerves on an occasion like this.

The silent little party approached rapidly. Tom Merry and Figgins were leading, and both of them were just as silent as the juniors behind them. Suddenly Tom Merry found his voice.

"There's Talbot, you chaps!"

"Yaas; there's old Talbot, deah boys!"

Talbot hurried to meet them. For the moment he could not see Cousin Ethel's protegee in the little crowd of juniors.

"Has he turned up, kids?"

"Yaas—yaas; he's turned up!" answered Arthur Augustus. "Mr. Palmah has awwived! Mr. Palmah, this is Talbot of the School House!"

"Pleased to meet the young gen'leman, I'm sure! 'Ope we shall be frien's!"

Talbot suddenly stepped forward. He faced Palmer with a startled, amazed expression in his eyes. For a moment or two Tom Merry & Co. stared at their chum in surprise. Talbot had gone quite white.

"Who—who are you?"

The words came from Talbot in an amazed outburst. The junior was glaring at the ex-soldier as if he had seen a ghost.

"Who—who are you?"

"John Palmer, young gent!" answered Cousin Ethel's protegee. "An old soldier of his King and a very unlucky man!"

Talbot did not answer. He was still staring Palmer full in the face. Tom Merry could not understand it.

No doubt Palmer was as big a disappointment to Talbot as he had been to the other juniors, but that scarcely sufficed reason for Talbot's obvious amazement.

"What's up, Talbot?"

"Anything w'ong, deah boy?"

"N-no, nothing is wrong!" muttered Talbot, his eyes still fixed on John Palmer. "It's quite all right!"

"Then—then pway let's go in to tea!"

"Yes; come in to tea!" answered Talbot, and he stood aside for John Palmer to pass.

The ex-soldier marched past with a grin on his fat, bearded face.

CHAPTER 3.

John Palmer.

IF there were surprise and uneasiness on Talbot's face as he followed the other juniors and John Palmer into the little cafe, there was still greater uneasiness in his heart. There was a little doubt, too, at first; but that was dying rapidly, and the uneasiness was growing.

Talbot took a chair at the bottom of the table, facing John Palmer. The junior seemed unable to take his eyes off Cousin Ethel's protegee.

Tom Merry and the other juniors had found their tongues at last. John Palmer might be a bitter disappointment. In their hearts they might consider him a fawning, altogether unpleasant individual. But he had done Cousin Ethel a good turn. Tom Merry & Co. turned their thoughts upon that fact, and ignored the unsavouriness of the man their girl-chum wished them to befriend.

With his strong-looking jaw set, Tom Merry was handing all sorts of provisions to Palmer. Whatever Palmer might look, whatever he was, it was up to Tom Merry & Co. to do their best to carry out Cousin Ethel's written requests.

But Talbot had no such thoughts. He was not even thinking of Cousin Ethel's wish, not even of Cousin Ethel. But Talbot had plenty to think of in spite of that.

And Talbot's last doubt had gone. He watched Tom Merry handing provisions to John Palmer, and the junior who had once been known as the Toff knew he had not made a mistake.

His thoughts were moving quickly. With his eyes fixed on Palmer, Talbot thought of the old, miserable days, now almost forgotten at St. Jim's except by a mean-spirited few. The wretched past came back in a flash to the junior who had lived it down so firmly.

Talbot saw himself a member of the mob of swell cracks-

men again. In fancy he could see Hookey Walker, and all the rest of the ruffians who had done their best to ruin the lad. And amongst those ruffians one face stood out clearly in Talbot's memory—the fat, bearded face of John Palmer!

Talbot was sure—quite sure! John Palmer had been known as Slade in those days, and he had only been a member of the mob of swell cracksmen for a short time. Palmer's methods had been too crude for the gang of "artistic" scoundrels, and they had dropped him.

Before that had happened, though, Palmer had been mixed up in more than one daring robbery planned by Hookey Walker and his ruffianly associates. Talbot remembered the incidents quite well.

And now John Palmer, or Slade, or whatever his name was, had come to St. Jim's in the guise of an ex-soldier! He had come there to be befriended by Tom Merry & Co. for having done Cousin Ethel a good turn!

Even now Tom Merry & Co. were playing up splendidly in doing their best by the ex-cracksmen.

Talbot racked his brains for further details of Palmer's past. But he really knew very little about the man.

It was quite possible that Palmer really had been a soldier once; and it was quite possible that the man was a reformed character. He certainly had rescued Cousin Ethel's dog in a very plucky manner, and worse characters than Palmer have reformed. Perhaps the man really had turned over a fresh leaf.

Suppose he had? Talbot set his teeth. If he was sure of that, then Talbot would never breathe a word about the past. Palmer would be safe for ever as far as the School House junior was concerned—if he had reformed! Talbot knew, to his bitter cost, how difficult it is to live down the past, and he would be the last in the world to make it difficult for anyone else to live it down.

Talbot watched his chums plying Palmer with good things, and tried to puzzle this problem out.

"Pway twy some more of this ham, Mr. Palmah—"

"Or have a little cake for a change?"

"Yaas, do have some cake! It is weally wipping, and you must be feahfully hungwy affah your long journey."

"And who says more tea?"

The juniors were doing their utmost for the man. They all seemed to have forgotten their disappointment at his appearance, and certainly Palmer seemed grateful to them. Talbot noticed that eagerly. Again and again he heard Palmer thank Tom Merry & Co. Very likely Palmer was trying to reform, and the help Tom Merry & Co. were only too ready to proffer him might prove the real turning-point in the ex-cracksmen's life. Talbot clung to that thought.

But he also thought of the other possibility. Suppose Palmer was still the dishonest ruffian he had been. If that were so, and Talbot kept silent, Tom Merry & Co. would all be imposed upon worse, sooner or later.

"Blessed if I know what to think!"

Tom Merry turned with a cheery laugh.

"What are you muttering about, Talbot?" he sang out. "Anything up, old chap?"

Talbot started violently. He had not known that he had spoken his thoughts aloud.

"That's all right, Tom Merry—"

"Of course it's all right, ass, if you are referring to the cake!" laughed the captain of the Shell. "You ask Fatty Wynn. He's wolfed about half-a-stone of it!"

"Oh, really, Tom Merry—"

"Yes, really, Fatty! I say, you fellows, what about asking Mrs. Court whether she knows anyone who has a cottage where Palmer can get a room?"

"Good egg, Tommy!"

"Trust a Shell fellow for good ideas!" said Tom Merry, with becoming modesty. "We Shell fellows couldn't get a bad idea if we tried!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Heah is Mrs. Court with some more tea, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Pway leave this mattah to a fellah of tact and judgment!"

Talbot sat on in silence, listening.

He heard Arthur Augustus raise the question about a room for Palmer in some neighbouring cottage, and he heard the tuckshop-keeper's answer.

The old lady seemed quite anxious about the affair.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy, I do happen to know of a cottage," Mrs. Court replied. "My sister, a widow woman, would be only too glad to let one of her rooms, and she'd find board as well, if you liked."

"Yaas, wathah, as that would save Mr. Palmah dining out each time, which would be vewy awkward in wet weathah, bai Jove!"

"Shurrup, ass!"

"Weally, Tom Merry—"

"Rats!" growled Tom Merry. "Er—Mrs. Court, what would your sister expect for her room?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 453.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"ON HIS HONOUR!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Yaas, bai Jove, that is wathah an important point!"
 "She usually charges twelve shillings a week for the room and board, Master Merry."

"Bai Jove, I wegard that as vewy weasonable, indeed!"
 "Yes, that would do ripingly!" exclaimed Tom Merry.
 "Palmer, I know the cottage, and it's a really nice place. Shall we call it settled?"

John Palmer looked across the table at the handsome, cheery face of the captain of the Shell. The oily smile flickered from the man's face, and he appeared very grateful.
 "It'll only be for a short time, young gen'lemen," he said.
 "It is not my way to sponge on people. I mean to look for work at once."

Talbot heard with some relief. If Palmer really meant to look for work in the neighbourhood, it certainly added weight to the idea that he had reformed.

Talbot jumped to his feet with the rest of the juniors, as Tom Merry paid for the tea. The three or four shillings it cost made an unpleasant hole in the ten shillings which had been collected on the way to the station, and the captain of the Shell exchanged dismayed glances with Jack Blake and Figgins.

"Perhaps Mrs. Court's sister will let us pay for half a week in advance, and the rest at the end of the week?"

"Yes, that's it!"
 "And we'll jolly well raise the cash somehow at St. Jim's!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "It'll be all right Tommy! Kim on, you chaps!"

And the juniors scudded from the cafe. Following in Palmer's footsteps, Talbot of the Shell brought up the rear.

CHAPTER 4.

Lumley-Lumley Speaks His Mind.

IF you School House duffers would only leave it to us—"

"Rats, Figgins!"
 "Yaas, wats, Figgay!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "We are all agreed that money to provide for Mr. Palmah must be waised, and my ideah is, if the mattah is left entiahly in my hands—"

"Bow-wow!"
 Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther of the Shell, and Figgins & Co. of the New House, were guests in Study No. 6, ostensibly for the purpose of arranging some scheme for raising the necessary funds for John Palmer. Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, the millionaire's son, had also been invited, because of his tried business abilities.

But as yet Lumley-Lumley had said nothing at all. He was watching the excited juniors with a smile on his keen face.

"It isn't likely New House bounders could think of a scheme to raise cash!" said Jack Blake hotly. "I know you are well-meaning, Figgins—"

"Look here, Blake—"
 "Yes, I am looking!" said Jack Blake, with increased warmth. "I can see a set of awful asses, too!"

Lumley-Lumley laughed loudly, and jumped to his feet.
 "Let's get the thing on a business footing, you fellows," he said. "I guess you said John Palmer wanted work?"

"Yaas, that is twue. The deah old chap is vewy keen—"
 "Well, I think I can get him some work on Harris' farm!"

"Bai Jove, that is wipping!"
 "But you couldn't get it at once, old man," objected Tom Merry.

"I might be able to."
 "Good egg!"

"Yaas, that is a wipping ideah!" agreed Arthur Augustus.
 "Howevah, we shall pprobably need funds, as Mr. Palmah's Wardrobe is in need of instant wepair, if not wewenal. Pway listen to me, deah boys, as I have a wattling good ideah—"

"Rats!"
 "Wing off, Figgay, you noisy wottah! I pwopose that the New House boundahs do their best to waise funds, and we School House fellows do the same. Then we can add the two sums wealised into a gwand total!"

"Good idea, Gussy!"
 "Yaas, wathah! I dare say we shall waise quite twenty pouns between us, deah boys!"

"Anyway, we'll do the best we can!" laughed Tom Merry.
 "What do you say, Lumley-Lumley?"

"I'm all in favour of finding the chap work," answered the millionaire's son quietly. "I saw you pass through Rylcombe with him, and work won't hurt him!"

Tom Merry looked keenly at Lumley-Lumley. Tom Merry & Co. had been successful in arranging for a room for

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 453.

John Palmer, and they were back at St. Jim's now to discuss matters.

The millionaire's son moved towards the door now.
 "Nothing like striking the iron while it's hot," he said.
 "Mr. Harris spoke to me about being shorthanded only this afternoon, and I'll ring him up on the telephone. If there's anything doing, we'll get permits and fix it all up!"

"And, in the meantime, we'll do what we can to raise funds!" exclaimed Figgins. "No brainy ideas ever came from the School House, so we'll clear back to our own show. We'll let you have a decent sum of money in a day or two, Merry!"

And Figgins & Co. sauntered away.
 A minute or two later Lumley-Lumley was busy in the telephone-box. When he came out again there was a satisfied grin on his face.

Tom Merry & Co. were waiting outside, and Lumley-Lumley greeted them with a cheery laugh.

"It's all right, chaps! Mr. Harris will take Palmer on at once—to-morrow, in fact—and he'll pay him fifteen bob a week and most of his grub!"

"Good!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"

"Of course, there'll be plenty of work to do," added Lumley-Lumley, with a curious grin. "But you say Palmer won't mind work, so that's all right. What about going down on our bikes to the cottage and telling him now, Merry?"

"Yes, that's the idea. I'll slip along and see Kildare about the permits!"

Tom Merry scudded away, but he was back before long. He had four permits in his hand.

"Kildare wouldn't grant another one," he explained. "I managed to get them for myself, Gussy, Blake, and Lumley-Lumley!"

The four juniors hurried to the bicycle-shed for their machines, and a few minutes later they were pedalling along the high road at a fine pace. Lumley-Lumley stopped for a few minutes at Farmer Harris' house to clinch matters, then they scorched to Mrs. Hall's cottage.

Mrs. Hall, a kindly-looking, motherly old lady, met them in the doorway. There was rather a severe expression on her face as the juniors raised their caps.

"If you've come to see Palmer, you'll find him upstairs," she said briefly. "He's gone to bed, Master Merry!"

"Gone to bed, bai Jove!"
 "C-come on, chaps!" muttered Tom Merry.

Lumley-Lumley grinned.
 The juniors trooped upstairs into the small but spotlessly clean room. The only unclean object to be seen was John Palmer, and he was in bed, smoking a pipe and holding a glass of steaming brown liquid in front of his eyes.

Arthur Augustus sniffed, and let his monocle drop from his eye.

"I twust you are not ill, Mr. Palmah?"
 "A little run down, I think," groaned Palmer. "I always take a sip of hot rum and water when I feel run down—just a sip!"

"What do you do with the rest of the half-pint?" asked Lumley-Lumley thoughtfully.

"Weally, Lumlay-Lumlay, deah boy—"

"Oh, don't mind me, Gussy! Get on with the washing! Tell Palmer we've found him work!"

John Palmer started. It was such a violent start that a certain amount of the hot rum and water flowed over the side of the glass.

Cousin Ethel's protege seemed strangely alarmed.
 "Work!" he repeated. "I—I can't express my thanks in words! When does the work start? Next week or the week after?"

"No, to-morrow," said Tom Merry.

"To-morrow! What—what sort of work is it, young gen'lemen?"

"Farm work, bai Jove! Weally most intewesting—"

"And you'll get fifteen bob a week for it," put in Lumley-Lumley. "Of course, the hours are rather long—from six in the morning until six at night!"

"From six in the morning!"

John Palmer sat up in bed, and took another sip of rum and water, about half a tumblerful, and gasped aloud. He faced the juniors in dismay.

"Again I can't find words to thank you, young gen'lemen!" he exclaimed. "An' I'm sorry to say I'ven't been straight with you!"

"Not stwaight with us, bai Jove!"

"No, I— When I said just now that I felt a bit run down," muttered Palmer, "I was 'iding the truth! As a matter of fact, I feel downright ill and ache all over!"

"Bai Jove!"

"And—and my 'ead is that giddy—"



Talbot faced Palmer with a startled, amazed expression in his eyes. "Who—who are you?" (See Chapter 2.) —

"Gweat Scott! That wathah looks like influenzah, Mr. Palmah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus sympathetically. "Do you feel wathah depressed as well?"

"'Orrible!"

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy, I am afwaid he has the 'flu!"

Tom Merry did not answer. He was staring hard at John Palmer.

"Pretty funny you should discover you had the 'flu just when we told you we'd got work for you, Palmer!" Tom Merry growled.

"Funny! I look upon ~~it~~ as a calamity, sir!"

"It is a gweat pittay, but it is poss that you will be bettah in the morning."

"Yes, very likely I shall," agreed Palmer. "If it is possible for me to crawl from my bed I shall do so. If it is 'umanly possible, I shall start work at—at six o'clock to-morrow morning!"

"It won't be humanly possible," said Lumley-Lumley, with a brief laugh.

"You think I have the 'flu, young gen'leman?"

"Never mind what I think!" snapped the millionaire's son.

"I guess I'll wait for you chaps outside!"

"Oh, we are just coming!"

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I twust you will be bettah in the morning, Mr. Palmah; and although I feel that it is only fair to wemark that I cannot help

wegarding your sudden attack as wathah suspish undah the cires, if you weally do ache all ovah, I suppose it is all wight!"

And the juniors left the room.

Lumley-Lumley, the junior who had spent so much of his early boyhood in the Bowery of New York and in other places where one must learn to read character or go under, was waiting outside. There was a broad grin on the face of the millionaire's son as Tom Merry & Co. came from the cottage.

Tom Merry had his hands deep in his pockets.

"What do you make of him, Lumley-Lumley?"

"There's only one thing to make, I guess."

"Bai Jove! What's that, deah boy?"

"Your precious John Palmer may have jumped in a river and saved Cousin Ethel's dog," answered Lumley-Lumley, "and he may have fought for his country; but at the present moment he's an old fraud."

"Gweat Scott! I had the same ideah foah a moment—"

"Well, I've got it for ever!" laughed Lumley-Lumley. "I wouldn't cross the road to give the old sponger twopence!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked at each other blankly.

Even if John Palmer were a fraud, as far as his pretended desire for work was concerned, Tom Merry & Co. still had their problem to face.

Cousin Ethel had spoken of John Palmer having faults, but in spite of them she had asked the St. Jim's juniors to stand

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 453.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"ON HIS HONOUR!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

by the ex-soldier. Perhaps being a fraud and a lazy sponger were the faults discovered by their girl chum. In any case, it was still up to Tom Merry & Co. to fulfil Cousin Ethel's wish.

"If he is a lazy rascal, we'll soon scotch that," said Tom Merry through his teeth. "We'll see him through for a bit, but he's jolly well got to work!"

"And perhaps aftah all, deah boys, he has got in—
fluenzah—"

"Rats!" laughed Lumley-Lumley. "Let's get back to St. Jim's."

"Kim on!" said Jack Blake. "Blow John Palmer! If he thinks he's going to play the old soldier game on us, he's jolly well mistaken!"

CHAPTER 5.

Arthur Augustus Telephones.

"THERE goes the bell, chaps!"

Arthur Augustus nodded. All four juniors were a little breathless after their cycle-run from Rylcombe, and a little depressed by the result of their visit to John Palmer.

All four hurried into the School House, Arthur Augustus leading the way. The swell of St. Jim's stopped at the top of the stairs.

"Bai Jove! I must wush off to Studay No. 6, deah boys, and post that lettah to Cousin Ethel! As I don't know her address in Scotland, I am w'iting home so that it can be forwahded."

Arthur Augustus darted away. He scudded along the passage leading to the Fourth Form studies, then he suddenly stopped. The telephone-bell was ringing loudly in the prefects' room.

"Bai Jove, I shall be latah than evah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, running into the telephone-box. "I twust no one who nattahs will happen along! Hallo!"

"Hallo!" came back a faint voice over the wire. "Is that St. Jim's?"

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, so you are the secwetawy of Wayland Wovahs! Weally, I had bettah fetch Kildare!"

Arthur Augustus stopped speaking, and listened. Gradually a sympathetic expression crept into his eyes, and after that a light of enthusiasm. At the end of two minutes Arthur Augustus was obviously flustered.

"Bai Jove, deah boy, I can onlay wegard your offah as genewous in the extweme! Yaas, wathah! I agwee uttably with you!"

Arthur Augustus' voice died away again, and he listened for another minute. When the swell of St. Jim's spoke again, there was an excited thrill in his tones.

"To-mowwow aftahnoon, bai Jove! Yaas, it could be awwanged. In the cires, I am weadday to give my word of honah in the mattah—"

"Kick-off at three o'clock!" came the voice over the wire.

"Yaas, wathah! Kick-off at three o'clock to-mowwow aftahnoon! Pway considah the mattah settled, deah boy!"

And, hanging up the receiver, Arthur Augustus raced out of the telephone-box and on to Study No. 6.

"Jack Blake, a vewy important thing has happened! I am all in a fluttah! You wemembah that wipping lettah the secwetawy of Wayland Wovahs w'ote to Kildare?"

"Of course I remember it!"

"Well, the secwetawy has just w'ung up St. Jim's," said Arthur Augustus breathlessly. "As there was no one about, I had to go into the telephone-box. The Wovahs want to play us on their gwound to-mowwow aftahnoon, bai Jove!"

"They will have to want, then!"

"But the club has offahed a three-guinea guawantee, the monay to be given to any chawity St. Jim's like to suggest."

"My hat, that's decent of them!"

"Wipping! The Wovahs insist on giving the monay to make up foah the wotten game they put up on our gwound. And it appeahs that the Wovahs are pwactically a new side, because so many of their playahs have enlisted."

"But it's no go!" said Herries. "The Head has said St. Jim's First Eleven are not to play the Rovers again, and so we sha'n't."

"Foah onte in a way I cannot agwee with our wespected Headmastah."

"Ass!"

"The Wovahs have apologised, and they are offahin' three guineas to chawity as a sort of penalty the club is imposing on itself, and I cannot help wegarding their action as wipping in the extweme. In the cires, I do not see what else I could do, deah boy."

"Eh?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 453.

"You see, the Wovahs had apologised, and they are pwactically a new team. I had to agwee, Blake!"

"My—my hat!"

"And the kick-off is at three o'clock," said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I am afwaid our wespected Headmastah would considah my action in a wewehensible light."

"What action?" snapped Digby.

"My agweeing with the secwetawy of Wayland Wovahs, deah boy."

"Ass! Duffer!" choked Jack Blake. "What did you agree about with the Rovers' sec?"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle in his eye, and viewed his chums through it with quiet dignity.

"I gave my word of honah, Blake, that I would take ovah the best possible team to play the Wovahs to-mowwow aftahnoon," said the swell of St. Jim's. "The kick-off is at three o'clock, as I wemarked befoah."

"My—my hat!"

Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby, gasped aloud, and stared at Arthur Augustus as if that elegant junior had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

Arthur Augustus commenced his preparation with quiet determination, and his chums inwardly fumed all through the hour. The moment prep was over, urgent messages were sent to Tom Merry of the Shell and Figgins & Co. of the New House.

The Terrible Three were the first to arrive, but Figgins, Fatty Wynn, and Kerr were not many seconds behind. They all crowded into the little study, and Jack Blake closed the door.

In a few words Blake explained:

"Mind, you," said the chief of the School House Fourth Form, "I agree with Gussy that St. Jim's ought to play the Rovers. Gussy is right about that; but—but, oh, Gussy, you ass!"

"Weally, Blake, I uttably fail to see—"

"You burbling lunatic!" choked Jack Blake. "Think of the row afterwards if we did play them—I suppose you mean that it is the Junior Eleven who are to play? You aren't going to have the frightful nerve to ask Kildare and the First Eleven chaps to turn out?"

"Gweat Scott, no!"

"Well, think of the awful row that'll follow!"

Arthur Augustus waved his hand loftily.

"I have thought of ewewything, deah boy!" he exclaimed. "You can always twust me to think of ewewything, and there weally is nothing at all to feah. It isn't St. Jim's Junior Eleven who are playing Wayland Wovahs to-mowwow—it's D'Arcy's Eleven, bai Jove!"

"My—my hat!"

"But the match will be reported in the papers, and the St. Jim's colours will be recognised."

"I pwopose we play in white shirts, deah boy."

"But—but the newspaper reporters—"

"The Wovahs' secwetawy doesn't think there will be any weportahs on the gwound, Tom Mewwy," answered Arthur Augustus. "He waised the point, and said there would be vewy few spectators, because there is a show of some sort on at Wayland to-mowwow. It will be quite all wight, deah boys. We can cycle ovah as though we were going foah a bicycle-spin, and nothing will evah be heard of the affaih. I twust you all wrealise that I wegwet this secwecey, but I had no othah wesource. Wayland Wovahs want to play us to vindicate their wewputation, and it is up to us to give them a chance of doin' it."

"But—"

Arthur Augustus waved his hand again.

"You see, I have given my word of honah to take ovah the best available team," answered the swell of St. Jim's. "Undah the cires, there is nothing foah us to do but to wegard the mattah as closed, and pwocceed to pick the team. I will admit that I was a twifle hastay, pewwaps, but it is too late to twouble about that now. Pway pass me some papah, and we will select the team."

"You shrieking ass!"

"You— Oh, there isn't a word!" groaned Lowther. "It doesn't matter whether we win, lose, or draw to-morrow."

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we shall all get something—eleven whackings, and one extra for the reserve man."

"Wats, Lowthah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Wats, deah boy! Fatty Wynn, I twust you are all wight foah goal?"

Fatty Wynn glanced doubtfully from Figgins to Tom Merry. All the juniors looked a little excited, and perhaps a trifle uneasy.

"Tom Mewwy, you will turn out, of course?"

The captain of the Shell did not answer for a moment. His sympathy was all with Wayland Rovers.

But the possible consequence attending the proposed match made Tom Merry hesitate. In the words of Jack Blake, it was simply "asking for trouble."

Arthur Augustus waited, pencil in hand. The silence in the study was becoming embarrassing.

Tom Merry broke it suddenly.

"Yes, I'll play—"

"Rather!"

"So will I!"

"You are a howling ass, Gussy!" said the captain of the Shell. "You've probably landed all your pals into an awful mess, but you've promised to take over a team to play the Rovers, and we shall have to back you up."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Thanks awfully, deah boy! I knew you would see the mattah in the wight light. Personally, I considah we shall have a wipping game, and as St. Jim's First Eleven only just beat the Rovers last time on their ground, we have a wattleing good chance of putting a vewy large feathah in our caps—"

"Brrrrr!"

Tom Merry breathed hard through his nose and hoped for the best.

CHAPTER 6. D'Arcy's Eleven.

"**B**AI Jove, what did I say, deah boys?"

"Blessed if I know, Gussy!" growled Monty Lowther. "You say such a lot! Thank goodness there are only a handful of spectators, anyway!"

Arthur Augustus nodded vigorously as he slipped from his bicycle.

"That was what I was wefewwing to, Lowthah!" he exclaimed. "There can't be more than twentay spectators on the gwound, so we can wegard ourselves as absolutely safe."

"Humph!"

Tom Merry and ten other juniors propped their machines against the pavilion wall on the compact, pleasant Wayland Rovers' ground.

Tom led the way into the visitors' dressing-room of the Rovers' pavilion in a hopeful frame of mind.

"It may be all right after all," he said.

"Yaas, wathah! I considah we have nothing to feah now. Bai Jove, there is the Wovahs' captain waiting to toss up."

Arthur Augustus scudded away, but he was soon back again. A cheery grin was on the face of the swell of St. Jim's.

"We have won the toss, deah boys, and we play against the wind in the first half—"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"The wind may drop, duffer!"

"On the contvawy, I wathah fancay it is going to fweshen up," replied Arthur Augustus. "You can twust me to have chosen the wight goal to defend."

Arthur Augustus led his side on to the field in great spirits.

Wayland Rovers were fielding a very strong eleven. But St. Jim's also had a strong team out. With Talbot at centre-forward and Tom Merry and Monty Lowther on either side of him, D'Arcy's team looked as if they would be sound enough in the front line.

Taken altogether, the St. Jim's side could scarcely have been strengthened except by First Eleven players.

Wayland kicked off, getting away at once with a fine rush. Tom Merry watched anxiously. If Wayland Rovers really meant to atone for their disgraceful exhibition of rough play on the St. Jim's ground, they had their chance now.

The Rovers broke their way through the St. Jim's half-back line, but there was not a suspicion of roughness. As a matter of fact, Tom Merry heard one of the home players shout an apology to Clifton Dane for blundering into him by accident.

Tom Merry's eyes brightened as he heard that shout.

"It's straight goods, Lowther!" he whispered.

"Rather!"

"They mean to play the game—"

"And we've got to play it, too, to win," answered Lowther in alarm, as the Rovers' winger centred the ball with a beautifully judged kick. "On the ball, chaps!"

"Good old Figgins!"

Figgins at left-back, had brought one of his long legs into action, and the danger was averted. The leader of the New House juniors had booted the leather away with a huge kick.

The ball flew to Arthur Augustus on the wing, and the swell of St. Jim's did not waste time. He flashed away at a splendid pace.

The Rovers' left-half tried to stop him, and was bowled over for his pains.

"Sowway, deah boy!"

"Don't mention it, old chap!" came back the ready reply of the Wayland player.

Wayland Rovers certainly were playing a fine, sporting game. They were a heavy bustling side, and they used their weight; but there was no sign of roughness or unfair play.

Arthur Augustus raced on until he nearly reached the home left-back. Then he whipped the ball across the centre. Tom Merry gained possession, feinted past a rather flustered half, and flashed the leather across to Talbot.

Talbot took the pass in his stride, shooting at the same instant.

Thud!

The ball left Talbot's foot like a shot from a gun. It sailed straight for the further corner of the net, and there was a shout.

"Goal!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, hard luck, Talbot!" cried Tom Merry. "Well saved, sir!"

The Rovers' goalkeeper had flung himself across his goal-mouth; and he had kept Talbot's terrific shot out in a wonderful manner.

It was very hard luck for Talbot, but it would have been equally hard luck for the goalkeeper if he had failed after such a fine attempt to save. Talbot grinned broadly.

"My hat, this is something like a game!"

"Ripping!"

There was a huge tussle on the St. Jim's left wing, then another shot, this time from Jack Blake. Again the home custodian saved, and added to his laurels by clearing the ball with a huge punt.

Almost instantly Figgins and Kerr, the St. Jim's full-backs, were in the middle of a battle royal.

Figgins and Kerr, the Scots junior, were perhaps the soundest pair of backs the St. Jim's junior side had ever fielded, and they played their very best game that afternoon. Figgins' tackling roused the handful of spectators into shouts of applause.

Again and again the Rovers' forwards tried to force their way through, but they were being splendidly held. And when long shots were attempted there was always Fatty Wynn's sturdy fist to bar the way to the net.

But it was the same at the other end of the ground. Tom Merry, Talbot, and Monty Lowther played the inside game with beautiful precision, and cut their way through the home half-back line splendidly; but they could not score. Time after time shots were rained in upon the home custodian, but they were all kept out.

"Play up, you chaps!"

"Yaas, on the ball, deah boys! Wush thwough, Talbot!"

"Ass!" grinned Talbot, who had just been bowled over. "Go on, Blake!"

Jack Blake was streaking in from the wing at a great pace. He swerved past the half-back, and slipped the ball right to Tom Merry's foot.

The captain of the Shell appeared to be about to shoot, then he swerved away to the left and was through.

A Wayland back came thundering along right on his heels; but the home player was taking special pains not to touch the junior's flying heels. If the full-back could overtake Tom Merry, he meant to do his utmost to prevent a score; but it was perfectly obvious the Rovers' player had no intention of adopting unfair means.

And there was no overtaking Tom Merry during that run!

The Shell junior covered the twenty yards which separated him from the goal area at a splendid turn of speed. There were excited shouts, and as a last resource, the Wayland goalkeeper rushed out. It was really his only chance.

Cleverly the custodian tried to cover up his goal as much as possible, and he waved his arms. But Tom Merry did not lose his head.

The chance of a lifetime had come to the captain of the Shell, and he got his right foot to the ball with all the strength of his muscular leg.

Crash!

The ball fairly whizzed into the net, and there was a spontaneous roar. St. Jim's had scored first blood.

And they had done so on the stroke of half-time, for the referee whistled for the goal and for the breather with the same blast.

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WEDNESDAY:

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CHAPTER 7.

A Great Match.

IF the first half of that unofficial match between St. Jim's junior team and Wayland Rovers had been exciting and clever to watch, it was completely eclipsed by the second. Tom Merry & Co. took the field after the interval, fully expecting a hard fight.

The Rovers started with a series of brilliant, almost irresistible rushes. Figgins and Kerr literally gasped as the home forwards swept up the field.

There seemed to be no holding the Rovers

"On the ball, Figgins!"

"Oh, well cleared!"

One of the fine, brilliant rushes had been stopped by the leader of the New House juniors, and the leather was sent flying down the ground to Tom Merry. The captain of the Shell trapped neatly, and flashed a perfect pass to Talbot.

Talbot dashed ahead, eluded a clever tackle, and transferred to Jack Blake; and the visiting forward line went sweeping down the field with a beautifully combined run.

Jack Blake made headway at a splendid pace. He ploughed his way through the half-back line with astonishing ease.

"Pass! Pass, deah boy!"

But Jack Blake went on. Lowther, Talbot, and Tom Merry, the St. Jim's three inside players, were all well marked. It was no good passing to any of them.

And one of the backs was closing in upon Jack Blake. It looked everything to nothing that the chance was to be missed.

But Jack Blake kept his head wonderfully well. He suddenly screwed round, and bewildered the home defence by slinging the ball right across the ground to Arthur Augustus. The manœuvre of the outside left passing to the outside right was as unexpected as it was successful.

Arthur Augustus steadied the ball and flashed ahead.

He swerved round the left back, and dribbled at a huge pace for goal. Someone rushed at him, but Arthur Augustus was just in time to shoot.

The ball flashed through the air. For a breathless moment it looked certain to find the net; then there was a thud. Arthur Augustus had struck the cross-bar, and the ball had glanced over for a useless goal-kick.

"Hard luck, Gussy!"

"Rotten luck, old ass!"

"By Jove, yes!" exclaimed one of the Wayland players. "You chaps jolly well deserved a goal for that run!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Tom Merry, laughing cheerily. "You are having as much of the game as we are. And a jolly fine game it is, too!"

There could be no doubt about the match being a very fine one. Whatever the result was at the end, the losers would deserve nearly as much credit for the display as the winners.

Ever since the start there had not been a single foul, not even an accidental one. The heavy Rovers' players were putting up a display as generous as it was fine.

After Arthur Augustus' hard luck, the exchanges ruled even for nearly half an hour. There were narrow escapes for both goalkeepers, but somehow the defence always managed to prevail in the end. And as time wore on the excitement and enthusiasm grew tremendously.

When the game had only ten minutes to go St. Jim's still held their one goal lead, but there was no sign of the Rovers accepting defeat. They were playing harder than ever and better than ever.

The St. Jim's defence were at their wits' end. There were many cases of bellows to mend, but everybody was in great form.

Harry Noble was working tremendously hard at centre-half for St. Jim's. Again and again he succeeded in getting the ball away to Tom Merry or Talbot or Lowther.

The visiting forward line, too, were playing in great form.

When there could only have been a very few minutes to go, Tom Merry made a desperate effort to put the result of the match beyond doubt. The captain of the Shell received the ball from Harry Noble, well in the St. Jim's half of the field, and Tom Merry whipped the leather ahead to Talbot.

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Talbot kept possession of the ball for a second or two, then passed back to Tom Merry, and the next moment the Shell junior was making a thrilling run down the field.

He scudded on, swerving and tricking his way past the home defenders. The handful of spectators cheered in excitement.

The captain of the Shell reached the backs, and was in difficulties for the first time. But he overcame the difficulties brilliantly.

Tom got his foot under the ball, and lifted it over the heads of the two defenders. And the next instant the Shell junior had raced between the backs, and appeared to have the goal at his mercy.

"Shoot!"

"Shoot, Merry!"

Tom Merry shot with all the power he could. And it was a perfectly placed shot as well as a fast one, for the ball flew away towards the further corner of the net.

"Hooway—"

Arthur Augustus' cheer died away into a groan. The Wayland Rovers' goalkeeper had flung himself across his goal-mouth again, and in some extraordinary manner had got his hands to the ball. The goalie had saved his charge, but he was still prone on the ground, with the ball lying motionless a yard or two out of his reach.

Talbot dashed up recklessly, Jack Blake came streaking in from the wing, and one of the home backs flung himself at the ball. There was a thud, a half-hearted cheer, then a perfect roar of relief. The Wayland player had cleared.

The back had got his foot to the ball with a huge kick, and the leather was travelling up the ground at an amazing pace.

Harry Noble jumped in the air in a vain attempt to head; then the home centre-forward was in possession. The Wayland player dashed on at a great pace.

Already the referee had glanced at his watch twice in less than half a minute, so there could only be a few more seconds left of the game. The Wayland player realised that fact, and ignored an excited shout to pass.

Figgins rushed at him, but the Wayland forward had the advantage. Figgins was beaten!

Kerr dashed across, but he could never be in time to prevent the shot. Still, the Scots junior tried desperately, and if there had been another second he might have succeeded.

But there was not. The Wayland centre-forward swung his right foot back and shot. There was a gasp from Fatty Wynn, and he flung himself headlong across his charge.

But Fatty Wynn never had a chance of saving that goal. The ball crashed into the net before ever the Falstaff of St. Jim's could reach it.

"Oh, well shot, sir!"

The words came from Tom Merry in an impulsive outburst. It had been a magnificent shot, and it would have been the rankest bad luck if it had not gained its reward.

The referee sounded his whistle, and pointed towards the pavilion. The great match Tom Merry & Co. had risked so much to play had ended in a splendid draw. It was the only fair result on the run of the play, and Tom Merry was as pleased as the Wayland players were.

"A jolly fine game, anyway!"

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as the crowd of players trooped off the ground. "I should like to say I regard it as one of the finest games I have evah played in!"

The Wayland captain flushed. He was a new captain, chosen by the Rovers' Club after the other match with St. Jim's, and he had set his heart on making this match a fine, sporting affair.

He had had more than his wish. The game had been as enjoyable as it had been strenuous and keen. No one could doubt that.

The captain held out his hand to Arthur Augustus.

"I want to thank you for playing us again," he said quietly. "Of course, I realise that St. Jim's had a perfect right to refuse any further match with us, and it was very generous of you to bring over such a very fine side. Here are the three guineas' guarantee we promised. Please present it to any charity you like."

"Bai Jove, that is wipping of you!"

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ONE PENNY.



Arthur Augustus fastened on to the leather, and dribbled for goal. (See Chapter 7.)

"No doubt there is some charity or someone at Rylcombe who will be glad of the cash?"

"Gweat Scott, yaas! As a mattah of fact, there is an old soldier we are twyin' to do something foah, but are wathah out of funds. It was my ideah to use the money to help John Palmah!"

"My—my hat, yes!" muttered Tom Merry.

"That sounds a ripping idea!" agreed the Rovers' captain heartily. "I wish the club could have afforded more."

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle in his eye and faced his team.

"Thwee cheeahs for Wayland Wovahs, deah boys!" he called. "Thwee of the vevy best! Pway don't dig me in the wibs, Lowthah, deah boy!"

"Ass!"

"Dwy up, Lowthah! Thwee of the vevy best—"

The cheers came in a fine outburst, and the Rovers' captain flushed pink again. He had expected much from this match, but not nearly so much as had been forthcoming.

Tom Merry & Co. were making it very clear that they considered Wayland Rovers had regained their reputation as a fine, sporting team.

Monty Lowther was the only one who was not cheering. He was still digging Arthur Augustus in the side.

"Gussy, you ass!"

"Weally, Lowthah!"

"Gussy, you shrieking ass!" shouted Lowther. "Look over there!"

Arthur Augustus wheeled round, and his monocle fell from his eye.

For there stood Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House!

CHAPTER 8.

Two Soldiers of the King.

"**B**AI Jove! He has gone, deah boys!"

Tom Merry looked blankly towards the exit. Mr. Railton's stalwart form could be seen distinctly as he passed with the rest of the little crowd through the gateway leading to the main road.

The Housemaster was wheeling a bicycle, and the dismay grew on Tom Merry's face.

"My hat! He's going straight back to report us!"

"Gweat Scott!"

The St. Jim's juniors looked at each other in alarm.

"Faith, and we're in for it now!" said Reilly, the junior from Belfast. "I should think Gussy will be after getting whacked."

"Pway don't be widic., Weelly!" exclaimed Arthur

Augustus quickly. "And pway don't waste time! We must wace aftah Mr. Waitlon and explain mattahs."

"A fat lot of good that'll do, ass!"
 "Yaas, wathah! I considah it will do all the good in the world, Tom Mewwy! We must wace aftah him at once!"

Arthur Augustus mounted his machine, and started off at a fine pace, and Tom Merry and the other juniors followed him. None of them possessed the confidence Arthur Augustus had that it would be all right when matters had been explained to Mr. Railton, but there really was nothing else to be done.

The juniors crammed on the pace as fast as they could. But Mr. Railton was also cycling along at great speed, and the juniors gained very little indeed on their Housemaster. Arthur Augustus bent his head over his handlebars.

"Pway huwwy up, deah boys! We have no time to lose!"
 "Ass!"
 "Of all the young duffers!" panted Tom Merry. "Hallo! Mr. Railton has stopped!"

The juniors could just make out Mr. Railton jumping from his machine. The Housemaster had stopped to speak to a white-haired old stonebreaker by the roadside. Evidently the stonebreaker's array of medals had attracted the attention of the man who had served in Kitchener's Army.

Arthur Augustus spurted desperately, and arrived on the scene in a breathless state. Mr. Railton was in the act of shaking hands with the old stonebreaker.

"Please, sir, may we speak to you foah a minute?"
 Mr. Railton turned and nodded pleasantly.

"Ah, D'Arcy! I hope you enjoyed your game?"
 "Yaas; wathah, sir!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "As a mattah of fact, we want to ask a vewy gweat favah of you, sir."

"A favour?"
 "Ass!" muttered Tom Merry. "What we want is to explain, sir—"

"Yes, wathah!"
 "What is it you want to explain, Merry?" he asked.

"Anything about the very excellent match D'Arcy's Eleven played with Wayland Rovers?"

"Bai Jove! Yaas, sir!"
 "But the Wayland secretary explained everything to me on the ground," added the Housemaster gravely. "I know nothing of the trouble last season, as I was away at the time. The secretary showed me copies of letters he had written to Kildare, and he told me about your telephone message, D'Arcy. I really fail to see how any explanation of yours can alter the facts."

"Bai Jove, no, sir!"
 "Then why trouble to explain?"

"I—I— There are some extenuatin' circs, sir," floundered Arthur Augustus. "Wayland Wovahs had lost their reputation as a sporting side, and they appealed to us—"

"And the game was quite unofficial, sir," said Tom Merry desperately. "It wasn't a St. Jim's side which played the Rovers. It was D'Arcy's Eleven."

"I shall probably mention the matter to Dr. Holmes at dinner to-night," said Mr. Railton, with a quiet smile. "You can consider it a report if you choose, but I do not

think you need fear the result. I shall certainly say how much I enjoyed the match. And I think it is highly probable that St. Jim's First Eleven will ask Wayland Rovers to try and arrange a match on their ground before the season is over, after all."

"Bai Jove!"
 "Hooray!" yelled Tom Merry enthusiastically. "Thanks awfully, sir!"

Mr. Railton smiled and nodded, and cycled on. The juniors stood looking after him in silence. Figgins, who in his heart often envied the School House their Housemaster, was the first to speak.

"Railton is a brick, you fellows!"
 "Rather!" replied Lowther feverishly.

The cheery voice of the old stonebreaker broke in. Tom Merry & Co. turned, and saw the white-haired old man fondling a little fox-terrier.

The stonebreaker laughed quietly.
 "I'm an old soldier myself," he said, "and I like to have a word or two with anybody that's seen service. He's the right sort, that master of yours, young gentlemen!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 Arthur Augustus glanced at the other juniors, and Tom Merry nodded. Arthur Augustus fumbled in his pocket. There had, of course, been some silver included in the guarantee-money handed over to him.

"Will you please accept this?" Gussy asked, holding out half-a-crown to the veteran. "It is not a feahfully large sum, but pewwaps it may be useful in these twyin' times."

The old stonebreaker looked at the coin and smiled, but he shook his head.

"I thank you, sir," he said; "but I'd really rather not. I get my living all right at this job; and Peter, this little chap here, helps when dog shows come along."

"Bai Jove—"
 "I hope you aren't offended, sir?" said the old man.

"No; wathah not. I can quite undahstand—"
 "I am glad of that, sir" answered the old fellow simply.

"I've never yet had to accept charity, and I don't want to until I am forced, and I trust that won't happen for a long time."

"Bai Jove, I twust not!"
 "And your dog helps you to make a living?" exclaimed Herries, with great interest. "He's a fine little chap. I've got a fine bulldog myself, so I know something about dogs."

"Yes; Peter's a fine little chap, and I was offered five pounds for him not so long ago. I wouldn't take fifty, sir!"
 "I wouldn't take five hundred for Towser!" said Herries.

"Gweat Scott! Wouldn't you weally, Hewwies?" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Oh, I see you are wagging!"
 "Rats!" snapped Herries. "So Peter wins prizes at dog shows?"

"He's managed to gain four firsts and three seconds so far, sir, and I count there are more to come. You don't happen to know when there is likely to be a dog show in these parts, sir?"

"My—my hat!"
 Herries gasped loudly. Tom Merry and Jack Blake glanced at him with puzzled looks.

"What's the mattah, deah boy?"

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"N-nothing!" gasped Herries. "I say— Oh, let's get back to St. Jim's, you chaps!"

"Yes; let's get on," returned Tom Merry. "If we are going to see John Palmer, there isn't any time to waste. It's quite likely Palmer was able to start work, after all."

"Bai Jove, I was forgetting about that! Let's pless on like anything!"

The juniors jumped on to their machines, and called out a cheery good-bye to the old stonebreaker. But they were in such a hurry that none of them noticed the old man's face.

If they had done so, Tom Merry & Co. would have been surprised at what they saw, for the old stonebreaker was staring at them in puzzled amazement.

CHAPTER 9.

Herries Has a Great Idea.

"THERE'S no need for you chaps to go to Rylcombe!" said Lumley-Lumley coolly.

"No need to go to Rylcombe!"

"No need to go and see John Palmer, anyway!"

Tom Merry looked at Lumley-Lumley with a quick glance. Lumley-Lumley laughed openly.

"Go if you want to, Tom Merry!" the millionaire's son said. "But I guess there isn't any need. I've just been with Palmer."

"Bai Jove! Then he was able to start work?"

Lumley-Lumley chuckled.

"I guess not, Gussy! The old fraud is still in bed, and drinking hot rum-and-water. He was singing to himself when I reached the cottage, but when he saw me he had a fit of coughing. I jolly nearly emptied the water-jug over the old swindler!"

"Gweat Scott! You might have killed him!"

"Bow-wow!"

"But if he has influenza, and temperature——"

"Ah, if!" scoffed Lumley-Lumley. "I tell you John Palmer is an old fraud! And Skimmy thinks so, too!"

"Did Skimpole go with you?"

Lumley-Lumley chuckled again.

"Rather! And he took John Palmer's temperature. At first Skimmy found the old beast was a hundred-an-nine in the shade, or something; but at a second attempt he discovered that the temperature was quite normal. Skimpole was upset about it, and is sending Palmer some improving books. There's nothing in the world the matter with Palmer except that he doesn't mean to do any work while you chaps are prepared to support him."

"We've no proof, Lumley-Lumley."

"I don't want any——"

"Is that quite fair?"

"Lumley-Lumley, why did you say that?"

"It's no bizney of mine, anyway."

"Still——"

"You do as you think best," answered Lumley-Lumley.

"If Palmer sneaks your ticker, Gussy, don't forget that I warned you!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Lumley-Lumley, why did you say that?"

Talbot flashed his question in a low, tense voice. He looked pale and anxious.

Lumley-Lumley glanced at him in surprise.

"Why did you speak about—about Palmer stealing D'Arcy's watch?" repeated Talbot. "Have you any reason for suspecting Palmer?"

"No, I hadn't any special reason, Talbot," Lumley-Lumley said slowly. "I didn't mean it dead seriously, of course; only I consider Palmer is an old fraud!"

"A man might sham illness to escape work, and still be—be honest——"

"Of course—at least, honest enough not to pick and steal!"

"But you don't think John Palmer is honest?"

Lumley-Lumley answered quietly:

"I haven't thought about that at all, Talbot. It's my belief Palmer is shamming illness, and so I called him a

fraud. I haven't the vaguest idea whether he is honest in the other sense or not."

"I see."

Sharp-witted as Lumley-Lumley was, he could not be expected to guess the real cause of Talbot's alarm. Talbot had not told anyone that he had known John Palmer in the bad old days. That secret was locked up in Talbot's breast.

Talbot set his teeth as he walked away. He would never tell Palmer's secret unless Palmer forced him to by some dishonest action, and that had not happened yet.

Talbot's uneasiness wore off a little as he walked across the quadrangle. He strode on with his hands in his pockets, but there was still a puzzled, uncertain expression in his eyes.

"Hallo, Talbot!"

Talbot started as Herries caught him by the arm.

"I say, Talbot, do you know where Blake is?"

"Gone to Study No. Six, I expect," answered Talbot. "I left them all just now."

"Well, come to Study No. Six at once, will you?"

"I was just going to do some prep, old chap."

"Blow prep!"

"What's happened, Herries?" asked Talbot, laughing.

"Nothing has happened; but—but— Look here; you are in with us about raising some cash to help John Palmer, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm with you."

"Then I've got the scheme of a lifetime," said Herries, lowering his voice. "It's absolutely a great wheeze, Talbot. What about a dog show?"

Herries made his suggestion in a quick, enthusiastic voice, and Talbot stared rather blankly at him. Herries went on quickly.

"That's my idea—a dog show!" he rattled on. "Talbot, I know we could get one of those barns on Harris' farm, and we could get any amount of entrants from Rylcombe at a shilling a head."

"My aunt!"

"Of course, there would have to be prizes, and that would mean shelling out at first; but we should get all the cash back three or four times over."

"I—I suppose we should if enough dogs were entered."

"There'd be heaps of Rylcombe people only too glad to enter their dogs!" went on Herries breathlessly. "The idea came to me suddenly when we were talking to that stonebreaker this afternoon. Talbot, it's the idea of a lifetime!"

"I—I suppose it could be worked——"

"Suppose it could be? It couldn't fail! Say we only got a hundred dogs entered; that would mean five pounds——"

"My hat! Are there a hundred dogs in Rylcombe?"

"Well, if we don't get quite a hundred, it won't matter. We shall have to ask that dog-fancier from Rylcombe to judge the animals. I'd be willing enough to do that and save the expense, only I mean to enter Towser, and, of course, he will get a first prize! The other chaps might say things if I gave my own dog a 'first'——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The show could come off on Saturday," said Herries. "There's no footer on, and we've two whole days. Think what a sell it will be for the New House bounders!"

"Yes, there is that in it, of course."

"I've got all the details worked out in my head. Let's go along to Study No. Six at once, and form a committee. We shall want a jolly strong committee, and I'm willing to act as chairman. Tom Merry and Jack Blake will be no end keen on the wheeze, I can tell you. Let's sprint for it, Talbot!"

Talbot laughed, and the juniors broke into a run. They arrived at Study No. 6 in a breathless state just as Jack Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three of the Shell were sitting down to tea.

Herries burst into the peaceful little study with a rush.

CHAPTER 10.

Arthur Augustus Pays a Visit.

"I WEGARD the whole ideah as wotten in the extreme!"

Herries jumped to his feet wrathfully. He had laid his dog scheme before the other juniors, and his suggestion had been received in dead silence.

Arthur Augustus had been the first to break the pause.

"I not onlay wegard the ideah as wotten in the extreme," exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, "but I considah that it could onlay have come from a devanged bwain——"

"Ass!" roared Herries.

"No one in his sane senses would willingly gathah together a large numbah of fewocious dogs," went on Arthur Augustus warmly. "It is perfectly notorious that dogs in

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large numbahs sewap like anything, and they have no wespect watevah for a fellah's twousahs."

"You burbling duffer, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to be described as a burbling duffah, Hewwies; and I wefuse to considah your uttahly wotten ideah about a dog show!"

"Who is asking you to consider it, ass?"

"Then the mattah dwops through—"

"Turn the tailor's dummy out of the study!" shouted Herries. "Turn him out, Blake!"

"I uttahly wefuse—"

"Then dry up!" cried Herries, in a warlike voice. "Tom Merry, that's my idea for raising money for John Palmer and scoring one against the New House—that we hold a first-class dog-show!"

Tom Merry glanced doubtfully at Jack Blake, and the chief of Study No. 6 glanced back.

"I should think it would work all right if we could get enough dogs," said Tom, a trifle doubtfully.

"We can easily do that—"

"Wats!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Wats! The ideah is wotten in the extweme!"

"I put it to the meeting!" cried Herries. "Does the School House of St. Jim's hold a ripping dog-show or not?"

"Yes, rather!" yelled Digby.

"It's agreed, then?"

"Y-yes," said Tom Merry doubtfully. "Mind, I don't say the idea is such a bad one for a Fourth Form fellow; but we've got to be careful not to give away too much cash in the prizes, you know."

"We can wait until we know how many dogs are to be entered before we decide about the prizes," returned Herries. "I thought of that. Now, what we want is a strong committee, so I propose that all the fellows in this room, Gussy, of course, standing out—"

"I uttahly wefuse to stand out, you cwass ass!"

"You don't like the scheme, idiot!"

"I wogard it as wotten in the extweme!" retorted Arthur Augustus. "But I simply wefuse to stand out of the committee. You wequire fellahs of tact and judgment on a committee, and I am quite weaday to act as chairman—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Yes, really!" snapped Herries. "You can be on the committee if you like, but the moment you open your mouth to cackle you get shot out. Tom Merry, do you think one or two of us could get permits to go down to Rylcombe? We must see that dog-fancier chap Tate as soon as possible, and get as many addresses of dog owners as we can."

"Yaas, wathah! And we can dwep and see John Palmah on our way."

Arthur Augustus jumped to his feet. He looked at Herries with a cheery, pleasant glance.

"Pewwaps, aftah all, your ideah is not so uttahly wotten! In fact, there may be something in it," conceded Gussy generously. "I will go and get as many permits as poss fwm Kildare, deah boys."

Arthur Augustus was back again in a very few minutes. He had succeeded in obtaining four permits.

Tom Merry, Jack Blake, Herries, and Arthur Augustus were to go to Rylcombe. Watches were hastily consulted.

Tea was hurried through, and within a quarter of an hour the four were on their way to Rylcombe. Tom Merry glanced in dismay at the church clock as the four juniors cycled into the little town.

"My hat, there isn't any too much time, after all!"

"No; we shall have to get a move on, and no mistake," replied Herries. "I vote we postpone seeing John Palmer until to-morrow!"

"No; we can't do that, deah boy. Mr. Palmah is ill."

"But there isn't time to see Palmer as well as Tate, the dog fancier."

"Bai Jove, I wogard that as wathah awkward! The onlay thing is to divide our forces, deah boys," suggested Arthur Augustus. "Some of us must see Mr. Palmah, as a person gets vewy depwessed when a person has influenzah."

"Well, you go and see him, Gussy, and we'll meet you here by the church in twenty minutes," said Herries. "How about that?"

"Wight-ho!"

"In twenty minutes from now, mind!" said Tom Merry.

"There'll be an awful row if we are late."

"I sha'n't be late, deah boy," answered the swell of St. Jim's, jumping on his machine again. "Pway use tact and judgment in awwanging mattahs with Tate! It is a pittay I cannot come with you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the three juniors cycled on, leaving Arthur Augustus to turn off down a side street to Palmer's lodging.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 453.

Arthur Augustus jumped from his machine as he reached the clean, neat little cottage, and raised his cap. Mrs. Hall was just coming through the doorway.

"Is Mr. Palmah still in bed?"

"Yes; he's still in bed."

"Then he has not wocovahed fwm his attack?" said Arthur Augustus sympathetically. "I'm atwaid that he has influenzah, aftah all."

"Perhaps he has, and perhaps he hasn't, sir. He wasn't well enough to go to work this morning, but he was well enough to go out for some more rum a bit later on!"

And Mrs. Hall walked past Arthur Augustus, with an angry expression on her face. The swell of St. Jim's looked puzzled as he mounted the stairs. He pushed open Palmer's bed-room door, and sneezed.

The bed-room was full of rank tobacco-smoke and the fumes of hot rum-and-water. Arthur Augustus fairly choked as he walked in.

Cousin Ethel's protege was sitting up in bed, carefully wrapped up in shawls, but apparently anything but depressed. He was smoking a clay pipe, and he had a newspaper propped up in front of him and a glass of steaming-hot rum-and-water by the bedside.

Whatever might be said against John Palmer, he seemed to be standing up to his attack of the "flu" very cheerily. His fat, unpleasant face wreathed in smiles as Arthur Augustus approached.

"This is very kind of you, young gen'leman! It's thoughtfulness like this as makes a man see what good there is in the world!"

"Pway don't mention it!"

"How can I help mentioning it, sir?" said John Palmer unctuously. "You can 'ardly guess how upset I was this morning when I found I couldn't go to work—"

"That's all wight, Mr. Palmah!" struck in Arthur Augustus cheerily. "Farmah Hawwis has agweed to keep the job open for you."

Palmer started, and the pleasant smile died out of his anything but pleasant face.

"Oh, has he? That's very kind of him, I'm sure! Won't you sit down on the edge of the bed, sir?"

Arthur Augustus hesitated, but he could not very well refuse.

"Bai Jove, I wondah you don't have your window open, Mr. Palmah!"

"With the 'flu, sir?"

"Yaas—oh, yaas; I was forgetting that!" said Arthur Augustus hastily. "I twust you are feeling bettah?"

"I—I think there may be a little bit of improvement."

"I'm very glad to heah that. I twust you will be quite all wight in a day or two. I must wush away now. Is there anything you want, Mr. Palmah?"

"Only to get well enough to go to work, sir," answered Palmer, in his oiliest tones. "Accepting charity 'urts an old soldier more than you can guess, sir."

"Bai Jove, then pway don't think of it! You did a wipping good turn foah my Cousin Ethel, and I wogard it as simplay a mattah of dutay to wepay you. I twust you will think no more about chawity, Mr. Palmah."

And, with a cheery nod, Arthur Augustus left.

He breathed deeply and with intense relief when he found himself outside, for the atmosphere of Palmer's room had nearly choked him.

CHAPTER 11.

Figgins & Co. Make a Discovery.

"JOLLY funny, anyway!"

Figgins muttered the words in a puzzled voice, and strained his eyes to pierce the darkness. Kerr and Fatty Wynn were also straining their eyes.

But there was not very much that Figgins & Co. of the New House could see. It was just possible to make out the largest of Farmer Harris' two barns and a small number of juniors passing in and out of it.

Figgins & Co. could not understand it.

"This is about the tenth time Tom Merry has been down to the barn, you fellows," Figgins whispered. "The School House bounders are up to something!"

"Like Gussy's cheek to say all New House chaps seen near Harris' farm would be ragged!"

"Awful nerve!"

Figgins chuckled. For if Arthur Augustus had not issued the unofficial warning, Figgins & Co. would never have thought of going near Harris' farm. The warning naturally sent them there at once.

Figgins looked very puzzled indeed.

"Blessed if I can make it out!"

"L-let's get a bit closer."

"Don't make a row, then!"

The three juniors clambered through the hedge, but still they could see nothing that solved the mystery. Tom Merry & Co. were busy inside the barn now, hammering and sawing at a furious pace.

Kerr crept cautiously a few yards nearer. The hammering still went on, and Figgins gritted his teeth.

"Make a rush for it, and swing the door open, shall we?"

"They'll spot us, Figgy!"

"We'll run for it if they do," whispered back the leader of the New House juniors. "I'm going to see what's happening inside that barn, kids!"

"Right-ho!"

Figgins & Co. waited for a moment or two, then rushed. They reached the barn, and Figgins wrenched open the door.

Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell, and Jack Blake and his chums of the Fourth, were working at a furious pace with hammers and saws by the light of several candles. Tom Merry wheeled round.

"New House rotters!"

"Collar them!"

"Altogether, chaps!"

The School House juniors came rushing from the barn, and Figgins & Co. made a dash for the open gate.

"Rush through!" shouted Figgins. "On the ball!"

Several more School House juniors had suddenly appeared in the farm gateway. They promptly lined up, barring the way against Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn.

"Stop the bounders, Kangaroo!"

Harry Noble, Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn did their best. They rushed forward to meet Figgins & Co., but Fatty Wynn was leading the way now.

The Falstaff of St. Jim's saw the juniors in front of him, but he did not stop. Fatty Wynn sprinted desperately.

"Brrr!"

"Yaroooooh!"

Fatty Wynn dashed into the middle of the opposition, and the New House junior's weight was too much for Harry Noble. He made a desperate grab at Fatty Wynn, and threw his arms round the fat junior's neck. Both thumped down.

"Kangaroo, leave go, or I'll roll on you!"

Harry Noble did not know whether he left go or not. He was conscious of an enormous weight suddenly dropping upon him, and then Fatty Wynn scrambled to his feet again.

The Falstaff of the New House promptly charged at Bernard Glyn, and again weight carried the day. Bernard Glyn thudded into Clifton Dane, and the Canadian went down with a thump.

"Oh, my aunt!"

"Gerroff!"

"School House, rescue!"

Tom Merry & Co. came dashing up, but Fatty Wynn was on his feet again just in time. He scudded on at a surprising pace, Kerr and Figgins beside him.

The three New House juniors dashed through the gateway, with Tom Merry & Co. on their heels.

"Take to the woods, Figgy!" panted Kerr. "We shall just do it."

"As hard as you can, then!"

Figgins, the champion junior sprinter of St. Jim's, could have got away by himself without much difficulty, but he kept his pace down to the best his chums could do.

There was a moment of suspense, then a New House cheer. Figgins & Co. had reached the woods.

"Is that how you like it done, Tom Merry?"

"School House duffers!"

And Figgins & Co. slipped away amongst the trees.

Kerr was the first to stop, excitement sparkling in his keen eyes.

"What do you think of it, Figgy?"

"Blessed if I know what to think!" growled the leader of the New House juniors. "Those School House duffers seem to be making about fifty rabbit hutches."

"But didn't you see that huge cardboard sign against the wall?"

"What sign, kid?"

"The giddy sign Manners was painting," chuckled Kerr. "The School House bounders are going to hold a dog show on Saturday afternoon!"

"My hat!"

"That's what the sign said, anyway," grinned Kerr. "This way to the St. Jim's Dog Show." Tom Merry & Co. are going to hold a blessed dog show, and you can be pretty certain it is in aid of the John Palmer fund."

"My—my aunt!"

Figgins and Fatty Wynn stared at Kerr blankly. They knew the cautious Scots junior too well to think he had made a mistake, and if the School House were going to hold a dog show, they would have scored off the New House finely.

"We've got to do something, you chaps!" said Figgy desperately.

"Rather!"

"We've got to hold a rival show next to their blessed dog show," went on Figgins, through his teeth.

"Another dog show, Figgy?"

"No; that's no giddy good! We shouldn't have time to get any dogs. My hat, though, what about a cat show!"

"But where would the cats come from?"

"We should have to have a cat hunt to-night, and capture as many mousers as possible."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll make our show a real rag," exclaimed Figgins. "There's no time to have a real cat show, of course, with prizes, and all that, so we'll make it a jolly fine rag. We'll get that other barn on Harris' farm. Harris is an awfully decent sort, and he'll let us have it for nothing, and we'll shove up a whacking big notice: 'New House Comic Cat Show.'"

"Good wheeze, Figgy!" said Fatty heartily.

"It's better than nothing, anyway," returned Figgins.

"Ten to one a lot of Rylcombe people will turn up for the School House show, and we must try and collar some of them. We'll charge the same entrance fee as Tom Merry charges; and if some of the people visit both shows, it'll be so much the better for the John Palmer fund!"

"That's so."

"Then let's get on with the washing," said Figgins practically. "Kerr, you slip along and arrange with Harris about the barn. Better do that on the telephone, or Tom Merry may twig. Fatty Wynn and I'll start the cat hunt at once, though I'm blest if I know the best way to catch cats."

"Collar 'em low, I expect," chuckled Kerr. "I'll meet you chaps in the New House quadrangle in ten minutes time."

CHAPTER 12.

The Dog Show.

"OPEN the door, you silly old fogeys!"

Arthur Augustus brushed the dust from his trouser knees, and jumped to his feet.

"Is that you, Wally?"

"Yes, of course, it's me," retorted Arthur Augustus' younger brother, Wally D'Arcy of the Third. "Open the door, ass!"

"The show doesn't start until thwee, and it isn't nearly that yet."

"Blow the show! Open the giddy door!"

And D'Arcy minor thumped and kicked away indignantly. Tom Merry laughed.

"Let the kid in, Blake! What do you want, Wally?"

D'Arcy minor slipped into the large barn, and hastily closed the door behind him. He chuckled loudly. He had Pongo, his famous and highly-valued mongrel under his arm.

For once in his life, Pongo was a picture of cleanliness and tidiness; but there was a depressed expression in his bright, canine eyes. Half an hour ago he had had his third bath that day, and he felt a little bit off in consequence.

Wally looked round the building, and chuckled again.

Already there must have been fifteen or twenty dogs enclosed in little cages, and some of them looked as if they would have some considerable difficulty in getting even "highly commended."

Wally D'Arcy placed Pongo in a cage, and grinned at Tom Merry.

"My hat! You old fogeys ought to see the crowd waiting in the road!"

"Bai Jove! Is there a crowd, deah boy?"

"A giddy army, Gus! Better open the show at once!"

"We can't until Tate comes to start judging the tykes, kid!"

"Blow Tate. I'll do the judging, if you like!"

"Wats, Wally!"

Arthur Augustus opened the barn-door and peered out. There certainly was quite a respectable little crowd waiting for the show to open.

"I told you it was a jolly fine idea, you duffer! My hat, it's getting on for three o'clock!"

The School House juniors glanced at their watches. The dog show was to open punctually at three o'clock, when Tate, the Rylcombe dog fancier, was to start the first part of the judging.

Herries looked round the decorated barn gleefully. The School House dog show certainly promised to be a huge success.

"Won't it be a sell for Figgins & Co.!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 453.

"Gweat Scott! We must wush away and change our attiah, chaps."

Tom Merry threw down a hammer.

"I'm coming, too, Gussy."

"Wight-ho!"

Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus hurried from the barn. "You'll find me in the bath-room, kid," said Tom Merry, a few minutes later.

"Wight-ho!"

Arthur Augustus ran up the stairs, and Tom Merry hurried to one of the School House bath-rooms. He opened the door, and started as a cheery voice rang out.

"Hallo, Merry!"

"Hallo, Kildare!" grinned the Shell junior; and the captain of St. Jim's looked at Tom Merry suspiciously.

"What are you School House kids up to on Harris' farm?" Kildare demanded. "It's not a rag, is it?"

"No, that's all right, Kildare!"

Kildare laughed.

"All right, is it? Oh, I say, you remember that trouble with Wayland Rovers?"

"Y-yes, Kildare."

"Well, it has all been settled now," answered the stalwart captain of St. Jim's. "It seems that Mr. Railton saw the Rovers play a friendly game last Wednesday, and he was greatly impressed by the sporting match they put up. Mr. Railton spoke to the Head about it, and the long and the short of it is St. Jim's First Eleven play the Rovers on their ground next Saturday."

"My hat! Is that a fact?"

"Yes; it's all settled."

"Hooray!" shouted Tom Merry as Kildare left the bath-room.

"Gweat Scott! My—my onlay toppah!"

Tom Merry started and stared at Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's came rushing into the bath-room, and dropped limply into the nearest chair.

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy!" he gasped.

"Ass!" shouted Tom Merry. "What's happened?"

"The guawantee monay fwom Wayland Wovahs has gone," said Arthur Augustus faintly. "It has uttably disapeahed fwom my gwey twousah-pocket!"

"You howling ass!"

"I wefuse to be chawactahwised— Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy, it seems uttably imposs that the monay can have gone, but it has! The Wovahs captain gave me two pounds in cuwency notes, and the west in silvah. I put the notes in that little leathah purse Cousin Ethel gave me, and the west of the monay loose in my othah twousah-pocket—"

"And it—it has all gone?"

"No, onlay the purse with the notes in it!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I didn't wear my gwey suit yestahday, and it was locked up in my twunk."

"Then how could anyone have sneaked it, ass?"

"I weally don't know—"

"And we haven't any chaps in St. Jim's who sneak another fellow's cash now!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in dismay. "Gussy, you careless ass, you must have lost the cash coming home from the footer-match!"

"No, I had the purse all wight when we cycled to Wylcombe."

"Then you must have dropped it, then."

"It seems most unlikely, as I have always considahed a twousah-pocket as a vevy safe place to keep cash in."

"Brrr!"

"Talbot, deah boy, have you seen that bwoon leathah purse of mine anywhere about?"

"Brown leather purse?"

Talbot had just come into the bath-room, and he started as Arthur Augustus' voice rang out.

"You've lost your purse, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah, and two pound cuwency notes in it!"

"Perhaps you've left it in Study No. 6, after all," said Tom Merry. "There's time to have a hunt round. Jolly awkward if you have lost the cash, ass!"

Tom Merry led the way up the stairs at a run. It really would be very awkward if the money were lost, for it would mean that nothing would be gained from the dog show for the John Palmer fund.

The promised cash prizes would have to be made out of the admission and entrance fees, and it was very unlikely there would be anything like a large profit.

Not a sign of the purse could be found in Study No. 6, or in Arthur Augustus' trunk, and to look anywhere else seemed pretty useless.

Tom Merry glared at the swell of the Fourth Form.

"Of all the burbling young asses, Gussy—"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Brrr!" ground out the captain of the Shell. "You ought to be boiled in oil, and then frozen to death!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 453.

"I cannot wegard your wemark in any light except as widic in the extweme!" replied Gussy loftily. "It is vevy unfortunate that the wotten monay is lost, but it is quite poss that it may turn up. My name is on the purse, and it is pwobable the findah will bwing it back to me. I would stwongly advise you not to wowwy about it, deah boys."

"Brrr!"

"And as it is pwactically thwee o'clock, we shall have to wush back to the barn," added Arthur Augustus. "You are quite sure I didn't give the money to you to mind, Tom Mewwy?"

"Rats!"

Further words failed Tom Merry, and he led the way back to Harris' farm in silence. Talbot was also silent; but he listened intently to Arthur Augustus, as the elegant junior went over the few known details of his loss again.

"I say, you fellows, Tate hasn't turned up yet!"

Herries greeted Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus with dismayed glances. It was already past three o'clock, and there was no sign of Tate, the dog-fancier.

"My hat! We shall have to open the show without him, Herries!"

"Y-yes."

"And perhaps Tate will turn up before we've got the other dogs in their cages," added the captain of the Shell. "He promised faithfully to be punctual. My aunt, we had better open the door!"

The would-be spectators were hammering away with a will at the barn door, and Herries did not dare to wait any longer. He opened the door, and he and Digby began to take the money.

Tom Merry & Co. had decided to charge sixpence admission, and the money was handed over cheerfully. About twenty people passed into the barn in no time, a good many of them carrying barking dogs.

"Gussy, get on with the washing!" shouted Herries. "Collar that collie before it goes for the Pom!"

"Wats!"

Someone's collie had broken loose, and was approaching a tiny Pom with a slow, menacing stride. Herries fairly yelled.

"Collar the dog, Gussy, you ass!"

"I uttably wefuse to touch the bwute! Gweat Scott!"

The collie made a friendly rush at Arthur Augustus, jumped up at him, and pawed half a dozen muddy patches down the Fourth-Former's startling waistcoat.

"Bai Jove! Down, you bwute! Call this wotten dog off, somebody!"

The collie was dragged away, and carefully fastened up in a cage. Herries and Digby were still taking money at the door, but all the time they were watching anxiously along the main road. Still there was no sign of Tate.

Talbot had gone off on a bicycle to search for the dog-fancier; but the Shell junior had not come back yet. Herries was getting alarmed.

"The dogs are all in the cages now, sir!" called out one of the exhibitors. "Better get to the judging part."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Who is to do the judging, sir?"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle in his eye, and looked round vaguely for support.

"As a mattah of fact—"

"Shurrup!" hissed Tom Merry, catching Arthur Augustus by the arm. "Herries, something's got to be done. Tate isn't coming, that's certain, and no one would ever agree to your judging the dogs. I don't know a pug from a bull-dog—"

"My aunt!"

Herries looked desperate. If the judging didn't soon start there would be some ugly questions asked about the cash prizes.

Herries choked.

"Gussy, your pater has no end of sporting dogs, hasn't—"

"Yaas, wathah, and jolly fewocious bwutes, too!"

"Well, you must know something about dogs!" whispered Herries. "Start the judging, and perhaps Tate will turn up, after all. We can't stand here like stuffed dummies! Start at cage number one, Gussy!"

"Wight-ho, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"You can twust me, Hewwies. And I wathah fancy I know a good deal about dogs. Bai Jove, this is cage numbah one!"

Arthur Augustus stopped in front of a particularly ferocious-looking bull-terrier, and stared at it steadily.

"Bai Jove—"

"Are you judging, sir?" demanded the owner of the bull-terrier.

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

"Then that dawg's a sight for sore eyes! Just you open his mouth an' look at his teeth—"

CHAPTER 13.

John Palmer's Faults.

"Gweat Scott!"

"Open his mouth, I say, and if you've ever seen a stronger jaw, or a finer set of teeth, I'd like to know where! Just open his mouth, sir!"

"My onlay toppah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, backing abruptly. "I wegwet to say that I must wefuse uttably to open his mouth—I mean, it is weally not neces! I can see frowm heah that—that he is a vevy fine animal!"

"But you 'aven't 'arf looked at him!"

"Pway don't intewwupt me! I award the wotten dog a first pwize!"

"Ass!" hissed Tom Merry. "Tate may come in a minute, and there's no need for you to award prizes! Make a tour of inspection first!"

"Thank you kindly, sir!" said the gratified bull-terrier owner. "I knew I was safe for a 'first,' of course; but I can see that there isn't much you don't know about dogs."

"No, wathah not—I mean— Bai Jove, I seem to wogonise this fewicious-looking bwute!"

"It's Herries' Towser, ass!"

"Bai Jove, yaas! I uttably wefuse to award Towser any pwize at all! Gweat Scott, what is this, deah boy?"

"A Great Dane!" said the owner indignantly; "and there isn't another in the country like it!"

"Bai Jove, I can't say I am weally sowway! Hold him back! Hold the bwute back, someone!"

"Ass, he's chained up!"

"You are weally sure of that, Tom Mewwy?" said Arthur Augustus doubtfully. "He made a vevy wotten spwing just then. I considah him a vevy fine dog!"

Arthur Augustus attempted to move away, but that was not good enough for the Great Dane owner. He seized Arthur Augustus by the arm.

"I know he's a fine dawg!" the man said darkly. "I knew that afore I came here! What's he get, that's what I want to know?"

"Highly commended, ass!" whispered Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I have gweat pleasure in highly-commending your dog, sir—vevy highly-commending him indeed!"

"What!" shouted the dog-owner. "I get a V.H.C., when that mongrel of a bull-terrier takes a 'first'? Not for me, young gent! Cæsar has a 'first,' too, or I'll know the reason why!"

"Bai Jove! Pway don't put yourself in a fluttah, sir, as—as— Tom Mewwy, I shall have to award anothead wotten first pwize!"

"And another one here, Gus!"

"Wats, Wally!"

"Pongo's going to have a 'first,' and don't you forget it!" shouted D'Arcy minor. "He's had three baths to-day, and if you don't give him a first—"

"Wats, you young wagamuffin!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "I uttably wefuse to award anothead first all the aifah-noon—"

"Hurrah! Here comes Tate, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Hooway! Mr. Tate, please commence judging these wotten dogs at once!"

Loud-voiced disapproval broke out at once. Most of the entrants seemed to prefer Arthur Augustus as a judge.

"No need to trouble, Mr. Tate!"

"You go on, sir; you're doing fine!"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle back into his eye, and faced the crowd defiantly.

"I wefuse to go on with the judging! I withdwaw in favour of Mr. Tate! I have quite made up my mind nevah to act at a wotten dog show again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tate, the keen-faced little dog-fancier from Rylcombe, joined in the laugh as he glanced round the exhibits. He faced the crowd in a cheery way.

"I mistook the farm, gentlemen, and that's why I'm late," he said. "Two dogs appear to have been judged; but that was only in fun. It doesn't count!"

"What!" shouted the bull-terrier owner.

"Oh, don't it!" yelled the Great Dane's master.

Tate merely laughed again.

"Don't lose your tempers, gentlemen," he said quietly.

"The best dogs are going to have the prizes, and I shall be able to get through this little show before tea. Master Talbot came along with me, and he wants to see you, Master Merry, and Master D'Arcy outside at once."

"Wight-ho, Mr. Tate! Gweat Scott, he's opening Towser's mouth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry laughed in great relief. Tate's arrival on the scene had turned the show from a farce into what promised to be a very successful little undertaking.

Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus left the barn gleefully.

"My hat, I thought you were never coming, chaps!"

Talbot spoke in a voice full of breathless excitement as Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus came out of the barn.

"What's the row, Talbot?" asked Tom Merry. "I'll tell you in a minute. Gussy, do you recognise this purse?"

"Bai Jove, yaas! It's the purse Cousin Ethel gave me, and the one I had the two pounds in. Where evah did you find it, deah boy? Why, it's half burnt!"

"Yes, it's half burnt all right. You are sure it was the purse you had the lost cash in?"

"Absolutely sure, Talbot. As a matter of fact, it is the onlay purse I have."

"Talbot, where did you find it?"

"I'll tell you that later on, Merry," answered Talbot quietly. "I'll keep the purse for a bit, if you don't mind, Gussy, and there's an outside chance I may get some of the lost money back. Tom Merry, if you trouble any more about raising funds for John Palmer, you are an ass!"

"My hat, Talbot!"

"Palmer's a drunken rotter!" said Talbot hotly. "Mrs. Hall has had to turn him out of her cottage because he went out this morning and came back in a disgustingly drunken state. The man's an absolute outsider!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You ought to hear what Mrs. Hall says about him, anyway, and she wouldn't say rotten things about anyone if they weren't true. But I must slip back to Rylcombe at once!"

"Talbot, one minute—"

"I'll explain everything later, Merry," said Talbot. "I can't waste time now, or there won't be a chance of getting any of the lost money back. I'll—I'll turn up at St. Jim's just as soon as I can, you fellows!"

And Talbot flashed away on the bicycle Herries had lent him.

Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus stood staring after him blankly. Talbot often puzzled his chums, but he had puzzled them more than ever that afternoon.

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders in amazement. He stood moodily outside the barn, watching the approach of two other St. Jim's juniors. The two were Mellish and Gore. They came up with their hands in their pockets.

Mellish, the cad of the Fourth, tried to grin cheerily.

"D'Arcy's Cousin Ethel has turned up at St. Jim's, you chaps."

"Bai Jove! Has she weally?"

"Yes, just drove up to the Head's house as we came away," said Mellish. "I thought you'd like to know at once, so Gore and I came straight down. May—may we just have a look in at your dog show, Merry? We only want to stay a minute or two, so it isn't worth while paying."

"Oh, go in and stay a week if you want to!"

"Thanks awfully!" exclaimed Mellish, digging Gore in the ribs. "Come on, old chap!"

And Mellish and Gore went in, delighted.

Tom Merry was still looking moodily up the road.

"I say, Cousin Ethel will be awfully disappointed, Gussy!"

"Yaas, it's wotten in the extweme!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "Cousin Ethel believed in John Palmah, and it is always wotten if you believe in people, and then discovah that they are wank outsiders. In the cires, I wathah wish Cousin Ethel hadn't come to St. Jim's, bai Jove!"

And Tom Merry agreed.

Inside the barn, Herries' dog show had gone off swimmingly and without a hitch. Tate had done his work conscientiously, and everybody was satisfied.

Tate grinned pleasantly as he made a short concluding speech.

"Many of you gentlemen who had hopes of winning prizes and have failed to do so, are, I trust, satisfied that it is because there were better dogs than yours in the show," the little man said. "Master Herries wishes me to say that the prizes will be awarded this evening, when a great number of St. Jim's boys will, no doubt, be present. Gentlemen, the first half of the show is closed!"

The dog-owners gave a hearty cheer, and there was a broad grin on Herries' face as the little crowd filed out of the barn. The show, so far, had been a great success.

"What do you think of my idea now, Gussy?" Herries chuckled. "Less than half the money we've taken by the show will cover the prizes, and with that three guineas Wayland Rovers gave you as a guarantee—"

"Bai Jove, haven't you heard, deah boy?"

"Heard—heard what?"

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"ON HIS HONOUR!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Why, about those three guineas, Hewwies!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wegwet to say I have lost two pounds of them, bai Jove!"

"You shrieking ass!"

"Weally—"

"You raving duffer!" yelled Herries. "You fellows, Gussy has lost two pounds of the Wayland Rovers' guarantee! Collar him! Collar the burbling young duffer!"

The juniors closed round Arthur Augustus with warlike faces; but Tom Merry abruptly held up his hand.

"Blow the two pounds!" he said. "Blow the John Palmer Fund! Blow John Palmer himself!"

"Yaas, wathah! In a way, deah boys, I am wathah glad I have lost the wotten monny!"

"Ass!"

"Oh, blow the whole affair!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "John Palmer is a rotter, and—and we've got to tell Cousin Ethel so!"

"Cousin Ethel?"

"Yaas, Digbay, foah the deah gal has turned up at St. Jim's."

"Hurrah!"

The juniors cheered in great glee, and Digby led the rush for the School House. John Palmer and the dog show held on his behalf were forgotten for the moment in the news that Cousin Ethel was at St. Jim's.

Cousin Ethel, looking even prettier and daintier than she had when Tom Merry & Co. had last seen her, held out her hand with a laughing welcome as the juniors faced up.

"I simply couldn't help coming to St. Jim's, Arthur!" she exclaimed, as she shook hands with Arthur Augustus. "You never even answered my letter about poor old John Palmer."

"Gweat Scott, I did, deah gal!"

"Well, I never got the letter, Arthur."

Arthur Augustus gasped aloud.

"My onlay toppah—I mean, bai Jove—I w'ote the lettah, but I believe I forgot to post it!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "I was goin' to Studay Numbah Six to get the lettah when the Wayland Wovahs wang me up on the telephone. The—the lettah is in Studay Numbah Six now!"

"Then, perhaps that's why I didn't receive it," laughed Cousin Ethel. "But it doesn't matter, Arthur; I know you have all done your best to help John Palmer."

"Bai Jove—"

"You have done your best, Arthur?"

"Y-yes, we have done our best," said Tom Merry, in a quiet voice. "But—but I think you've been deceived as to his true character."

"You said in your lettah that he had his faults, deah gal, and, bai Jove, he has!"

Cousin Ethel nodded.

"Yes, John Palmer has at least one fault—his great pride," the girl-chum said quietly. "If you had seen the splendid way he jumped into the river to save my dog and the pride with which he refused any reward, you would have called his splendid, silly old pride a fault."

"Gweat—gweat Scott!"

"You have noticed the pride yourself, Tom Merry?"

"Not—not exactly in that way!" gasped the captain of the Shell.

"Bai Jove, here's Talbot, deah boys!"

Tom Merry gasped with relief. The arrival of Talbot saved the captain of the Shell from a very difficult question. But Talbot's arrival did a great deal more than that.

The Shell junior hurried up to Arthur Augustus.

"There are twenty-five shillings of your lost two pounds, Gussy," Talbot said. "The rest of the money has been spent in—in drink, I think."

"In drink!"

"Who has spent it?" flashed Tom Merry.

"John Palmer," answered Talbot quietly. "The purse Cousin Ethel gave to you, Gussy, I found half-burnt in Palmer's room at Mrs. Hall's cottage, and I followed the clue up. I found John Palmer at the Green Man, and made him return all the money he hadn't spent. Palmer said he found the purse; but I expect he robbed you in some way, Gussy."

"Bai Jove!"

"Do you think he did?"

"I—I can't say, deah boy; but it is not imposs, as I sat on the edge of his bed that night we went to see Tate about the dog show, and he may have stolen the money then."

"That's how he did it, right enough!"

"Boys, who are you talking about?" exclaimed Cousin Ethel, in amazement. "You don't mean to say that you think John Palmer has—has robbed Arthur?"

"I am afraid so, Cousin Ethel."

"And—and, anyway, he's an awful scamp," added Tom Merry. "We know for a fact that Mrs. Hall had to turn him out of her cottage for behaving like a beast."

"Merry, I simply cannot believe it!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 453.

"I am afraid it's twue, deah gal!"

"Oh, you have all made a great mistake!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel indignantly. "You have, really!"

Talbot shook his head.

"I am afraid we haven't, Cousin Ethel. I knew John Palmer ages ago."

"You knew John Palmah, deah boy?"

Talbot flushed a deep red, but he was still facing Cousin Ethel.

"Yes, I knew John Palmer when—when I was a burglar," he said quietly. "Palmer—he was known as Slade then—was a member of the Hookey Walker Gang for a short time."

"Talbot, I cannot believe it!"

"It's true enough, Cousin Ethel," answered Talbot, in a low voice. "I recognised Palmer directly I saw him at the cafe where we all had tea; but I said nothing, because I thought perhaps he had reformed. I couldn't stand in the way of his having a last chance. But he hasn't reformed; he was a cracksmen in the old days, and he is a thief now—I am certain he robbed you of your purse, Gussy. But I only succeeded in getting the money back when I told Palmer I knew him, and would hand him over to the police if he didn't clear out of Rylcombe at once. I—I bought his ticket for him, and saw him off by the five o'clock train."

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry and the other juniors said nothing. And when Cousin Ethel walked away, even Figgins did not attempt to follow her.

Tom Merry & Co.'s girl-chum was feeling all the bitterness of disappointment which comes when someone who has been believed in is found wanting.

Meanwhile, Gore and Mellish, having got through their free view of the dog show, had been attracted by the sounds coming from the smaller barn.

"Mum—my hat! It's cats, Gore!"

"No giddy doubt about that, ass!" growled Gore. "My only Aunt Jane, there is a notice all ready to be hung over the door! Whose wheeze is this?"

They opened the door of the smaller barn. Through the gloom inside glittered greenly the eyes of many cats.

"The New House Comic Cat Show," read Mellish, from a big strip of cardboard already stuck up inside. "I say, Gore, I remember now that Figgins asked me this afternoon what time the dog show started."

"What did you say? Six o'clock?"

"Yes, I didn't know that Herries was going to open the rotten affair in the afternoon."

"And Figgy didn't twig it, either," said Gore, grinning. "These New House rotters won't half be wild! They were going to run this wheeze in competition, you bet!"

"Don't see much in it," replied Mellish, yawning. "Come along, Gore! It's no bizney of ours, anyway."

"What an ass you are!" snapped Gore. "Can't you see that this is no end of a chance for us to jigger up the whole thing Figgins & Co. will come rushing down directly after tea, and so will Herries and the rest of the Tom Merry gang. Why shouldn't we let both lots of giddy beasts loose, and bust up both shows?"

The project was a little too bold for Mellish to cotton to on the instant.

"I—I say, old chap, I thought you'd stopped bucking against Tom Merry & Co.," he faltered.

"Then you thought wrong. Talbot's one of the best, and I don't buck against him—at least, not often. But I never said I loved Tom Merry & Co."

"Mum—mum—my hat, though, we can't let the dogs loose!" protested Mellish. "Suppose they get lost?"

"Dogs don't get lost, you utter idiot! Trust a dog to find his way home all serene! What fun would there be in it unless we let the giddy cats go as well?"

Mellish did not quite see where the fun came in, anyway. There was less of the brute in him than in Gore. But Mellish was as clay in the potter's hands when he ran up against anyone with a stronger will than his.

"I'll let the cats go, then," he said, choosing what he thought the less dangerous task.

Gore shrugged his shoulders, but agreed.

He raced away to the other barn, now deserted, and began quickly to unfasten the cages. Towser's low growl rather alarmed Gore, but the other animals made no hostile demonstration. They all seemed relieved to get free.

Peter, the stonebreaker's terrier, was the last to be liberated. Gore noted the fact that his cage bore a ticket announcing that he had won a first prize. He gave the little dog a push with his foot, and darted out.

Mellish was waiting for him.

"We—we'd better bunk, Gore! If Tom Merry—"

"Rats! What do I care about Merry?"

TUCK HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1st

"Oh, I know! But— Ow—yow! Yarooooogh! Help! Murder!"

"Yarooooogh! Oh, great Scott!" howled Gore. The dogs were making upon them in a serried mass, snapping and growling for all they were worth. It was as though they had all gone mad together!

The two juniors staggered back in amazement and fear. Then they turned to flee; but it was too late.

Mellish, quite unintentionally, barred the way of the Great Dane. The Great Dane seemed to be in a terrific hurry.

"Ow—yow! Help, Gore!" But Gore had also collided with the Great Dane, and it was not the dog which went down.

Over the two, grovelling in the farmyard mud and slush, raced a dozen dogs of assorted breeds. Pongo snapped at Mellish, whom he did not like, and Towser left the imprints of dirty paws upon the classic countenance of George Gore.

"They're after the cats!" panted Mellish. "Ow—yow!" "Hang the cats!" roared Gore. "I don't care if they eat every blessed one of them, and then die of indigestion!"

The scratch pack was giving tongue after Figgy's startled horde of cats. Pursued and pursuers were lost to sight in the gloom, and the two culprits staggered up.

"There will be no end of a beastly row, Gore!" "Shurrup, ass! There's someone about!"

"It's only the old stonebreaker trying to catch his rotten tyke!" said Mellish sourly. "Let's get before he spots us!" Gore growled something vicious, and they "got."

Herr Schneider, the German master, was alone in a Form-room at that moment. Something happened!

The window stood widely open, for the night was quite warm. Through the open window, making a most hideous row, came Thomas, the School House cat.

"Mein Gott! Ach himmel!" roared Herr Schneider, as Thomas alighted upon his back, and dug in his claws with a force that suggested grappling-irons at the very least.

There came a rush of feet in the corridor, and a dozen juniors, headed by Tom Merry and Talbot, burst into the room.

They were just in time to see a strange sight. Thomas appeared to have been made the special quarry of the pack, for over the edge of the window, the Great Dane in the advance and Towser second, came at least a dozen dogs.

"Der teuffel! Vat—"

"All right, sir!" sang out Tom Merry. "We'll see—"

"But it is not all right, Merry! It is— Ach, vat you do, you vile beast brute?"

The cat was clawing at the good Herr's fat neck, seeking to get higher.

"Ow!" gasped Skimpole, as the big dog took him in the chest, and bowled him over as a burly back may bowl over a light centre-forward.

"Towser, you rascal!" yelled Herries.

"Grab them! Grab them, you fellows!" shouted Talbot, gripping the Great Dane by the collar, and hanging on with all his strength.

Herries seized Towser, and apparently tried to conceal him under his jacket, with a wild idea that in some way or other Towser must be protected from the trouble that would fall upon him if his share in this business became known.

The Great Dane struggled desperately with Talbot. Peter the terrier, made wild leaps in his endeavours to get at poor Thomas. The collie had mixed himself up most uncomfortably with Herr Schneider's legs. Thomas, with arched back, fur all on end, and glittering eyes, spat and swore like a mad cat.

Into the pandemonium walked Cousin Ethel, with the old stonebreaker behind her.

"Oh, the poor cat!" cried the girl. "Let me—"

"Not jolly likely!" gasped Figgins; and, in fear lest those talons might be exercised upon Cousin Ethel, he gallantly reached for the cat himself.

It was lucky for Figgy that his attempt was not successful. He would have been very much in the plight of the British Tommy who caught a Tartar during the Crimean War.

But the cat gave a tremendous spring, landed on the floor close to the grate, eluded by the fraction of an inch the snapping jaws of a setter, and disappeared up the chimney!

Herr Schneider collapsed with a groan into his chair. Peter the terrier ran to his master, wagging his brief tail, and looking as innocent as he knew how.

"Oh, what is all this, Herr Schneider?" asked Cousin Ethel.

"I cannot explain mit mineself at all, Miss Clayton; I do not vat you call understand!" panted the worthy Teuton.

"But tere is vun ting tat I know, and tat is tat I am scratched all ofer mineself! Ach himmel!"

Herr Schneider fled in confusion. Skimpole picked himself

up, and looked round for other evidence of the earthquake which he believed had happened. Talbot quietly led out the Great Dane, now grown less frantic; and the other dogs, all except Peter, followed, escorted by several of the juniors. Herries brought up the rear, still vainly endeavouring to maintain the fiction that his Towser was much too high-minded a dog to think of chasing cats.

"Some japer must have let the dogs loose!" Tom Merry explained to Cousin Ethel. "It was a pretty mean trick. Then, I suppose, they happened on poor old Thomas, and—"

"I guess that our cat show was let loose, too!" blurted out Figgins.

Tom Merry looked at him in amazement. But at that moment Talbot re-entered the room, and Cousin Ethel turned upon him with something very like a frown defacing her fair forehead.

"Talbot, I thought you said John Palmer left Rylcombe this afternoon?"

"Yes. I saw him off by the five o'clock train," answered Talbot quietly.

He hated to see that frown, but his conscience was clear.

"And you say, too, that he must have stolen Arthur's money!" went on the girl, reddening, and in ringing tones.

"Talbot, I cannot understand you!" The old stonebreaker moved a step or two forward, and looked as if he meant to speak, but at a sign from the girl he kept silence.

"I do not understand you, Miss Clayton; but I am sure of my facts," replied Talbot.

"But you are wrong—quite wrong! It's—it's wicked!" flashed Cousin Ethel. "For this is John Palmer!"

She laid her hand on the stonebreaker's arm.

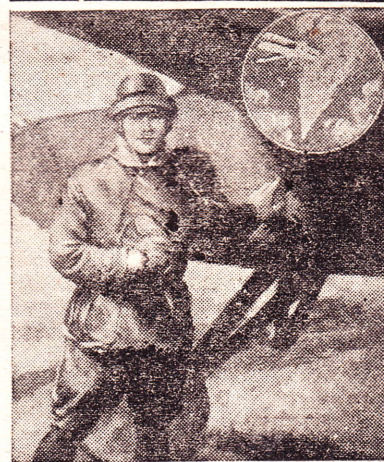
"Bub—bub—but— Oh, I say, you know, that's all—"

Tom Merry gave Manners a dig in the ribs which cut short his speech.

"There's some mystery here," he said. "You know, Cousin Ethel, that there couldn't be a more reliable chap than old Talbot. If he says—"

"It doesn't matter a scrap what he says!" cried the girl passionately. "This is my John Palmer, the man who saved my dog!"

(Continued on page iv of cover.)



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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"ON HIS HONOUR!"

OUR GREAT NEW AUSTRALIAN SERIAL!

CORNSTALK BOB



The Previous Instalments Told How

Old TOM HILDER, a cattle-farmer of Katfarit, Australia, is faced with ruin for the want of £1,000. He goes to a friend in Sydney, HENRY NORMAN, from whom he obtains the money, but is afterwards robbed, and, in recovering the notes, becomes mixed up, in the eyes of the police, with a gang of scoundrels.

His son BOB receives the money from his father, and takes it to SUMMERS, the bank manager, who is in league with BOARDMAN, a scoundrel who has plotted to ruin old Hilder.

Bob is afterwards arrested, and charged with passing false notes at the bank, but is liberated from his prison-cell by CAPTAIN DASHWOOD, a notorious outlaw.

Bob learns from him that his father was robbed by a man named SUTHERLAND, the leader of another gang of outlaws, and he sets out in pursuit of him. He traces the villain to an hotel, where he also sees his father. A fight ensues, and the place is burnt down. Bob narrowly escapes with his life, believing his father to be dead.

Later, old Hilder appears upon the scene, pursued by troopers, just as Dashwood and Bob are returning stolen property to the house of a squatter; Dashwood having recovered it from Sutherland. They all succeed in getting away, and later capture Sutherland. In doing so, however, Dashwood is caught by the police, but by a clever plan of old Hilder's, and with the help of BOGONG, Dashwood's black servant, he is released. He makes for his hiding-place, and Bob and his father ride off to fetch Sutherland from the place where they had left him, gagged and bound, when going to Dashwood's rescue. He is strapped upon a horse, and they set off to join Dashwood again.

(Now read on.)

The Troopers Again.

There were still three hours to daylight, and Bob and his father set off at a steady pace for the maze. Nothing happened to balk them on the way, and they arrived there just as dawn was breaking. Bogong was waiting to guide them through the forest, impenetrable to all white men, and the black tracker did not hide his glee when he saw Sutherland sitting, morose and terrified, on the horse.

"Golly! Ain't he a picture!" he gurgled. "Massa will be glad! You all come now with me. Massa cooking breakfast."

They followed him in and out amongst the trees, with the brushwood often as high as the horses' withers. They came to the crevice in the cliff, and, brushing through the tangled foliage there, they saw the plain below, now bathed in the first sunlight. Sutherland, overwhelmed by astonishment, gasped in his bewilderment. The horses picked their way down the path, and as they rode on to the plain, Dashwood, at the far side, came out of the hut, and waved his sombrero as a greeting.

They cantered across, and as Bob and his father jumped down he held out his hand. The habitual sternness had gone out of his handsome face, his eyes had lost their hardness, and there was an unusual note in his voice.

"But for you fellows, I should be locked up by this time, with death as my certain doom," he began, "and I don't know what to say of your pluck and cuteness. I never was more amazed than when I saw Bogong crawling out from behind those sacks of oats; I felt inclined to pinch myself to make sure I was awake. And the way you drew off those troopers so that we could bolt out, was one of the smartest things in bush record."

"It was father who planned out all that," Bob explained.

"And he has a mighty fine headpiece," Dashwood replied. "The police must be raging, tearing mad. I had chucked up all hope, and now—now I am free again. It seems too good to be true, and I will never forget this to you—never. When you chaps are in your luck again, and I am on the far side of the globe, if ever I have the luck to get there, I'll think of you often, and thank you in my heart."

"We're glad to have got you out of the pickle, and we know you mean every word you say. We don't look at you as others do," old Tom explained. "Enough said, Dashwood. None of us much care about jawing. And we hope you will yet manage to get away, and we'd like to think that we'll be up in the world again. Heigho! Seems to me that's a far cry, though."

The outlaw smiled, took the pipe out of his mouth, and pointed the stem at Sutherland.

"You haven't reckoned on that josser," he said. "It's wonderful how you can get a good turn sometimes out of a chap who's yearning to do you a bad one. He'll come in handy. I was in fear you mightn't nab him. Take him off the horse, and bring him along. When he's had some grub his face may straighten out a bit more human like. Anyhow, he'll have to toe the line as we want. Breakfast is ready, and you're ready, too, I guess."

He went back to the hut, and Bob unstrapped Sutherland's legs, and helped him to the ground. Bogong led the horses away. In the hut Dashwood was laying the meal on the rough table, and evidently he had gone to great trouble to make it both ample and appetising. Bob and his father were desperately hungry; the savoury viands appealed to them so forcibly that they at once sat down, and began to do ample justice to them; and Sutherland, too, ate eagerly.

Nothing was said until all had satisfied their hunger, but old Tom Hilder occasionally gazed across wistfully at the outlaw. As the latter stood up and began to fill his pipe, old Tom looked at him in the same questioning way again. Dashwood laughed.

"I reckon I know what's been keeping your headpiece active," he remarked. "You've been trying to puzzle out how a scoundrel like this sneak-thief can help you. But he can, and he's going to! We'll start the palaver, now that we've fed. Well, Mr. Sutherland, and when did you see your great friend Boardman last?"

Bob and his father started. Evidently Dashwood had some card up his sleeve. Sutherland flushed, and his mouth grew tight. The outlaw tapped him none too gently on the shoulder.

"None of that!" he said. "You had better speak honest (Continued on page iv of cover.)"

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GEM, Oct 14th, 1916.

CORNSTALK BOB!

(Continued from page 20.)

for once. You wouldn't like to be a prisoner here until we find a way to hand you over to the police. They want you nearly as much as they want me!"

"What do you know about Boardman?" Sutherland gruffly inquired.

"I don't know any good of him," Dashwood replied. "And I don't think the better of him since I heard that he has been rowing in with you."

"Who told you that?"

"The troopers who made me prisoner. They thought they had me safe; they spoke freely enough. I learnt a lot."

"Did they tell you anything that can implicate that cur Boardman?" old Tom Hilder asked, rising in his excitement at the mention of the man who had ruined him and Bob, and who now owned their property. "Boardman has been the cause of all our trouble, as you know. He plotted it for years, whilst he pretended to be my friend. Oh, if only I could get the chance, at last, to show him up—"

"Steady, steady!" Dashwood cut in pleasantly. "Just wait and you'll hear a lot. Now, Mr. Sutherland, none of your game. So you joined in with Boardman to get Gell out of his way."

"Gell!" Bob cried.

"It's a fact," Dashwood stated. "Gell's conscience has got at him. On Boardman's instigation he tried to put you both out of the world. His nerves are shaken. Boardman is in mortal terror lest he may blab, and asked this cur to help him to get rid of Gell."

Sutherland's face, from being scarlet, turned white as a sheet.

"I didn't do much," he moaned.

"And that's just it," Dashwood retorted, bending across the table. "You didn't do enough to please Boardman." The outlaw laughed. "There's just one thing that perhaps has been puzzling you," he went on. "You went to rob Nayler's house. When you got there the police burst in. How did it happen that the police knew you were coming and gathered in force to capture you and your gang?"

Sutherland struggled to his feet.

"Didn't you tell them?" he rasped out hoarsely.

"I tell them!" Dashwood scoffed. "We went there to catch you! It's not likely we would get the police around, is it? No! You must look farther. It was Boardman who told them. Yes, and out of spite, because you wouldn't work in with him all the way about Gell!"

Sutherland's face began to twist in his fury.

"He betrayed me!" he shouted. "Then I won't spare him! I'll tell you everything I know!"

Dashwood nodded. His tone changed.

"We're all sports," he remarked. "And, if you speak the truth, we'll give you a chance, later on, to clear out; but not before you have made reparation to these men. That's fair and square! You're a shady lot, and so is Gell, but neither of you are a patch on Boardman for low trickery. These fellows must show him up to get back what is rightfully their own. No one can bring Boardman to book but Gell. So we're after Gell, more even than we were after you. Now where is Gell? Tell us that and you'll be forgiven a lot."

"If that's all you want, my job is not hard," Sutherland replied, his voice shaking with hatred of Boardman. "I can tell you where Gell is, and where he's likely to be for a long spell. Boardman has him a prisoner only a mile from Hilder's old home."

"My old home?" old Tom cried.

"Yes, where Boardman lives now, and a thundering good thing he is making out of it," Sutherland answered. "Gell is in a cave near there."

"Dead Man's Cloof, father!" Bob cried. "You walled it up when I was a kid so that the cattle could not stray in. That must be the place!"

"Ay, that's it for a cert! So Gell is there," old Tom murmured, his voice vibrating with joy. "Well, well! It looks as if our troubles are nearly over. This is a happy day, and thanks to you, Dashwood! Bless my life! We must make a start at once!"

Dashwood glanced across at Bob, his face showing that he disapproved of haste.

"We'll need caution," he said. "Don't forget all that has just happened. Every police station for miles around is in a ferment. There'll be such a hunt for us as Australia never knew yet! As long as we stay here we're safe, unless—" He broke off. "But that's impossible," he said, following his train of thought without explaining it.

(Another fine instalment of this exciting serial next week.)

N

BY COUSIN ETHEL'S WISH!

(Continued from page 19.)

The juniors, grown to a small crowd now, stared in blank amazement.

The old stonebreaker stooped to pat the head of Peter, who was getting fidgety, and then looked up smilingly. His face, always rather attractive, was especially so when he smiled.

"I think I can guess what has happened, young gentlemen," he said. "When I—I pulled this young lady's dog out of the river, and said I was going to Rylcombe, she told me some of you would meet me. I—well, charity is not in my line—no offence, but I can't bear it—and so I didn't come along that day!"

"Gwreat Scott! Then—"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy! Who on earth is the other John Palmer, then?" asked Figgins. "He seems to have put it over these fellows pretty completely! Ha, ha, ha!"

Then Figgins wilted under the gaze of Cousin Ethel, who saw nothing at all funny in the affair.

"How did he come to impersonate you?" inquired Talbot.

"Well, I'm afraid you may think me to blame for that," answered the genuine John Palmer. "I told a man that was working alongside me all about the young lady's kindness. He must have caught at the notion of imposing on it. Yes, I do feel a bit guilty, but—"

"Not likely!" chipped in Jack Blake. "It wasn't your fault—not a bit of it!"

"Certainly it wasn't!" said Tom Merry. "Gussy, we owe John Palmer ten shillings for the prize Peter won!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! I have onlay a soveveign on me, but if Mr. Palmah—"

Cousin Ethel made ever so slight a gesture of dissent. Talbot gripped Gussy by the elbow. The old man said simply:

"I'll be glad of the ten shillin's, sir, as Peter has won that for me, but no more! Not to be ungrateful, but it's not in my line!"

"Wight-ho!" replied Arthur Augustus, flushing crimson with the conviction that he had been putting his foot in it.

"Bai Jove, though, that farm job—the one the othah John Palmah, the wuffian, don'teherknow, didn't want—wouldn't that about fill the bill foah ouah fwead beah, deah boys?"

"Oh, ripping good notion, Gustavus!" cried Tom Merry heartily.

"Will it suit you, Palmer?" asked Talbot.

"That it will, sir! Nothing better! I'll start to-morrow morning, if I may!"

So it was arranged, Tom Merry and Talbot getting leave after prep to take John Palmer and introduce him to Mr. Harris.

"We'll talk to that bounder Figgy about his cat show to-morrow!" said Tom on the way back.

And he said it grimly, too.

"Oh, I think we might let it drop!" answered Talbot.

"After all, whatever they meant to do, it turned out a frost; and, anyway, we can't talk to them—not in the way you mean, Tommy—while Cousin Ethel is here. Must have harmony while her visit lasts, you know!"

And Tom Merry agreed.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co.—"ON HIS HONOUR!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)

FOOTBALL NOTICES.

Matches Wanted By:

ALLERTON JUNIORS F.C. (14½)—4-mile r. Waverree Play-ground.—S. Marsden, 24, Mayville Rd., Mossley Hill, Liverpool.

REGENT ALBION F.C. (15)—3-mile r. Salford.—H. Appleyard, 36, Regent Rd., Salford, Manchester.

GROVE F.C. (11).—A. Mackesy, 21, Grove St., Deptford, S.E.

DAYBROOK ST. PAUL'S (17)—10-mile r.—J. A. Extall, 62, St. Albans Rd., Arnold, Notts.

HACKNEY ORIENT F.C. (15-16)—3-mile r. Bethnal Green.—E. Pittman, 10, Squirries St., Bethnal Green Rd., E.

WANDERERS F.C. (14)—reasonable distance Kentish Town.—J. Garbutt, 2, Fulbrook Rd., Tufnell Park, N.

A NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE CLUB wants matches within 10 mile r.—Albert Law, 55, Tenth Avenue, Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

GREEN LANES ALBION F.C. (13-14).—R. Holloway, 7, Coleraine Rd., Hornsey, N.

CHRIST CHURCH F.C. (13-14)—6-mile r. Bristol.—F. Richards, 29, Southernhay Avenue, Clifton Wood, Bristol.

14-10-13