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THE KING'S HIGHWAY!



GOOD-BYE TO GUSSY'S WAISTCOAT!

(A Scramingly Funny Scene in the Splendid Logg Complete School Tale in this Issue.) 19-7-10

THE KING'S HIGHWAY



A Magnificent Long Complete Story
of
TOM MERRY & CO. at St. Jim's,
by
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

A Painful Predicament!

"**H**ALT!" sang out Tom Merry cheerily.

The red caravan was rolling along a sunny road in Sussex, with six juniors of St. Jim's in straw hats tramping with it.

The seventh member of the party was looking out of the little window of the caravan. The eyeglass gleaming in his eye revealed him as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the Fourth Form.

The sun was at the meridian, and summer heat streamed down on the road. It was high time to halt for the noonday rest, especially as this was the first day of the tour, and all the vanners agreed that it was a good idea to take it easy the first day.

Tom Merry was leading the horse. He led him from the road across a grassy strip to the shadow of great trees on the edge of a wood. To the peering caravaners the shade of the trees was grateful and comforting.

"Tom Mewwy!"

The voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy proceeded from the little window.

Tom looked round.

"Hallo, Gussy! Turn' out and help us camp!" he called out.

"Yes; don't be a slacker, Gussy!" said Blake.

"You've been taking it easy all the morning, riding in the van, while we've been tramping," said Monty Lowther. "I think Gussy ought to get dinner."

"Yes, rather!"

"Turn out, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus' eye was gleaming through his eyeglass, and his aristocratic face was pink with wrath.

"I cannot turn out without my twosahs!" he said warmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not regard it as a laughin' matter, you fellows! I have been kept a prisonah in this van all the mornin', while that howlin' ass Blake has been cawwyin' my twosahs on his arm—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the caravaners. "I do not regard this as playin' the game!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Blake induced me to hand out my twosahs on pwetence of bwushin' off the mud from them—"

"No pwetence about it," answered Jack Blake. "I've brushed it off!"

"I undahstood, Blake, that you would hand me back my twosahs when you had bwashed off the mud."

"I'm not responsible for what you understand, old chap."

"How was Blake to guess that you could understand anything, Gussy?" Monty Lowther inquired.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Once for all, Blake, will you hand me back my twosahs!" said Arthur Augustus, in concentrated tones.

The caravaners gathered under the window of the halted van. They were all smiling, apparently undismayed by the wrath in Gussy's noble countenance.

"Owin' to wewehensible trickwery, my baggage has been left behind at St. Jim's," continued Arthur Augustus. "I have no etah twosahs to change into. I have already insisted upon goin' back to the school for my baggage."

"That's the trouble!" grinned Blake. "As soon as you agree not to go back for your baggage you can have your bag."

"That's a fair offer!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I refuse to agree to anythin' of the kind," said the swell of St. Jim's hotly.

"I have brought simply nothin' with me. I had two twunks pecked, and two barboxes, and some twavelin'-bag—"

"And that's why we left them behind!" chuckled Digby. "You see, there isn't room for your outfit in the caravan," explained Tom Merry. "If you could be satisfied with as much stuff as any other fellow—"

"It is necessary for at least one chap to be decently dressed to keep up the credit of the party, Tom Mewwy. I presume that you do not want us to be taken for a party of twumps."

"I don't mind a bit."

"I mind a great deal, Tom Mewwy. Suppose we meet somebody we know, and there is not a single toppah in the caravan! There is such a thing as keepin' up respectable appearances.

Howevah, I will agree to bring only one swunk and one habbox."

"He's getting reasonable," remarked Herries. "As soon as ho's been a few hours longer without his bags he will agree to only one bag, the same as the rest of us."

"Welly, Hewwies—"

"We could do with one toppah in the caravan," remarked Manners.

"I am glad you can see that, Mannahs!"

"It would do to keep the potatoes in, or—"

"You uttah ass!"

Blake held up the elegant nether garment he had been carrying on his arm.

"Do you want this, Gussy!" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Will you agree not to go back for the baggage?"

"Nawah!"

"Then you can go and eat cake, old top!"

"Give me my twosahs!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Bow-wow!"

Headless of the eloquent voice from the caravan window, Tom Merry & Co. proceeded to camp.

It was too warm for a camp-fire, and the spirit-stove was taken out and lighted and a kettle set on it. There were bread and cheese and ham galore, to be washed down with coffee, it being agreed that it was better not to start cooking just yet, on the principle of taking it easy the first day.

Every time one of the fellows took anything from the caravan he was exposed to the vehement eloquence of the imprisoned Gussy, of which he took no heed.

Gussy's baggage was too large an order for the caravaners to tackle; and his imprisonment was to last until he agreed to give up all idea of fetching it along.

His chums had offered to "whack out" their supplies with him, a garment here, and a handkerchief there, so to speak; and they considered that this was sufficient to meet the circumstances. But the swell of St. Jim's was not likely to see eye to eye with them on that point.

While the caravanners ate their lunch in the shade of the trees, and the horse contentedly cropped the grass, Arthur Augustus ate a sandwich in the van, and made remarks from the window.

But his remarks were not heeded; the fat had gone forth, and Arthur Augustus, like the flower that was born to blush unseen, wasted his sweetness on the desert air.

After lunch Tom Merry & Co. stretched themselves in the grass to rest. It was very pleasant in the thick grass in the shade of the trees, watching the clouds that buzzed by on the long white road, the farmers' traps that trotted, and the slow, heavy market-carts that crawled.

"Ripping way of spending a vacation, caravanners!" Tom Merry remarked. "Simply ripping! If every day is like this—"

"Tom Merry!"
"Hallo! There goes Gussy again!"
"I demand my twosahs!"
"You know the peace terms, Gussy!" chuckled Blake. "Are you going to argue?"

"Certainly not!"
"Time we got along," said Tom Merry, rising, and stretching himself. "I think you ought to come out and harness the horse, Gussy."

"I cannot," said Gussy, without my twosahs, Tom Merry," roared the indignant voice from the window.
"Are you going to slack in the van all the afternoon?"

"I am not slackin', you vottah; I am waitin' for my clobber!"
"Go on waiting, old top!" said Blake cheerily.

And the horse was put to, and the caravan rolled on in the sunny summer afternoon to the accompaniment of wistful observations from the window.

CHAPTER 2.

Camping Out!

"THIS looks like a good place!"
The horse was standing in the wood in a blaze of crimson and gold.
Tom Merry & Co., as they marched, were looking out for a spot to camp for the night.

Away from the road a lane ran through a deep and shadowy wood, with big patches of grass here and there among the trees.

"Lots of room for the van under the trees, and lots of room to camp," said Tom. "It must be common-land, as it's not enclosed, I should say, so we can't be turned off. Go-up!"

The horse was led down the lane and into the trees.

There a halt was made.
The horse was unharnessed, and hobbled as that he could not wander away. He browsed contentedly under the trees, while the caravanners proceeded to make their camp.

All of them were hungry after the afternoon's progress, and there was plenty of wood for a fire, and Blake had undertaken to cook a stew that would be worth while. Tom Merry and Lowther and Manners gathered brushwood and lighted a fire, and Herries and Dig were peeling potatoes and scraping onions. Blake opened a tin of beef, which was to form the principal ingredient of his famous stew. There was no water at hand, but there was a keg in the caravan which was kept for such emergencies. Jack Blake thoughtfully filled a big iron pot about half-full of water.

A tripod was set over the fire, and the pot slung to it. Blake, as chief, assumed direction.

"We shall want a good fire, if this stew is going to be worth eating," he

said. "Keep it going, you shall boulders!"

"That kept the Terrible Three busy. Blake sliced onions into the water in the pot with a still more thoughtful expression.

"As a matter of absolute fact, Blake had his doubts about how a stew was made, but nothing would induce him to admit as much.

"Isn't that rather a lot of water?" Tom Merry ventured to inquire, looking doubtfully into the iron pot.

Blake raised his eyebrows.
"Perhaps you know how to make Irish stews better than I do?" he suggested.

"Not at all, old chap. But it seems to me—"
"Plenty of water means plenty of gravy," explained Blake.

"Gravy!"
"I—I mean broth. It will be quite rich and thick when I've done with it. Hurry up with those goods, Dig!"

"Ready, old top!"
"Pick 'em in!"
"Don't you cut 'em up!" asked Manners.

"I don't!" answered Blake emphatically.
"I thought—"
"If you want to see your thinker, Manners, think about keeping up a good fire. This stew has got to keep simmering."

"What on earth are you putting in now?" ejaculated Monty Lowther, a few minutes later.

"Radishes."
"Radishes in a stew?"

"This is an Irish stew!" said Blake in a tone of patient and laborious explanation. "Practically anything can be put into an Irish stew."

"Shove in a few pickles and some treacle!" suggested Lowther, apparently in a vein of sarcasm.

"I'm going to put in some pickles," answered Blake calmly.
"Oh, my hat!"

With a defiant eye, Blake added the pickles. The stew still looked very thin, and it seemed to have taken on rather an odd colour. Blake seemed satisfied with it, however, and he was cook. The beef from the tin floated in the water in a solid chunk.

The Terrible Three laboured at heaping up a crackling fire under the pot, and the stew bubbled and steamed. Blake jabbed a fork occasionally into a flouting potato, to see how it was getting on. The potatoes, for some reason, persisted in remaining hard.

"When will it be ready?" asked Herries at last.
"When it's done!" answered Blake shortly.

"When will it be done?"
"When it's finished!" snapped Blake. Herries grunted.

"Perhaps we'd better begin on sardines," murmured Tom Merry.
Blake turned a ruddy and heated face from the stew.

"If you want to gorge on sardines, and waste this splendid stew—" he began warily.

"Oh, all right! We'll wait!"
"It won't be long now," said Blake, more genially. "As soon as the taters are soft, it's done."

Dig jabbed a potato with a fork.
"Hard as nails," he said.
"For goodness' sake, Dig, don't interfere with the cooking. 'Taint an easy job cooking a stew with fellows shoving in all the time!"

"Don't get excited, old xcent!" murmured Manners.
"Who's getting excited!" roared Blake.
"Ahem!"

"There's such a toing as being worried by silly asses who don't know anything about cooking!" said Blake wistfully.

Jack Blake's temper seemed to be suffering a little, and the other caravanners were discreetly silent, and waited as patiently as they could. But they were hungry, and they cast expressive glances towards Blake and the steaming iron pot. The silence was broken by a voice from the caravan.

"Are you goin' to give me my twosahs, Blake?"
"Rather your trousers!"
"Weally, Blake—"
"Dry up!"

"I refuse to dry up, Blake, unless you hand me my twosahs!"
"Go and eat coke!"

"Hallo, here he comes!" murmured Tom.
An elegant figure, wrapped in a rain-coat which descended to his ankles, emerged from the caravan. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had had enough of his imprisonment, and he was emerging, minus his missing bags. The weather was rather warm for a raincoat, but that could not be helped. It was Blake's raincoat, and that could not be helped, either, as Arthur Augustus' things were still reposing at St. Jim's.

There was a wistful glitter in Arthur Augustus' eye as he approached the grinning caravanners.

"Blake—" he began.
"Hats!"
"Where have you put my twosahs?"
"Find out!"

"If that is what you call a civil reply, Blake—"

"Hut up!"
"Bai Jore! I am beginnin' to be sorry, Blake, that I ever undertook to go caravanning with you!"

"Bah! here!" snorted Blake.
"Have you seen my twosahs, Tom Merry?"

"Certainly!"
"Where are they, then?"
"Out of sight, old chap!" said the captain of the Shell, laughing. "You look sobby in that coat, Gussy—stay in it!"

"I cannot go to St. Jim's for my baggage like this, Tom Merry."
"Quite so!"
"I insist—"

"Done!" announced Blake. "Plates! Haven't you got the plates ready? Dash it all, I think you might have got the plates ready, instead of grumbling at waiting!"

"Here they are, old top—quite ready!"
"Well, I couldn't see them. I'll serve straight from the pot—that will save washing up dishes. If you don't mind that plate steady, Dig, you'll get it up your sleeve. There! I told you so!"

"You silly ass!" roared Dig.
"Look here—"
"Peace, my infants, peace!" said Tom Merry soothingly. "Why grouse! Ladle it out, Blake; it smells all right."

"It will taste all right, too, I can tell you!"

"What's this?" inquired Monty Lowther, spearing a hard substance in his plate, and holding it up for inspection.

"Beet from Blake."
"Don't you know a dumpling when you see one?" he inquired.

"Wh! It's a dumpling!"
"What did you think it was, fat-head!"

"I thought it might be a paving-stone or something!"
"You silly chump!" roared Blake.

"My mistake!" said Lowther blandly.
"But how do you cut it? Or do you

recall it in one piece, like a pill! I'm only asking for information."

Blake did not afford Lowther the information he asked for. He snorted like a grampus instead, apparently annoyed.

Tom Merry had taken up a spoonful of the broth. There was quite a queer expression on his face as he tasted it, and he did not finish the spoonful.

"I—I think I'll stick to the solids!" he remarked.

"Same here!" murmured Manners. "The solids are a bit too solid for me!" remarked Lowther. "Anybody get a clanger for this dumpling?"

Blake breathed hard.

"These blessed taters are as hard as when they started!" said Herries. "I can hardly get a fork into them!"

"Utter rot!" answered Blake.

"Try it yourself, then!" said Herries warmly.

"Both!"

The caravaners were looking very queerly at their plates of stew. Arthur Augustus, who was hungry, had let the burning question of his trousers drop for the time, and taken a plate of stew. The face he made as he tackled it was really extraordinary.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "What do you call this, Blake?"

"Irish stew!" howled Blake.

"Bai Jove! If the Irish make stews like this it would serve them right to get them Home, Wike!"

"Ah!"

Blake cast a heated glance round at his comrades. All of them were well supplied with stew; but they did not seem to be getting on with it. Herries set the example of putting down his plate.

"Don't you like it?" demanded Blake.

"It's got a jolly queer taste," said Herries. "Have you been putting any of the methylated spirit into it by mistake?"

"No!" howled Blake.

"Perhaps it was the pickles. I don't believe people put pickles in stews," said Herries, shaking his head. "I'm not going to eat that stuff!"

"What are you calling it?"

"Stuff."

"Look here, Herries—"

"I'll look as long as you like, but I'm not going to eat it! Let's see you eat it yourself, if you come to that!" said Herries warmly.

"So you don't like the stew!" said Blake, looking round. "There's no satisfying some people! Here I've worked for an hour or more making a first-rate stew, and you turn your noses up at it! You can jolly well make the next stew for yourselves, I can tell you! Not that I care—there'll be all the more for me!"

"Lots for you, I should say!" murmured Monty Lowther.

Certainly there was plenty for Blake. Nobody else seemed to want any. Jack Blake, with a defiant brow, helped himself to a huge plateful, and started with a spoon. A sudden pained expression came over his ruddy face, and the caravaners chuckled.

"Like it?" asked Tom Merry.

Blake gazed.

"Splendid!"

"What?"

"Simply ripping!" said Blake obstinately.

"Try the dumplings!" said Monty Lowther maliciously.

Blake eyed his dumpling, and tested it with a fork.

"I don't care for dumplings," he remarked carelessly. "They're all right, but I don't happen to care for them. The stew's splendid!"

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He took a second spoonful.

"Go it!" said Manners admiringly.

"Stick to it, old chap! Let's count his spoonfuls!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you think I don't like this stew!" demanded Blake hotly.

"Well, go ahead with it, if you like it."

"Yess, wathak!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

Jack Blake made a sudden movement, and the plate slipped from his knee into the grass.

"Oh dear!" he exclaimed.

"Bai Jove! You did that on purpose, you howler!"

"Don't be an ass!" scolded Blake.

"Lots more in the pot, Blake!" reminded Lowther.

Blake did not seem to hear that remark. The other fellows were beginning on bread and cheese and sardines, and Blake, after a thoughtful pause, followed their example.

"It was the beef!" Blake said suddenly, when supper was over and the stew had been nearly forgotten by all but its hapless perpetrator.

"Eh! What was the beef?" inquired Tom Merry.

"In the stew, you know! I knew it was something!" said Blake. "That blessed tin of beef came from Chicago, and goodness only knows what it was made of. That was it, of course!"

And the caravaners suppressed their smiles, and mercifully let it go at that.

CHAPTER 3.

In the Dead of Night!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was taking it quietly.

Once or twice, as the caravaners rested and chatted after supper, the eye of Arthur Augustus lingered on them, and he smiled slightly.

That was all.

Possibly great thoughts were moving in Gussy's mighty brain. If so, he did not confide them to his comrades.

He did not even mention the trousers again. He did not ask where they were concealed, or attempt to look for them.

When Blake asked him if he had given up the idea of loading the caravan with baggage his only reply was:

"Wate!"

"You won't get your bags till you give us, you know!" Blake remarked.

And Arthur Augustus only repeated:

"Wate!"

The caravaners turned in early. They intended to be up again at early dawn, and to start on the road soon after daylight. The tent was put up for four, three having room in the bunks in the van. The Terrible Three and Herries shared the tent, and Blake, Dig, and Arthur Augustus the van. Arthur Augustus turned in first, and was apparently fast asleep when Blake and Dig clambered in.

"Poor old Gussy!" murmured Blake, as he glanced at the swell of St. Jim's, in the lowest bunk, by the lantern light. Always playing the goat, and always having to be set upon! Hallo! He's awake!"

Arthur Augustus had made a movement. But it was only momentary, and his eyes did not open.

"Asleep, Gussy?" asked Dig.

No answer.

"Well, it's time we were asleep, too!" yawned Blake. And the chums of the Fourth turned in, and the lantern was extinguished.

The caravaners were tired with the day's tramp, and they slept soundly enough. The door of the caravan was left

wide open, to admit the air of the warm summer night. Outside there was only the slight sound of the sighing wind in the branches, and an occasional movement from the horse resting in the grass.

Silence and slumber lay on the caravan camp.

So it lay for an hour or more. Then there was a faint sound in the caravan. The head of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy emerged from his bunk.

"You fellows asleep?" he whispered. Only steady breathing from the bunks above answered him.

"Blake! Dig!" murmured Gussy.

It was clear that Jack Blake and Robert Arthur Digby were sound asleep. The swell of St. Jim's smiled in the darkness, and crept softly from his bunk. With great caution he drew on his clothes—what he had of them. The most important garment was still wanting; but it was for that reason that Arthur Augustus was moving so surreptitiously in the dead of night. When Blake and Dig had observed him peacefully asleep, the elegant junior had been slumbering with one eye open, so to speak. In the dark he knew exactly where to find Jack Blake's trousers.

And he found them and slipped them on.

Taking collar and tie, hat and boots, in his hand, the swell of St. Jim's crept out of the caravan.

Silently as a specter he crept away, and stepped out of possible hearing to finish dressing.

In the starlight a grin showed on the aristocratic features of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

His present actions were the result of his cogitations during the evening. The mighty brain of Arthur Augustus had been at work, after all.

Having completed his attire to his satisfaction—or, at least, as well as it could be completed by starlight, and without the aid of a mirror—Arthur Augustus approached the horse cautiously.

Gussy had already made friends with the horses. He liked horses, and horses and dogs always liked Gussy. The animal put up its head to be rubbed.

Arthur Augustus whispered nothing to him, and put on a halter, and the horse rose from the grass.

Quietly, cautiously, Arthur Augustus led him away.

He was making for the road; but he went some distance on the grass along the roadside, so that the sound of hoof-beats should not awaken his comrades.

At a safe distance he led the animal out upon the high road.

There was no sound from the sleeping camp.

Tom Merry & Co. slept on, utterly unaware of that surreptitious evasion of the junior who had been kept under surveillance.

Arthur Augustus chuckled softly as he climbed on the horse's back. Gussy could ride bareback with ease. There was a tribe-trail of hoofs as the swell of St. Jim's and the caravan horse disappeared into the night.

The caravan camp slept on.

It was not till dawn was breaking in the east that Tom Merry stirred in the tent and rubbed his eyes.

A glimmer of pale light came in at the opening of the tent.

Tom sat up.

The caravaners had arranged to rise at dawn; and Tom, though he felt inclined for another snooze, was not a slacker. He rubbed his eyes again, yawned, and turned out.

He gently stirred Manners and



The faces of the juniors as they tackled the stew were extraordinary. "Bal Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "What do you call this, Blake?" (See Chapter 2.)

Louther and Herries with his foot, and they turned out, too. Herries sat up with a tremendous yawn.

"I say, it's jolly early!" he protested. "Dawn!" answered Tom. "Hardly dawn yet."

"Look!" "I think that's what's left of the moonlight," argued Herries, with a blink towards the pale, shadowy twilight without.

"There wasn't a moon last night, father!"

"I—I mean starlight. Yaroooooh!" roared Herries. "If you bump my head on the pole again, you idiot—"

"Turn out, then, slacker!" George Herries grunted and turned out. The air was fresh and keen and very invigorating as the four juniors came out of the tent.

"Those Fourth Form slackers still snoring!" said Manners, with a glance towards the caravan.

Herries looked in at the van, justly indignant at such slacking.

"Turn out, lazybones!" he roared. "Hallo!" came a sleepy voice.

"Tain't rising-bell!"

"Turn out!"

"Yaw-aw-aw!"

Herries plunged into the van, and whipped the bedclothes off Blake and Digby.

"Hallo, Gussy's up already!" he ejaculated.

"Gussy up!" exclaimed Blake, as he

turned out quickly. "Looking for his trousers, I suppose. Hallo! Where are my bags!"

Blake looked wrathfully round the van. But his garment was not to be seen.

"That blessed image has collared my trucks!" he exclaimed, in great wrath.

"Lucky he didn't collar mine," remarked Dig.

"Pity he didn't, you mean!" snorted Blake. "I'll jolly well hit him on the nose! Where is the Herries?"

"Haven't seen him."

"Oh, my hat! He can't have mizzled!"

Blake looked out of the van in alarm. Certainly there was no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the dawning daylight.

"Seen Gussy, you Shell-fish!" shouted Blake.

"Eh? No. Isn't he there?"

"No. He's got out, in my trucks."

"Phew!"

"I'll scalp him!" roared Blake. "This is one of his little jokes, I suppose. Get me Gussy's old bag, Tomny. They're stuck in the middle of that may-bush."

"Right you are," said Tom Merry, laughing.

The much-disputed trousers of Arthur Augustus were dragged from their place of concealment, and Blake donned them and came out of the van. Then the six juniors looked up and down and round

about for the swell of St. Jim's. But no sign of him was to be found.

But, though they did not discover Arthur Augustus, they made another discovery.

"The horse!" exclaimed Blake suddenly.

"The horse!" repeated Tom Merry.

"It's gone!"

"Gone!"

"My only hat!"

"Wandered away!" exclaimed

Herries. "You ought to have tied him, Blake."

"I did tie him."

"Then who's untied him!"

"Gussy!" roared Blake.

"Gussy? Oh crumbs!"

The juniors stared at one another.

There was no doubting what had happened. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was gone, and the caravan horse was gone, and it could not be doubted that they had gone together.

Blake brandished a fist in the air.

"I'll scalp him!" he roared. "This is because of his thundering trucks! He's gone off, and taken the gee-gee—"

"He'll come back," said Tom Merry soothingly. "Gussy couldn't mean to leave us stranded. He'll come back all right."

"I'll punch his head when he does!"

"We can't get on without a horse, that's a cert.," remarked Monty Louther. "Let's get breakfast. It's

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only a joke of the silly ass. He'll come back by the time we've done breakfast."

With that hope in their breasts the caravanners rebuilt the camp-fire, set it about preparing breakfast.

But when breakfast was over and done with there was still no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Blake climbed to the top of the caravan and scanned the landscape for him, but in vain. Like Sister Anne, he failed to see anyone coming. He came down in a state of great wrath.

"He can't have gone back to St. Jim's for his blessed clobber, can he?" asked Manners.

"Oh, my hat!"

"If he has, he won't be back here soon; it's a good many miles," said Tom Merry.

Blake breathed hard through his nose.

"And we're stranded here till he turns up with the horse. Oh, I'll biff him when he does come!"

"You ought to have kept an eye on him."

"How could I keep an eye on him when I was asleep, instead!"

"Bless him!" said Lowther. "We shall have to waste the morning, at this rate; and we've got to get, somewhere and buy grub for lunch."

"Better him!"

"Oh, the howling ass!"

"If we could move the van, I'd get on and leave him behind, blessed if I wouldn't!" asserted Blake. "But we can't move the dashed van without a dashed horse!"

"That's a cert," said Tom Merry. "We've got to wait for Gussy."

"Oh, the villain!"

"Oh, the silly ass!"

"Oh, the clump!"

The previous day, the eloquence of the trouserless Gussy had been expended on his comrades at great length. Now, as they waited, fuming, in the sunny morning, their eloquence was expended upon him—but equally in vain. The sun rose higher and higher, and still the missing swell of St. Jim's did not appear.

"We're lost the morning!" growled Blake, in great exasperation. "Could we get a new horse from somewhere?"

"There must be farms somewhere about."

"Not with horses to lead, I should think. Besides, we're responsible for that blessed horse, and we've got to pay for him!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Oh, the villain!"

Pip-pip! There was a sound of a motor on the road, but the juniors did not heed it. A dozen cars had passed their camp already. But this especial car did not pass. To the surprise of the caravanners, the car came whizzing along till it was abreast of the camp, then turned into the little lane that led into the wood where the caravanners were halted.

There was baggage stacked in the car. And on the seat beside the chauffeur was a well-known figure. And as the car halted there was a yell from all the caravanners at once.

"Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus had returned.

CHAPTER 4.

Coming to Terms!

TOM MERRY & CO. ran towards the car.

Arthur Augustus jumped down to meet them with a smiling face. The swell of St. Jim's was looking his THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 597.

best. Evidently he had changed his clothes during his absence, and he was neat as a new pin from head to foot.

"Good-mornin', deah boys!" he smiled.

"Gussy!" roared Blake.

"You cheaky ass!"

"Where's the horse!"

"We've wasted all the morning—"

"Pway don't all speak at once, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully.

"I have wasted the mornin', too, owin' to your leavin' my slobbich behind at the school; but I'm not gweasin'."

"You—you—you—" gasped Blake.

"I am sorry if you were annoyed at bein' left stranded, old chaps," said Arthur Augustus. "But you really left me no other resources, you know. If I had left you the horse, you might have gone on without me, and I should have lost track of you!"

"We jolly well should have!" hooted Herrie.

"Where's the horse!" demanded Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"The horse is all right," he said. "I wode him as far as Bunbury—that's the next village on this road—and put him up—at present I will not reveal where. Fortunately, I was able to get a local team there to the junction, and catch the night express back to Wayland."

"You—you—"

"There is nothin' whatever to get excited about, deah boys. You really left me no other resources, you know. Probably speakin', I ought to make you pay my hotel bill at Wayland, where I had to put up for the remainder of the night."

"Oh, you ass! You—you—"

"It's all right, I keep on tellin' you! I hired this cab in Wayland, and drove oval to St. Jim's for my baggage. It was locked up in a study, but, fortunately, Taggles had a key that would fit. I ought to ask you fellows to settle the tip I had to give Taggles—it was wathah a heathy one."

"Oh, slaughter him!" gasped Blake.

"However, I am not askin' you to settle it. I squashed Taggles, and got my baggage. I stopped for nothin' but some breakfast in Taggles' lodge, and to change my clothes. I didn't want to keep you waitin', you know. I trust I am a considerable chap. And heah I am, deah boys, and heah's my baggage."

Arthur Augustus waved a graceful hand to the laden car.

The Wayland chauffeur, in his seat, was grinning. But Tom Merry & Co. were not grinning. They were looking volcanic.

"Collar him!" said Blake. "Give him the frog's march!"

"Woolly, Blake—"

"Bump him!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Make an example of him!" gasped Lowther.

Arthur Augustus backed away.

"Pway allow me to remind you that you haven't a horse to the caravan," he said. "Unless you make it pay, and agree to take my baggage on board, I shall not reveal where the horse is!"

"What!"

"So you had bettah come to terms, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus genially.

Tom Merry & Co. blinked at the swell of St. Jim's. This was really an unexpected master-stroke from the great Gussy.

"The—the horse!" said Blake.

"The horse is in a safe place, deah boys, all weathly when we want him. I will instruct the chauffeur to take a message to the place when he leaves, and the horse will be brought heah by a boy."

arranged that. But I shall refuse to do so unless you fellows do the wight thing."

"The right thing!" howled Blake.

"Yess, wathah! I have taken all this twouble to get my baggage heah, and it is goin' into the van."

"It's not going into the van!" yelled Blake.

"Then I am a'waid, deah boy, that you will have to wait for the horse until it does!" said Arthur Augustus victoriously.

And Arthur Augustus polished his eyeglass, and calmly waited for the caravanners to make up their minds.

There was an explosive chord from the chauffeur. Arthur Augustus glanced at him, and the chauffeur became busy with his engine.

Tom Merry & Co. were silent, gazing expressively at the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus was in deadly earnest, there was no doubt about that. And he had the whip-hand. The caravan could not stir from the spot without the horse, and only Arthur Augustus knew where the horse was.

"You utter, unlimited ass!" said Tom Merry at last. "Where the clump do you think your baggage can be put if we take it aboard!"

"I have reduced it, Tom Mewwy, out of consideration for the limited space. I have left the biggest trunk at St. Jim's. On reflection, it occurred to me that it was too large to go in at the door of the caravan. I have weally very little with me now."

"Little!" ejaculated the captain of the Shell, with a glance at the loaded car.

"Yass! Only one trunk—not much largah than a cabin trunk—and two hat-boxes, and a couple of portmanteaux, and a small bag, as well as my wug and umbrellah and sleepin'-bag and wathap-proof and ground-sheet for campin' out, and a few odds-and-ends, such as golf-club—"

"Is this a caravan tour, or a moving job?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"How many toppers have you brought!"

"Only two."

"How many neckties!" asked Herrie, with deep sarcasm.

"Not more than a dozen, deah boy. I was wealred to be strictly moderate, considerin' the confined space of a caravan."

"Bump him!" said Manners.

"I wathah to be bumped, Mammah. I suggest that you fellows talk it oval, and decide to do the wight thing."

Monty Lowther glanced at the luggage again, and his eyes glistened. That glimmer showed that the humorist of the Shell had an idea—an idea of a humorous nature. He nodded.

"Good idea!" he said. "Let's talk it over, while Gussy polishes his eyeglass. Come on!"

"I will wait for you with pleasamah, deah boys," said the swell of St. Jim's gracefully.

Tom Merry & Co. retired towards the caravan, leaving Arthur Augustus standing by the car.

"Well," said Tom, "what have you got in your noodle, Monty? I can see there's something."

"Better agree to Gussy's terms," said Lowther.

"Lend meert from Herrie."

"We can't have the caravan stacked from end to end with his lumber, can we?" he demanded.

"It won't be for long."

"Eh? It will be all the time, I suppose! Gussy isn't likely to part with it if we let him keep it!"

"The van won't even hold it, unless it's

stacked over the floor and in the bunks," said Dig.

"Gus mayn't want to part with it," agreed Lowther. "But fellows have to do a lot of things in this world that they don't want to do. Gus says that we take it aboard, or he won't hand over the goods. Let's take it aboard. I've a scheme—"

"I don't think much of that scheme," grunted Blake.

"Not much good, in my opinion," remarked Horrie, with a serious shake of the head.

"Followed! Look here, carrying in expensive, sometimes," said Monty Lowther. "We can afford to pay our way, but extra cash will always come in handy, won't it?"

"But I suppose so. What are you driving at?"

"Gus's baggage. Let him shove it in the van. Later on we'll sort it over, and leave him what's necessary, and the rest—"

"Pitch it out into the road!" asked Horrie.

"No; that would be waste. We'll try the Cheap Jack street—"

"What?"

"We'll talk in a market-place, and hold a sale—"

"A sale!" gasped Tom Merry.

"That's the scheme," said Horrie.

"He, he, he!"

"I don't mind being customer," said Lowther. "I think I could make the sale go. It won't be very particular about price, it stands to reason that we can sell the goods. Gus's goods are all good quality, you know."

"He, he, he!"

"There was a yell from the schoolboy caravaners.

Lowther's idea was evidently popular. In fact, there was not much choice in the matter; for the caravaners had to have their horses, and there necessarily was not room in the van for half of Arthur Augustus's ample baggage. If it was taken aboard at all, it could only be with a view to unloading it later on; and Lowther's "stand" for the unloading seemed quite good.

Arthur Augustus glanced across at the consultation. He was pleased to see the juniors in a merry humour. Being perfectly convinced of the justice of his cause, he was determined to have his way—but he greatly preferred to have the point yielded gracefully and good-temperately.

"Well, have you fellows decided?" he called out. "I really hope that you are going to act reasonably, dear boys."

"We've decided, I think," murmured Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!"

"Oh, yes!"

"It's settled!"

"Good!" said Tom.

The caravaners came back towards the car. Arthur Augustus's eyes gleamed at them with cheerful inquiry.

"Well, dear boys," he smiled affably.

"Glad to do the right thing!"

"Yes," answered Tom Merry.

"Gus, old man, you're too much for us. Shove your rag bags into the van!"

"But Jove! My baggage is not rag-bags, Tom Merry!"

"Whatever it is, shove it in, and let's get on!"

"Oh, right!"

"And the sooner the quicker!" grunted Horrie.

"I'm very glad, dear boys, that you have made up your minds to do the right thing. You've been very kind to consult me about the proper thing to do—"

"Give your chin a rest, Gus, and let's get on!"

Arthur Augustus turned to the chauffeur.

"Perhaps you will be kind enough to assist with the traps, Robinson," he remarked.

"Certainly, sir!"

"You will be very careful with the baggage, won't you? You chaps might load the chauffeur a load. Don't be slack, you know."

"I will do my best," boasted Horrie.

"I will do my best," boasted Horrie.

"If you regard that as an intelligent remark, Horrie—"

"Fit in!" said Tom Merry.

And the chauffeur and the caravaners piled in, and the transfer of Gus's baggage from the car to the caravan commenced.

CHAPTER 5.

On the Road!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY looked on and gave directions. His directions were not much heeded. The trunk, the hat-box, the bags and portmanteaux, were heaved out of the car and heaped into the van. The red caravan was necessarily ready for a caravan caravan that the van was built would have accommodated Arthur Augustus's baggage without showing signs of strain.

The hay was littered; there were bags in the little pantry, bags on each of the bunks. Even Arthur Augustus looked a little nervous as he saw the final result of the stacking away of the baggage. It was not easy to get in and out of the caravan when the task was done.

"But Jove! That's wathah a close fit!" Arthur Augustus remarked.

"Like to send it home again?" asked Tom Merry.

"Injuss, dear boy! I was thinkin'—"

"Thinking we should be crowded out of the van?"

"But Jove! I never thought of that! I was thinkin' it would be wathah difficult for me to get at my things when I wanted to go to sleep—"

"Horrie, we needn't use the bunks. We can all sleep in the tent."

"Seven of us in the tent!" roared Blake.

"You must not mind wathin' it a little, Blake, on a caravan tour. I trust you are not goin' to be soft."

Blake murmured something under his breath.

"All the cookin' can be done in the open air, too," remarked Arthur Augustus, with an air of deep consideration.

"When it rains?" asked Monty Lowther.

"When it rains, dear boy, we can live on tinned stuff and let's get a supply of tinned stuff to fall back on. Of course, tinned stuff is not good for the country, but we must be prepared to wath it a little on a caravan tour."

But for the little scheme mooted by Monty Lowther, and adopted unanimously by the caravaners, Arthur Augustus would probably have been smoothed and battered on the spot.

The idea of roughing it, even to a tent, and living on "tinned stuff," so that the caravan could be stacked with trowsers, lies, boots, trousers, and other unnecessary articles, would have been a little too much for the patience of Tom Merry & Co. But now they were very patient. The stacking of the caravan was strictly "pre-arranged." Though Arthur Augustus's horse was not yet aware of the important circumstance.

So the caravaners smiled readily, and allowed Arthur Augustus to chat. The stacking having been completed, Arthur

Augustus paid the chauffeur for the hire of the motor-car, with instructions to call at the inn in Banbury as he drove through, and take a message about a horse.

The car buzzed off at last.

It was now time for the midday meal, so the caravaners partook of it while they were waiting for the horse to arrive.

Some after dinner a lad from the inn drove up with the horse, and the caravaners were able to start.

The horse was harnessed, and led down the little lane into the high road, and the journey was resumed.

Arthur Augustus remained in the van for some time, sorting out his belongings and packing them more carefully.

When he joined the juniors walking with the horse, he announced that he had made quite a lot of room in the caravan, and that it would be possible for one bunk to be used for sleeping in.

"I think I will have it," Arthur Augustus remarked. "I shall be able to keep an eye on my clobber, you know. You fellows are very welcome to the tent."

"Whereas the caravaner smiled."

Arthur Augustus talked on contentedly.

He had gained his point—a most important point. If any accident arose on the journey for which a fellow would have to drive, Arthur Augustus was now prepared to sleep for that occasion, and keep up the credit of the party. If they were asked to dinner by some county magnate, one member of the party at least would be able to turn up in beautiful evening clothes, which would shed a lustre of respectability over the whole band. If any important call had to be made on any important person, the caravaners would be able to send at least one representative in a silk hat. Arthur Augustus felt that these were very important matters—and that it was up to him to see to them, as they were overlooked by careless journeyers like Tom Merry & Co.

So Arthur Augustus was feeling quite satisfied.

The other fellows were feeling satisfied, too, though for quite different reasons. If their little scheme was carried out, there would be more than one bunk available for a sleeper that night. There would also be an extra supply of rags on hand, which would come useful, in all probability; cash had a way of running out somehow.

Monty Lowther consulted a county map as they went on.

"We're a couple of miles off Stockley," he said presently.

"Anything special about Stockley?" asked Monty.

"Yes; it's market day there to-day, according to the guide-book."

"Oh!" said the caravaners.

"There'll be a crowd in the town, and a lot of buying and selling," said Lowther. "Probably a lot of peddlers and Cheap Jakes, you know."

"But Jove! It will be wathah a waste of time going there," remarked Arthur Augustus. "We shall have to go there very slowly. Better go wathin' it."

There was a sudden clank from the caravaners. They certainly did not intend to go round the market town.

Arthur Augustus glanced at them in some surprise.

"I fail to see anythin' to cackle at in that remark, dear boys," he said.

"The question is about camping," said Monty Lowther, unheeding Gus's observation. "We can't camp in Stockley; and, as Gus says, we may be a good time getting through if there's a big market crowd."

"Bettah go woun'!"
"Going round means going a long way," by lanes and things, jolly rough going," said Lowther, shaking his head. "But Jove! Then we had bettah keep on!"

"Oh, yes, we'll keep on!" smiled Blake.

"But I've got an idea," continued Monty Lowther. "We've kept one like with the van, jolly, for just such occasions. We may be a long time getting through Stuckley if there's a crowd; and, besides, we've got to do a lot of shopping—we're nearly out of grub. It will be jolly nearly time to camp when we're through."

"Quite time, most likely!" grinned Dig.

"Well, suppose one fellow goes ahead on the bike, and picks out a good camping ground the other side of the town?" asked Monty Lowther. "Then he can meet the van on the road past Stuckley and guide us to it. Otherwise, we may get stranded for a camp."

"Jolly good idea!" said Tom Merry heartily.

"Yess, wathah!"
"Gussy couldn't do it for us!" said Jack Blake solemnly. "I hardly think that Gussy could pick out a good camp."

"Wessly, Blake—"
Tom Merry chimed in.

"Now, I think you're wrong there, Blake. I should think that Gussy is just the man. Only, it's a bit of trouble—"

"But Jove! I don't mind the trouble, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus unhesitatingly. "As a matter of fact, I think the match had bettah be left to me. You fellows would most likely pitch on a very unsuitable spot."

"Well, if Gussy could do it—" said Lowther dubiously.

"Wessly, Lowthah, I wathah think that I am the most capable fellow heah to do it!" said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"Well, let Gussy try, then," said Lowther. "We'll rely on Gussy! After all, we can't do better than rely on a fellow of tact and judgment. Gussy's tall us that himself."

"Yess, wathah!"

"Done!" said Tom Merry. "Yank down the bike from the van, then. Pick a place a couple of miles past the town, Gussy, if you can, we don't want to be too near the houses."

"Leave it to me, dear boy!"

Arthur Augustus looked to the bike, found it in order, and mounted. He waved his hand cheerily to his comrades, and rode away ahead of the caravan, and as he disappeared towards Stuckley town there was a general chortle from the caravanners.

With Arthur Augustus bustled a couple of miles beyond the market town, picking out a camping ground, his comrades were at liberty to loiter in the market-place and do business there! Which, if Arthur Augustus had fully known it, was the reason why he had gone ahead on the bike. Fortunately, Arthur Augustus did not know it.

CHAPTER 6. Sale Now On!

"HERE we are!"
"Looks boy!"
There was a rattling of wheels and hoofs, a buzz of voices, in the narrow street of the little country town. The market-square, in the middle of the town, was crowded. There were carts and barrows, and stalls; there were pedlars and Cheap Jacks; there were stacks of fruits and vegetables. And there were plenty of people. The St. Jim's caravan had to

go slow through the narrow street among many other vehicles, and it halted in the market-square in the midst of a buzzing throng. Tom Merry drew up in the square, cheek by jowl with a gipsy caravan, from which a lively sale of brooms and brushes and tin cans and pails was proceeding.

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "I suppose we can sell things as much as anybody else. But—but—"

"Of course we can!" answered Monty Lowther. "We shall have to put up a sign first."

"A—sign?"

"Certainly! I can paint a sign. Anybody can paint a sign. We've got a can of paint and a brush in the van."

"We shall want a board, or something—"

"What's the matter with the van?" answered Lowther. "I'll paint the sign on the side of the van—"

"You jolly well won't!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You'll have to find something else, you duffer!"

"If you're going to make difficulties at the very beginning, Tom—"

"Fathah! You're not going to dabble over the van."

"It could be painted out afterwards."

"How soon?"
Monty Lowther had to yield the point. He was very keen on his scheme, and not disposed to stick at trifles; but the other caravanners did not mean to let him try his skill as a sign-painter on the side of the van. There was a limit, and that was it!

"Well, you duffers sort out the rub-

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high, and I'll find something," said Lowther impatiently.

"Right-ho!"
Monty Lowther disappeared among the market throng, and the Co. proceeded to bundle out the ample baggage belonging to the swell of St. Jim's.

A crowd, chiefly juvenile, began to gather round the van. Tom Merry & Co. did not exactly look like itinerant merchants, and their proceedings excited some curiosity.

The janitor did not mind that, however. It was all the better for business.

"We must have Gussy something," said Tom Merry, with great consideration. "The dropping bars and ground-sheet are really useful. Let them be."

"Oh, rather! What about the gelid-ehs?"

"Well, they might come in handy if we have trouble with tramps on the road; and they don't take up much room. Let them stay."

"And some of the clobber," said Dig. "Say, twice as much as he wants. That will be treating Gussy well."

"Oh, rather!"

"Keep all the boots—some of us may run out of boots, with so much tramping!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"What about the toppers?"

"Change those out!"

Blake reflected.

"No," he said; "we'll keep one top-
per. Gussy can never be really happy without a topper, and we want him to be happy. It can be slung under the van, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! Here's Monty!"
Monty Lowther came back with a board under his arm. It was a rough board about seven feet long and a foot wide. Under his other arm were two slim posts.

"I've borrowed this lot," he explained. "Awfully expensive to buy! But we can have the use of them for an hour or two for half-a-crown, and dabble on as much paint as we like. Sort out the stock while I'm doing the sign!"

"We're doing it. Go ahead!"
Monty Lowther went ahead.

A professional sign-painter would probably have regarded Lowther's handiwork with deep scorn; but Monty himself seemed quite satisfied with it. After all, it served the purpose, even if it lacked artistic finish.

And it was quickly done, too. The sign was dashed in, and then the posts were jammed in the ground, and the sign nailed across them. The result was quite imposing.

There were huge red letters on the sign, picked out with green, in a manner that was striking, if not exactly gratifying to an artistic eye.

"SALE NOW ON!
ANY PRICE YOU LIKE!
NO OFFER REFUSED!"

"That will fetch 'em, if anything will!" declared Lowther.

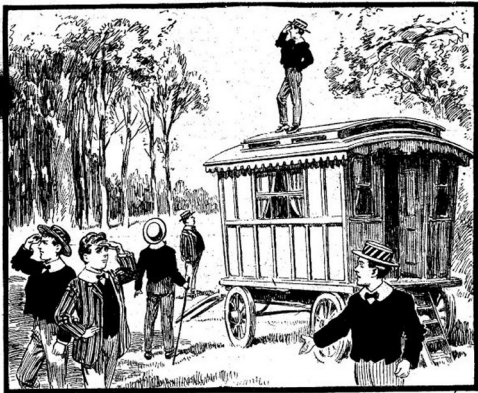
Lowther was right.

There were a good many bargain-hunters in the market-place, and the glaring sign caught their eyes, and drew them to the St. Jim's van.

Gussy's trunk having been emptied of its contents, Monty Lowther stood out to begin the sale.

Lowther had nerve enough for a whole battalion, and he was not in the least disconcerted by the crowd and the sea of eyes turned upon him.

"Walk up, gentlemen!" he shouted. "Sale now on! Any price you like! Latest fashionable London neckties, one shilling each! Walk up!"



From the top of the caravan Blake scanned the landscape, but there was no sign of Arthur Augustus. "He can't have gone back to St. Jim's for his blessed clobber, can he?" asked Manners. (See Chapter 3).

There was a pressing forward at once. As Arthur Augustus D'Arcy never gave less than half-a-guinea for a necktie, Lowther's offer was a liberal one.

The least sophisticated of the inhabitants of the little Sussex town could see that those handsome neckties were tremendous bargains.

There was quite a rush on the neckties. In three minutes the stock was cleared out.

"Who said I wasn't a born salesman?" roared Monty Lowther triumphantly. "Why, I was born for the business! I can sell up those socks!"

"Where you are!"

"Gentlemen, these splendid silk socks, in all the colours of the rainbow, going at two bob a pair!"

There did not seem to be much demand for silk socks in the market-place. Natty silk socks, however valuable in themselves, were not much in the line of burly agricultural gentlemen. But a pedlar with an aquiline nose, who was looking on, promptly came forward, and made an offer for the whole bunch.

Monty Lowther looked at him.

"In the business—what?" he asked.

"Nefter you mind, missa fren't," answered the pedlar. "I takes all zoe socks off your hands, I zink."

"You're welcome."

The socks went in one lot. Silken socks certainly seemed rather superfluous on a caravan, and the Co. were

quite of opinion that Arthur Augustus was better without them.

The sale having once started, business was brisk.

There seemed a ready sale for everything belonging to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—possibly because of the extremely reasonable prices the amateur salesman was asking. If one of the inhabitants did not want the things, there was always a pedlar or some other merchant to snap them up—to be sold again, of course, at about four hundred per cent. profit. But the St. Jim's salesman did not mind what profit his customers might make on the transactions so long as he cleared his stock.

Reasonable as the prices were, money rolled in. Manners stood with a silk hat to take the money—the topper that was generously being retained for the use of Gussy. Possibly the topper was not being improved by the usage, but that could not be helped.

Quite an excited crowd surrounded the St. Jim's caravan. Goods of such high quality, and at such low prices, had never before been offered for sale in the market-place of Stuckley.

Monty Lowther was quite enjoying himself. Monty had many gifts; but he had never shone as a salesman before. Now he was shining.

The great sale was almost over when there was a disturbance in the crowd, and loud exclamations.

"Keep back!"

"Keep that danged bike away from my legs!"

"Don't shove!"

"P'way let me pass!" came a familiar voice.

And Monty Lowther, with the last "lot" in his hands—a bunch of handkerchiefs—ejaculated:

"Oh, my hat! Gussy!"

CHAPTER 7.

Wrathy!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY had found a camping-ground.

It was quite a suitable spot, a couple of miles beyond the market-town. It was just off the high road, on the common, with shady trees and a stream. Having found it, and decided on it, Arthur Augustus returned to the high road to wait for the caravan.

He waited a good time.

But the caravan seemed a long time coming through Stuckley; and, after waiting nearly an hour, Arthur Augustus decided to go and look for it. So he remounted the bike and rode back into the town.

He was looking out very carefully for the red caravan, and he almost fell off his bike when he spotted it, drawn up in the market-square, with a huge, glaring sign close at hand—"Sale now on."

The crowd was too thick for riding.

and Arthur Augustus jumped down and ran his bike towards the van.

He was too astonished for words. What sale could be proceeding from the St. Jim's caravan was a deep mystery to him. The dreadful truth had not yet dawned upon his mind.

But as he came closer he suspected. Some of the purchasers were handing about their purchases and commenting on them; and the sight of fashionable neckties and silk socks and beautiful waistcoats caused a glimmering of the truth to dawn upon the mind of the noble Gussy.

He snarled recklessly through the crowd, amid angry protests.

"Keep back!"
"Keep your place!"
"Who are you shoving!"
"Who be you?"

Arthur Augustus did not heed. He got through, and came breathlessly up to the red caravan.

He let the bike go, and it tumbled against the van. Then he jumped towards the junior salesman.

"Lowthah!" he gasped.
Lowther looked down at him from the top of the big trunk.

"Hallo, Gussy! I'm afraid I can't take an offer from you for these hankies. I'm selling to the public."

"They are my handkerchiefs!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"The last dozen!" said Lowther.

"Any offers?"
Arthur Augustus jumped at the salesman and jerked the bunch of beautiful handkerchiefs from his hand.

"You uttah wottah!" he gasped.
"Don't interfere with the sale, Gussy!" said Blake chidingly.

Arthur Augustus gasped for breath. "You feashful wottah! You—you—you have been sellin' off my proparty!" he stammered.

"Didn't you want it sold off!" asked Monty Lowther, in surprise.

"Certainly not, you wuffian!"
"Then what did you stack it in the van for?"

"—I—I—"
Words failed Arthur Augustus.

"If Gussy wants to keep that last lot of hankies, let him," said Blake generously. "They'll come in handy for cleaning pots and pans and things, anyhow."

"Blake! You—you—"
"Then there's nothing but the bags and the trunk left to sell," said Monty Lowther. "I'll offer the whole lot for a quid."

"You howwid wuffian!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "That trunk alone cost twenty guineas."

"Then it's bound to fetch a quid, with the portmanteaux thrown in."

"I wufuse to allow you to sell my trunk."

"Now, look here, Gussy—"
"Lowthah, I wogard you as a wascal—"

"You can regard me, old chap, in any character you choose to assume!" said Monty Lowther affably.

"He, ha, ha!"
"I mean you are a wascal—not me, you are!"

"Never mind what you mean, Gussy! If you don't want me to sell off these trunks and things, you can book them for home at the railway-station. Luckily, there's a station here, or we should have to leave them stranded."

"—I—I—"
"Give him the dibs, Manners. The money's his," said Lowther. "I'm not asking a commission on the sale, Gussy. I've done that for nothing, out of friendship."

"Oh crumbs!"
Manners handed the silk hat to Arthur Augustus.

"There was a heap in it of shillings and half-crowns and coppers—quite a sum of money."

"We've kept back that topper for you, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "It looks a bit like a busy at present. But you can brush it."

"You awful wottah!"
"Eh!"
"You feashful wuffian—"
"Me!"
"Yes, wathah—you! I wogard you with uttah despisio— I mean contempt!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"This is what Gussy calls gratitude, I suppose!" remarked Lowther.

"Gwattidoo, you howwid wottah! I am goin' to give you a feashful twashin!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"My dear chap, you'll get run in if you begin scragging in the marketplace," said Blake. "There's a policeman yonder, to look after hooligans!"

"Order, Gussy! Don't disgrace us, you know!"

"Keep it's 'ickle temper!" murmured Lowther.

"Oh, you wottah! You feashful wottah! My toppahs—my clobber—my ties! Where are my socks!"

"Sold!"

"Oh, you feashful beast!"

"Gentlemen, the sale is now over!" called out Monty Lowther. "Now, you chase, it's time we got moving! Did you find a good camping-ground, Gussy?"

"Wats! My clobber—"
"Put the horse to," said Tom Merry.

"I wufuse to allow—"
"I come on," said Blake cheerily.

"Time we got busy."

"Oh, you awful wottah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's stood with the dishevelled topper in his hands, looking quite dazed. But Tom Merry & Co. got busy at once, now that the sale was over.

Monty Lowther yanked down the sign, and carried back the pieces to be returned to their owner. The Co. harnessed the horse. All was very soon ready for a start.

"Ready, Gussy!" called out Tom Merry.

"Wottah!"

"My dear chap—"

"Beast!"

"Anything happened to annoy you, Gussy?"

"Oh, you feashful wuffian!"

"What about those bags and trunks and things?" asked Jack Blake. "No good putting them back in the van now they're empty. Like us to help you to the railway-station with them, Gussy! They can be labelled for home."

"Wottah!"

"Gussy's getting quite abusive. Anybody would think we hadn't done him a good turn!" exclaimed Blake warmly.

"You have sold my clobber!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Well, it was that or dropping it out of the van along the road. And that would have been a waste. Although the war's over, Gussy, it's wrong to be wasteful."

"Oh, you wottah!"

"Start!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"You—you—you feashful beasts!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "As the bags are now empty, they may as well be put on the railway. They are no use in the caravan."

"Then we'll lend you a hand with them," said Blake generously. "You don't deserve it, after the shindy you've been kicking up. But we'll do it."

"Wottah!"

In the kindness of their hearts the

juniors carried the empty bags and the trunk into the railway-station, where Arthur Augustus, with a dark brow, saw them labelled for home. Then they returned to the caravan. Arthur Augustus was silent and wrathful. He was all the more exasperated because his comrades persisted in taking the view that they had done him a good turn. As Monty Lowther remarked, there were pounds and pounds in cash, and there would have been nothing at all if the baggage had simply been dropped out of the van and left behind—the other reason.

But Arthur Augustus did not see it. He tramped on with the van, as the caravaners marched out of the town, with a set brow.

When Blake spoke to him, Arthur Augustus returned him a cold, steely stare, and did not answer.

His wrath was not to be appeased. True, he still had more baggage than any other member of the party; and he had the cash that was the result of the sale. But he thought of his clobber that was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream; and, like Rachel of old, he mourned for that which was lost, and would not be comforted.

CHAPTER 8.

A Fearful Thrasing!

"WHERE'S the camp, Gussy?"
The caravan was well out of the town now, and the sun was low behind the hills.

Tom Merry asked the question, and Arthur Augustus gave him a grim look.

"I wufuse to answah you, Tom Merry!"

"But where's the camp?"
"I will point out the place when we awvive at it; but I wufuse to speak to a fellow who has twated me with gross disrespect."

"Alas!" sighed Tom Merry.

Monty Lowther gave a gentle sob, Arthur Augustus' eye glittered at him, but he did not speak.

The caravan rolled on till it reached the common, and there Arthur Augustus condescended to point out the spot he had selected for camping. The red caravan came to a halt on the grass.

"Jolly good place," said Blake. "I knew we could rely on Gussy to find us a really good camp!"

"Tact and judgment, you know!" murmured Dig.

"Much obliged, Gussy!"
Snort!

The soft answer was not destined to turn away wrath in this instance. Arthur Augustus' wrath was too deep-seated for that.

The caravaners proceeded to camp. The old cooking-stove was taken out of the van and set up; and the interesting discovery made that the pur of paraffin had been overlooked.

"Never mind—we'll have a camp again," said Manners.

Arthur Augustus sat on a grassy knoll while the caravaners were camped. He did not offer to help. His noble brows were knitted, and his eyes were gloaming. The destructive wrath of Achilles, so eloquently sung by Homer, seemed to have come to life again in the usually placid breast of the swell of St. Jim's.

It is not only that the ample stores of clobber was gone beyond recovery. There were other supplies upon which Gussy could have drawn. Moreover, an extensive round of shopping would have set the matter right. But it was borne in upon Arthur Augustus' indignant mind that fresh supplies of clobber would suffer the same fate as the old supply. If he renewed the stock, it only meant a

series of cheap sales in all the market-towns through which the St. Jim's caravan passed.

Which was intensely exasperating. So Arthur Augustus glowered, while his chums were building the fire and getting supper in the gloaming.

"Supper's ready, Gussy!" called out Blake, at last.

Arthur Augustus rose from the knoll and came towards his comrades. He threw off his jacket, a proceeding that he regarded with raised eyebrows.

"Not going to bed yet?" asked Blake.

"I am not going to bed, Blake."

"Tuck in, old chap! These scones are really good, though Blake cooked them," said Tom Merry.

"I am goin' to thwash Lowthah."

"Eh?"

"Undah the cires, I have no resource but to give you fellows a fearful thwashin' all round."

"My hat!"

"I am beginnin' with Lowthah, because I regard him as the worst," said Arthur Augustus.

"Are you weady, Lowthah?"

"Ready for supper? Yes, rather!"

"Weady to be thwashed, you wotah!"

"No! Not quite."

"When will you be ready?"

Monty Lowther reflected.

"You really mean business, Gussy?" he asked sadly.

"Yes, wotah!"

"You won't let me off?"

"Not undah any cires whatever."

"Then I'm bound to accept your challenge," said Monty Lowther.

"But as challenged party I have the right to choose time and place for the deadly combat."

"I—I suppose so."

"Very well," said Lowther cheerily.

"I'll fight you, Gussy—"

"Good!"

"The year after next—"

"Eh?"

"At the North Pole."

"What?"

"And now we'll have supper," said Monty Lowther.

"Pass the scones, Blake."

There was a chuckle from the caravanners. But Arthur Augustus did not chuckle. He frowned portentously.

"Lowthah, you silly, jokin' ass, I insist upon your gettin' up and puttin' up your hands!" he exclaimed.

"I've chosen time and place—my right, as challenged party," answered Lowther.

"I say, these scones are good! Try them, Gussy."

"I refuse to try them, Lowthah. I am goin' to thwash you."

"Mercy!"

"I refuse to show the slightest mercy a wotah like you. I am goin' to give you a fearful thwashin', and then we'll othah wotahs aftah you."

"Begin on Blake," suggested Lowther, his mouth full of sausage.

"Blake's worse than I am—be's a cheeky little Forn fac. Begin on him."

"I refuse to begin on him, Lowthah. If you do not see immediately and put up your hands I shall stwike you on the nose!"

Monty Lowther sighed.

"Won't you have mercy on my tender years, Gussy?" he pleaded.

"Think of my poor old uncle! Do you want to bring down his pink whiskers in sorrow to the crematorium?"

"Wats! Get up at once!"

"Blessed if I ever knew Gussy was such a ferocious Hun!" said Lowther, in surprise.

"Fancy quarrelling with a chap like this for doing him a good turn! Why, we're bound to do good turns, as scouts—"

"You have not done me a good turn,

Lowthah—you have played me a wasolly trick, and unless you stand up at once, I shall hit you!"

"My dear, dear old pal—"

"I do not regard you as a pal, Lowthah. I regard you as a wuffin, with no respect whatever for a fellow's clobber. If you do not put up your hands I shall pull you nose!" roared Arthur Augustus in great wrath.

"Run away and play, old bean!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus reached for Lowther's nose, to carry out his dire threat. The humorist of the Shell jumped up. Evidently the swell of St. Jim's was in deadly earnest, and was not to be denied.

"Now, then, you wotah!"

"Gussy!" exclaimed Blake.

"Wey dey up, Blake! I am goin' to thwash you next!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Are you weady, Lowthah?"

"May I finish my sausage?" inquired Monty Lowther mockingly.

"In case of fatal results, it will be a satisfaction to have finished my soss!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus did not answer. He pushed back his cuffs and rushed at the Shell fellow. Monty Lowther promptly put up his hands, backing away from the rush. The caravanners were all on their feet now; supper was interrupted.

Monty Lowther gave more and more ground, followed up by a terrific onslaught from the swell of the Fourth.

Crash!

One of Gussy's terrific thumps came home at last on Lowther's chest. The Shell fellow rolled over on his back.

Arthur Augustus panted over him.

"Get up, you wotah! Get up and be thwashed!"

Groan!

"Do you hear me, Lowthah!" roared Arthur Augustus.

Deep groan!

"Are you hurt, Monty?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Monty Lowther did not reply. His limbs stretched out and a shudder ran through him, and he lay still.

CHAPTER 9.

Awful!

"MONTY!"

"What's the matter?"

"Get up, old chap!"

"What have you done, Gussy?"

The caravanners surrounded the still form of Montague Lowther of the Shell with anxious faces. Arthur Augustus was pushed back. Five juniors were kneeling round Monty Lowther with anxious exclamations.

Arthur Augustus ceased to brandish his fists. The ferocity died out of his noble face.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "He can't be hurt, you know! It was only a thump on the chest!"

"Wait while I feel his heart!" murmured Tom Merry.

Tom Merry opened the fallen junior's waistcoat and groped for his heart. Then he gave a cry.

"Monty! Old pal! Poor old Monty!"

"Dead!" wailed Manners.

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Wubbish!" he stuttered. "How could he possibly be dead when I only gave him a tap on the chest? Don't play the goat!"

"Look at him!" groaned Blake. "Oh, Gussy—Gussy!"

"Weasly, Blake—"

"Poor old Lowther!"

"He was a funny ass!" said Digby

scorrowfully. "But I'm sorry for this. He will never make any more of his rotten jokes!"

"He'll never put any more chestnuts in the comic column of the 'Weekly'!" murmured Herries.

"Poor old Lowther!"

"What's going to become of Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus panted.

"I believe you are wotah!" he stuttered. "There is nothin' the matter with him. Let me see him!"

There was a deep groan from Monty Lowther as Gussy pushed his way through the juniors.

"He lives!" exclaimed Tom Merry dramatically.

"He lives!" echoed Blake.

"I was quite awah that he lives!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "I knew you were wotah, you wotah!"

Groan!

"Lowthah!"

"Send for a doctor!" moaned Lowther faintly. "I feel that I am sinking! I forgive you, Gussy!"

"Weasly, Lowthah—"

"If I perish, don't let Gussy be hanged! Say a donkey kicked me. Say anything; but don't let them hang Gussy. It will spoil his necktie."

"Bai Jove!"

"Water!" murmured Lowther.

Arthur Augustus had succeeded in getting near his hapless victim at last. He started violently as he saw that Lowther's cheeks were deathly white—as white as chalk.

"Oh ewky!" he ejaculated. "I—I am awfraid that Lowthah is weally hurt—"

Groan!

"Do you feel vewy bad, old chap?"

Groan!

"Get him into the caravan and put him to bed," said Tom Merry anxiously.

"You buzz off for a doctor, Blake, on the bike."

"Right you are!" said Blake. "I suppose I can find a doctor in Stuckley. Give him water, and look after him while I'm gone."

"We'll do our best."

"Gussy had better clear off! In case of fatal results—"

"Oh dear!"

"In case of fatal results Gussy had better keep clear. I suppose I'd better bring the police back with me. They'll have to know."

"Yes; buck up!"

Jack Blake jumped on the bike, and peddled away towards the town at frantic speed. He vanished round a bend in the road.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood rooted to the ground, while Tom Merry & Co. lifted Lowther and bore him into the caravan. He was laid in one of the bunks. Tom Merry held water to his lips, and Lowther sipped feebly.

D'Arcy peered into the van.

"How is he, dear boys?" he faltered.

"Look at his face!" answered Tom Merry in a hushed voice.

"White as chalk!" said Herries.

"Oh dear! I did not weally mean to hit him so hard!" mumbled Arthur Augustus. "I suppose it was wotah a hard knock!"

"It was a fearful blow!" said Digby.

"You know what you are when you get excited, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wotah! Oh dear!"

There was a faint moan from the bed. Tom Merry turned at once to the suffering patient.

"Has the doctor come?"

"Not yet, old kid!" said Tom.

"Blake's riding like anything. He won't be long."

"Don't let Gussy be arrested! I'm sure that Gussy didn't mean to be guilty of manslaughter!"

"Gwoogh!"

"If I don't recover——"

"You will wecovah all wright, Lowthah!" said Arthur Augustus huskily.

"Gussy had better go. It's not safe for him to stay here if Blake is bringing the police. Gussy will have to become a wanderer on the face of the earth. I forgive him!"

"I shall not go, Lowthah! I shall remain with you, deah boy! I am sowwy I gave you such a feahful blow!"

Groan!

"I am suah you will wecovah all wright!" said Arthur Augustus, scanning the Shell fellow's white face anxiously.

"Keep your peekah up, deah boy!"

Tom Merry buried his face in his hands. A sob was heard from Manners. They seemed deeply affected.

"Gussy!" moaned Lowther.

"Yass, deah boy!"

"Before I expire——"

"Wow!"

"Before I expire, old chap, let's be friends!" said Monty Lowther faintly.

"I always thought well of you, Gussy!"

"I'm suah you did, old fellow!"

"I always admired your taste in ties!"

"Oh cwicker!"

"I always thought you looked better in a silk topper than any other fellow at St. Jim's!"

Tom Merry made a choking sound under the hands clasped over his face. Manners gasped spasmodically.

"And now I be here," said Lowther feebly.

"You do!" murmured Manners.

"Now I am bring here, Gussy, felled by that terrible blow——"

"I really did not mean to hit so hard, Lowthah, old chap. I am sowwy—more sowwy than I can weally say."

"Let us be friends," moaned Lowther.

"Yass, watah!"

"It is pax?" asked the Shell fellow feebly.

"Yass! Oh yass!"

"If I should recover, D'Arcy——"

"You'll wecovah all wright, deah boy."

"If I should recover, will you be friends and never row again, and never make a fuss about selling yor flobber?" moaned Lowther.

"Honour bwright, deah boy!" assured Arthur Augustus. "Keep your peekah up! Blake will be back with the doctah vey soon!"

"You're sure, Gussy—sure you won't rag any more——"

"Quite suah, deah boy!"

"Then I may as well recover," said Monty Lowther, in quite a different voice, as he sat up cheerfully. "And now I'm recovered I'll go and finish my supper!"

And Monty Lowther turned cheerily out of the bunk, and jumped from the caravan, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy watching him with eyes almost starting from his head.

CHAPTER 10.

Sent to Coventry!

"H. A. ha, ha!"

ther. Monty Lowther was from the caravan after Low-

Arthur Augustus jumped wiping his face with a handkerchief. The handkerchief came away very white.

"It was no wonder that Lowther had been white as chalk. It was chalk that was rubbed on his cheeks."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors, greatly entertained by the expression on Arthur Augustus' aristocratic face.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came an echo, and

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Jack Blake wheeled the bike from behind a fringe of may-bushes. Evidently he had not ridden very far in quest of a medical man.

"D'Arcy glared at him.

"Blake!" You—you did not go for a doctor."

"My dear chap, we don't need a doctor to rub chalk off Lowther's chivvy," said Blake, in surprise. "No good paying a medical man's fee for an easy job like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You spoofin' wotiahs!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Lowthah was not hurt at all!"

"Go hon!"

"He was only pullin' my log——"

"Got that already?"

"You all knew it, and you were all pullin' my leg!" yelled Arthur Augustus in great wrath.

"He's tumbled to that!" said Manners in great admiration.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You were chalkin' his silly face while you were shawwoundin' him and keepin' me off——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I regard this as a wotten trick, and I'm goin' to thrash Lowthah all the same!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"After making it pax?" asked Lowther, with a chuckle.

Arthur Augustus stopped suddenly.

"Oh, bai Jovo! You twicked me into makin' it pax, you wotiahs!"

"Exactly!" said Monty Lowther, with a nod. "Now let's finish supper. As the gent says in the opera, the comedy is finished!"

And Monty Lowther sat down cheerfully to resume operations on the sausages and chips; and the chinking caravanners followed his example.

Arthur Augustus looked at them with deep wrath and scorn.

"You uttah asses!" he exclaimed. "I regard you as a set of silly chumps, playin' tricks like silly fags. I have a great mind to leave the partay, and refuse to go cavavannin' with you any more."

"Oh, Gussy!"

"I would certainly do so, but I am awah that you silly kids would land yourselves into some trouble without me, and I feel responsible for you, now that we have started!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall not abandon you to your own resources," said Arthur Augustus.

"But I feel bound to impress upon your minds that you cannot play these silly tricks upon a chap with impunity. I am goin' to send you all to Coventry!"

"Wha-a-ut?"

"Which?"

"You need not argue with me," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I am sowwy, but I feel it is time for a chap to put his foot down. I am goin' to send you all to Coventry for a week, and I trust it will be a lesson to you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Tom Merry & Co.

"Pewraps you will cackle in anotheah way when you have been in Coventry a day or two!" said Arthur Augustus crushingly.

And he turned his back on the caravanners.

Tom Merry wiped his eyes.

"Good old Gussy!" he murmured.

"How lucky we brought him along with us. Caravanning wouldn't really be a success without Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The caravanners finished their supper in very cheery spirits, considering the crushing sentence that had been passed on them by the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus sat at a distance, on the step of the caravan, and ate bread and cheese in solitary state and dignity.

It had not yet apparently occurred to the mighty brain of Arthur Augustus that in sending the whole party to Coventry he was, in effect, sending himself to that undesirable residence. Doubtless that would dawn upon him later.

The sun had disappeared, and the stars glimmered of starlight in the summer evening. The caravanners prepared to turn in.

"Sleeping in the van, Gussy!" asked Blake affably.

No answer.

"Deaf, old chap?"

"I have told you, Blake, that you are in Coventry, and I refuse to uttah a single syllable to you!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus gave a disdainful sniff. He took his sleeping-bag and ground-sheet out of the caravan, and disposed himself for slumber in the grass.

That was a very pleasant way of passing a summer's night, with an air-pillow and a muffler for the head. The other caravanners put up the tent, and the party were soon sleeping the sleep of the just.

The rising sun was the signal for the rising of the caravanners in the morning.

The embers of the dead fire were raked together and lighted, and water boiled for coffee and eggs. Arthur Augustus partook of coffee and eggs in grim silence. His comrades were in Coventry, and the swell of St. Jim's was resolved to keep up the sentence till they were in a proper state of repentance.

The caravanners—"cut dead" by their noble chum, chatted among themselves quite cheerily, however. They soon appeared to forget the existence of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Having addressed a few remarks to him which elicited no reply, they let him severely alone, and Arthur Augustus was left to enjoy silent dignity.

After breakfast there was washing-up and packing, and then the red caravan took the road.

The horse trumped along cheerily, and the juniors trumped, too, in a merry mood.

They talked to one another, but addressed no remarks to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—apparently remembering at last that they were in Coventry.

The expression on Gussy's lofty face became rather peculiar as the morning wore on.

His severe sentence did not seem to have a crushing effect upon his comrades; but it was having a rather dis-comforting effect upon himself.

As a matter of fact, his wrath had died away; it was but seldom that he went down on the wrath of Arthur Augustus, and still more seldom that the sun rose upon it.

He was prepared to give directions, advice; but he was barred from doing so by the fact that he could not, by his own decree, speak to his companions.

The caravan arrived at a cross-road and there was a pause for consultation. Arthur Augustus did not take part in the consultation. His comrades seemed oblivious to his existence.

The road was decided on, and Tom Merry bade the horse "ree-up!" and then Arthur Augustus broke the silence at last.

"You fellows have not chosen the best road!" he said.

Arthur Augustus' remark fell upon the desert air. The caravan moved on.

"I spoke to you, Tom Merry!" said the swell of St. Jim's warmly.

Tom Merry, apparently deaf, led on the horse.

"Blake—"
Jack Blake looked at Arthur Augustus in surprise, and did not speak. The lean Fourth-Former breathed hard.

"If I receive a proper apology, Blake, I'm willing to overlook your conduct!" he said.

"Answah me, you silly ass!"

Jack Blake took a stump of chalk from his waistcoat pocket, and chalked on the side of the caravan:

"Can't!"

"Why cannot you ansawah me, you ass!"

"Because I'm in Coventry!" chalked Blake.

Arthur Augustus breathed harder than before, and walked on.

CHAPTER 11.

Let Out!

TOM MERRY & CO. chatted cheerily as they marched with the caravan. There was only one silent member of the party.

That was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He was not silent from choice. But his remarks, like the seed in the parable, fell upon stony places. And so he restrained them. His comrades had evidently taken the sentence of "Coventry" with proper seriousness at last, and were keeping Arthur Augustus to it.

There was no noonday halt that day. After a marching consultation, the juniors decided on a bread and cheese lunch "on the hoof," as Blake called it, and an early halt in the evening. Arthur Augustus did not approve, and he said as much. But he might as well have addressed the caravan itself as the caravaners.

"I regard it as a much better idea to west undah the trees for a while!" he declared.

Silence.

"I consider it ridiculous to keep on without a west, Tom Merry."

"Come up, old horse!" said Tom Merry; but his remark was addressed to the caravan horse, not to the swell of St. Jim's.

"I must say that you fellows don't know how to manage a caravaner's tent," said Arthur Augustus heatedly.

"Fellows who don't know should yield to the judgment of a fellow who does know."

"Not a bad road, is it?" remarked Lowther.

"Not at all," said Blake. "Too many dashed motors, but I suppose that can't be helped. Caravaners are always being carried by the idle rich."

"Bai Jove! You vevy often wide in a day yourself, Blake."

"There's a jolly good horse, and we shall be through the day all right," said Merry.

"Any more cheese, Dig?"

"There was some left—somebody's shed it—"

"I have taken the cheese, Dig. I presume that I am entitled to some lunch when I am hungry."

"Well, if there isn't any more cheese, Dig, I'll have some bread-and-butter."

"There isn't any more butter."

"Oh, my hat! Hand out the marmalade, then."

"I will have some marmalade, too, Dig, dear boy!"

Dig handed Blake the marmalade.

"Affah you, Blake."

Blake thoughtfully replaced the jar in the caravan. Arthur Augustus's eye glittered behind his eyeglass. He was growing fed up; yet he scarcely had a right to grumble, as he had passed the

sentence of Coventry himself, and the other fellows were only obeying his lordly behest.

The caravan wound on through deep lanes, amid woods and fields, in the shining summer afternoon. The juniors had consulted a map, and decided where to halt for the evening; but Arthur Augustus did not know. No remarks had been addressed to him on the subject.

During the afternoon he walked on in stately dignity. Presently he stepped into the caravan for a rest.

Then the walking caravaners exchanged a grin.

"Poor old Gussy!" murmured Blake. "He's sent us to Coventry for a week. I wonder if he will keep it up for a week!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He will burst his crop if it goes on for twenty-four hours, I think," grinned Monty Lowther.

And the caravaners chortled.

Arthur Augustus heard the chortle as he rested in the caravan, and he breathed hard with growing wrath.

The red sunset was glowing on hill and field and meadow when the caravan came to a halt at last. Arthur Augustus jumped out of the vehicle.

"Well, I'm ready for a rest!" Jack Blake remarked. "We've done a jolly good day. Walking it, too—not slacking in the van!"

"If you imply that I have been slacking in the caravan, Blake—"

"We'll light up the stove," said Tom Merry. "Luckily, we thought of laying in a can of oil to-day."

"I retired to the caravan because I was fed up with a wotten wad of good manna on the part of my companions," said Arthur Augustus.

"Out with the stove!" said Herries.

"Who's going to fill it!"

"I will fill the stove if you like, deah boys. You fellows would probably make a mess of it."

"Oh, I'll do it!" said Blake, unheeding.

"We'd better arrange to take that job in turns. That's fair play."

Blake lifted out the stove, and paraffin having luckily been remembered that day, he filled it and lighted it. Oil-cooking was a great improvement on a campfire on a sultry evening. Arthur Augustus watched Blake's proceedings with a knitted brow.

"What about an Irish stew?" asked Blake thoughtfully.

"Mercy!" ejaculated Lowther.

"Look here, you silly Shell-fish—"

"Boiled bacon and beans," said Tom Merry. "We bought a piece of boiling bacon at the last village, and we've got lots of beans."

"An Irish stew is a jolly good thing. It's filling, you know. You'd feel jolly satisfied after an Irish stew."

"We're too far from a town," said Lowther, shaking his head.

"What's a town got to do with it?"

"I mean if we wanted to call a doctor afterwards—"

"Look here—"

"Or an undertaker—"

"Ha ha, ha!"

Blake sniffed, and did not try his hand at another Irish stew. Bacon and beans were boiled; and with much satisfaction, and perhaps a little surprise, the caravaners found that the bacon was quite eatable. The beans turned out too hard to eat; the amateur cooks having unfortunately forgotten that they required to be soaked in water before cooking. But they couldn't expect to remember everything at once, as Tom Merry remarked with undiminished cheerfulness.

Arthur Augustus sat silent at the festive board. There was a cheery chat

round the supper, but the swell of St. Jim's did not join in. After supper he rose to his feet.

"I have the honah of biddin' you fellows good-bye," he said, in his most stately manner. "I am goin' to retire from this party. I trust you will not land yourselves in trouble, though I have my doubts. Good-bye!"

And Arthur Augustus walked off.

He took only three steps, however. Then all the caravaners jumped up and rushed after him.

"Hold on, fathhead—"

"I wufeso to be called a fathhead, Tom Merry."

"Only pulling your leg, old chap," said Blake. "Come and sit down and let your chin wag!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You sent us to Coventry, you know. What did you expect?"

Arthur Augustus paused. He could not walk off—that was certain, for all his cheery chums had hold of him, and did not intend to let him go. And as a matter of fact, Arthur Augustus did not want to walk off.

"If you fellows are goin' to behave yourselves—" he said at last.

"The question is, and we let out of Coventry?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Oh! Ahem! Yass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Sit down, old scout!" grinned Blake.

"Let your dear old chin wag. Gussy, old man, we want you to think out the route for to-morrow. We're relying on your judgment, you know. Don't leave us in the lurch."

Arthur Augustus smiled genially.

And all was calm and bright!

THE END.

(Don't miss Next Wednesday's Great School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"A MIDNIGHT MYSTERY," by Martin Clifford. Order Early.)

NOTICES.

Correspondence, etc., Wanted.

Special.

Miss Doris Marler, 9, Gulltiston Avenue, Wembley Hill, London, wants news of Monica Daniels.

F. R. Bethnas, Mallandrose House, Girgaum, Bombay—with readers in England and the States interested in literature, especially poetry.

Billy Fitzwater, 22, Evandale Road, Malvern, Victoria, Australia—with readers in Europe, and the States—exchange of book numbers, etc.

L. Tomlinson, 120, Cromorne Street, Meadows, Nottingham, wants agents for Correspondence Club. Stamp, please.

Wm. McCall, Glasgow, Glasgow, Wigton, readers specially invited.

Norman Philip, Home Farm, Kewbury, Abingdon—with readers anywhere, 1923.

R. G. Hobbs, 69, Stonelaw Drive, Rutherglen, Glasgow—with readers anywhere.

John W. Penn, 125, Dartmouth Park Hill, Highgate, N. 19, wants members for "Gem" and "Magnet" Club; competitions and prizes; London readers specially invited.

Mrs. T. Morris, 4, Oakland Terrace, Castleton, Lancs—with readers, 20 and upwards, in Australia, New Zealand, China, and America.

Sec. Exchange Correspondence Club, 99, Round Street, Bradford, Yorks, wants members. Stamped addressed envelope.

A. Benn, 94, St. Paul's Road, Baisill Heath, Birmingham, would like to meet young fellow about 17, in Moseley or Balsall Heath district. Write.

Cricket.

C. E. Mills, 4, Landells Road, East Dulwich, S.E. 22, wants to hear from readers in Dulwich, 14-26, to form cricket-club for 1924.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS.

A Special New Serial by the Editor of the Companion Papers.

CHAPTER 7.

Gems From My Postbag.

ONE of the most pleasant tasks which fall to my lot, as Editor of the Companion Papers, is the answering of my readers' letters. But, although a pleasant task, it is sometimes a perplexing one also.

A few years ago, just before I went to the war, an enthusiastic Liverpool reader sent me a letter containing no less than 305 questions!

The letter I referred to consisted of forty typewritten sheets, and the writer demanded a reply to all his questions by return of post! Needless to state, he was unlucky.

One of the richest gems from my postbag is, I think, the letter I received some time ago from a boy-reader who was keenly interested in Mr. Frank Richards.

My correspondent wanted replies to the following quaint queries concerning the popular "Magnet" author:

1. Is he a mason?
 2. Is he young and handsome, like an Adam, or is he an old man, with a flowing beard and goat in his big top?
 3. Is he a Bolshevik?
 4. Does he collect butterflies?
 5. Is he an admirer of Charlie Chaplin?
 6. How many million words has he written in his lifetime?
- I am afraid this reader's demands weren't satisfied, either.

Some of my chums who possess a sense of novelty, likewise a sense of humour, are in the habit of writing their letters to the Editor in verse.

Foremost among those blithe spirits is Jimmy E., of Epton, whose snappy little ditties have frequently appeared on one or other of the Chat pages.

Shortly before "School and Sport" was published I told my readers that I had a great surprise in store for them, but that I was not allowed at that time to divulge the nature of the secret. Whereupon Jimmy E. sent in a poetic refrain, commencing thus:

"Now then, Mr. Editor,
What's it all about?
This amazing secret—
Won't you let it out?
Is our friend Frank Richards
Planning a surprise?
Has he, by good fortune,
Captured German spies?
And after "School and Sport" was on the

market, delighting the hearts of thousands, Jimmy E. poured out a fervent thanksgiving:

"Yes, the book was topping:
Simply great, I guess!
Did we want another?
Echo answers 'Yes'
Frank's such a Trojan,
Such a shining star,
Make him write another,
Just for Jimmy E."

The youthful poet had his heart's desire, for shortly afterwards another "Boys' Friend" Library story appeared on the market.

To revert once again to the keen interest which many readers take in Frank Richards, here is another gem received from a curious reader:

"Does Mr. Frank Richards like plenty to eat? How big is he? What is the diameter and circumference of his neck? What size does he take in collars and boots? How many pens does he use? Does he write shorthand? What kind of ink and nibs does he use? How old is he? How many times has he been married? Where does he write his stories? Has he ever been in prison? Does he like comic papers better than the 'Adventures of Gory Georgina, the Chief of the Chopper'? Is he a good band at marbles? Has he a whip and top to spare? What does he think of 'Old Moore's Almanac'? Does he wear spectacles? What is his idea of the very best food anyone could sit down to?" etc.

Of course, not all the letters I receive are complimentary ones. The following epistle is a fair specimen of the scurrilous letters I sometimes receive:

"Most Honourable Sir (I),—Myself and numerous friends beg leave to ask you to give us your permission to form an Anti-Magnet Club. We have had one ideal in life—to skwash the 'Magnet' and its works of inkwity. The blood-thirsty tails contained therein are not fit for any boy to read.

"I am knee-slanting taking this vile paper from the pupils in my Form, and those are the most depraved set I have in my 30 year of experience as a master at a public school some across.

"I have know doubt whatever but that you will not publish this letter, but if published I shall be pleased to answer any questions on the subject.

"I remain for ever an Anti-Magnetite."
"S. F. S."

S. F. S. is not the only ignorant-minded person who has lifted his hand against the Companion Papers. There was Robert Carlton, hailing, I believe, from Chester, who formed an Anti-Gem League. This league flourished for a time, but it was speedily swept into oblivion—a fate which its precious promoter very nearly shared!

Turning to more recent times, I find a number of abusive communications from an individual signing himself "Falkirk." This misguided young gentleman has now retreated into his shell also.

Then, of course, there are the loyal letters, which greet us through all the others.

It would be impossible to quote at any length from this tremendous batch of letters, but the following communication is a fair sample:

"Manchester.
"Dear Sir,—After perusing a copy of the 'Magnet' Library at the request of my son, who is a constant reader, I have come to the conclusion that to read a 'Magnet' would be to the advantage of those parents who, from a rooted belief that this journal is unfit for healthy-minded boys with the prospects of a career before them, forbid their boys to read such a work.
"I have no hesitation in denouncing such people as extremely prejudiced and narrow-minded. Mr. Richards has succeeded in imparting to his characters the touch of real life.

"Harry Wharton and Bob Chery, to my mind, everything that British boys should be acquainted with of adventure, yet, without possessing the ability to distinguish between right and wrong.

"With sincerest congratulations to Mr. Richards, and heartfelt wishes for the future success to the Companion Papers.

"Yours most respectfully,
"FATHER OF TWO (J. S.)"

Letters of this sort, from parents, schoolmasters, young men and maidens, old men and children, pour into my sanctum daily. It is no exaggeration to say that their number goes into thousands; and the boys have a very busy time keeping the files.

Some people affirm that the Companion Papers receive no support from the clergy and from other influential people.

This is not the case.

When "The Sunday Crusaders" appeared in the "Magnet" Letter over a hundred British clergymen sent letters of appreciation. And only a few weeks ago a Devonshire clergyman threw down the challenge, and defied anyone to prove that the Companion Papers contained anything but clean, healthy, pleasant literature.

Apart from the loyal letters and the disloyal, I have received letters of another sort. Anonymous letters arrive by the score: in fact, I think there are more of the anonymous sort than the others.

"I am no altogether in favour of the anonymous letter. Far rather would I see the writer's name and address. His communication can then be replied to straight off—the post, and be-of-also, as they say—may be sent to him by anonymous at once to wait several weeks for a reply on the page. There are other objections to the anonymous letter which I need not enumerate here.

There is yet another type of letter of which I have been a constant recipient. I refer to the "hogging" letter.

This sort of letter does not emanate from my regular readers. Most of them are written by people who make it a business to edge and to live, and who, when I was forwarding against these precious gentlemen at the outset, and they have never received a penny from me, nor are they ever likely to.

On rare occasions certain readers have got into trouble of some sort and have written to their Editor for financial aid. In a moment of weakness a boy once appropriated the

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BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY.

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By S. CLARKE HOOK.

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Two Stories of a Boxing Highwayman and a Famous Detective
By ANDREW SOUTAR and MAXWELL SCOTT.

No. 465. THE SCHOOL IN THE BACKWOODS.
A Grand Story of Frank Richards & Co.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

PRICE FOURPENCE PER VOLUME!

funds of his cricket club, and he wanted me to help him replace the money before the affair came to light. I did so, and never a word of acknowledgment reached me!"

"I have also given financial assistance, from time to time, to others who have come forward with tales of woe; but as I have received nothing but rank ingratitude, I have now decided to make no further payments of this sort, under any pretext whatsoever. Hence I think it is only right, since I am not an agent of the Charity Organisation Society or any other benevolent institution.

"I not infrequently receive letters addressed to "Master Harry Wharton," "Arthur Augustus D'Arcy Esq.," and "The Hon. Richard St. Johnstone, M.A.," such letters are being very amusing.

"One of the most interesting letters recently to land is from a keen bicycle rider, who advocates that some of our stories be placed on the films. This is a subject of such general interest that I am reproducing my chum's letter herewith:

"Dear Mr. Editor,—For a long time before the war, and even for a few war years, there were repeated demands for a film of Tom Merry & Co. and Harry Wharton & Co. quite a little remembrance attached. Answers to Correspondents, saying the suggestion was being carefully considered; but for the last few years we have ceased to trouble you, owing to the war."

"Now, this suggestion seems quite feasible—at least, so far as I have studied cinema films and their composition. Everybody would flock to see a 'Magnet' or a 'Gem' film of this sort—say 'The Taming of Harry Wharton,' 'Tom Merry's Schoolboys,' or—'which is well adapted for a cinema film—'Cousin Ethel's Schoolboys.' Martin Clifford's greatest and best.

"Tom Brown's Schoolboys, the once very popular boys' book, and 'Little Women,' the almost universally popular girls' story, have both been filmed. Why not the present-day creations of the masters of boys' and girls' literature? Who would not think it the greatest feat of his life in which he saw 'School and Sports' and 'Cousin Ethel's Schoolboys' filmed?"

"Of course, no cinema company would take this up were it not assured monetary success. Personally, I am quite convinced that it would be. The one thing needful is the material support. If any papers in the world can do it, the Companion Papers can!"

"Your enthusiastic reader,
"W. M."

The question of placing some of our stories on the films is one which has been constantly before my mind.

"What is the unattractive; but I see no reason why we should not now go ahead in this matter. Martin Clifford, Frank Elphinstone, and Owen Conquest share my opinion.

"Of course, these things take time. But I think I can assure my reader-chums that before very long, Tom Merry & Co. will appear on the cinematograph. Difficulties may crop up, but I do not think it will take long to find the necessary actors; and W. M. of Sheffield, in company with all his fellow-readers, may look forward to the time when Billy Blunter will ride across the desert, with a jump-off in one hand and a portal-order in the other—perhaps!

"This chapter deals with the various letters I have received. I am afraid it is woefully incomplete, because if I were fully into this subject I should fill whole volumes."

"My next chapter will deal with some of the letters who have flocked to my sanctum since I have occupied the editorial chair.

CHAPTER 8.

Welcome Guests—And Others!

MOST editors are men of mystery. That is to say, they seem to be shut off from the outside world, like so many hermits. They receive no visitors, nor even contribute to the task of interviewing callers being left to one of the sub-editors.

I sometimes wish that this were so in my own case. It is not nice to be worried from all corners by a long line of long-haired poets and chin-wagging artists.

However, I realised at the outset that it was good policy for an editor to personally interview all callers wherever possible. Many of the callers happen to be readers; and their views, if not always helpful, are generally interesting.

(Continued on page 14.)

The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are:

THE MAGNET. THE BOYS' FRIEND. THE GEM. THE PENNY POPULAR. DRUCKLES.
Every Monday. Every Monday. Every Wed. Every Friday. Every Friday.

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS GLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.

For Next Wednesday:

"A MIDNIGHT MYSTERY."

By Martin Clifford.

Our next grand, long, complete story deals with the further adventures of the St. Jim's Cannavarians.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy lights upon a strange mystery. He discovers, in the small hours of the morning, a man digging furiously in a plantation; and the St. Jim's seniors, when they hear of the curious nocturnal specter buried treasure, or possibly something more gruesome. A great many amusing and exciting incidents occur before the investigators of

"A MIDNIGHT MYSTERY."

succeed in unravelling it.

ARE WE DOWNHEARTED? NO!

My "straight talk" to my readers, published on this page some weeks ago, had the desired effect.

A wave of enthusiasm has swept through the country, and every Gemian seems anxious to do his bit towards promoting the interests of his favourite paper.

Here is a typical letter from one of my chums:

"Bandsworth,

"Birmingham.

"Dear Editor—I was greatly surprised and pained to read your 'straight talk' to your readers. Not for one moment had I dreamed that my favourite paper's circulation was below that of the 'Magnet.' Indeed, I thought that the GEM enjoyed a much higher circulation than any of its Companion Papers."

"However, it is as well to face the facts, and I am glad you have put the whole case fairly and squarely before your supporters. I have read your publications for several years, and although I have left my schoolboys far behind me, I still enjoy your splendid little books.

"But, above all, I have always liked the GEM, and still think it absolutely the best of the bunch. The 'Boys' Friend,' the 'Magnet,' the 'Penny Popular,' etc., are all very good, but so my mind, and one of them supports the GEM for all-round excellence. To me, St. Jim's, and everything and everybody connected with it, are dear. I cannot say that about Greyfriars or Rookwood, Tom Merry & Co., and all the boys of GEM characters—especially Gussy, whom I love above all—are living friends and companions.

"In conclusion, I will say that I will endeavour to do my bit towards realising your hopes and mine—that the GEM shall take its proper place, at the head of all others.

"With all good wishes from
"A LOVER OF THE 'GEM.'"

Good for you, my Birmingham chum! You do not stand alone in your determination to back-up your favourite story-paper through thick and thin. Local messages are pouring in from all parts of the world; and the GEM Library is not, nor ever will be, in danger of being swept off the map by other and less attractive publications.

HAMPSHIRE AGAIN!

This is a great year for Hampshire. On June 17th, Joe Beckett, a native of that splendid shire, met and defeated Frank Goddard in the boxing-ring in a couple of rounds.

Shortly before this the Hampshire County Cricket Eleven, after sustaining a severe defeat at the hands of Middlesex, found themselves matched with one of the strongest sides in the country—Sussex, at famous Kennington Oval.

And what happened?
On the second day of the match people began to leave the ground, telling each other moodily that the match would end in a draw. And so it would have done but for two

great factors—the bowling of young Alec Kennedy and the fielding of that magnificent batsman, Brown.

Brown fielded in the position known as "silly mid-off"—a most dangerous position, almost a suicidal one. He defied the efforts of the batsmen to wipe him off the face of the earth; he dismissed Jack Hobbs and Abel with wonderful catches; and in the end Hampshire gained a well-deserved victory by six wickets.

The crowd at the Oval is always a sporting one; and the pucky Hampshire team received recognition at the finish by shouts of "Bravo, Hampshire!" "Jolly well played!" etc.

And so say all of us!

THE MAD DOG OF EUROPE.

To Mr. Hastings Draper I am indebted for a set of verses concerning the ex-Kaiser.

I would willingly have published these verses in the GEM Library but that I fear most of my readers are heartily sick of WILLIAM of Hohenzollern and all his works.

If Mr. Draper cares to submit to me verses dealing with a more palatable subject I shall be pleased to consider them.

H. A. H. (YOUR EDITOR.)

NOTICES.

Correspondence, etc., Wanted.

Miss Annie Lee, 53, Scarborough Road, Victoria Park, N.E.—My readers in England, H. Quartermain, 51, Crawford Street, St. Albans, Christchurch, New Zealand—with readers anywhere, to exchange Companion Papers and correspond.

Crickets.

Matches wanted by a Volunteers C.C.—17 years.—Secretary, E. Farnes, 3, Gladstone Road, Stamford Hill, N. 13.
Waxton Stray C.C.—13—3 miles.—Wm. Hill, 80, Weston Street, Sheffield.

Football.

St. GEORGE'S ATHLETIC.—Matches for next season, also players wanted by this club.—H. Pembroke, 15, Cobden Street, St. George's Road, Peckham, S.E. 15.

Book Numbers.

James White, 46, Black Lion Lane, Hammer-smith, W. 6, offers a hundred copies of the Companion Papers, set at 1d. each. "4d. Library," 2d.

H. H. Edge, 115, Tottenham Road, Southgate Road, London, N., has seventeen New Series "Penny Populars" to dispose of; would exchange for foreign stamps.

H. Huxley, Spring View, Ashton-under-Lyze, Lancs, offers two hundred back numbers of the Companion Papers. Also offers 2d. each for "Tom Merry's Peril" and "Bob Cherry's Barri Out."

E. Watson, 309, Ivydale Road, Nunbad, S.E. 15.—"Through Thick and Thin," 1s. 6d. offered; Nos. 2, 3, and 14 "Magnet," 1s. offered.

G. E. Le Mesurier, 114, Gower Street, St. John's Newfoundland—"Bob Cherry's Barri Out," "Drummed From the School," "Tom Merry for England," "Kildare for Ireland," and the two Christmas numbers, 1914; also "School and Sport," 2s. 6d. offered.

H. Makin, 12, Whibly Street, The Brook, Liverpool—back numbers of Companion Papers, 2d. each. Write first.

W. Smith, 43, St. Elba's Street, Beverley Road, Hull—Gems and "Magnets" before 1900; also double numbers before 1914; also—"Dreadnoughts" and "Greyfriars Herald." Double prices. Write first.

Miss Nina Allwood, Chelsea Street, Leichhardt, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia—with readers anywhere, 1s. 6d.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

(Continued from page 15.)

I am bold enough to assert that I have received more visitors at my sanctum than any living editor.

My carpet, once glossy and luxuriant, is now threadbare by the procession which constantly trode in and out of my room.

All sorts and conditions of people have trodden this carpet, from pork butchers to politicians. And the big easy-chair, which is for the convenience of callers—and not for the Editor to lie and doze in, by the way—could tell quite a history, too.

One of the first men who sat in that chair was Martin Clifford. He rather regretted having sat in it, too, for the office-boy had been experimenting in the vicinity with secotine and various other sticky substances! The most heart-breaking visitor I ever had was a stout-looking gentleman, who sent up his card just after I arrived at my sanctum one morning.

What the fellow wanted I have never to this day been able to decide. All I know is that he came in, took my hand in a grip which hurt painfully, and then settled down in the easy-chair without a word, watching me intently the whole time.

All the morning I was being closely scrutinised by the man as if I were some crepey, crawly sort of insect being surveyed through a microscope.

It was to have been a very busy day for me; but do you think I could work beneath that unceasing, critical stare? Not a bit of it! Every time I turned to my desk and tried to make a start, I imagined that my silent visitor would suddenly produce a dazzer, and proceed to bury it in my back!

Why didn't the fellow speak? I wondered. Was he tongue-tied, or was he a foreigner, ignorant of every syllable of our language? I was in a state of distraction by the time mobbyday arrived.

Leaping to my feet, I put on my hat and sallied forth to lurch, out of range of that shrivelling stare.

When I got back to the office the gimlet-eyed monitor was still there. He hadn't budged, so far as I knew, from his seat.

I could stand it no longer.

"Look here," I demanded, "what do you want?"

No reply.

"What brings you here?" I exclaimed, raising my voice.

Still no reply.

"Are you a contributor, a reader, or a moon-rack idiot?" I bellored.

Silence.

I gave it up in despair, and attempted once more to tackle my work.

But I could make no headway. I was conscious all the time of that penetrating gaze.

Presently I rang for the office-boy. My feelings by this time were almost homicidal.

"Help me chuck this fellow out!" I muttered.

The office-boy gave one glance at my stout-looking visitor, and shook his head.

"I'm not a champion weight-lifter!" he said, and withdrew before I had time to reprimand him.

What was to be done now?

I didn't feel equal to tackling the hefty-looking gentleman myself.

Although a bit of a boxer, I realised that a blowpoint of science or fingercuff could trans-

fer a fourteen-stone lump of humanity from the easy-chair into the passage outside.

My sub-editors might have helped me, but they were rather good-looking fellows, and I didn't want their faces to be disfigured for life. (The office-boy was an ugly-looking little beggar, so it wouldn't have mattered in his case.)

I might have summoned the police, but I did not wish to make a scene of that sort.

Besides, the gentleman in the easy-chair had committed no offence for which he could be made to answer in a court of law.

There was nothing for it, therefore, but to sit down and wait the stout person's pleasure.

The afternoon wore on.

The pen fell from my nerveless fingers.

If any of my chums have ever tried to concentrate their minds upon work under similar circumstances they will understand my wretched plight.

It was about five o'clock, and I was just beginning to think I should have to summon the police, after all, when my amazing visitor rose.

Lumbering towards me, he took my hand in the same tight grip he had given me on entry, and then, without a word, moved to the door.

His ponderous footsteps died away down the passage, and I have never seen the man since. My readers may select whatever construction they choose upon this curious incident.

The briefest interview I ever had was with a young Yankee, who burst into my sanctum one morning with the exclamation:

"Say, boss, you run these hyer papers?"

I nodded.

"Geel! I guess they're 'it'!"

And, slapping me heartily on the back, this man of few words retired.

On another occasion a very bombastic youngster rushed into my office like a whirlwind.

"Gherio, odd top!" he began.

I took no notice of this familiar greeting.

"All hail, odd pudding-face!"

I frowned.

"Who are you, and what do you mean by addressin' me in that manner?"

"Oh, come off the high horse," said my visitor, calmly dropping into the easy-chair.

"Are you the editor of the 'Magnet'?"

"Ah!"

"Gee! I should like to see the editor of the 'Gem' as well. Likewise the editor of the 'Boys' Friend.' The editor of 'Chuckles' and the 'Penny Pop' ought to be here, too! I've got something to say to 'em!"

"I am the editor of all the papers you mention," I said.

"What! You run all the lot?"

I nodded.

"Are you the covey who signs himself 'H. A. H. (Your Editor)'?"

I confessed I was.

"That's ripping! I've come up here to let off steam—"

"You've let off quite enough already," I remarked.

"Rats! I haven't planged into my subject yet. I want to give you a few useful hints on how to run the Companion Papers."

"Thank you," I said dryly.

(This extraordinary interview with my reader will be continued in next week's issue. Make sure of your copy by ordering now.)

Greyfriars Epitaphs. No. 11. By BOB CHERRY.

BENEATH THIS WEEPING-WILLOW, WITH COLD EARTH FOR HIS TILLER

1115

PAUL PONTIFEX PROUT.

One-time Master of Greyfriars School, who when chasing an imaginary burglar with his Winchester repeater, turned the weapon upon himself with fatal results.

ALAS, POOR PROUT:

We had it on his own authority that, during his exploits in the Rocky Mountains, he was an excellent shot; but since that time his hand must have lost much of its cunning.

During his spell at Greyfriars he was an active member of the

FRIARDALE SPECIAL CONSTABULARY,

and such was the zeal with which he performed his duties that he ran to earth all sorts and conditions of men, not passing to reflect whether they were innocent or guilty.

He was also the possessor of

A WEIRD AND WONDERFUL MOTOR-BIKE,

which skimmed the roads like a swallow, and caused unlimited casualties to chickens.

On one memorable occasion, when the kitchen staff went on strike, Mr. Prout volunteered to cook; and Greyfriars squirmed in agony for weeks afterwards as a result of his apple-dumplings; and when he made his first cake he was hailed as the inventor of the anti-Zepplin bullet.

On another occasion he captained a cricket-team, and his merry antics set the school in a roar.

Only one person ever rivalled Prout as a comedian, and that was his favourite pupil, Coler of the Fifth. In fact, if one wished to decide which was the bigger ass, it would be necessary to toss up for it. Anyway, they are both gone—Prout off the earth, and Coler off his rocker!

"Reader, this rude and ragged rhyme For ever will abide— A record of the only time Prout fired, and never missed!"

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