

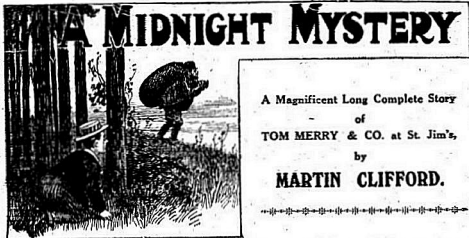


A MIDNIGHT MYSTERY!



TROUBLE FOR THE HOLIDAY TOUR PARTY!

(A Scramingly Funny Scene in the Splendid Long Complete School Tale in this Issue.) 28-7-19



A Magnificent Long Complete Story

of

TOM MERRY & CO. at St. Jim's,

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.

Late Hours!

"GEE HUP!"
 "Come on, old boss!"
 "Get on!"
 "Oh, the beast!"
 "Get a move on, you howl'd animal!"
 There were seven caravanners, and they were all talking at once. Their remarks were addressed to the horse.
 The horse did not seem to mind.
 He blinked sleepily at Tom Merry & Co., and stood firm. And the caravan stood still in the moonlight, with the long white road stretching before and behind it.

Circumstances—the horse—had had enough. Monty Lowther had named him. Circumstances, because he was circumstances over which the caravanners had no control.

"Whack him!" said Herries desperately.

"Fenwags he is tired!" suggested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"I know I am jolly tired!"

"Same here!" grunted Jack Blake.

"I shall want a new pair of legs to start in the morning. Gee-up, you boss! Come on, old boss! Nice old boss! Good old horse! Oh, you rotten species for a sarcocorn! Gee-up, old boss! Oh, you beast!"

"Whack him!"

"It would be wathak wuff to whack him, Herries, because he is fatigued."

"We can't camp here!" roared Herries.

Tom Merry looked round thoughtfully.

There was a park wall on one side of the road, and fields, bordered by a high hedge, on the other. The strip of grass by the roadside was too narrow for the caravanners to think of camping there. Not a light was to be seen anywhere. The hour was late.

Under the bright moonlight the chimes of St. Jim's had been tinkling on with the caravan a long, long way—looking for a suitable place to camp for the night. They had not found one yet. Caravanners had to take their chances, and nothing had turned up so far.

Now Circumstances had had enough. Ahead, the road rose steeply, and the horse was not inclined to negotiate the hill. So he stopped. Probably, with equine sagacity, he had discovered that

there was a general disinclination to "whack" him.

"We shall have to camp somewhere," said Manners. "After all, we can't keep on all night. That hill ahead looks a bit of a corker."

"My legs are aching, you know," remarked Digby.

"Yess, wathak!"

"We can't stick in the road," said Herries.

"There's a gate in the hedge further up," remarked Tom Merry. "I—I wonder whether we could turn into that field. It looks all right for camping, but—"

"It will be necessary to ask permission from the owner!" said Arthur Augustus.

"The owner's fast asleep by this time—it's nearly twelve."

"May be a row in the morning if we camp there," observed Monty Lowther.

"But, after all, we can stand a row after a night's rest!"

"Yess; that is a vewy sensible consideration. Fenwags we had better try the field."

"I'll look round and see the lie of the land," remarked Tom Merry. "Keep an eye on the gee. He might wander."

"Hs, hs, ha!"

Circumstances was not likely to wander. Tom Merry's remark was of the sarcasm-humorous variety.

Leaving the caravanners and the caravan in the road, Tom Merry ran along as far as the gate in the hedge, and looked over.

Beyond the gate was a grassy field, and beyond that a clump of trees, which shut off the view.

Whether there were buildings at hand he could not tell. The spot looked very lonely. At the end of the field was a plantation, dark and silent, with a little brook wandering away among the trees, glimmering here and there as a ray of moonlight filtered through the branches.

"Just the place!" murmured Tom Merry.

He tried the gate; it was on the latch. A wide gate, evidently used for letting cattle in and out. The field was pasture, but it was unoccupied at the present time. Surely there could be no harm in tired caravanners camping there for the night—ready to offer payment in the morning for the accommodation. Asking permission of the owner was the right and

proper preliminary; but it was quite certain that the owner would not care to be awakened at midnight for permission to be asked, even if the caravanners could find his house. Tom Merry resolved to chance it.

He returned to the red caravan.

"All across," he said. "We'll risk it. We'll offer them five bob in the morning."

"Is there a house?" asked Blake.

"Might be one behind the beeches yonder, but I can't see it. There's a plantation at the other end, and nothing there. Come on!"

"Will the least come on!"

"Gee-up!"

"Open the yato, dear boys, and perhaps you will understand that he is going to have a west!" suggested Arthur Augustus brilliantly.

Tom Merry went back to the gate and along it open. It was within sight of the horse, who could also hear the creak of timber. Perhaps Circumstances understood, as Gussy suggested; at all events, he moved on of his own accord, and the caravan rumbled on the road.

Circumstances turned in at the gate, without need of guidance, and the red caravan passed through. Tom Merry closed the gate behind it.

"Bai Jove! This looks all right!" remarked Arthur Augustus, glancing round the moonlit field. "Plenty of grass for the gee, too. And there's a brook. We shall want wathak. The keg is empty."

The caravan jolted over rough ground.

Tom Merry led the horse on, inside the hedge, and stopped it close by the dark, towering firs. The shadow of the trees fell upon it, and almost concealed it from chance view—which was an advantage.

It would have been too painful to be ordered off, if anyone had spotted the caravan from a window and taken the trouble to come out. Blake cut across the field to the beeches, and returned with the information that there was a house with gardens on the other side of the row of trees. The windows were all dark, and the occupants evidently asleep.

"Let 'em sleep," said Lowther. "We won't disturb them at this time of night with requests for permission to camp. They might say no."

"Besides, we don't know that this field belongs to that house," said Manners.

"And it doesn't matter, anyhow—I'm sleepy!" grunted Herries.

"Whenever it would be more polite to wake them up and ask permission—"

"Fathful!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"We needn't trouble about the tent," said Tom Merry. "It's fine enough to sleep out without that, with the waterproofs and blankets."

"It had about supper, dear boys?"

"There's some sandwiches left. We'll eat 'em lightly, and take 'em out at breakie," said Tom, laughing.

"Yess, wathah! This is a good place."

The careworn were chiefly anxious to get to sleep. It was Arthur Augustus' turn to look after the horse, and Gussy released the animal from the van, and tethered it with a long rope, to give plenty of room for grazing. Blake and Herries and Dig turned in, in the bunks in the van. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther brought waterproofs and blankets into the thick grass. Six juniors were sleeping peacefully, after washing dry sandwiches, by the time Arthur Augustus had finished with the horse.

CHAPTER 2.

Bunkies and Blankies!

"**B**AL JESS! I am faithfully sleeping!" answered Arthur Augustus, as he came back to the caravan.

"You fellows asleep?" he asked, looking down at Tom Merry & Co.

The Terrible Three of the Shell at St. Jim's were sleeping the sleep of the just. Only steady breathing answered Gussy's query.

"Tom Merry, dear boy—"

No answer.

Arthur Augustus stooped and shook the captain of the Shell by the shoulder. Tom's eyes opened drowsily.

"Wharver matter?"

"I am awery to wake you up, Tom Merry—"

"Gorraw!"

"I am weally sorry, as I know you are fatigued, dear boy, and it is wathah wathah to be wike out of the first sleep. Huh—"

"Gorraw!"

"But I want to know wethah there are any sandwiches left—"

"Blurrup!"

"I am wathah hungry, you know! Yooop!"

Tom Merry introduced his foot into the discussion at that point, and the swell of St. Jim's jumped and howled.

"Yowah! You wathah wathah—"

"Now, let a chap go to sleep, you cease aw!" said Tom Merry, in a self-phrased tone.

"I wethah to be called a cease aw, Tom Merry?"

"Sure!"

"I-I wethah some supper, you know—"

"Sure!"

"I wethah you as an infernal' brate, Tom Merry. Lowthah, dear boy, are you quite asleep? P'raxy wake up, old chapp!"

Lowther's eyes opened as he was shaken. He did not speak. He lit out, and Arthur Augustus sat down suddenly on the grass.

"Oh awkey! What did you punch me for, Lowthah, you aw?"

"You wake me up again," said Mandy Lowther, in concentrated tones, "and I'll get up and take a tump-peg to you!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Sure!"

Arthur Augustus picked himself up. He gazed at Lowther, meditating whether to hurt himself on the Shell fellow, and take a summary vengeance. Fortunately, he decided not. And he also decided not to wake Manners. He sat him about the campfire, and in a moment of the blindest idea of looking for them himself, and found them, and ate them.

"Now I had better turn in," he murmured. "It is wathah a nice night for a sleepin' bag. These few bunkies might weally have checked it out for me. However, I can get it."

Arthur Augustus looked into the van for his sleeping-bag. It was a very cozy sleeping-bag, sheepskin inside, and waterproof without. Sleeping in a bag with an air-pillow, was grateful and comforting on a summer's night. It had not occurred to Arthur Augustus to get it out before his comrades turned into the bunks, which was unfortunate.

It was very dark inside the caravan as Arthur Augustus groped for the rolled-up bag, not quite remembering where it was. The first thing his hand came into contact with was a human nose, and what followed was a very human yell.

"Yow! What's that?"

"Bal Jess! Howrah—"

"What are you chumping my nose for while I'm asleep?" howled Herries.

"I was not tumpin' your nose, Herries—"

"You sally aw, playing fool jokes when a fellow's tired out and sleepy. Huh—"

"Weally, Herries—"

A foot came out of the bunk in the darkness, and it caught Arthur Augustus under the chin. He sat down in the caravan with a bump that shook the vehicle.

"Yawwoop!"

"What the Gander's that for?" came Blake's sleepy voice from the top bunk. "That idiot Gussy playing practical jokes—"

"Gorraw! I was not—"

"I'll take him!" came Blake's voice, as he leaned down from the bunk, pillow in hand.

As Arthur Augustus was scrambling up as the pillow swept, and it caught him full upon his noble nose.

There was another crash as the swell of St. Jim's rolled over, roaring.

"Jump down on him!" gasped Herries.

"Wait a minute! I've got a golf club here!"

Arthur Augustus decided not to wait for the golf-club. He scrambled out of the caravan.

"You wathah wathah!" he gasped.

"Clear off you noisy hoodlum!"

"I wethah my sleepin' bag—"

"Clear off!"

"My sleepin' bag is in Guss's some-what—"

"Why didn't you get it out before we turned in?" demanded Dig.

"Bal Jess! I wathah thought of it, you know!"

"You can think of it till morning, then," said Jack Blake. "You put your nose in the van again and you get the golf club!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Blurrup!"

"I wethah to jrat! I cossidah—"

What!

A boot missed Gussy's head in the doorway of the van by an inch. The swell of St. Jim's jumped back.

"Bal Jess! What wathah there that look!" he gasped.

"Do you want the other?" howled Herries.

"I wethah to have the other, Herries! I insist—"

What!

"Oh awkey!"

The second boot dropped on Arthur Augustus' head, and there was a yell. Arthur Augustus was wrothy now. He shuffled up both boots, and buried them back into the caravan. There was a sudden and terrific crash of crockery. Apparently the table had landed in the wrong part of the caravan.

"Great Scott!"

"The sally aw! Go out for him—"

"It is all your fault, you wathah duffah! I insist—"

A golf-club, with an infernal face behind it, appeared in the doorway, and Arthur Augustus did not stop to finish his remarks. He retired hastily.

"Come back, you sally!" roared Blake, brandishing the club over the steps of the caravan. "Come back and be wathah, you cease aw!"

What!

Arthur Augustus made that reply from a safe distance. He gave up all thought of the sleeping-bag for that night. Venturing into the caravan again was a good deal like venturing into a lion's den, and Arthur Augustus considered it judicious not to try his luck as a Daniel.

He returned to the Terrible Three, who were sleeping peacefully, too tired to be disturbed by the clamor in the van. He nudged Tom Merry gently.

"Tom Merry, dear boy—"

"Gorraw!"

"Can you spare me some blanket, dear?"

What!

Awakened out of his sleep a second time, the captain of the Shell did not even listen, and he did not take the trouble to speak. He punched.

"Yawwoop!"

Arthur Augustus jumped back.

"Tom Merry, you wathah wathah—"

"Oh, you sally aw!" howled Tom Merry. "If I get up to you I'll stop you into little bits! I'll—"

"I was about to request—"

"Will you go away and be quiet, you baddish wagger!"

"I wethah to be characterized as a baddish wagger, Tom Merry! I was awery about to request—"

"Will you let a chap sleep!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"But I enquire—"

"Quiet, you yelling chump!" roared Manners, waking up.

"Weally, Manners—"

"Will you shut up!" breathed Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Swash him!" howled Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three rose as one man, with their pillows in their hands. There was a frontal attack upon the unfortunate swell of the Fourth, and he was driven off under a shower of stripes.

It was useless to attempt to explain; these sleepy and infuriated careworners were not in a mood for explanations. They swiped till the swell of St. Jim's fairly fled.

Then they returned to their blankets, feeling somewhat agitated.

In a couple of minutes they were fast asleep again.

But Arthur Augustus was not asleep. He was rubbing his head and his shoulders, and gasping for breath, and shivering.

"Bal Jess! The faithful wathah! Bal Jess! I weally think that a fellow's manners deteriorate when he goes awery!" he growled.

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CHAPTER 3.

A Midnight Mystery I

"WOTTEN!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy murmured that word disconsolately.

He found it difficult to sleep. The Terrible Three slept like tops in their blankets and rugs in the grass. Blake & Co. slept like tops in the caravan. But Arthur Augustus, bunkless and blanketless, only dozed off occasionally.

The swell of St. Jim's had found a soft spot on the edge of the fir plantation near the purling stream. It was a grassy slope, and quite comfortable, and the murmur of the stream had a lulling effect. But, warm as the night was, it was not warm enough to sleep without coverings. Arthur Augustus woke to the consciousness that his feet were cold.

And he pronounced that it was rotten. Having attempted to doze off again in vain, Arthur Augustus sat up in the grass and yawned.

The moon was high over the fir plantation, and a dim light filtered down among the trees with a rather ghostly effect. D'Arcy was at a little distance from the caravan camp, and he felt a little lonely. He was debating in his mind whether to make another raid on the van for his sleeping-bag, when a sound caught his ear from the fir plantation behind him.

He started a little, and glanced round into the trees.

There was undergrowth among the firs, and he could not see far. But he could hear.

From the direction of the murmuring stream, farther along in the plantation, came a steady sound, which Arthur Augustus could not mistake, though it amazed him to hear it at that hour of the night.

It was the thudding of a delving spade.

As it was past one o'clock in the morning, it was astounding enough to hear a spade at work. The earliest of early agricultural risers could scarcely have started work at one in the morning, and the latest of workers would hardly have kept it up so late. Besides, the plantation had been still and silent when D'Arcy dozed off. Whoever was digging had started while the swell of St. Jim's was in his doze.

In utter astonishment Arthur Augustus sat and listened to the delving of the spade.

It was not more than ten yards from where he sat, though the intervening trees and bushes hid the delver from his sight.

The spade thudded and clumped in earth and rang on stones, and it was accompanied by the sound of tossing spadefuls of earth.

Whoever was digging was working hard and fast.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, utterly mystified. "This weally beats Banagher, as Mulvaney minah puts it. That chap must be vewy indutwious to be workin' away like that all night. Bai Jove! It weally looks as if it might be some awful murdewah burryin' the body."

As that thought Arthur Augustus shivered.

It did not seem improbable in the loneliness of the fir wood.

For certainly the digging could not be done for any ordinary reason. If a man dug there at one in the morning it could only be because he did not want his occupation observed by others. Moreover, there was nothing to dig for in such

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a spot. There was no cultivation there. Evidently what was going on was surreptitious in the extreme.

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet.

The mystery was a strange one, and he intended to see what was going on behind the trees.

He pushed his way cautiously through the fir wood.

The sound of the active spade was a sufficient guide.

The glimmer of the stream in the moonlight came to his eyes through the thicket, and he paused.

He was close to the mysterious delver now, and he could see him.

Within a yard or two of the water's edge, where the ground had doubtless been softened by the water in flood-time, a burly man was bending over a spade.

Arthur Augustus could only see his back, which was broad.

The burly man was knee-deep in the excavation he had already made, and he was making it deeper. Beside the hole was a mound of earth piled up.

Arthur Augustus looked on through the thicket.

Strange as the man's proceedings were, it was his own business, after all, unless some evidence was forthcoming of a criminal act. And, so far as Arthur Augustus could see, the burly man was digging—merely that and nothing more.

While Arthur Augustus stood in dumb amazement, the man was digging away with activity, almost with fury, as if in a desperate hurry to get through with his task.

A panting exclamation reached Arthur Augustus' ear at last.

"Hang it! That will do!"

The spade was thrown down, and the burly man stepped from the hole, breathing hard.

His face was partly turned towards Arthur Augustus now, but in the thick shadow of the trees the St. Jim's junior could not discern his features. He caught a glimpse of a beard, and that was all.

The man stood for a moment or two, breathing stertorously, and Arthur Augustus sagely concluded that he had reached an age when hard and rapid digging told upon him.

The man moved suddenly, striding away through the firs at a great rate in the direction of the row of beeches along the side of the field where the caravanners were camped.

In a moment or two he vanished from D'Arcy's eyes, and the rustling he made died away into silence.

Arthur Augustus stood rooted to the spot with amazement.

He stirred at last, and advanced cautiously to the spot where the man had been delving.

There was a hole several feet long in the earth of unequal depth, but at the deepest place it was a good four feet.

The swell of St. Jim's jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and stared blankly into the excavation.

Evidently the man had buried nothing there. The hole was left open, with the spade lying beside it.

"My only hat!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "What evah can it mean? Is he some howid lunatic, or some cwan takin' exchaise at this vewy odd time?"

Explanation there seemed none, and Arthur Augustus wondered whether the bearded man would return. It seemed incredible that he should have laboured at the excavation in that lonely spot for nothing. If the hole was intended for any purpose it could only be to bury something; that was clear. What was it the unknown intended to bury there?

Arthur Augustus thought of a body again, and shuddered. He stepped back quickly into the shelter of the thickets. If the man was a dangerous criminal, it was not judicious to be discovered there by him within reach of his spade!

But the affair was too strange and too suspicious for Arthur Augustus to think of letting it rest there. It was his duty to know what the unknown was surreptitiously interring in the fir plantation at dead of night. It was not likely to be anything that the man could explain easily.

Arthur Augustus waited.

He was feeling sure now that the burly man intended to return, and he soon discovered that he was right.

There was a sound of heavy tramping in the firs, and the burly figure came in sight again, bending under a weight.

There was a large sack on his shoulder, bulging with something! Arthur Augustus' eyes were riveted on that sack.

Certainly it did not look as if it contained a human body. It was not more than four feet long, and it was crammed full, and the top tied. What it contained was a deep mystery; but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thought that he could guess.

"Loot!" he murmured.

D'Arcy had decided now. The man he was watching was a crackman concealing his plunder. That really seemed the only possible explanation under the mysterious circumstances.

And the swell of St. Jim's grinned in the shadows.

The crackman, if crackman he was, could bury his loot, with a watchful eye upon him. The loot would be disintegrated later. Arthur Augustus, like Beer Fox, laid low and said nothing.

The burly man tumbled the sack into the excavation, without opening it. Evidently the sack was to be buried with its contents. There was a sound of heavy tramping as the man stamped the sack down as low as possible in the pit. That staggered the swell of St. Jim's a little. If it was loot in the sack, this was rather a rough way of handling it. The man jumped out of the hole, and started shovelling in the earth.

Arthur Augustus watched him in silence.

He could not make out the man's features in the shadows, but once or twice he caught a glistening of perspiration there.

The man was evidently fatigued with his work. He was slowing down, but he still stuck doggedly to his task.

The last shovelful of earth was bundled in at last, and stamped down. Then the unknown leaned against the tree for some minutes, resting after his long labour.

But his task was not finished yet.

After having rested, he proceeded to dispose of the turf over the covered pit with great care.

Arthur Augustus understood. The rascal-Gusny had made up his mind that the man was a rascal—was covering up his tracks. He wanted to conceal from chance observation the fact that anyone had been digging in the fir wood at all.

He was so long occupied in replacing the turf, and arranging it with sedulous care, that Arthur Augustus nearly nodded off in the thicket while he was thus engaged.

He came to with a start, as the man picked up his spade, and, after a last glance round, quitted the spot.

Arthur Augustus watched him go.

With the spade over his shoulder, the burly man disappeared in the direction of the beeches across the field.



The man sprang back from the pit, as D'Arvy, gaff-stick in hand, rushed at him. The juniors recognized the tall, harsh features of Gubb. "Coffin him, dash boys!" shouted D'Arvy. (See Chapter 15.)

The last sound of his footsteps died away, and Arthur Augustus D'Arvy rubbed his eyes.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "It wally eems like a vewy extraordinary discomf'it! Bai Jove! I'm awf'ly sleepy!"

The man was evidently gone for good this time. Whatever was the meaning of the strange happening of that night, it was over now. Divided between thoughtfulness and drowsiness, Arthur Augustus took his way back towards the caravan camp.

He settled down in the grass under the fir, leaning against a trunk, and nodded off. This time the want of coverings did not disturb him—he was too sleepy for that; and the smell of St. Jim's was still deep in slumber when the caravan camp turned out in the sunny morning.

CHAPTER 4.

Not a Success!

"HAI! JO! Where's Gussy?"

"Gussy!"

"Gustavus!"

Tom Merry & Co. had turned out cheerily, in the early sunlight of the summer morning.

Early carts were rumbling along the road that bordered the field on one side behind the high hedge. But in the field and the fir wood, no one was to be seen save the caravanners. But beyond the beech trees across the field the juniors

could now see red chimney-pots in the daylight. They belonged to the house Bisko had observed, and to which, as the juniors guessed, the field and the fir plantation belonged.

"Where on earth's Gussy?" asked Tom Merry, looking round. "Has he wandered away? He really ought to be hobbled like the horse!"

"He was hitching up a shiny last night," said Blake. "Waking us up in the van for some reason. We lifted him."

"He woke us up, too," said Manners. "Where the dickens is he?"

D'Arvy was not in the caravan camp; but they soon found him on the border of the fir wood, leaning against a tree in a sitting posture, fast asleep.

Jack Blake stirred him gently with his boot, and Arthur Augustus awoke gaspingly.

"Ow!"

"Wake up, old infant," said Blake.

"Are you going to sleep all day?"

D'Arvy blinked at him.

"I have only just nodded off, Blake."

"What! It's seven in the morning!"

"Bai Jove! Is it? Howd'voh, I have had vewy little sleep, owing to your unfeeling brutality last night," said Arthur Augustus severely.

Blake grinned.

"Every time you wake a tired chap up with your red Gussy, you'll get lifted, he said. "You'll learn in time."

"Wally, Blake—"

"What did you do it for?" demanded Herris.

"You nitsh as, I wanted my sleepin' bag!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Couldn't you get it before we turned in?" asked Dirty.

"Bai Jove! I never thought of that!"

"You'll think of it next time," chuckled Blake. "Now roll up, Gussy—we're going for a swim before breakfast. There's quite deep water in this brook, and we can spread ourselves for once and get a real wash."

"That's a good idea, dash boy!" said Arthur Augustus, the cloud vanishing from his brow at once.

The chief drawback to a caravan, in Gussy's opinion, was the lack of a bath-room.

He joined the juniors cheerily as they started for the brook, towel on arm, after igniting the Primus and putting the kettle on it.

For the moment Arthur Augustus had forgotten his strange adventure of the previous night; but it came back into his mind as the juniors went to bathe.

"I suppose we ought to go up to the house this morning, and ask permission to camp here," Tom Merry remarked.

"Altho' our bath, then," said Blake.

"We had better get permission before we start cooking breakfast; might be interrupted if some meany Johnny

interrupted it some meany Johnny

interrupted it some meany Johnny

interrupted it some meany Johnny

interrupted it some meany Johnny

interrupted it some meany Johnny

comes down and wants to know what we're doing here."

"Gussy can go and ask permission for us," remarked Lowther. "As the owner of the only silk topper in the party, he is the man for ambassador."

"Yess, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "Yaw-aw-aw!"

"What are you yawning about?"

"I have had very little sleep, Blake. I was goin' to tell you fellows about a very strange thing that happened last night."

"Eht! Nothing happened, did it?" asked Manners.

"Yess, wathah! Pway lend me your cabs, deah boys. It is wathah important."

"My hal!"

The juniors regarded Arthur Augustus curiously.

The night had been uneventful enough for them, as they had slept soundly all through it.

Astonishment dawned in their faces as Arthur Augustus related his experiences.

Monty Lowther closed one eye when he had finished.

"It was wathah remarkable, deah boys, wasn't it!" Arthur Augustus wound up.

"Very!" murmured Blake.

"Awfully!" murmured Manners.

"Antounding in fact," said Tom Merry, laughing. "What did you have for your supper, Gussy?"

"Weahly, Tom Merry. I fail to see what my supper had to do with it!"

"Lots, old chap! It must have been your supper, and something jolly indigestible, to give you nightmares like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus started.

"Bai Jovo! If you think I dreamed it—"

"Well, didn't you?"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I was as wide awake as I am now!"

"Are you subject to these?" asked Lowther.

"These what, Lowthah?"

"Delusions, old chap!"

"You uttah ast!"

"My dear old infant," said Blake soothingly, "you see, you must have dreamed it, because it can't possibly have happened. You see that?"

"I fail to see anything of the kind, Blake! I certainly saw it happen. I admit I was very surprised!"

"Well, let's get into the water!" said Dig.

"Pway stop a minute, Dig! This is wathah a serious matter, and we ought to decide what is to be done about it."

Tom Merry & Co. grinned. Arthur Augustus' story was so very remarkable that they could hardly be blamed for supposing that he had dreamed the whole occurrence.

"Nothin's to be done—except you'd better have lighter suppers," said Herries.

"Weahly, Hewies—"

"You see, it never really happened!" explained Manners.

"I regard you as a set of uttah asses!" exclaimed D'Arcy warmly. "I tell you I was as wide awake as anything, and I distinctly saw the man bury the sack of something."

"Was it a body?" grinned Lowther.

"It may have been a body, Lowthah. If it was, it must have been doubled up in the sack, however."

"Perhaps a merry burglar burying his loot," chuckled Dig.

"Yess, I considah that vevy probable."

"This is such a probable spot for a burglar to bury his loot!" howled Monty Lowther.

"Miles from everywhere. And burglars usually carry round spades for burying loot in the plantations—I don't think!"

"Powwaps it wasn't a burglah, Lowthah."

"No perhaps about it, old chap—it wasn't! It was a merry ghost," said Monty Lowther.

"It was not a ghost, you ass! As you appear to doubt the wealth of the occurrence—"

"Ha, ha! Just a few."

"I will show you the spot where the mysterious person buried the sack."

"Well, seeing is believing," remarked Tom Merry. "Show us the place, old son, and we'll dig up the merry loot, and believe in it."

"Follow me!" said Arthur Augustus loudly.

"We're after you! Go it!"

"Lead on, Macduff!" chuckled Blake. Arthur Augustus led on.

But after a few paces he slowed down, and looked round him in some perplexity.

He had taken it for granted that he would be able to find the spot easily enough. But it did not seem so easy now.

The grassy bank of the brook stretched for a good distance among the fir-trees, and it was rough and uneven the whole way. Exactly where he had watched the mysterious deliver at work—the swell of St. Jim's did not know. He knew it was close by the brook, but that was all he knew.

Up and down the bank he went, with six grinning followers. The Co. had not the slightest doubt that Gussy had dreamed the whole affair, and they did not expect him to find the spot. And they were right—he didn't! He paused at last with a frowning brow.

"As I mentioned, the man caved up the place with turf," he said slowly.

"He must have wemored the turf vevy carefully, you know, so as to replace it aifawards and conceal the spot. He has certainly done it vevy well. I cannot trace it aifah all."

"Hr, ha, ha!"

"I should be vevy glad to know what you fellows are cacklin' at!" said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

"I'll tell you what," said Lowther.

"Go to sleep and dream it again, old fellow; and then you may be able to find the spot. While you're doing it, we'll have our swim."

"Weahly, you ass—"

"Hr, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. proceeded to bathe, leaving Arthur Augustus ruminating on the bank. After some rumination the swell of St. Jim's followed his chums into the water. There was no finding the place where the mysterious man had buried the sack, and Arthur Augustus had to give it up—for the present at least.

CHAPTER 5.

Gussy's Duty.

TOM MERRY & CO. tumbled themselves down in great spirits under the firs, and then returned to the camp for brekker. The kettle was singing away cheerily, and Blake cut rashers and spread them in the frying-pan. While the rashers hissed and sizzled on the oil-stove, Lowther boiled eggs on the spirit-stove. The other fellows were busy, excepting Arthur Augustus. Gussy was feeling the lack of sleep overnight; and he announced that he would take a nap while the other fellows got brekker.

And he climbed into the caravan and napped.

Tom Merry glanced several times towards the row of beeches that hid the red-brick house from view. He decided to pay a call there while breakfast was cooking. It was nearly eight o'clock now, and it was pretty certain that the occupants of the house were astir by that time. Leaving his comrades busy, the captain of the Shell started for the house.

It was only civil to ask permission for camping; and, moreover, it might prevent the caravanners from being ordered off in the middle of breakfast. It was necessary to respect the rights of private property.

Tom passed through the beeches, and found a fence, with a gate leading into a garden. A red-brick house stood beyond, with a green veranda in the front. The main entrance was towards the road, where there was a drive up to the house. Tom Merry crossed the garden by a path into the drive, and approached the house.

The building was not a country mansion. It was what an estate agent would describe as a "commodious and desirable residence." It was not large, but there was an air of pretentiousness about it. Some of the windows were open, showing that the occupants were astir; and Tom caught a glimpse of a housemaid with a broom.

He knocked at the door, and waited.

The housemaid, minus the broom, opened the door, and looked at the St. Jim's junior inquiringly.

"Can I see the master of the house, please?" asked Tom Merry, raising his straw hat politely.

"Mr. Grubb isn't down yet, sir."

"Oh!" said Tom, a little taken aback. "Perhaps I can see—ahem!—somebody. We're caravanning, and we want to ask permission to have breakfast in the field yonder."

The maid looked doubtful.

"Mr. Grubb doesn't like gipsies about," she said.

Tom smiled.

"But we're not gipsies," he said. "We're schoolboys caravanning in the vacation. We shall do no harm, and we should be quite willing to pay for the use of the field. Is there someone we could ask?"

"I will call the housekeeper. Mrs. Wibbs may know."

"Thank you!"

The maid did not ask Tom to enter, and he waited on the step. In a few minutes a somewhat thin and angular lady of uncertain age, with a sharp eye and sharp nose, appeared on the scene. Up went Tom's straw hat again. Mrs. Wibbs eyed him sharply.

"Caravanning?" she said.

"Yes, madam. Would there be any objection to our camping in the field for an hour or so?"

"Mr. Grubb would not like it."

"Ahem!"

"You'd better go on your way."

"Ahem! The fact is, we—ahem!—arrived rather late last night, and we took the liberty of camping," murmured Tom Merry. "We should have asked permission, but did not like to disturb anybody."

"Impudence!" said Mrs. Wibbs.

"Oh!"

"You'd better go about your business!"

"Ah!"

"Mr. Grubb will be angry when he comes down!"

"Ahem! But—"

"I advise you," said Mrs. Wibbs unpleasantly, "to get about your business at once. That's my advice to you!"

"Ahem! Hg—"

Slam!

Tom Merry's persuasive eloquence was suddenly cut short, and he had to jump back to save his nose as the door closed.

"Oh, my hat!" he ejaculated.

Feeling considerably discomfited, he took his way back to the caravan camp. Breakfast was nearly ready, and Arthur Augustus was still snoring in the van.

"Well, what lack!" asked Blake.

Tom made a grimace.

"Not much," he answered. "We're served off."

"Oh, rotten!"

"The man of the house is a Mr. Grubb—"

"Well, a man with a name like that ought to sympathise with chaps who want their brekker!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"The staff appears to consist of a housekeeper and a housemaid. The housemaid is all right—"

"Thomas!"

"Ass!" said Tom. "The housemaid seems to be a nice country girl, but the housekeeper is a corker. She looks something like old Ratty at St. Jim's."

"Oh dear!"

"The Grubb-bird is still in his little nest, but Mrs. Wibbs says we're to clear. Grubby will be ratty when he comes down, it seems. Now, the question is, whether we're to regard this as official. The Grubb-man may be the soul of hospitality, for all we know, and the Wibbs-bird may be mistaken. Instead of being angry at finding us here, Grubby may be delighted—ahem!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On the whole, as we're hungry, and breakfast is ready, I think we'd better give Grubb the benefit of the doubt. We'll hope that he'll be glad to see us."

"Better hope that he won't come down till we're gone!" grinned Lowther.

"Well, he mayn't; he seems to be rather a slacker, sticking in bed after eight in the morning. He may stick there till ten, and we shall be over the hills and far away by that time. Let's have brekker now, anyhow, and chance it."

"The words of the Great Chief are words of wisdom!" said Monty Lowther.

"Let's!"

And they did.

Arthur Augustus came out of the caravan rubbing his eyes, and joined his comrades at breakfast.

He shook his head over his rashers and eggs, however, when he had heard the result of Tom Merry's interview at the Grubb mansion.

"It is wathah iwewegulah to camp in a man's grounds without permiah," he said. "The housekeepah probably has authority to ordah us off."

"Quite so! Pass the salt, Gussy!"

Well, Tom Merry—

"We'll think it over," said Tom cheerily, "and we'll have brekker while we think it over. Show the eggs this way, Dig. I'm hungry."

"It would be wathah wotter for some angry person to come wushin' in while we are at brekkah."

"Yes, rather! Get on with it, in case he does!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fortunately, Mr. Grubb did not appear for breakfast. Doubtless he was still sleeping in bed. After breakfast the juniors started on the washing-up, but Arthur Augustus did not join in. He went into the caravan, and came out in his spotted Etons, with a silk hat on his noble head. That handsome topper had not had the best usage during its tour. Blake had kept potatoes in it once, and it had also been used as a dustpan. But Arthur Augustus had rectified it, and by dint of industrious brushing and polishing, had restored it to something like its pristine glory.

As the picture of elegance stopped down from the van there was a general stare from the caravanners.

"What's this game?" demanded Blake. "You're not thinking of giving a Punch and Judy show, I suppose?"

"You uttah an!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I have drowessed myself respectably to call on Mr. Grubb."

"No need to call on him now, as we're getting ready for the road," said Tom Merry. "It's too late for you to give the merry housekeeper the glad eye, Gussy. You shouldn't have been snoozing—"

"If you mean to imply, Tom Merry, that I am capable of givin' a lady of wive years the glad eye—"

"Well, what's the game, then?" asked Lowther. "If you're thinking of the housemaid, there's no time for it. We're starting."

"I regard you as a wibald wuffian, Lowthah! I am goin' to call on Mr. Grubb."

"What for?"

"For two reasons. It is necessary to apologise for havin' used his grounds without permission. That is only civil. And it is my duty to acquaint him with what happened in his fir plantation last night."

"Nothing happened there, excepting that a silly ass went to sleep and dreamed he was at a cinema."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglasses into his eye, and started. The chums of St. Jim's stared after him.

"Gussy!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Well!"

"You're not going to spin that yarn to Grubb—"

"I regard it as my duty, Tom Merry, to inform Mr. Grubb of the vewy strange happenin's heah last night. He has a right to know that some unknown person was spakin' furze with his grounds."

"Yes, if it really happened, you ass."

"It did happen, you chump!"

"Rats!"

"I regard you as an ass, Tom Merry!"

And with that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy marched off, and refused to heed the howls of remonstrance that followed him.

CHAPTER 6.

A Stormy Interview!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY knocked at the big brass knocker and waited. The door was opened by the housemaid, whose

round face was quite pleasant as her eyes rested on Arthur Augustus. The well of St. Jim's was really a thing of beauty and a joy for ever just then, and he certainly did credit to any caravaning party.

"Can I see Mr. Grubb, please?" inquired Arthur Augustus.

"Mr. Grubb is at breakfast, sir. I could take in your name."

"My name is D'Arcy, but Mr. Grubb probably does not know it. Will you have the kindness to mention that I wish to see him upon a vewy important mattah?"

"Very well, sir. Please step in."

Arthur Augustus stepped in.

The elegant junior certainly did not look as if he had emerged from a caravan, and probably the maid did not connect him in her mind with Tom Merry's earlier visit.

She returned in a couple of minutes.

"Please step this way, sir!"

Arthur Augustus was shown into a room looking on the green veranda, where a portly gentleman sat at breakfast.

He was not a handsome gentleman.

His face was hard and lined, his jaw very square, and he had little sharp eyes that glittered under thick brows. His square jaw was adorned by a grizzly grey beard.

He did not rise as the swell of St. Jim's entered, but gave him a sharp look from under his thick brows.

"Mr. Grubb?" inquired Arthur Augustus politely.

"Yes." The portly gentleman's voice was sharp and snappah. "What do you want?"

"I belong to a party of caravaners, sir—"

"What?"

"We camped in your field last night, and—"

"What—what?"

The portly gentleman jumped up. Apparently Mrs. Wibbs had not mentioned the caravaners to him yet.

"Caravanners!" he jerked out. "Yass, sir—"

"You camped in my field?"

"Yass—"

"You impertinent young rascal!"

"Bai, Jove!"

"You have been in my field all night?"

"Yass, naturally, as we camped there."

"Oh!"

The portly gentleman sank into his chair again. He looked angry, but more startled than angry, and Arthur Augustus could not help wondering a little.

"I am vewy sowwy, sir, that we entahed your grounds without akin' permiah," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"As we were so late we did not care to disturb the wewose of your household, sir. I need hardly say that we have done no harm to your grounds. As the field is apparently used for pasturage, it could not be hurt by our campin' in it."

"You—you—you camped in the field!" said the portly gentleman, in a faint voice.

"You have been there all night!"

"Since midnight, certainly."

"In—in what part of the field?"

"Close by the fir plantation, Mr. Grubb."

"Good heavens!"

The portly gentleman sat and blinked at Arthur Augustus. The news seemed to be quite a shock to him.

"Did you—did you—did you sleep soundly?" he ejaculated, at last.

Arthur Augustus had not expected that polite inquiry, after Mr. Grubb's inhospitable manner. He smiled genially.

"Thank you for inquiry, Mr. Grubb. The other fellows appear to have slept like tops, but I did not have much sleep. I trust, sir, that you will excuse us for using your field."

Mr. Grubb stared at D'Arcy. His fat lips opened several times as if to put a question, but they closed again.

"You—you—you were not disturbed at all during the night?" he articulated at length.

"As a mattah of fact, I was, sir; and that brings me to the mattah I have to acquaint you with. A vewy curious thing happened aftah midnight in the fir plantation, sir. As you are the ownah of this property, I regard it as my duty to acquaint you with it."

Mr. Grubb did not speak; he seemed to find some difficulty in breathing. His penetrating eyes were fastened upon Arthur Augustus with an almost embarrassing intensity.

"Pway do not let me intewupwack your

breakfast, sir," said Arthur Augustus considerably. "Your wathahs will be gettin' cold."

Mr. Grubb seemed to have forgotten his rathors.

"Go on!" he gasped. "You—you say that—that something happened in—in the fir-wood?"

"Yess, sir."
"Wha—what was it?"
"A vewy peculiah thing, sir. I found a man there diggin' a great pit—"

"Oh!"
"And he brought a sack and buried it in the hole he had dug—"

Mr. Grubb almost ceased to breathe, so intense did his interest in the story appear. Arthur Augustus felt rather flattered at his fixed and intense interest. It was very different from the reception the caravanners had given to his story.

"Go on!" articulated Mr. Grubb.
"The man covahed up the pit, and we placed the turf so cleverly that I was not able to find the place this mornin'," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh!"
"But the occurrence was so strange that I felt bound to inform you, sir, as the oamah, of the propriety. The man's proceedings were vewy odd and suspicious. I was afraid at first that there was the body of a murdered person in the sack—"

"You fool!"
"Eh?"

"I—I mean, go on. Go on at once!"
"Vewy well; I will proceed," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "If it was not a murdered body—I mean, a murdered man sir—in the sack, I presume it was plundah of some kind. It is impos, of course, that the man could have any honorable reason for buyin' anything in such a place at such an hour of the night."

"What was the man like?"
"I could not make out his features, sir, owin' to the uncertain light. He was wathah a burly fellow—about your own build, sir—"

"Oh!"
"And he wore a beard. I could not see anythin' else."

"And—and that is all!"
"That is all, sir. I leave it to you to take any steps that you regard as appropriate undah the circs. If you considah it advisable to call in the police—"

Mr. Grubb jumped.
"The police!" he stutered.

"Yess. If you considah it advisable to call in the police to investigate the mattah, I will make it a point to remain in this vicinity for the present, in case my evidence is requiuhed."

Mr. Grubb rose to his feet again.
He seemed to have recovered his composure; and there was a deadly glitter in his sharp eyes.

"You young scoundrel!" he said.
"Wha-a-ah!"

"You have trespassed on my ground, and now you have come to me with this cock-and-bull story—"

"Wessly, Mr. Gwubb—"

"I do not believe a single word of it!"

"Sir!"
"You are a lying young vagabond," roared Mr. Grubb, "and I will have you and your associates arrested for trespass! As for you, I will lay my stick about you for your lying tales!"

Arthur Augustus stood petrified as the portly gentleman ran to a corner and grabbed up a heavy walking-stick that stood there.

He woke to life, however, as Mr. Grubb strode at him, brandishing the TUE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 599.

stick. His eye gleamed through his eyeglasses.

"Pwey keep that stick to yourself, Mr. Gwubb," he said quietly. "I should be sorry to stwike a man of your yeahs, but I shall not allow you to touch me with that stick!"

Mr. Grubb did not heed.
"Evevry word I have told you is quite true—"

"Take that!"
Arthur Augustus jumped back in time to escape the stick. Mr. Grubb followed him up, lashing out again, his podgy face purple with wrath. One lash landed on Arthur Augustus' shoulder, and he howled. Then he dodged under the raised stick, grabbed Mr. Grubb's arm, and wrenched the stick away—so actively that the fat gentleman had no chance of stopping him. He hurled the stick with a crash into the fireplace, and faced Mr. Grubb, his hands up and his eyes gleaming.

"Now come on, you wathah, if you like!" he panted.

The portly gentleman towered over the slim junior of St. Jim's; but Arthur Augustus was looking quite dangerous, and Mr. Grubb paused. He pointed to the door with a trembling hand.

"Get out, you young scoundrel!" he exclaimed in a voice choked with passion. "Get out! Out of my house!"

"I will wettee from your house with pleasah, Mr. Gwubb. If I had known what kind of ill-temperd wuffian you

are, I should certainly not have entahed!"

"Get out!" roared Mr. Grubb. "I am goin'!"

Arthur Augustus walked out. The scared-looking maid opened the front door for him, and he left the house. As he went he heard the voice of Mr. Grubb roaring:

"Set the dog loose! Do you hear? Set the dog loose!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

And he hurried back to the caravans camp.

CHAPTER 7.

At Close Quarters!

CIRCUMSTANCES was in harness when Arthur Augustus arrived at the camp. Washing-up was over and the crocks packed, and the caravanners were ready to start. The horse, refreshed by a rest and a feed, was willing to go, which was lucky. Tom Merry & Co. were only waiting for Gussy.

"Hallo! Here he is!" said Herries. "Ready, Gussie? Hallo! What's the matter!"

"Oh dear!"
"Didn't you thrive with the Grubb-bird?" asked Monty Lowther. "Didn't he receive your merry apologies in the proper spirit?"

"He did not, Lowthah!"
"Didn't the silk topper have the proper effect?"

"Wats!"
"And Gussy's got on his best tie, too!" said Blake, in surprise. "The Grubb-man must be hard to please!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I have been treated with uttah wudeness!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "The man called me names!"

"He did, did he!"
"Yess, wathah; and he wefness to believe a word of what happened last night in the plantation—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You eackin' assos—"

"My dear man, of course he doesn't believe in dreams!" said Manners.

"Wats! And he tried to thrash me with a stick—"

"What!"
"And he has set the dog loose—"

"Oh, my hat!"
"Gentlemen," said Monty Lowther, "I think it's time we retired from this agreeable and sylvan scene. This Grubb-man seems a regular Hun. Gee-up!"

"Gee-up, old hoss!"
"Hallo! Here he comes!"

"Pwee!"

Through the bushes came Mr. Grubb, with a big stick in his hand, and a big, savage-looking dog at his heels. Mr. Grubb's podgy face was purple and his eyes were glittering. The juniors eyed him dubiously as he strode into the path the caravan was about to take.

He certainly did not look an agreeable customer to deal with.

It was rather surprising too; for though a man might be angry at caravanners camping in his ground without permission, there seemed no reason for this display of actual fury. And there was no doubt that Mr. Grubb was signing boiling with rage.

"You young scoundrels!" he roared, as he came up.

"Bai Jove!"

"How dare you camp on my land!" roared Mr. Grubb. "Vagabonds! Rascals! Thieves!"

"Draw it mild, Mr. Grubb!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with a flash in his

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Whiz! A boot missed Gussy's head in the doorway of the van by an inch. The swell of St. Jim's jumped back. 'Hai Jove! What wuffian threw that boot?' he gasped. (See Chapter 2.)

eyes. "We're not vagabonds or thieves, and you know it! We're willing to pay for camping in the field, if you like!"

"Fix your own figure, sir," said Monty Lowther politely—"anything from tuppence to ten bob!"

Mr. Grubb gasped.

"Vagabonds! I'll have you arrested, and the van searched for stolen property!" he roared.

"Look here, you old donkey—" began Blake hotly.

"Seize them, Fangs! Fetch them!" yelled Mr. Grubb.

Fangs, as the dog seemed appropriately to be named, came snarling at the juniors.

Tom Merry & Co. jumped back.

The dog was big and savage, and though they could hardly believe that Mr. Grubb really intended to set the animal upon them, it was only too plain that such was his intention.

"Seize them!" he yelled. "Seize them!"

"You mad fool!" roared Manners.

"Get that dog off!"

"Seize them!"

Fangs rushed in.

Fortunately, Blake had a stick in his hand, and he faced the dog. A slash from the stick made Fangs retreat a few paces, but evidently with the intention of coming on again. He was showing his teeth and snarling horribly. If those sharp, yellow teeth had been fastened upon one of the juniors, the results

would have been serious. But Mr. Grubb was still yelling to Fangs to "seize" them.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy bounded into the van. But he was not thinking of deserting his comrades at that terrible moment, by any means. He reappeared in a second—with a golf-club in his hand. It was an iron-headed cleek, and a very useful weapon. Tom Merry & Co. had growled a good many times over Gussy's golf-clubs in the van, but they came in useful now.

"Leave him to me!" shouted Gussy.

Blake was trying to keep the dog off with his stick, but that could not have lasted many moments. Arthur Augustus rushed in, with the cleek brandished over his head.

Crash!

There was a fiendish howl from Fangs as the iron head of the cleek crashed upon him.

He scrambled away, howling and tottering. The blow had been a terrific one, and it was enough even for the savage dog.

"Good-old Gussy!" gasped Blake.

"Get the other clubs, deal boys, in case he comes on again!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I will keep an eye on him."

"What-ho!"

Heedless of the raving Mr. Grubb, the juniors scrambled into the caravan for the golf-clubs. Tom Merry jumped out with a big driver in his grasp, and the

others followed, with what weapons they could catch up in a hurry. They had no fear of Fangs now.

It was the unfortunate Fangs that was in fear of them, as a matter of fact. The crashing blow from the cleek had hurt him, and he was snarling and howling at a safe distance, heedless of his master's commands to "seize" the caravanners.

"Gee-up!" gasped Tom Merry, taking the horse's rein in his left hand, and keeping the driver ready in his right.

The caravan moved on.

Mr. Grubb brandished fat fists at them, evidently bursting with fury. The caravanners marched on towards the roadside gate. Arthur Augustus paused to address the infuriated Grubb.

"I regard you with utter contempt, Mr. Grubb!" he said severely. "You are a wascal!"

"I—I—I—"

"You are a wascal and a coward!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "You have compelled me to strike a dog, you uttah, cwingins' wottah! I have a sweet mind to give you the same for yourself!"

Mr. Grubb backed away. Arthur Augustus was very nearly as angry as he was himself now. There had been no help for it in the matter of "biffing" Fangs with the cleek, but it was a very unpleasant necessity, and Arthur Augustus was naturally exasperated. He

floated the cloak under Mr. Grubb's fat nose, much to his alarm.

"Come on, Gussy!" called back Blake.

Tom Merry had the gate open now for the caravan to pass out into the road. Arthur Augustus hesitated.

"I consider that we ought to give this fat wascal a fearful thrashing befoah we go, deah boys!"

"Come on!"

"It is his fault that I had to hit that dog!"

"Come on, you ass! Do you want to be charged with assault and battery!"

"Wais!"

However, Arthur Augustus came on, and followed his comrades out into the road. The gate clanged shut after the caravan.

Mr. Grubb followed them to the gate, and shook a fat fist over it.

"Vagabonds! Thieves!" he roared. "I'm going to the police-station now! I'll have that van searched for stolen property! I'll—I'll—"

"Oh, ring off, you silly old donkey!" said Blake.

"I'll have you prosecuted for trespass! I'll—"

"Go and eat coke!"

The caravan and the caravanners swung on along the road, and Mr. Grubb's infuriated voice died away behind.

CHAPTER 3.

Arthur Augustus Sees It All!

UP the hill went the caravan on the white road between high, shady trees. The caravanners started at a good pace, anxious to get beyond range of Mr. Grubb's diabolical sneers. But they soon slowed on the rise. Circumstances set the example: like a sensible horse, he intended to take it easy going uphill. And once more he proved circumstances over which the juniors had no control. They followed his example.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wore a thoughtful frown as he walked, his topper gleaming in the sun. He was not really clad for tramping; he had put on his finest feathers, so to speak, to do honour to Mr. Grubb when making his morning call—an honour of which Mr. Grubb had proved himself utterly unworthy. The other juniors were more caravanners, as Blake called it. Tom Merry was in shirt and trousers and belt, with a straw hat on the back of his curly head, his cheeks burned red by the sun, and a sun-bliester on the tip of his nose. The captain of the Shell did not

really look worthy to be walking alongside of the spotless swell of St. Jim's.

But Gussy did not long remain spotless. Motor-cars whirling past distributed dust over him liberally, and a passing cart of brushwood caught his topper with a projecting branch, depriving it of some of its glory. Gussy retired into the caravan to change.

Tom Merry & Co. were feeling rather ruffled.

They had had various experiences during the couple of weeks they had already spent on the road, and they had met with plenty of courtesy—and plenty of the reverse. But they had never before come into contact with a man like Mr. Grubb. He was the limit.

"The chap must be a bit potty," Manners remarked, after a long silence.

"He might be annoyed; but what was there to fly into such a fuster about?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom Merry.

"Perhaps he'd been drinking overnight. I believe that makes a man ratty in the morning."

"Let it be a warning to you, my young friends!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Fathhead!"

"Well, I'm jolly glad to see the last of him," remarked Jack Blake. "Mr. Esteliff, at St. Jim's, is quite a nice man in comparison. I used to think Ratty was the outside edge."

"We sha'n't see him again, that's one comfort."

Arthur Augustus dropped from the van and joined the walkers, having changed his attire for something more serviceable. He was now clothed and in his right mind, as Monty Lowther expressed it.

"Just on the top of the wias, deah boys," he remarked. "Wathah a good place for a halt, at the top of the hill!"

"It isn't time yet to halt for lunch. We can't waste a morning doing half a mile."

"I wathah think—"

"Besides, the sooner we get out of the neighbourhood the better," said Blake.

"We don't want any more trouble with Grubb. He was only talking out of his hat, I suppose; but if he sent the police after us for trespass—"

"We could explain that in a perfectly satisfactory mannah, Blake."

Blake grunted.

"Very likely we could; but we started out to do caravanning, not to explain things to fathheaded country justices," he answered.

"Yass; but—"

"The man looked spiteful enough for anything," observed Dig, "and I think he might be cad enough to make out we

were rogues, and get the bobbies to search the van. He said he would."

"There's nothin' in the van a bobby might not see, Dig."

"We're caravanning, ass, not showing bobbies the sights!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"Anyhow, the sooner we get clear of this quarter the better," said Tom Merry. "We're not looking for trouble."

There was a general nod of assent, excepting from the swell of the Fourth. Gussy shook his head.

"I am sorrowy I do not agree, Tom Merry."

"Never mind about your agreeing, chaps, so long as you give your chin a rest!" answered the captain of the Shell affably.

"Weally, Tom Merry—"

"Yee, give it a rest, Gussy; it's a bit overworked!" urged Blake.

"Wais!"

"Fine view from here," remarked Horries as the caravan slowed to a halt on top of the hill crossed by the winding white road.

The juniors looked round them with satisfaction. From the top of the acclivity they had a wide view of rolling downs, green and wooded. Green meadows, and hedges of darker green, and shadowy masses of woodland made up a scene of sylvan beauty it was good to look upon.

There was open grass beside the road to a wide extent—plenty of room for camping, if the caravanners had come on a mile the previous night. But the hill—and circumstances—had been in the way.

"Just the place!" said Arthur Augustus, looking round.

"For what?" asked Blake.

"Campin', deah boy!"

"We're not going to camp!" roared Blake. "We're going to do six more miles at least before we camp!"

"Impos! At least," said Arthur Augustus with dignity, "if you fellows insist upon goin' on I shall have to wemain!"

"What for, ass?"

"I refuse to be called an ass!"

"Gee-up!" said Lowther.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"You unspeakable, incredible ass, what do you want to stay here for!" exclaimed Blake in great exasperation.

"Do you want to have another interview with the Grubb-bird, and a rural bob?"

"I have not done with Gwubb yet."

"Wha-at?"

"Pway listen to me, deah boys, without so many wude interwupsions! You wememnah what happened last night, and—"

"Nothing happened."

"I informed you—"

"Oh, your blessed nightmare!" granted Horries.

"Weally, Hewwies, I have remarked several times that it was nothin' of the sort. I regard it as my duty to discovah the meannin' of that mystery."

"Fathhead!"

"That man, whoevah he was, was busyin' somethin' surreptitiously at dead of night. It is impos to leave the manah where it is. If he is a criminal, we become accessories atfah the fact he sayin' nothin' about it."

"Oh, my hat!"

"But it never happened!" shrieked Blake.

"It did happen, deah boy!"

"You dreamed it!"

"I did not dream it!"

"Anyhow, you've told Grubb, and it's his land and his business," said Tom Merry patiently.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

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"That is what I am comin' to, deah boys!" he said. "I suspect that a crime has been committed—"

"Bow-wow!"

"And that Gwubb had a hand in it."

"Oh krikey!"

"Consider the mattah judiciously. The man who buwied the sack brought it to the fir plantation from the direction of the house—"

"Oh dear!"

"He was wathah a portly chap, and wore a beard. Gwubb is a portly man, and wears a beard."

"So it was Grubb you dreamed you saw diggin' at dead of night!" said Jack Blake sarcastically.

"I did not dream it, Blake! Gwubb treated me with uttiah wudness when I called upon him. Now I have reflected upon it I can see that he was vevy startled, and in fact, vevy alarmed."

"Bosh!"

"If you characterise my remarks as bosh, Blake—"

"Well, piffle, if you like that better!" grunted Blake. "Any old thing!"

"Wats! You fellows have remarked yourselves that it was vevy extraordinary that Mr. Gwubb should fly into such a fearful tempah!"

"That's so!"

"He wan the wisk of causin' serious injury by settin' the dog on us. It was all because he was alarmed."

"What should he be alarmed about?" demanded Digby.

"From discovahin' that cavavannahs had been camped all night close to where that sack was buwied, and then findin' that one of them had actually seen it buwied!" said Arthur Augustus sagely. "He was vevy anxious to know whether I knew what the man was like. I remarked that he was a man about his own build. I can see it all now. It was that wottah Gwubb who was busyin' the sack at one in the mornin', and he was awfully alarmed at bein' discovahed. That is why he was talkin' 'vot about settin' the police on us, an' havin' the van searched for stolen propoorty. It was to frighten us into clearin' out of this neighbourhood as fast as possible."

"My hat!"

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged glances. For the first time they began to think that there might be something in Arthur Augustus' astounding yarn, and that possibly it was not merely a nightmare induced by uneasy slumber.

Certainly Gussy's theory accounted for the extraordinary conduct of Mr. Grubb, which was exceedingly difficult to account for on any other hypothesis.

Undoubtedly Mr. Grubb had acted as a man might act who had a guilty secret which he was afraid might be unearthed by the caravanners who had camped by chance in his field.

"But—but—but—" said Tom Merry. "I assure you, Tom Merry, that I am quite wight!" said Arthur Augustus confidently. "I am convinced that it was Gwubb who was diggin' in the fir woad last night!"

"Well, even if it was, a man has a right to dig in his own ground at any time he please, night or day!" observed Blake.

"Yaas; but—"

"And he has a right to bury a sack if he chooses, or any old number of sacks, as long as they're his own!"

"True! But—"

"So we'd better get on, and leave him to dig to his heart's content!" concluded Blake.

"Impos, deah boy! The suw-wep-titious mannah in which the sack was buwied showed that it contained a guilty secret. The man was frightened out of

his wassally wits with the feah that he was discovahed. A crime has been committed—probably the sack contained the ghastly remains of a hapless victim—"

"Grough!"

"The man is none too good to commit such a fearful crime. He called me a scoundwail!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, it is not a laughin' mattah! I considah—"

"My hat! Look!" murmured Blake, with a glance back along the road.

A trap had come into sight behind the caravan, and it was Mr. Grubb who sat in it driving. Arthur Augustus gave his chums a triumphant look.

"I wathah think, deah boys, that the wascal is followin' us to make suah that we are goin'!" he remarked.

"Gee-up!" said Tom.

Circumstances moved on. Arthur Augustus nodded assent. He was determined to probe the mystery of Mr. Grubb; that was settled. But evidently it would not do to camp near that gentleman's house, and under his eye. That certainly would only put him on his guard. So Arthur Augustus moved on with the caravanners.

Mr. Grubb's trap slowed down.

He alighted from it, and led his horse up the hill. The caravan went on down the opposite slope, and the juniors, looking back, saw Mr. Grubb coming over the top, still leading his horse. And he was still leading it as he came down the decline.

Again Arthur Augustus gave his chums a triumphant smile.

"Why is that ewasty old boundah leadin' his horse, deah boys?" he asked.

"To give it a rest, I suppose!" said Dig.

"He was divin' when we first saw him—and uphill, too. Now he is leadin' it downhill."

"Well, why, then?" demanded Dig.

"He's doin' it so as not to pass us; it's an excuse for wemahin' behind the caravan to watch us!" said Arthur Augustus calmly.

"Rats!"

"You will see, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus with serene confidence, "that old wascal will keep behind us a long way yet!"

And, to the surprise of the Co., Arthur Augustus proved to be right.

CHAPTER 9.

Gussy's Little Game!

TOM MERRY & CO. glanced back a good many times as the caravan rolled on along the white, dusty road.

A hundred yards behind the caravan Mr. Grubb trudged on, leading his trap. He did not catch the eyes of the juniors, but they knew he was watching the caravan.

When an hour had passed it was pretty certain that Mr. Grubb was there on account of the caravanners, and on their account only.

The juniors put the matter to the test. The caravan was turned into a side road, leading to a little village off the highway. From the village it took another winding lane back to the high road. The detour took the caravanners a couple of miles out of their way. And all around that detour Mr. Grubb followed them. He had given up leading his horse now, his fat legs apparently growing fatigued. But he had sat in the trap and kept the horse at a walk, so as to come no nearer to the caravan.

When the caravanners regained the high road and resumed their route, Mr. Grubb, in his trap, was still behind them.

The matter was quite clear now.

Mr. Grubb could have had only one possible motive for following the caravan in that useless detour—it was to keep them in sight.

Evidently he was watching them, and his object in that could only be to make sure they were quitting the neighbourhood. He did not approach near enough to speak to them.

By noon the St. Jim's party were six miles from Mr. Grubb's house, and at that time the fat gentleman was probably satisfied that they were really going.

He turned into a side lane and drove off, disappearing from view.

But Blake, climbing to the top of a high bank beside the road, spotted him a few minutes later; he had returned by another turning into the high road, and was driving back the way he had come.

The caravanners moved on in a very thoughtful mood.

"Well, he's seen us safe off the premises!" said Monty Louther with a faint smile.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose that was his object," said Tom Merry musingly. "He must have wanted to make sure we were gone. I suppose the old donkey knows we saw him following us."

"Well, we may as well halt now," remarked Dig. "I'm ready for lunch!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The St. Jim's caravan turned from the road upon a stretch of grass and stopped. During lunch by the roadside the caravanners discussed Mr. Grubb and his peculiar actions. But their chief feeling seemed to be relief that they had done with the exceedingly disagreeable gentleman. Arthur Augustus listened with a disapproving frown.

"We'll do a few more miles this afternoon," Blake remarked.

And then Arthur Augustus chimed in emphatically:

"Wats!"

"My dear man, we're not going to slack about here all day!"

"We are goin' to camp here for today," said Arthur Augustus decidedly, "and to-night—"

"Well!" grunted Blake.

"To-night I am going back to probe the mystery."

"My only hat! Aren't you fed up with Grubby yet?"

"Quite fed up, deah boy, but I refuse to let the mattah weat. The fact that the man was so anxious to see us clear off proves that he has a guilty secret!"

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully.

"I think there's something in it now," he admitted. "Gussy seems to have seen the Grubb-bird burying something in his plantation last night. Grubb was alarmed at being found out, and anxious for us to clear off—I suppose so that there wouldn't be any danger of our talking in his neighbourhood. I don't understand the affair, but I don't specially want to. It's no business of ours!"

"Exactly!" assented Blake.

"A crime has been committed—"

"Oh rats!" said Tom. "Nothing of the sort. The man looks a fat, pompous sort of pig, but not a criminal. I don't know what his game was, but I don't suppose it was anything against the law."

"Then how do you account for his conduct, Tom Merry?"

"I don't account for it, old nut. We're out caravanning—don't solve giddy mysteries that don't concern us!"

"Hea, hea!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus emphatically. "I shall not insist upon you fellows accompanyin' me; but I shall

certainly go back this evening now that Mr. Gussy is off his guard."

"What for?" demanded Lowther.

"To solve the mystery."

"But if we couldn't find the burying-place by daylight, we certainly couldn't find it after dark," said Tom.

Arthur Augustus smiled superior.

"I have been thinking, dear boy, while you fellows have been talking." Now, suppose you were a criminal—

"Eh?"

"Suppose you were a fearful criminal—say, a murderah—"

"You silly ass!" roared Tom Merry.

"I am only supposing, of course, dear boy. Suppose you were a fearful criminal, and had been seen burying the body—or some other parcel of your guilt—in a secret place at dead of night, what would you do?"

"Rats!"

"You would go back the next night and dig it up, and hide it in a safe place," said Arthur Augustus, triumphantly.

"And if Mr. Gussy has any sense, that is what he will do—think of that we are miles away, and safe off the scene."

"I—I suppose he might."

"He is sure to, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus confidentially. "And instead of being miles away, we are going to be on the scene—on the watch! When the wawal starts diggin' up the body—if it is a body—"

"H!" grinned Blake.

"Or watevah it is, we shall catch him."

"Eh?"

"We shall catch him, and hand him over to the police—"

"And suppose it turns out he was only burying a dead cat?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was nothin' of the sort, Lowther. However, to make sure, we will wait till he has dug it up, in order to avoid any risk of puttin' our foot in it."

"Look here, Gussy—"

"I am goin', anyway. I will take a golf-club in case there is trouble. You fellows can please yourselves, if you wish to rely on my tact and judgment," said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

"Ass! You can't go back alone, and risk that dashed dog."

"Then you can come with me, dear boy."

"Oh, it's not!"

"Weally, Blake—"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Oh, let Gussy have his own way," he said. "He won't be happy till he gets it. After all, a rest won't hurt us; we're not bound for anywhere in particular, so we're in no hurry. Somebody will have to stay with the caravan, though."

"Yess, wathin'!"

"I'll jolly well stay with the caravan," grunted Herries. "You won't catch me trespassing on Grubb's ground, because Gussy had a nightmare!"

"Weally, Herries—"

"Same here!" pawned Manners.

"Walking six miles for a reason is all right. Walking it without a reason is all wrong!"

"Just my idea," agreed Digby.

"Passed unanimously!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Please yourselves, you fearful scurkaks!" said Arthur Augustus loftily.

"I am goin' at any rate! Will you come, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, I'll come!" sighed Tom.

"What about you, Blake?"

"Oh, it's silly not," growled Blake.

"Never mind! Lunatics have to be humoured, you know—"

"Weally, Tom Merry—"

"Oh, I'll come!" said Blake. "Some-

body will have to come and see that Gussy doesn't get into mischief."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Three of us will be enough to deal with Grubb—and the body—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And so it was settled. And when the shadows of night were falling fast, to put it poetically, Tom Merry and Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy started to walk back the way the caravan had come—with a long walk before them, bound, as at least two of the three believed, upon a wild goose chase. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy never faltered in his conviction; and Arthur Augustus was given his head.

CHAPTER 20.
Caught in the Act!

"HISST!"

Arthur Augustus whispered that dramatic warning.

The three juniors were on the watch; or, to be more exact, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was on the watch, and Tom Merry and Blake were dozing.

The trio had arrived at Mr. Grubb's little estate at a late hour. They had not gone in by the field gate, Arthur Augustus suggesting that they might be observed if they did. Under cover of the

like his companions; but he did not think of doing. He watched with the eyes of Argus.

Tom Merry and Blake sat in the thicket, their backs to big trunks, and dozed off. Blake remarked that Gussy could awaken them when the murderer came along with the body. A remark that made Arthur Augustus sniff.

It was rather a weary vigil for Arthur Augustus.

He watched while his comrades dozed. But he had his reward at last. There was a sound of footsteps along the brook.

It was then that Arthur Augustus stooped over his dozing comrades and whispered dramatically:

"Hsst!"

"His eyes opened."

"What?" began Blake.

He gazed, as Arthur Augustus dabbed a cool hand over his mouth.

"Hisst!" whispered D'Arcy. "He's come!"

"Eh? Who?"

"The man!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tom Merry. The three juniors listened intently. The sound of heavy footsteps was audible to all three of them. Somebody, it was clear, was coming.

"Don't move!" whispered D'Arcy.

The juniors remained still.

The footsteps came on, within a few yards of them, and stopped—close by the brook. Then there was a sound of a man at work. Tom Merry ventured to peer through the openings of the bushes. Above the fir plantation the moon shined in the sky, and silver light fell upon the trees and the brook that meandered among them. And in the dim light Tom Merry made out the bony figure of a man cutting turf.

In the uncertain, shadowy light he could not distinguish the man's face, but there was no doubt that his portly figure was very like Mr. Grubb's.

Tom was startled into wide wakefulness now.

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NOW ON SALE.

night they had climbed the high fence that separated the fir plantation from the road, and dropped inside.

They picked their way through the fir wood towards the little brook, the murmur of which reached their ears at last.

Two of the juniors at least were not in an easy mood. They were, in point of fact, trespassing, and that was a rather serious matter. Arthur Augustus was of opinion that, as they were acting in the name of justice, that was justifiable; but his comrades had doubts on the subject.

However, they were in for it now, and it was too late to hesitate and cower. He was drawing towards midnight when the three juniors encamped themselves in a thicket close by the brook, from whence they had a full view of the grassy bank for a good distance. The spot where Gussy had seen the doer at work the previous night was in sight, though Gussy could not exactly locate it.

Arthur Augustus was a little sleepy.

Gussy's amazing yarn was evidently true; it was no dream. Tom Merry and Blake were watching the mysterious doer now, as D'Arcy had watched him the night before.

Arthur Augustus was trembling with excitement. He was too excited even to feel triumphant.

The juniors kept very quiet. The man was engaged upon the turf for some time. Then he began to dig.

Spadeful after spadeful of earth was thrown out.

In the fir plantation there was no sound save the shudding of the spade and the falling earth as it was tossed out of the deepening pit.

The juniors watched in wonder.

They were almost certain now that the man was Mr. Grubb. But why Mr. Grubb should be delving in that lonely spot at such an hour was a deep mystery. His object could scarcely be one that would bear the light. For if so it was pretty certain that he would have done his digging at a more reasonable hour. Evidently he had waded off his home, bold was adroit, and the last traffic had died away on the road; until the three countryside was certain to be plunged into slumber.

For an hour or more the juniors watched him.

Then the bony man stopped out of the pit he had dug, gasping for breath.

He glanced round him suspiciously, but it was plain that he had no idea that he was being watched. The juniors had not made a sound.

Arthur Augustus pressed Tom's arm. He was expecting to see the man lift the mysterious sack from the pit. But he did

not do so. He leaned the spade against a tree, and tramped off down the bank and vanished among the trees, just as he had done the previous night.

Arthur Augustus rubbed his eyes. "Bai Jove!" he murmured. "The faint footsteps died away. 'Well, he hasn't dug' anything up!" murmured Blake, yawning.

"It is weally vewy odd——"
"He wasn't digging in the same place," said Tom Merry. "The way he had to shove in the spade showed that the earth wasn't loose. He was digging new rat, not in the old one."

"Yess, watahah! I see that now. Bai Jove! He must be going to buy something else!" whispered Arthur Augustus excitedly.

"What on earth——"
"Hush!"
The juniors were utterly bewildered. Even a murderer could not be supposed to have two bodies to bury on successive nights, and a cracksmen could hardly have a second lot of loot to dispose of so soon. Moreover, it was perfectly evident to everybody but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that the fat Mr. Grubb was neither a murderer nor a cracksmen. Yet his proceedings were secret and surreptitious. It was clear enough that he had a guilty secret of some kind to keep. They cudgelled their brains in vain.

And they were very silent as the returning footsteps of the mysterious delver were heard.

He came through the trees again, panting, and bending under the weight of a heavy sack.

Tom Merry shook his head in blank amazement. D'Arcy had seen the man bury a crammed sack the previous night. Now he was burying another crammed sack. What could it mean?

The man dropped the sack into the pit with a grunt.

Then he seized the spade, and began shovelling in earth.

It was then that Arthur Augustus took action.

"Follow me, dear boys!" he whispered.

"Hold on——"

"Follow me!"

"But—but——"

"Come on!"

Arthur Augustus rushed out of the thicket, golf-club in hand.

The man had heard the mutter of voices, and started violently. He seemed rooted to the earth as Arthur Augustus rushed into view.

Tom Merry and Blake followed the swell of St. Jim's. There was nothing else to be done.

The man sprang back from the pit, panting. A shaft of moonlight fell upon his face then, and the juniors recognised the fat, harsh features.

"Grubb!" exclaimed Blake.

"Cotlah him, dear boys!"

The man seemed about to flee; then he swung up the spade threateningly. The golf-club crashed on it, and sent it whirling to the ground. The next moment Gussy was struggling with Mr. Grubb.

"Back up, dear boys!" he yelled.

And Tom Merry and Blake rushed in, and crashed the struggling man. Mr. Grubb went to earth with a crash, with the three juniors on top of him.

"Yeop!"

"Got him, the wascal! Got him!"

"Got him down!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Sit on his head, Tom Mewwy——"

"We've got him!" gasped Tom. "I hope we shan't be locked up for this! Yawhow, we've got him!"

There was no doubt about that; they

had got him. Tom Merry and Blake pinned the portly gentleman down with their weight, and Arthur Augustus jumped clear.

"Hold him, while I see what is in the sack!" he exclaimed.

There was a breathless howl from Mr. Grubb.

"Let that sack alone! Don't you dare touch——"

"Wats!"

"I'll have you arrested——"

"I watah think it is you that is goin' to be awosted, you wascal! If there is a body in that sack——"

"Fool!"

"Look in it, Gussy, and stop chinn-waggin'!"

"Wight-ho!"

Arthur Augustus jumped into the pit.

"Bai Jove! It smells howwid!" he ejaculated.

Mr. Grubb struggled to rise, but Tom Merry and Blake kept him pinned in the grass, while Arthur Augustus slit the sack down with his pocket-knife. Then he was heard to give a horrified sniff.

"Well, what is it!" called out Blake.

"Gwooooh!"

"What is it, you ass!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Ooooooooh!"

"You ass; what——?"

"It is a side of bacon, dear boys!"

"What!"

CHAPTER 11.

The Awful Secret.

TOM MERRY and Blake yelled together.

"A side of bacon!"

"Oh crumbs!"

They released Mr. Grubb, and jumped up. The portly gentleman scrambled to his feet. But he seemed more scared now than when the St. Jim's juniors had seized him.

"Five pounds!" he gasped.

"Eh? What are you burbling about?" snapped Blake.

"Five pounds to keep this dark!" gasped Mr. Grubb. "No harm in it—no harm at all. It's my own property!"

"Five pounds to keep it dark! I—I—I'm a respectable man! Five pounds——"

Arthur Augustus was holding his nose in the pit as he turned over the contents of the sack with his foot. Tom Merry and Blake stared in utter amazement, unbecoming the frightened Mr. Grubb.

The contents of the sack were extraordinary.

There were two sides of bacon, both in an advanced state of decomposition. There were besps of sausages, also decomposed, and smelling frightfully. There were saveloys, and there were potatoes, and there were other articles of diet; and all of them were in a shocking state.

The scent that rose from the pit made the juniors wish that they had given Mr. Grubb time to cover it in.

Arthur Augustus jumped out.

"Is-it-it isn't a body!" he stammered.

"It-it isn't loot! It-it's food, and all uttably wotien! Is the man mad!"

"Oh, you ass!" breathed Blake.

"Weslly, Blake——"

"Oh, you thundering chump!" said Tom Merry. "You've brought us here——"

"If the man is mad, Tom Mewwy, he ought to put undah westwind. Mr. Grubb, will you have the kindness to tell us wethah you are mad or not!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

To the surprise of the juniors, Mr. Grubb was shaking in every limb.

The discovery seemed to have appalled him.

He leaned against a tree and groaned.

"Ten pounds!" he said huskily. "Not a syllable about this, young gentlemen, and I'll make it ten pounds! I'm a respectable man! I'll overlook you trespassing on my grounds! I'll give you leave to camp here as often as you like! I'll do anything——"

"Bai Jove!"

"Not a word about it!" pleaded Mr. Grubb. "I'm a ruined man if this gets out! And I'm standing for the local council, and I was on the Food Control! Oh dear!"

The truth was dawning upon the juniors now.

It would have been rather difficult not to see the truth on reflection; but Mr. Grubb's terror helped to enlighten them.

"My only hat!" said Blake, with a deep breath. "I see now! He's a filthy food hoarder!"

"Bai Jove!"

Groan from Mr. Grubb.

"Ten pounds!" he said faintly.

"You thumping rascal!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You've hoarded up all that food in war-time and it's gone bad——"

Another groan from the unhappy Grubb.

"I've had my punishment," he mumbled. "It's been a long-drawn 'error to me. I stacked it away when the control started. Oh dear! I had it in cellars—it was easy enough, me being on the Food Committee. But—oh dear! —I've been punished for it! Go easy, young gentlemen!"

Mr. Grubb almost wept. He was not at all ferocious now. He was thinking of what would follow if the matter was made public, and he was scared almost out of his fat wit.

"Like a fool, I stacked away more than I needed, like a lot of folks. And it began to go bad. I had the cellar screwed up. I said it was rats! I've sacked servants for being inquisitive! Oh dear!" Another groan. "It's haunted me! And then the dashed war ended, and left it all on my 'sands!"

"Bai Jove! You awful wascal!"

"I don't say it was patriotic!" groaned Mr. Grubb. "But I never could do without a square meal. It cost me a pile of money, too. Sacks and sacks of potatoes rotting in the cellar, and talking—simply talking! But the sausages were the worst! And the bacon—when it began to hum, there was no stopping it! I've been down to that cellar o' nights, swamping it all with disinfectant. Oh dear!"

The St. Jim's juniors gazed at him. Mr. Grubb seemed almost doubled up. The unhappy hoarder was punished for his sins. His hoard had come home to roost, as it were.

"Ever since the thundering war ended," moaned Mr. Grubb, "I've been trying to get rid of it. But it was like trying to get rid of a body. I chucked a sack of potatoes into the river one night, and the next day they was found, and there was a regular hullabaloo. I've dropped packets of sausages and things, tied up, all over the country, I have. But there was talk when they was found and opened. I got scared, and chucked it. But—but the things in the cellar got worse and worse——"

Tom Merry chuckled.

He could picture the hapless hoarder, and his growing horror of that unspeakable hoard.

"Then I began burying it at night!" groaned Mr. Grubb. "Nearly every night it's fine! I've come out and buried something. I started that months ago. But it's hard work for a man of my age.

I caught cold once, and was laid up for three months. Oh dear!"

"Well, you awful rascal, you deserved it!" said Blake. "Well, Gussy, you've found out the giddy mystery. Are you going to hand him over to the police?"

"There was a howl from Mr. Grubb. "Young gentlemen, go easy with a man! I'm a respectable man, and I'm standing for the local council! I-I don't believe it's actionable, so long after the war, but it would ruin me—"

"You ought to be wined, you uttish wascal!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly.

Mr. Grubb groaned. "Ave pity on a man!" he mumbled. "I'm standing for the council! I'm looked up to here—"

"The fearful wascal ought to be punished, dear boys. If the war was still on, I would certainly insist upon handing him over to the police!" said Arthur Augustus.

"He's been a bit punished already,

with all that awful stuff talking in his cellar. I should think!" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bump him, and let's get off!" said Tom Merry.

"Yess, watah!"

"Ten pennies to keep it dark, young gentlemen!" groaned Mr. Grubb.

"Keep your wotten money, you awful wascal! We are goin' to bump you!"

"I-I say—" gasped Mr. Grubb.

"Collish him!"

Three pairs of hands fell upon the portly gentleman, and whirled him away from the tree. Bump, bump, bump!

"Yow-aw! Yooop! Yaropooch!"

Crash!

Mr. Grubb went whirling into the pit, and landed on the beam with a heavy concussion and a loud roar.

The juniors left him there, to sort himself out.

"Good-by-ee!" sang out Monty Lowther.

And they went.

Tom Merry and Blake chortled as they started for the caravan camp. Arthur

Augustus was looking rather thoughtful. The midnight mystery had been solved, but not exactly as Gussy had anticipated.

The caravaners were asleep when the trio arrived at the camp; but in the morning there was a great outbreak of chortling when the tale was told. Arthur Augustus listened to it with lofty dignity.

"I see no reason at all for this movement," he said. "It might have been a crime—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In fact, it was really a crime!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And think I was wight to press the mystery. And if it had turned out to be a body in the sack—"

"Instead of a side of bacon—"

yelled Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, watah!" said Arthur Augustus.

And he was not smiling as the caravaners took the road again. But the other six caravaners smiled enough for seven.

THE END.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS.

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

CHAPTER 9.

Criticism.

"IN the first place," said the youth, calmly abstracting one of my cigarettes and proceeding to light up, "we will take the 'Magnet.' Dashed good paper, the 'Magnet,' except for a few small blemishes."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. The story of Harry Wharton & Co. is pretty; the serial is written by a chap who ought to be in the Home for Wasted Journalists; the Chat is utter drivel; and the pictures are too picturesque for words! Apart from these drawbacks, the 'Magnet's' a jolly fine paper!"

"Oh—"

"Some remarks apply to the 'Gem.' Topping paper, the 'Gem.' Sound, leading reading for young and old, as you say in your self-satisfying editorials. The stories are quite outside the pale, and the pictures more so; but what does that matter? Now, with regard to the 'Boys' Friend'—"

"Hada't you better start?" I said calmly.

"Finish! Why, I haven't started yet! Who writes those Bookwood yarns?"

"Owen Conquest."

"You might give him my compliments, and ask him what he's doing outside Colney Hatch!"

"No! At all! Who writes the 'Boys' Friend' (Chat)?"

"I write it myself."

"Then you deserve to be put in a padded cell!"

"Lack here—"

"Now, with regard to 'Checkers.' Who draws those funny-looking animals on the front page?"

"Tom Wilkinson. Why?"

"He ought to be in the Zoo! Is the monkey he draws supposed to be a Eddie's representation of himself?"

"Tom Wilkinson would punch your head if he were here!" I said sternly.

"Who writes those yarns of Dick Boyle?"

"Harry Clifton."

"My hat! It's a shame to allow such dangerous men to be at large! Who writes 'Figg, the Funnicker'?"

"You're a bit misted," I said. "You mean, 'Figg, the Funnicker.' That's written by a very capable author."

"Well, he ought to be muzzled!"

"My dear fellow—"

"Cut it out! Who writes those verse sketches on the front page?"

I mentioned the poet's name.

"That merchant, said my visitor, "ought to be put in prison for twelve months without the option of a fine!"

"Really, must protest—"

"Who writes the 'Penny Popular'?"

"It is the joint work of Frank Richards, Martin Clifford, and Owen Conquest."

"Then that precious trio ought to be banged on a gibbet! Of all the absurd impostors!"

"What do you mean by this torrent of destructive criticism?"

"Simply this. You're no good for your job."

"Who-ah!"

"As a lover of the soil you might have your good points. As an editor you're hopeless."

"Do you dare to presume—"

"I do, and I shall read these papers better than you! Certainly! Now, if I were given a free hand up here, I'd revolutionise the Companion Papers!"

"To such an extent," I said calmly, "that their circulation would disappear!"

"Stuff and nonsense! I should rope in new readers from all parts of the globe. The cry would go round, 'Tom Jenkins now edits the Companion Papers. All it's well.'"

"You're a humbug, Jenkins!"

"No!"

"You are talking out of the back of your neck, as Bob Therry would say."

Tom Jenkins rose to his feet, and started scattering the sheets of manuscript which lay on the table.

"What's the little game?" I asked, in alarm.

"I'm taking over your job."

"Great hoist!"

I was fed up with Jenkins.

To be so calmly informed that I was no use as an editor was bad enough; to see a raw, untamed youth in the act of organizing me of my job was indubitably worse.

I realised that it was a time for instant action.

Striding forward, I picked up Master Jenkins as if he were a sack of coals and slung him over my shoulder.

"Looze!" protested Jenkins.

"Not yet, my infant!" I said, walking for the door.

"What are you going to do?"

"Show you the way out, my son!"

And I staggered along the passage with my burden.

Jenkins protested and threatened, but I bore him into the hall, and we shot downwards.

When we reached the ground floor I explained the situation to the astonished commissionaire.

"Kindly show Master Jenkins a short cut to the street!" I said.

The commissionaire grinned.

A moment later a youthful body nibbled on the pavement of Farringdon Street with a dull thud.

My objectionable visitor had gone! And he has never had the temerity to come to the Fleetway House again.

CHAPTER 10.

Enter a Poet.

ANOTHER extraordinary freak who was drifted into my domain was a youth who, to judge by his flowing locks and the stubble on his chin, had not visited the barber for a dog's age.

"Good-morning, fair sir!" said he.

"Cut it out!" I said. "If you had anything to say to me, say it, and get out! I don't wish to be rude, but this constant ebb and flow of visitors is most distracting. I can't settle down."

"Neither can I," said my visitor, with a sorrowful shake of his shaggy head. "I've been hunting high and low for a house ever since the Aristocrat was signed. I've tramped everywhere—from the quillens of Piccadilly to the wild haunts of Wapping—and there's nothing doing. No, sir, you are not the only person who can't settle down."

I laid down my pen with a sigh.

This youth evidently regarded me in the light of an autocrat and estate agent, probably imagined I should handle gold and buy him a residence.

That's the worst of being an editor. You have to be so many other things as well. In my time I have been an Army List, a London Telephone Directory, a Dictionary of Geographical Knowledge, a washer, a surgeon, a champion weight-lifter, and a pugilist. Shakespeare was quite right when he said that each man in his time plays many parts.

I turned to my visitor.

"If you're wanting a house," I said, "I can put you on to one."

"That's splendid, dear old soul!"

"Isn't he familiar?" I snapped.

"Certainly not, old bean!"

I was lost between a desire to bundle the long-haired merchant neck-and-crop into the

passage, or to hurl him bodily from the office window. With what delight would I have hailed the third and last body on the flames below! Then would the wicked cease from troubling, and the harassed editor be at rest.

But, remembering the penalty of manslaughter, I withheld my hand.

"There is a house," I said, "in the environs of Paris."

"Environ is good," said my valet.

"I'll back it both ways."

"I wish you wouldn't keep interrupting!" I said hotly. The house is a grand one in its own grounds. It has a commanding view of the South London Gunworks.

"Excellent!"

"There are four bedrooms, four reception-rooms, a dining-room, a bath-room, and a kitchen-chamber."

"Very quiet?"

"There is also a coal-cellar, and a well-detached woodshed for the accommodation of my friends who arrive during the present overcrowded state of the metropolis. It is situated in a garden, glazing at my visitor's right hand, "that there is no dog-kennel!"

"Yes, that is a great pity," agreed the youth, "because I should have liked to invite you occasionally."

"Yes—you are a little flattered."

"It is extremely good of you," continued the youth, "to bring this precious residence to the notice of a wandering outcast like myself."

"You will take the house?"

"Certainly!"

"I wish," I hinted, "in one hundred and fifty pounds per annum."

"Excellent!"

"Are you overborne at the small figure?"

"Not at all. I am overborne by the knowledge that one hundred and fifty pounds will buy me a house in the language of the scattering folk, I am on the rocks!"

"What?" I ejaculated. "You've got the amazing cheek to come here and ask me to let you go to a house, when all the time you're on the rocks?"

"My visitor smiled."

"My dear old thing," he said, "I didn't ask you to put me on to a house. You volunteered the information yourself."

"I do not know how you do it!"

"I do! But my most pressing need, at the present moment, is dough."

"Are you a baker, then?" I exclaimed.

"A good baker, sir."

"What a splendid business!"

"I mean such, the money, spondulicks, dollars, shillings, and—"

"And you expect me to advance you a loan?"

"I imagined that my profession had changed in so long a time from auctioneer and estate agent to moneylender."

"But the long-haired youth shook his head."

"I do not believe in accepting loans," he said, "I have my family pride to consider."

My successor, Lord Stowell, Broke, fought, as you may have heard, in the Wars of the Roses."

"Hras your ancestor?" I growled. "Look here, you've wasted quite enough of my time already. If you don't come straight to the point, and tell me the object of your visit, I won't be answerable for what may follow!"

"My visitor leaped forward earnestly in the easy chair."

"I wish to know," he said, "if you want an Omelette?"

"A what?"

"An excellent stranger of rhymes. In other words, a poet. I understood you were fast one of those dangerous people on your side of the Channel, and I thought I'd try the English-shaking world. But he not write the 'Gentleman's Lyrics,' in the 'Gem,' showed the 'Favourite Friends in France?' And he is a poet, and I don't think you'd be likely to be so generous to the 'Boys' Friend'?"

"He is," I admitted. "But—"

"Has he not quitted the marble halls of the Fleetway House?"

"Yes, but—"

"I thought so. These poets cannot turn out their best work to the accompaniment of the ceaseless clashing of typewriters, and the piercing screams of the office-boy as he surveys the front page of 'Chuckles.' A safe retreat is his only recourse. Give me temporary wealth of solitude, he cries, and I'll do you right! Abuse in his quiet bungalow on the South Coast, he can turn out verse with the regularity of a sausage-machine. Here, 'mid the City's roar and bustle, he cannot think."

(Continued on page 22.)

The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are:

THE MERRY. THE BOYS' FRIENDS. THE GEM. THE PENNY POPULAR. CHUCKLES. Every Monday. Every Monday. Every Wed. Every Friday. Every Friday.

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS GLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.

For Next Wednesday:

"TRIMBLE ON THE TRACK!"

By Martin Clifford.

Our best story deals with the father and son of Tom Merry & Co. whilst on their caravan holiday tour. It is full of fun and excitement, and my boy and girl rhums meet on no account into this great number of their favourite story-paper.

This last-and only—way to make certain of your copy, is by ordering your copy from your own agent.

THE CIRCULATION OF THE "GEM."

A Reader's Comments in Rhyme.

The following quaint letter has come to hand from a reader living at Rarhead, near Glasgow.

"Dear Editor.—These lines I write, to give an evidence of the immense reduction in the old Gem's circulation."

"You must remember, my dear Sir, the nation's love of war. The price of all things has been raised twice what it was before."

"I read both 'Gem' and 'Magnet,' and I find it hard to say, which of the twain I like the best, they're both so bright and gay."

"Yet those are not the only two; there's 'Chuckles' and the rest. Your readers like the lot, all, although those two are quite the best."

"Some odd folks call them 'horribles,' and other odder names. They don't know what they mean so true sportsmanship in games. They threaten we will not let it, where the crowd, but really, we cannot. We have a good word, dear editor, the days are not so many, when you'll reduce the price again, back to the good old penny."

"Do not wish this letter, your readers to deliver, but know they'll be the Gem once more, when prices do drop."

In thanking my claim for his letter, I should like to mention that, in spite of the fact that the Gem is still three-halfpence—as most of the boys' papers are—the circulation is putting on fresh each week, the caravan stories being exceedingly popular.

I have other features in mind, too—features which I have no doubt will cause the circulation of the good old Gem to soar yet higher.

A VERY CRITICAL YOUNG LADY

Miss Minnie Kennedy-Smith, of Lambeth, has something to say concerning the Gem, and she does not spare her words.

In case Minnie thought that I should be afraid to publish her letter, I am quoting it this week in full:

"Dear Sir,—You brought to our notice, a few weeks ago, the sad fact that the circulation of the Gem was on the decline. You set us to be enthusiastic, and instead the paper broadened, but really, we cannot. We have a heart to make people read some of the awful stuff now being written."

"For goodness sake get Mr. Martin Clifford to make his characters more lively. Not a word of the stork-up captain still, give us more amusing and more readable. What living boy does 104 smoko and tell his? "

"Another grievance is that the boys are for ever at school. They never travel."

"As Guss would say, there is certainly 'room for improvement.'—Yours,

"MINNIE KENNEDY-SMITH."

Before writing another letter on these lines, Miss Minnie, it might be as well to make sure of your ground, that the "sucky" type of story

is popular. Allow me to say, as a man who knows what he is talking about, that it is not. Ninety-nine readers out of a hundred would prefer to read a healthy, clean, bright story to one of the above sort.

As for your remark that the boys never travel—why, they seem to have been doing nothing else for the past few weeks! What about their caravan exploits?

Whilst I do not agree in the least with your unfair comments, I must compliment you upon one thing. You have not refused, as so many critics do, from giving your full name and address. I appreciate this, and I hope you will write again. I hope, also, that your views will become less biased in the future of time.

YOUR EDITOR.

NOTICES.

Correspondence, etc., Wanted.

N. Haxton, 114, Elmfield Road, Bexley, Yorks, wants to exchange a No. 2 Mercury for a Brownie Camera. Any number.

J. W. Davis, 20, Spinkfield Avenue, Westcote Park, Leicestershire, wants members for his "Magnet" and "Gem" Club. Competitions. Amateur magazine free.

F. O. Brooks, 214, Corfield Street, Bethnal Green Road, London, E. 2, wants to hear from readers interested in amateur journalism.

An advertising manager of the National Amalgamated Society of Correspondents, Loughborough, is open to receive any announcements for the society's new publications stamped envelope for particulars.

Football.

Chalkoper, back, and half-back wish to join teams—17s. 6d. only.—Y. Gray, 13, Saltman Crescent, Paddington, W. 2.

Book News.

Leo Ford, 15, Pump Court, Southwark, Adelaide, South Australia, offers a "Magnet" containing complete list of stories from commencement.

Victor Green, 2, Whippsand, King's Lane, Yorks, offers "Magnet," No. 570, 271, 272-3.

C. Blye, 4, Union Place, King's Lynn—"Magnet" of 1914-15. Fair price given. Write first.

J. G. Gorton, Stoneham, Tuffrey Avenue, Chislehurst—"Nelson's Gem Library," 143, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, offered. Write first.

E. F. Ingham, Euston Avenue, Highgate, Adelaide, South Australia—"Magnet," "Carried Away"; "Gem," "Figgins' Pig Pudding." Double price. Must be done.

E. Clark, 25, Pitt Street, North Shields, Northumberland, wishes to buy, sell, or exchange back numbers of "Gem" and "Magnet" before 1915.

W. J. E. Buxley, March 27, The Mall, Newport, Isle of Wight, offers six shillings worth of Standard Book Literature. No postage included. Paper will also receive a copy of a work on physical education.

J. Babington, 3, Catherine Road, Tipton Park, Gillingham, Kent—"Magnet," 1300, 1301, for offer. Write before sending, or call any evening after 7.30.

Harry Hogg, 7, Norton Street, Beverley, Yorks, has copies of the "Penny Popular" in offer—from Jan. 1917, to March, 1918.

R. Woodhouse, 10, Tottenham Court, Littleton, London, E. 14, offers fifteen hand-drawn bound volumes of the Companion Papers. These are "Magnet," 1911; "Gem," 1911; "Populart," 1911. Any reasonable offer.

W. S. Gagner, 10, Lindsay Street, Hurlingham, Middlesex, "Lance Magazine" between 191 and 191. Clean. Write first.

W. E. Young, 21, Kirby Road, Coventry—"Bob Cherry's Saring Out," "Figgins' Pig Pudding," "Buster the Stead," "Buster the Postman," also stories of Buster. Write first, stating price.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

(Continued from page 15.)

to be contented. In fact, he has a fearful taste, to cultivate his mind and muscle.

"How it!" I said warmly.

"The point is," continued the gambler, "you'll want another hand so here to take the place of the late lamented one. I'm your man."

"I have no vacancy—"

"Ah! How often have I heard those four words uttered here, but I have never since I first submitted my 'Ode to an Raving Blackheath.' Here am I, a young man writing with ideas—building over with you, in fact—and you heartily follow every page of it and say, 'I have no vacancy. For chance!'"

For the first time I noticed that my visitor looked decidedly downcast. In fact, his boots had no heels at all. His collar, like the Duke of Devon's, went sliding out into the street for the simple reason that he lacked a collar-stud. His clothes were several sizes too small for him. He looked, in fact, not merely on the brink of poverty—but fairly over the edge!

I tried to take pity on him.

"I cannot give you a permanent job here, I said. 'But if you have any suitable work—"

He slipped his hand into his breast pocket, and drew out a bundle of manuscript.

"My name," he explained, "is entirely neglected. I am not offering you the same stuff that I submitted to the 'Officer's Journal' in 1882. These efforts are novel, original, and up-to-date. Listen to this title to the 'Gem': 'The Penny Pop!'"

And, clearing his throat, he began:

"O 'Gem!' O 'Gem!' Precious pearl!
Delighting every boy and girl!
With what delight do May and Donald
Hail all the pictures of Macdonald!"

"You're a bit aside there!" I interjected. "Mr. Macdonald has not yet resumed his position as chief artist to the 'Gem' Library."

"Who does the sketches at present, then?"

"Warwick Reynolds, chiefly."

"Well, you don't expect me to find a rhyme for 'Reynolds,' surely? I don't think even Byron could do that!"

"Try 'Reynolds,' then," I suggested. "Mr. Reynolds is also a 'Gem' artist."

After a few moments' reflection my visitor burst forth with the following:

"O 'Gem!' O 'Gem!' Precious pearl!
The Versatile Three stand all alone!
We love to see each number of this Co.
Be ably drawn by E. E. Reynolds!"

"Oh, help!" I groaned.

"Having overcome that difficulty," said the poet, "we will proceed."

And he proceeded:

"Great Gussy also takes a part in
The splendid yarns by Clifford Martin,"

"Hold on!" I said. "You've got Mr. Clifford's name the wrong way round!"

"Nonsense! That's a way they have in the Army—and a very sensible way, too! Besides, how the merry dickens am I to get a rhyme for 'Clifford'?"

"That's your business. You profess to be a poet; therefore it's up to you to deliver the goods!"

"Suppose we amend that couplet as follows, then?"

"Our Clifford is a genius; that he
Describes each week the deeds of Gussy!"

"Some are born poets," I observed, "and some have poetry thrust upon them. But you'll thrust it upon some too often! I want you to put up in time!"

"In time, yes—but not yet. Listen!"

"We love the exploits of Tom Mowry,
We love the smile of Robert Cherry—"

"I dare say you do!" I cut in. "Unfortunately, Bob Cherry figures in the 'Magpie'—and the 'Gem.'"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You'd better try again!" I said dryly. The lord refused to be beaten. He ran his fingers through his flowing locks, and made another attempt:

"We love each dating jape of Merry's,
And all the curious whims of Horrie.
The bearded Russian and the slim Pole
Are very fond of Glyn and Skimpole!"

At this point I was obliged to send the offender out for some bread. One needs a stimulant to endure verse of this sort.

"Shall I proceed?" asked the bard.

"I wish you'd proceed out of this office! I'm getting near the end of my tether!"

"Oh, don't say that!"

"In the best of the poem is the same style as the opening lines."

"Yes."

"Then I should advise you to take it away and bury it! I don't want to hear any more."

"Very well. Perhaps there 'Lined on the 'Penny Pop' will please you better. Here they are!"

"The 'Penny Pop!' The 'Penny Pop!'
No't my circulation top—"

"It jolly soon would if I published pills like that in it!" I said.

"We get our fill of fun for one day,
'The 'Penny Pop' comes out on Monday,"

"Indeed! That is the first I've heard of it," I said. "The 'Penny Poplar' comes out on Friday."

"Thanks for the tip. I'll alter that little couplet, then:

"Who cares if Thursday is a dry day?
The 'Penny Pop' comes out on Friday!"

"Carey on!" I said wearily. "Never mind me, but don't blame me if the offender, already bored to tears, comes in and drops you in the middle of your recital!"

Raising his hand aloft, the poet continued:

"Dear 'Penny Pop,' I am thy price
Right indistinct, in oiden days;
Nik now that all your yarns are new,
And by the three best authors, too,
I dance a Jaxx in my delight,
It's ripping! Roll on, Friday night!"

"Why not Friday morning?" I said. "The 'Penny Poplar' is on sale then."

(To be continued.)

Greyfriars Epitaphs.

No. 12. By BOB CHERRY.

WOT I SAYS IS THIS

THE LIES

what came was

GOOLING, THE POSTER.

WHO FAILED TO TAKE ENOUGH WATER
WITH IT,

AND EXPIRED

In the ancient gateway of Greyfriars,
with a touch of kry clenched in his horny
palm.

HE WAS A MOST CHARMING MAN

when sober—which was never!

For many moons he was the keeper of the
gate, and the sworn enemy of the law-
breakers, to whom he spoke:

YOUNG RIPS! WHICH I'LL REPORT
YER!

His favourite relaxation was to juggle

THE JUICE OF THE JUNIPER.

frequently known as gin) and, in the words of
the poet,

THE SPIRIT WAS SIBONG WITHIN HIM!

The percentage of water taken with his gin
became small by degrees and beautifully so,
until at length it ceased altogether—and so did
Guss!

He discharged his duties as faithfully as his
god and rheumatism would permit, but he
never turned up his nose at a "tip"—especially
one of Massey's, which kept him in "good
spirits" for weeks afterwards.

"Poor Gussing! Fate is 'run,' I fear,
For though he was both 'half' and
'about,'
Death stretched him on the 'litter hole',
In another world he 'hope' about!"



The Luck of the Idols

A grand new series of thrilling complete yarns, dealing with the history of two little idols which rested on the palms of the hands of a Hindu god, and the strange and sinister influence of the one, and the good luck brought by the other.

These stories are quite different from the usual run, and grip with intense interest. Start them TO-DAY in

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