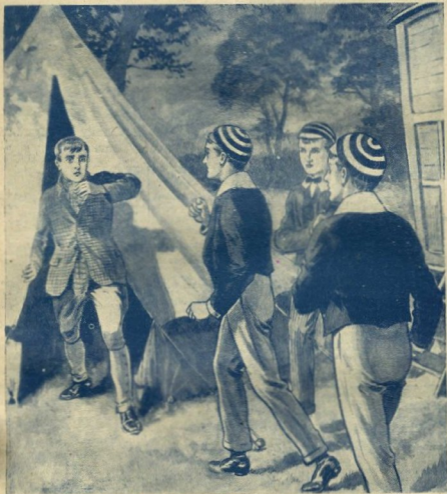


CHARLEY AND THE CARAVANNERS!



TOM MERRY & CO.'S STRANGE DISCOVERY.

(A Dramatic Scene in the Splendid Lonz Complete School Tale in this Issue.)

32-9-12

Charley and the Caravanners



A Magnificent Long Complete Tale dealing with the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. on a Caravan Tour.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.

The Chase of the Caravan.

LISTEN!

"**L** Tom Merry halted. The full, round moon rode high in the sky, and the roads, the fields, and the great mass of the Chiltern Hills were almost as bright as by day.

It was past midnight, but the St. Jim's caravan was jogging along a chalky road in the Chilterns. Jack Blake was driving, occasionally jerking the reins, and addressing remarks to the horse.

Circumstances—the caravan horse—displayed an inclination to halt at every other step. He did not seem to see any adequate reason for this night march; and Circumstances had a will of his own.

Some of the caravanners were dozing in the van. But Tom Merry and Monty Lowther were walking with the horse, seconding Blake's manful efforts to keep him on the go. Circumstances was not tired; he had been resting all day. But he evidently thought it was high time that all respectable caravanners were in bed.

"Listen, you chaps!" Tom Merry looked back along the road, across which the shadows of the wayside trees lay in a black network.

"Gee-up!" grunted Blake.

"Hold on, Blake!" "My dear man, if this lump of dead-and-alive catmewer ever stops we shall never get it to start again. Give it a push."

"We're being followed," said Tom. "Oh, rot, old chap!" "Fathhead! I can hear horses on the road."

Blake gave a snort, and allowed the horse to halt. Circumstances did so with an air of great firmness. Something

more than persuasion was likely to be required to make him start again, as Blake foresaw.

Tom Merry was listening intently. Now that the rumble of the caravan, and the clumping of Circumstances' hoofs had ceased, deep silence lay on the hilly road.

Through the silence came the tattoo of distant hoof-beats.

Far back on the road horsemen were riding at a gallop after the St. Jim's caravan.

"I thought I heard it several times," said Tom Merry. "Now I'm sure. You fellows can hear it!"

"Half a dozen horses," said Lowther. "Five or six at least."

Grunt from Jack Blake. Blake's temper was a little ruffled by the caravan horse, who had evidently imbibed the modern craze for self-determination.

"Well, what does it matter?" asked Blake. "If chaps have a fancy for riding in the middle of the night, it needn't worry us."

"I'm thinking of Cutts." "Cutts of the Fifth? Bother him! We've done with that cad!" "I hope so. But—"

"We're six or seven miles from St. Leger Lodge now," said Blake. "They wouldn't follow us all this way—if they followed us at all."

Tom Merry did not answer. He was staring back along the road intently with knitted brows. He thought it only too probable that Cutts of the Fifth and his friends were following the caravan, and if that was the case there was trouble in store for somebody.

An eyeglass glimmered in the doorway of the van, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked out inquiringly.

"Campin' beah, deah boys!" he asked. "The horse thinks so!" grunted Blake.

"Well, what are you stoppin' for?" "Tom Merry's dreamin' about Cutts of the Fifth!" said Blake crossly. "He thinks those rotters are after us."

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jumped down from the van.

Manners and Herries and Digby followed him, and they brought golf-clubs with them. If Cutts & Co. were on the track, the clubs were likely to be wanted.

"I'm not dreamin', Blake, old scout," answered Tom Merry. "Look!" He pointed along the road.

In the moonlight a bunch of riders had come into sight in the distance, riding hard.

They were too far off for faces to be recognised, but one of them, at least, Tom was sure he knew.

"Cutts!" said Lowther. "Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Those Fifth Form wottahs are aftah us, deah boys. I wathah thought that Cutts would be watty, aftah gettin' such a fearful thwackin'."

"Aux armes, citoyens!" sang Monty Lowther humorously. "There's goin' to be a scrap!"

Jack Blake jumped down from the driver's seat.

The thudding of the horses' hooves on the hard, chalky road was more and more now, growing nearer and louder every moment.

"They mean trouble," said Tom Merry.

"We can give 'em back as good as they send!" growled Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The St. Jim's juniors gathered together, each with a weapon of some kind in his hand. The road they were follow-

ing was a very lonely one, and the hour was very late. There was no chance of help at hand. In grim silence they watched the bunch of riders draw nearer, till they were able to recognize Cutts of the Fifth and Pry and Gilmore in the moonlight. Three burly fellows, who looked like stablemen, were riding with the three Fifth-Formers of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove! It's goin' to be wathah a scarp!" remarked Arthur Augustus, as he took a business-like grip on a cleek. "I've really my fault, you fellows. I've led you in this."

"You always were an ass!" remarked Herries.

"Weally, Howwies—"

"And a chump!" said Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry cheerily. "They look rather a hefty crowd for us, but we'll handle them all right."

"Oh, yes, rather!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked distressed.

He felt that it really was his fault; and so, certainly, it was.

In the innocence of his unsuspecting heart he had joined Gerald Cutts' party at St. Leger's house, to discover, rather late, that he was only wanted to gamble and lose his ample cash, which he had firmly decided to do. And, as Cutts' evil temper had been fully roused by his refusal, Arthur Augustus would have been severely handled had not the rest of the caravanners come to the rescue.

But they had rescued him, roughly handling Cutts & Co. in the process. And then the caravanners had pushed on, late as the hour was, anxious to get out of the neighbourhood of St. Leger Lodge.

Tom Merry had not quite expected Cutts to take his defeat, and his thrashing quietly; and evidently he had been right. There were several rough fellows employed about the stables at the Lodge, and evidently Cutts had called them up, and started on the track of the caravanners to pay off his score. "Shoulder to shoulder," said Blake. "They've seen us now. That cad Cutts is grinning!"

"The uttah wotwath!"

A grimy face looked out of the caravan. It belonged to Charley Chipps, lately a stable-boy at the Lodge. It was Charley who had guided the caravanners to the rescue of their chum, whether out of regard for Arthur Augustus or in retaliation for a thrashing Cutts had given him they did not inquire.

Charley knuckled his sleepy eyes, and blinked at the St. Jim's juniors.

"Wot's the row?" he asked.

"There is goin' to be a scwap, Charley!" answered Arthur Augustus. "You had bettah stay in the van, kid."

Charley blinked along the moonlit road.

"Master Cutts!" he ejaculated.

"Yass!"

"And the stable blokes!" said Charley, with a whistle. "They're a rough old lot, sir, they are. You covas 'ad better mizle!"

"Rats!" grunted Blake.

"We should uttably refuse to wetweat with those wuffians, Charley!" said Arthur Augustus with dignity.

"And they'd catch us up if we did!" grunted Herries.

"Yass, wathah!"

"The kid can help," said Blake. "Cutts knows you showed us the way into the Lodge, Charley, and if he lays hands on you you'll get some more of his riding-whip. Lay hold of something and line up!"

"Every little helps!" assented Tom Merry.

Charley nodded.

"I'm your man, gents!" he answered. And Charley jumped out of the caravan with a frying-pan in his hand. It was the only weapon he could find, the golf-club being already appropriated.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

Cutts & Co. came on at a gallop, as if they meant to ride the caravanners down, and the juniors drew close to the van. Within a few yards of the St. Jim's caravan Cutts pulled in his horse so suddenly that the animal reared and pawed the air.

"Got them!" exclaimed Cutts. "Pile in, you fellows! Use your whips, and thrash them till they can't yell!"

And Cutts lashed out with his riding-whip.

CHAPTER 2.

The Fight.

"YAWOOOOH!"

It was Arthur Augustus who caught Cutts' riding-whip with his shoulder, and he gave a terrific yell.

Cutts' followers rode close, and they had the advantage, being on horseback. They lashed out mercilessly at the juniors with their riding-whips.

It was a raffianly attack, but quite in keeping with the character of Gerald Cutts. He evidently cared very little how much damage he did. He had relied upon Arthur Augustus' banknotes to restore his finances, having been rendered nearly "stony" by his little speculations on the races. He had been disappointed, and thrashed into the bargain, and now he was in a bitter, revengeful mood that a Hun might have envied.

He lashed out recklessly with his whip, while his horse pranced. Loud yells rang out as the whips made rapid play on heads and shoulders.

Tom Merry & Co. were at a disadvantage, but they were not taking the attack quietly by any means.

The golf-clubs lashed out in return, though, unfortunately, the horses caught more of the blows than the riders. The animals pranced and plunged under the blows, however, and some of the riders were soon in difficulties.

Prye of the Fifth lost his stirrups and his reins, and clung to his horse's neck to save himself, gasping. The horse, uncontrolled, broke into a gallop, and dashed away up the road, with Prye clinging frantically to his neck and yelling for help.

But there was no help for Prye. His comrades were too busy.

Gilmore's horse was rearing and plunging, maddened by a blow on the nose, and Gilmore had all his work cut out to get him under control. He was quickly out of the tussle, as well as Prye.

Cutts was a good horseman, however, and the four stablemen had no trouble. And the three of them plied their attack hotly, and they were a big handful for the juniors on foot.

It was Charley who first distinguished himself. Heedless of the lashes that rained on him, the little vagrant seized one of the grooms by the foot and unhorsed him. The man came down into the road with a heavy bump, and lay groaning, his horse dashing away at a gallop.

Arthur Augustus seemed to be understudying a grasshopper in his wild jumps and hops to elude the blows Cutts was raining on him; but the swell of St. Jim's found a chance with the cleek at last. The iron-headed golf-club landed on Cutts' chest with a terrific clump, and

the backguard of the Fifth rolled off his horse as if he had been shot.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Whis!

Charley's frying-pan flew through the air and caught one of the grooms on the side of the head.

He went down into the road, roaring. A change had come over the scene now.

There was only one of the grooms who was not out of the scrap, and he was assailed on all sides by lashing clubs.

He backed his horse, turned tail, and rode back the way he had come, with a score or more of bruises to show for his trouble.

Cutts of the Fifth was staggering to his feet, his hard face almost demoniacal in expression.

"Down that cad!" panted Tom Merry.

"Yass, wathah!"

Cutts dodged the cleek, and closed with Arthur Augustus.

But Blake and Herries and Digby rushed in to the help of Arthur Augustus, and Cutts went down, the juniors sprawling over him.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther rushed at the two grooms who were on the ground. They had no mercy on them. The golf-clubs lashed at the pair as they scrambled up and fled after their runaway horses.

Gilmore had succeeded in getting his horse under control at last.

But he did not linger.

The fight had gone against the rascals of the Fifth, after all, and Gilmore did not want any more.

He turned a deaf ear to Cutts' frantic yells for help, and rode away at a gallop.

Cutts' horse was pawing the ground, and Tom Merry dragged it round, and gave it a smart tap, sending it careering up the road after the fleeing Gilmore.

"Besten the rotters!" gasped Tom.

"Yow-ow-ow!" mumbled Manners, as he rubbed his head.

"Oh! Ow! Wow!" was Monty Lowther's remark.

"Oh, my hat! My napper!"

"Never mind. We've beaten them."

"Oo Wov!"

"And we've got Cutts!" said Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming. "We've got that cad! Hold him, you fellows!"

"Yass, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Cutts was safe enough. He was on his back in the road, and Jack Blake was kneeling on his chest, and Herries was trampling on his legs. Dig was jamming a golf-club on his nose, as a hint to keep quiet; but Cutts found it difficult to keep quiet. Arthur Augustus had taken a grip on his hair, and was tugging at it in great excitement.

"It's all wright!" gasped Gussy. "I've got him! He can't get away unless he leaves me his top-knot!"

"Goooop!" roared Cutts.

"You can yell as much as you like, you wotwath, but I've got you!"

"Yaroooh! Leggo!" shrieked Cutts.

"I refuse to let go, Cutts!"

"Yow-ow! Help! You young demon, you're pulling my hair out by the roots!" wailed the Fifth-Former.

"I am uttably wearied, Cutts, whethah I pull your wotten hair out by the woots or not!"

"Yow-ow-ow! Help! Stoppit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"Yoooop!"

"Go easy, Gussy!" chuckled the captain of the Shell. "We don't want to scalp our prisoners like Red Indians, you know."

"I am afraid the wassal will get away, Tom Newwy."
 "Yarrah!"
 "He won't get away while I'm kneeling on his chest," remarked Blake.
 "You-ow-wonooop!"
 "Will you keep quiet, you uthah wottah, if I let go your hair!"
 "Wow-ow! Yes! Anything! Leggo!" shrieked Cutts.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Arthur Augustus left off tagging at last. Cutts' face was crimson with anguish and fury.

"I wathah think we have whacked the wottahs," said Arthur Augustus, with great satisfaction. "I am, feckfully hurt, you know, but we have won the victory! Hawwah!"

"Oh, my napper!" mumbled Lowther.
 "Look at my nose!" said Manners.
 "Nevah mind your nose, Mannahs, old chap."

"Fateh! Ow-ow!"
 "Hai Jove, your nose does look wathah a sight, Mannahs!" said Arthur Augustus sympathetically. "It might have been worse, howevah."

"How could it have been worse, you say?" growled Manners.

"It might have been my nose, deah boy," answered Arthur Augustus innocently.

"You—you—you frabjous idiot!"
 "Weally, Mannahs!"
 "You bowling dummy!"

"I am vewy sowy for your nose, Mannahs, but I wrefuse to listen to these opprobrious wemahs."

"Will you let me go!" said Cutts between his teeth.

The cad of the Fifth was quivering with rage in the vengeful grasp of the juniors.

Tom Merry & Co. had certainly received severe punishment in the tussle; but Cutts was sorry by that time that he had set out for vengeance. The attack on the caravaners had certainly not gone "according to plan."

"No, we won't let you go," said Jack Blake coolly. "You came here of your own accord, and you'll go when we please—not when you please. Charley!"

"Yes!" grinned Charley.
 "Get a rope out of the van!"
 "Instantly, sir!"

"What on earth—" began Tom Merry.

"Cutts is coming along with us," said Blake. "He was very keen on following our van. He can follow it a bit farther!"

"My hat! What—"

"I'm going to tie him on behind!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Ee's the rope, sir!" grinned Charley.

"Tie it round his wrists, Dig, while I hold the cad!"

"What-ho!" chuckled Dig.
 Cutts began to struggle again, and Arthur Augustus promptly collared his hair and began to tug. Cutts was tired first, and he gave in.

Digby knotted the end of the rope round Cutts' wrists, fastening them securely together. Then the dandy of the Fifth was allowed to get on his feet. His first proceeding was to kick at Blake with savage force. But Herries was ready with a club, and the club landed on Cutts' leg just in time. It landed with a sounding crack, and Cutts gave a howl of anguish.

"You'll get that every time you kick!" remarked Herries.

"Yaa, wathah!"
 "Ow-ow! You-wow!"
 Cutts did not kick again. One lesson of that kind was quite enough for him.

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 62.

Jack Blake tied the loose end of the rope to the caravan.
 "Now we'll get on!" he remarked.
 "Let me go!" shrieked Cutts.
 "Shut up!"
 "I'll yell for help! I'll—"

Crack!
 Herries put in another with the golf-club, and Cutts roared.

"It will be a hard one next time," said Herries warningly. "You can't kick up a row at this time of night, Cutts. Quiet, old top!"

"I—I—I—"

"Are you going to be quiet?" demanded Herries, brandishing the driver within a foot of Cutts' nose.

"Oh, you—you— Yes!" gasped Cutts. "Keep that club away, you young villain. I—I—I'll be quiet!"

Cutts gave a wild look round the road. His friends were gone, and his horse had vanished into the fields. There was likely to be some difficulty in recovering that horse; but that was Cutts' business, and he certainly could not set about it now. He was booked to follow the caravan.

Tom Merry & Co. spent some time in attending to their injuries. There was a plentiful flow of embezzement. Then they took the road. Circumstances yielding to the persuasion of a pull at his head, and a cracking whip at his tail.

Cutts followed the van.
 He had no choice about that, as he was tied on.

The caravan swung along in the moonlight, and Cutts of the Fifth kept up with it behind, like a led horse, with an expression on his face that Manners said he would like to photograph, only he was afraid it would damage the camera.

CHAPTER 3.

Follow Your Leader.

"KEEP on till morning!" remarked Tom Merry.

"Yaaa, wathah! It's a wippen' night," said Arthur Augustus. "I will dwive if you like, Blake."

"We don't want to wind up in the ditch, old chap!"
 "Weally, Blake!"

"Jolly good idea to keep on till morning," said Herries. "I'll turn in, and you can call me in the morning."

Herries turned into a bank in the caravan, and Dig and Manners followed his example. Charley was camping on the floor in a rug. Lowther sat with Blake in front, and Tom Merry walked at the horse's head.

It was a glorious summer night, with a full silver moon sailing overhead, and a deep-blue sky dotted with fleecy clouds. The caravan proceeded at a walk, save when a steep slope in the road made Circumstances get a move on whether he liked it or not.

Behind the van tramped Cutts of the Fifth.

Cutts' face was a study.
 For a time he was silent; but at last he began to demand, in furious tones, to be released.

The caravaners did not heed, and Cutts' voice grew louder and louder. He woke Herries at last.

Herries did not like being awakened out of his nap. He did not say anything to Cutts, however. He reached out of the van with a creak, and gave the dandy of the Fifth a rap on the head.

Cutts roared.
 "Another word, and I'll come out to you!" said Herries.

"You—you—"

Crack!

"Ow-ow! Wow!"
 After that Cutts was silent. Herries returned to his bunk, and his nap was not disturbed again by Cutts.

The unfortunate Fifth Former tramped on in furious silence.

His dealing with the junior caravaners had been unfortunate all along. His little scheme for repairing his shattered finances at the expense of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been a ghastly failure. And his bid for vengeance had been a more ghastly failure still. Now he was tramping behind the caravan, tied on like a dog, with burning eyes and fury in his heart.

There was no help for him. Not a soul was passed on the lonely road as the caravan rumbled on in the small hours of the morning.

The night march was an agreeable experience enough for the caravaners, but Cutts did not find it agreeable.

The moon waned at last, as the early flush of dawn began to creep over the Chilterns.

The caravan rolled on till the dawn was rosy in the sky and the birds were beginning to sing.

Then, on the outskirts of a little village, Tom Merry booked round for a suitable spot for camping.

Charley put his head out of the van in the dawn, and rubbed his eyes and grimed at Cutts. Charley had not forgotten the thrashing Cutts had given him in the stable-yard at St. Leger Lodge. Cutts gave him an appealing look.

"Cast off that rope, Chippo!" he muttered, keeping his voice low to avoid awakening the juniors in the van.

"No fear!" grinned Charley.
 "I'll speak to St. Leger, and ask him to give you your job again at the Lodge, Chippo."

"Promise!" asked Charley.
 "Yes!" said Cutts eagerly.

"And 'ow much is your promise worth, Master Cutts?" inquired Charley decisively.

Cutts ground his teeth.
 "You scrubby little scoundrel!"

"You laid into me with a 'orse-whip!" said Charley. "I've paid you out, ain't it? I showed them blakes 'ow to get in at the Lodge, when you was trying to swindle Master D'Arcy, and thrash 'em 'cause he wouldn't be swindled. P'raps you're sorry now you laid that whip on, Master Cutts!"

Perhaps Cutts was sorry, considering the consequences; but he certainly looked as if he would like to lay it on again.

"You're a rotter, you are, Master Cutts!" jeered Charley. "A rotter, and no mistake! And a 'ound!"

Cutts almost choked.
 "I'll show them blakes 'ow to get in at the Lodge, when you was trying to swindle Master D'Arcy, and thrash 'em 'cause he wouldn't be swindled. P'raps you're sorry now you laid that whip on, Master Cutts!"

"You can say ten quids, and I wouldn't do it," answered Charley. "I got your marks all over my back now, Master Cutts!"

"I—I—I'm sorry—"

"I-deeny you are, as it's turned out!"
 "Cast off that rope, kid—"

"No blinking fear!" answered Charley emphatically. "I'll pull your ears instead, Master Cutts!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Like this 'ere!" said Charley.

He dropped from the van and pulled Cutts' ear, with a gurgle of merriment. Then he jumped back, and dodged Cutts lashing him.

Cutts had to stand on one foot while he kicked, and the pull of the van nearly dragged him over. He jumped desperately to save himself, panting, and Charley followed him, giggling.

"Are another try, Master Cutts!"



"This is my twined Charley Chipps, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, introducing the late stable-hand of St. Leger Lodge to his father. "I met him a few weeks ago in Bucks. He was employed in the stables there." (See chapter 11.)

"Oh, you little hound!" muttered Cutts, stifling with fury.

"Ourselves!" retorted Charley.

"Charley!" said a voice from the van.

"Yesir! Yes, Master D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus rubbed his eyes, and jammed an eyeglass into one of them and surveyed Charley severely.

"I am surprised at you, Charley!" he said.

"Oh, Master D'Arcy! What 'ave I done!"

"You are triumphin' ovah a fallen enemy!" said Arthur Augustus sternly.

"That is as bad as hittin' a chap when he is down! I am vewy much surprisid at you, Charley! It is not cwicket!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Hallo! There goes Gussy's jawne!" came Dig's sleepy voice from the van.

"Last thing at night and first thing in the mornin'!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"Oh, go it, old chap! Are you all firstly?"

"You uttah ass—"

"It's all right; I shall be asleep again before you get to seventhly!"

"I wufuse to wepny to such wibald remarks, Dig!"

And Arthur Augustus dropped from the van, and for the next few minutes he walked with Charley, reading that dismayed youth a very severe lecture,

to which Master Chipps listened very meekly.

"Halt!" sang out Tom Merry at last.

The St. Jim's van jolted to a halt.

The early sunshine glimmered on a wide common, with the red tiles of a village in sight down the road.

Arthur Augustus glanced round approvingly. He quitted Charley, perhaps feeling that he had done enough, for the present, for that youth's moral improvement.

"A vewy good spot for campin'!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "We can get some watah in the village, and perwaps some milk and eggs for bweakkah. They're up already—heah come some chaps!"

Three farm hands came tramping along the road, on their way to early work.

Cutts' eyes gleamed as he saw them. He was ready to yell for help to any stranger that passed, and these were the first.

But the juniors were not prepared to explain the matter to strangers. They collared Gerald Cutts, and bundled him headlong into the van.

There Blake sat on him, and Herries jammed a golf club on his mouth, to keep him quiet till the labourers were past. The trio passed, with a cheery "Good-morning!" cheerily returned by the caravanners, and their footsteps died away up the road.

Tom Merry looked into the van, and

grinned at the sight of Cutts' furious face.

"About time we kicked that fellow out!" he remarked.

"Not at all, deah boy! I dare say there is a police-station in the village yondah."

"What the thump do you want with a police-station?"

"I think we had better give Cutts into custody on a charge of assault and battewy, deah boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly fool!" yelled Cutts.

"Well, I dare say we could give him in charge, if it comes to that," remarked Blake.

"We won't, though! I've got a much better idea. Caravanning is all very well, but to make it really comfy you want a man-of-all-work along with you. That's Cutts' job."

"Wha-at!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Cutts is pretty good at a lot of things," said Blake. "He can ride and shoot, I believe; and I know he can play poker, and back horses, and drink whisky, and smoke cigars. The only thing he's never tried his hand at is honest work. We're going to give him a chance. Are you willing to be our man-of-all-work for to-day, Cutts?"

"No!" yelled Cutts.

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"Jab him with that club, Herries!"

"Certainly!"

"Yaroooh!" roared Cutts.

"Are you willing now, Cutts?"

"You young demon!"

"Another jab, Herries!"

"Yooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you willing now, Cutts?" asked Blake cheerfully.

"Yow-ow-ow!" gasped Cutts.

"Good! I thought you'd be willing if I talked to you a little! Keep that club handy, though, Herries—ho may jab again!"

"Yes, best!"

And Cutts was lifted out of the van—to commence his career as man-of-all-work to the caravan party. And, to judge by Blake's looks, Gerald Cutts' new job was not going to be a sinecure.

CHAPTER 4.

The Man-of-all-Work.

TOM MERRY and CO. turned the caravan off the road, crossing the common to a considerable distance in order to keep their camp out of range of passing eyes. That was necessary, considering the measures they were taking to secure the services of a man-of-all-work. Circumstances were taken out and labelled, and he grand contentedly on the grass, and then lay down to sleep. Diggs and Lowther went into the village in search of provender while the others were preparing the camp. Cutts of the Fifth was cast loose from the ropes of the van; but Blake tied it to his arm and kept hold of the other end. He did not intend to give his man-of-all-work a chance of scolding himself.

As soon as his hands were free Cutts clenched them furiously, and he looked inclined to run amok among the caravanners.

But he didn't. Blake and Herries had gulf-clubs ready for him if he did; and Cutts was aware that those clubs would be used without mercy in case of mutiny. The juniors had the marks of the whip all over them from the fight of the night before, and the marks were painful. Until those marks wore off, at least, they were

not likely to waste much mercy on the blackguard of the St. Jim's Fifth.

Gerald Cutts was "in for it."

"Better have a campfire!" remarked Blake. "There's plenty of loose sticks in the hedge yonder, and it will save the oil. Nothing like economy! Will you gather us some firewood, Cutts?"

"No!" shrieked Cutts.

"Jab him, Herries!"

"Keep off!" roared Cutts. "I—I—I'll gather the—the firewood!"

"Get a move on, then!"

Blake and Herries and Messers accompanied Cutts to gather the sticks. They did not gather any; it was so work working when there was a man-of-all-work on the spot. Cutts gathered the sticks, simmering with speechless fury; and when he slacked Herries was always ready with a jab. After a jab or two Gerald Cutts gave up slacking. Herries was rather emphatic in his jabs.

Cutts was led back to camp with his arms stacked with brushwood, his face almost hidden by his cargo. What could be seen of his face was pale with rage.

"This will remind you of when you were a fag in the Third!" remarked Blake. "I dare say you were a slacking little rascal! But we're not going to let you slack now! Will you clean the stoves for us, Cutts?"

"No-yes!" gasped Cutts.

"If they're damaged at all, Cutts—it's easy to damage a Primus—we shall give you a round dozen with the clock! That's a tip!"

The stoves were not damaged.

By the time Cutts had finished them Lowther and Dig were back, with a can of water, a jug of milk, and a bag of eggs. Cutts was rather oily, and smelt considerably of oil, and there was a dab of soot on his nose.

"May as well have the kettle cleaned after breakfast, as we've got a man to do it for us," observed Blake.

"Yess, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"While we're having broker, Cutts, you can get on with the boots."

"I won't!" raved Cutts.

"What!"

"I—I mean, all right, Yes!"

"Yes wathah!" demanded Blake.

"That man-of-all-work has been jolly badly trained," said Monty Lowther.

"Don't you know that you say 'sir' to your master, my man?"

Cutts' only reply was a homicidal look.

"Are you getting tired of jabbing him, Herries?"

"Not at all."

"Then jab him till he addresses his master with proper respect."

"Certainly!"

Herries was quite active with the Cutts, and had hopped as the P. Former jabbed.

"Yaroooh! Heppah! I'll—I'll—"

"Will you treat your masters with proper respect now, Cutts?"

"Owl! Yow! Yes!" gasped Cutts.

"Yes wathah!"

"That's better! Keep that up."

"Yess, wathah! If you are very indutious and respectful, Cutts, we may be able to give you a good character when we sack you."

"Bear that in mind, Cutts."

Cutts made an indistinguishable sound.

"Do you hear me?" demanded Blake.

"Yes!" gasped Cutts.

"Give him a—"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Cutts, before Blake could get out the word "jab."

"Hoi Jove! He's learnin'!"

"Well teach him manners in time," remarked Blake. "After a bit more he will be quite a good servant. Don't you think so, Cutts?"

"Yes—sir!" gurgled Cutts.

"That's right!"

The caravanners sat down cheerfully to breakfast. Cutts had to sit down, as Blake was keeping hold of the cord on his arm. He looked round wildly, but only the wide common stretched before his eyes. There was nothing to help Cutts.

His feelings could not have been expressed in words as he sat and glared savagely at the caravanners. He was paying for his sins now; and, as his sins were many, it was only just that the punishment should be heavy.

"Aren't you going to feed your man, Blake?" asked Tom Merry, with a laugh, when breakfast was over.

"Well, I don't believe in pampering menials," said Blake. "Still, he can have some bread and marmarine—not too much marmarine."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts refused the proffered refreshment with a savage gesture. He was set to work cleaning and polishing kettles and saucepans. It was not an enticing task; and, to tell the exact truth, the caravanners had neglected it a little. Some of the pots and pans were most decidedly in need of polishing. Blake's man-of-all-work came in very useful indeed. A job or two were required to start Cutts polishing; but after that he polished away as if his life depended on it. His ribs certainly did depend on it. They were aching from Herries' emphatic jabs.

After a night's march, the caravanners intended to rest all the morning. Tom Merry and Blake, who had had least sleep, turned in, Herries being left in charge of Cutts' cord. Herries was so likely to fall as a watchman; he was sharply on the alert as his own bed. Toward could have been.

Pots and pans and kettles gleamed silver when Cutts had finished with them. Cutts did not look so bright; he was, in fact, extremely dirty by that time, and his once elegant clothes were in a rather sad state. He stared away towards the road every few minutes, with a faint hope of seeing his friends arrive; but there was no sign of them. Frye and Gilmore had had more than enough of the caravanners, and Cutts was left to his fate.

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man to rub down the horse, Blake?" asked Arthur Augustus, as Blake was turning in.

"Jab him till he does it properly," yawned Blake. "Don't let him yell and wake me up, though. If he yells, give him twice as much, Herries!"

"Leave him to me," answered Herries. Cutts was quite able to rub down the horse, and he did the work thoroughly.

After that his duty was to bring pails of water from the pond, and wash down the outside of the caravan. Several little tasks that had been overlooked were performed now—by Cutts. By noon Gerald Cutts was getting tired. It was probable, as Lowther remarked, that he had never done so much honest work in his life before as he had done that morning.

Tom Merry and Blake turned out of the bunks in time for lunch, and an appetizing stew was boiled in an iron pot over the camp-fire, Charley Chipps feeding the fire with sticks under it. When the merry caravanners sat round to lunch, Cutts was offered the bread-and-margarine again, and this time he accepted it. He was nearly famished by that time. He ate his frugal fare with a pale and furious face, while the caravanners discussed the savoury stew.

"We start after lunch," remarked Tom Merry. "Isn't it about time you sacked your man, Blake?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake considered.

"He's jolly useful," he said. "I know he's ugly and bad-mannered, but he can work. Why not keep him on?"

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Servants are very difficult to obtain in these days, you know. Let us give Cutts a permanent job."

Cutts breathed hard.

"More trouble than he's worth, if he howls to people we pass on the road," said Tom, laughing. "Besides, I think the rotter has had enough."

"Have you had enough, Cutts?" asked Blake.

A sardonic look was the only reply.

"Where's your club, Herries?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes!" gasped Cutts. "I—I mean,

228, sir! I—I've had enough!"

"Well, I'm afraid you haven't been with us long enough for us to give you a character," said Blake. "Besides, I couldn't give you a very good character, Cutts. You can work, but you are unwilling, and require constant jabbing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let him loose," said Blake. "I sha'n't be sorry to see the last of him. You can go, Cutts. You're discharged!"

Cutts rose to his feet. The look on his face was like unto that of a Prussian Hun in his most Hunnish mood. He was released from the cord, and he stepped away.

"I'll remember this!" he said, in a voice hoarse with fury.

"It will do you good to remember it," assented Blake. "I hope you'll have benefited by the lesson, Cutts, before we see you next term at St. Jim's. Otherwise, we may take you on as a fag in Study No. 6."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme give him a kick afore he goes!" exclaimed Charley Chipps.

"Charley!"

"Oh! Yes, Master Gussy?"

"What did I tell you about twinnipin' o'ah a fallin' enemy, Charley?" asked Arthur Augustus severely.

"Oh lor!" said Charley.

Gerald Cutts tramped away across the common towards the road. He had a ten-mile walk before him to get back to St. Leger Lodge. He turned, at a safe distance, and shook a furious fat at the

caravan camp; and Jack Blake smiled, and waved back with his hand in genial farewell. Then Cutts tramped out on the road and disappeared.

CHAPTER 5.

The Proper Thing to Do!

"NOW, deah boys—" "Jawbone solo by Gussy!" said Monty Lowther.

"Pray do not interrupt me with widdlewose remarks, Lowthah! There is a wathah important mattah to be settled."

"Anything happened to your silk hat?" inquired Blake.

"Nothin' has happened to my silk hat, Blake."

"Is it your best necktie?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Or your silk socks?" asked Blake. "I used a pair to wipe out the fryin'-pan yesterday!"

"Bai Jove! You uttah wuffan!"

"It was all right; they'd been washed," assured Blake. "I think they want washing again now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fellows will leave off cacklin'," said Arthur Augustus warmly, "we can consider the wery important mattah I was alludin' to."

"Is there anything important, besides your tappers and neckties and socks?" asked Monty Lowther, in surprise.

"Wats! I was welerin' to Charley."

"Oh, Charley!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! What is goin' to be done with Charley?"

Master Chipps blinked at Arthur Augustus and grinned. Tom Merry & Co. stared at their noble chum.

"I dare say Charley knows best," suggested Dig.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Charley has been sacked," he said.

"Well, that's no loss to him," said Blake. "He's quite as well out of the stables at St. Leger Lodge."

"Yaas, wathah! I agree to that. I am wery much afraid that Charley's mowal twainin' was neglected there."

"Go hon!"

"I should certainly advise Charley not to return there," said Arthur Augustus.

"The associations of the place are of a low moral tone, and not at all good for a youngstah like Charley."

"Go hon!" murmured Blake.

"Moreovah—"

"That's a good word!" said Monty Lowther admiringly.

"Pray do not interrupt me, Lowthah. Moreovah, it is wery pweb that if Charley went back to the Lodge, that howwid wascal Cutts would pitch into him again, and most likely St. Leger wouldn't take him on, either. You see, it was werrin' to Charley that you fellows wescused me from those wottahs, and they are likely to feel wery watty about it."

"Just a few, I should think!" grinned Blake.

"I ain't goin' back," said Charley.

"I've 'ad enough of Master Cutts' orsewhip, I can tell you!"

"What are you thinkin' of doin', Charley?"

"Dunno, sir!"

"Let's pass the bat round for Charley, and make up a little sum to see him through till he gets a job," suggested Manners.

"That's a good idea!" assented Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I do not wgerat it as a wery good ideah, deah boys. Pwobably Charley could get a job all wight. But I feah

that he is feelin' the effect of the wery bad mowal twainin' I has wescived. I am sorry to say it—I am suah you will excuse me, Charley—but he is a wegulah little wascal in some respects."

"Oh, sir!" murmured Charley.

"He has told wophpaha," said Arthur Augustus. "I am also awah that he has sacked horses—a youngstah like him! And you can see for yourselves that he is not wery clean."

"Well, I have some doubts as to whether he really bathes every mornin'," said Blake solemnly. "But perhaps he forgot to ring for the hot water when he was sleeping over the stable at the Lodge."

"Oh, my eye!" said Charley.

"Pray do not jest on a serious subject, Blake. There is somethin' wery wong in the state of affairs when a fellah isn't able to get a bath wery mornin'," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I shouldn't wondah if that is the cause of the induswath unweat in this country."

"Oh, crumble!"

"Howevah, to resume—"

"My hat! Haven't you finished yet?"

"Certainly not!"

"Better camp here for a few days, and let Gussy finish," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Wats! I was goin' to remark that it was partly on our account that Charley was sacked, and it is up to us to see him through. Moreovah—"

"We've had moreover before!"

"Moreovah," said Arthur Augustus, frowning, "Charley's mowal twainin' wequishs lookin' to, for the wossons I have stated. Undah the circs, I think I had better take Charley in hand."

"You!"

"Yaas, wathah! I think that would lo the wight and pwopah thing to do. He can come on in the caravan with us—"

"Oh!"

"And as we are goin' through Hampshire latak, we will take him home—"

"To—to your father's place, do you mean?" ejaculated Blake.

"Yaas."

"Oh, my hat! And what will Lord Eastwood say when you trot him in?" asked Blake dazedly.

"I weally do not know, Blake. But no doubt he will wgerat me as havin' acted in the pwopah mannah. I feel that we have a duty towards Charley, and I will ask my patah's advice about cawwain' it out."

"My word!"

"Is Charley to be consulted?" queried Lowther meekly. "It's barely possible that Charley may want to have a word in settlin' his own business."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I never thought of that! Charley, deah boy—Arthur Augustus turned to the staring Charley benignantly—"would you like to come on with us in the cawwain'?"

"Oh, lor!" said Charley. "Wotter!"

"I am suah, Charley, that you will not be offended if I wquest you to have a thorough wash first."

"Oh, my eye!" gasped Charley. "I'm all right, sir. I 'ad a wash the day before yesterday, sir!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Course, it wasn't all over," added Charley.

Arthur Augustus glanced at his grinning chums.

"You see, deah boys, Charley is wery much in need of pwopah twainin', in the hands of a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Are you going to wash him?" asked Blake.

"Wats! It is settled that Charley come on with us."

"Old on, sir!" said Charley.
"Bai Jove! Don't you want to come, kid!"

"Not if the other young gents don't want me to, sir," said Charley sturdily.
"If you wants me to come, sir, I'll make myself useful about the van, and look arter the 'orse; but I ain't coming if I ain't wanted, jist because you're a kind-hearted young bloke, sir."

"I twust, deah boy—" began Arthur Augustus.

"All serene, Charley!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We want you no end, old top."

"We yearn for your society, dear boy," said Monty Lowther, with great solemnity.

"Who yer kiddin'?" said Charley.
"It's all right—you're coming," said Blake.

"Then I'll look arter the 'orse, and do jobs," said Charley. "I want to earn my keep, sir."

"That is a vewy pwopah spewit, Charley," said Arthur Augustus approvingly.

"And now," said Blake, "if Gussy's done exercising his lower jaw, we may as well take the road."

"But is he done?" asked Lowther doubtfully.

"Weslly, Lowthab—" said Tom Merry, jumping up.

And the caravanners broke camp, and started on the road once more, and the latest addition to the caravan party tramped along with the horse, whistling cheerily. There was no doubt that Charley was satisfied with the new arrangement. But Tom Merry & Co. could not help wondering what Gussy's noble pater would say when Charley arrived at Eastwood House.

CHAPTER 6.

Fur Cap.

"**W**HERE are we headin' for now, Tom Mewsey?"

"Reading," said Charley.
"Bai Jove! Then we are in Berkshire!"

"Fortunately," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "it is all Berks and no bites!"

"Wats!"

It was a week since the St. Jim's caravanners had left St. Leger Lodge, in the Chiltern Hills, behind them. The caravanners had wondered at first whether they would see anything more of Gerald Cutts of the Fifth. But they did not see anything more of him. Cutts had had enough of the caravanners, and they went their way in peace—glad enough, on their side, to see the last of the black sheep of St. Jim's.

Charley had proved quite an acquisition to the caravan party. Charley knew all about horses, and was soon fast friends with Circumstances. And, although the caravanners were prepared to "whack out" the work on fair terms, treating Charley as one of the party, that cheerful youth insisted upon earning his keep, as he expressed it, and he made himself useful in a score of ways. And when Arthur Augustus discovered that Charley could brush a silk hat—and brush it nicely—he was more than ever satisfied that he had done the right thing in attaching Charley to the party.

Charley was driving now, with a very cheerful if somewhat grubby face. Charley had taken quite kindly to regular washing, but, somehow, his face had a tendency to grabbiness.

"We cross the Thames again at Reading," said Tom Merry.

ing," said Tom Merry, "then we keep on into Hants, and you land your passenger at Eastwood House, Gussy."
"Yaas, wathah!" assented Arthur Augustus. "And we can drop in for some biscuits at Woadin'."

"Some what?"
"Biscuits. Woadin' is famous for its biscuits, you know."

"Yes, ass! But there's no need to go to Reading for them," said Blake. "You can get them anywhere. Hallo! I've seen that merchant before."

Blake glanced at a tattered figure that was tramping along the road a little ahead of the caravan.

The other fellows followed his glance. The stranger was a tramp, and a very unattractive-looking one, in tattered and frowzy attire, with a rag of a fur cap jammed on his head.

Tom Merry & Co. could only see his back, but there seemed something familiar to their eyes about the man.

As the caravan rumbled behind, the tramp turned his head, and cast a beery glance at the voyagers. And then the juniors ejaculated all at once:

"Fur Cap!"

They recognised the man now. They had fallen in with him at the beginning of the caravan tour, at the time when Figgins & Co. had captured the van, and the School House juniors had pursued the raiders and run them down.

What his name was they did not know; but they knew the beery, evil face and slouching gait of the roadside ruffian.

Fur Cap evidently recognised them, too, for he scowled savagely at the cheery party.

Jack Blake paused.
"Good chance to bump that rotter!" he said. "You remember he led us astray when we were looking for Figgins & Co., and landed us in a field among bulls and things!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
"My eye!"

It was a sudden ejaculation from Charley.

He was staring blankly at the ruffian-looking man by the roadside. Tom Merry glanced up at him.

"Hallo, Charley! Do you know that merchant?" he asked.

"Oh, crickey!" was Charley's answer. "He blinked at the merchant. Fur Cap looked at him, and started, and grinned."

Charley gave the horse a touch with the whip, and Circumstances jumped into a trot. The caravan rattled past the tramp at a good rate. The juniors, who were walking, were left behind for a minute.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

The caravanners hurried after the van. Fur Cap stood staring after them, with an evil grin on his face, and then started on his way again—in the same direction as the caravan.

"Hallo! What did you bolt like that for, you young ass!" exclaimed Blake, as he came up with the van.

"S'kuse me, sir," said Charley, colouring. "The 'orse is a bit fresh, and he went it!"

"Charley!" said Arthur Augustus sternly.

"Yessir!"
"You are tellin' whoppahs again, Charley!"

"Oh, sir!"
"The horse did not bolt!" said Arthur Augustus. "You whacked him, and that was why he ran, Charley."

"I—I—"
"I am vewy sorry, Charley, to see that you have not broken yourself of the howid habit of tellin' whoppahs. It is vewy distwessin'."

Arthur Augustus looked really distressed. It seemed as if the moral training he had been giving Charley for the past week had been wasted.

"Oh, sir!" murmured Charley. "Sorry, Master Gussy! I—I meantsay—I—I didn't want to speak to that bloke, sir."

"There was no reason, Charley, why you should speak to that vewy unpleasant person, if you did not wish to."

"No, sir," said Charley meekly.
"He is a vewy disreputable person, Charley!"

"I know, sir."

"I suppose you mean that you know the man, and you wanted to keep clear of him, kid?" said Tom Merry.

Charley's grubby face was crimson.
"I—I've come across 'im before, sir," he stammered.

"You are vewy wight in wishin' to keep clear of him, Charley. He is a vewy unsewupulous and wuffianly person. But you should not tell whoppahs!"

"I—I won't sir!"

"Pway beah that in mind, Charley! I am tellin' you this for your own good, you know, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus kindly.

"Oh, yes, sir!"

Charley devoted his attention to the horse, still looking very red and confused, and Arthur Augustus let the subject drop. It was pretty clear that Charley was acquainted with Mr. Fur Cap, whatever his name was; and it was to his credit

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Cutte was led back to camp with his arms stacked with brushwood, his face almost hidden by his cargo. What could be seen of his face was pale with rage. (See Chapter 4.)

that he did not wish to keep up the acquaintance of so very questionable a character.

Blake looked back presently, and remarked:

"That tramp rotter is on our track."

"Is he a-follerin' of us, sir?" asked Charley.

"Looks like it."

"He was walkin' in this direction when I passed him, you know," remarked Augustus.

"Probably he is goin' to Weadin', too."

"Probably enough," assented Blake.

"We'll keep an eye open for him all the same. He's quite capable of stealing the horse when we camp, if he gets a chance."

"Yass, wablah! Charley!"

"Yessir!"

"Fway be vewy careful, Charley, if you see that boundah wouud again, not to have anythin' to do with him. He is a wotten chawactah!"

"Yessir."

The caravan rolled on, and Fur Cap

was dismissed from the minds of the caravaners, though perhaps not from Charley's. Reading lay ahead now, and the van crossed the Thames by the great bridge, and rolled on through the busy town.

The sun was sinking now, but the caravaners kept on the road till they were well into the open country again. Charley had given the driving to Blake now, and he sat at the back of the van, his eyes on the road behind as the van rolled on. The brightness seemed to have gone out of Charley's face, and he looked very thoughtful.

He dropped from the van presently, and approached Arthur Augustus rather timidly.

"Master Gussy—"

"Yass, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus benignantly.

"There's a lot of blackberries in them 'edges, sir," said Charley. "I thought as 'ow I might gather some of them, sir, in a basket for supper. I'd roon catch you up again."

"Certainly, kid! A vewy happy thought."

And Charley took a fruit-basket from the van, and started work on the hedges. The caravan rolled on, and Charley was soon out of sight behind.

CHAPTER 7.

Dark Doubts!

HERE'S CHARLEY!"

Tom Merry asked that question about half an hour later. He had been looking out for a camp, and he had found a suitable spot. Then he missed Master Chippis.

Arthur Augustus was talking cricket to Herries and Dig as they walked. He was explaining how he would have bagged a century in the match with Greyfriars, if, owing to unforeseen circumstances, his wicket hadn't fallen.

"Charley's comin' afiah us," he answered. "He's stoppin' by the wood to gather blackbewies."

"The young ass! He would have

missed us if we'd turned off the road," said Tom.

"Oh, Charley is a vewy sharp kid! He would find us all wight," said Arthur Augustus. "Besides, we are not turnin' off the woad if we are goin' to camp heah."

"Halt!" sang out Tom. Circumstances halted on a furry common that stretched beside the road. The sun was very low down now, and a dark night was coming on. It was high time to camp.

Charley was not there to lend a hand as usual. The horse was staked out, and the caravanners prepared supper, and still Charley did not arrive.

"Where has that young ass got to?" grunted Blake. "He can't have misaid us, as we haven't left the high road."

"Those blackberries will be rather late for supper if he doesn't buck up!" remarked Mowzy Lother.

Arthur Augustus rose from the steps of the canvas and scanned the road, upon which the shadows now lay thick. He was relieved to hear the sound of a footstep.

"This way, Charley!" he called out. It was Charley at last.

Master Chipps came tramping off the road and joined the rangers with his basket on his arm in which lay a few blackberries. He had evidently not been very successful in his search for the luscious berry.

"Did you lose your way, kid?" asked Tom.

"Oh, no, sir!"

"You've been a long time."

"Very sorry, sir!" said Charley humbly.

"My dear kid, it doesn't matter," said Tom, smiling. "I was only afraid you'd got lost."

"I ain't got many berries, sir," said Charley. "There wasn't so many as I thought on them 'loggs."

"That's all wight, deah boy!"

"Your supper's ready, kid," said Manners.

"It's really too bad!" said Charley. "You young gents 'ave gone and got my supper instead of me 'elpin' it."

Charley seemed quite ashamed. And he did not make a very good supper. As a rule, Master Chipps had a very healthy appetite indeed; but he seemed to have lost it now.

He was very silent, too.

He answered the remarks of the caravanners when they spoke to him in monosyllables.

It was some difficult to see that there was something amiss with Master Chipps; and the caravanners could not help being aware that it dated from the meeting with Fur Cap on the other side of Reading.

In spite of himself, a curious suspicion came into Tom Merry's mind. He would not give it utterance, however. Charley was a member of the party now, and therefore to be trusted. But Tom started when, having finished supper, Charley rose, and said:

"You gents mind if I takes a little stroll afore you to bed?"

"Do just as you like, kid," said Tom.

"Thank you, sir!"

Charley disappeared into the shadow. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy polished his goggles very thoughtfully, and presently broke the silence that followed Charley's departure:

"Probably you fellows have noticed that there seems to be something' wath wong with our young fwiend?"

"I should think so!" grunted Blake.

"Then you have noticed it, Blake?"

"Yes, ass! It was plain enough for even you to see."

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's jolly queer," said Blake. "I hope—"

"Well!" said Tom Merry.

"Well, I should hate to distrust the chap," said Blake, "but—but we know what a little rogue he was when he was with Cutts & Co. He knew that ruffian we call Fur Cap. That rotter was following the van to Reading. I—I wonder—"

"That's what I was thinking," said Tom Merry quietly. "I wonder if that rascal has followed us farther? It was very queer, Charley dropping behind and staying so long."

"He went to gathah blackberries, Tom Mowzy."

"He didn't have much luck with them, then?"

"Bai Jove! You suahly do not suspect, Tom Mowzy, that he dropped behind to meet that howrd ruffian Fur Cap without our knowledge," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, agast.

Tom Merry smiled uncomfortably.

"I don't like to suspect it," he said. "But it looks jolly like it."

"Weally, Tom Mowzy—"

"What's the good of beating about the bush?" grunted Herries. "It's as plain as daylight that that's what he did. He looked it all over his face when he came back!"

"I wufuse to credit it for one moment, Hewies!"

"Be-r-r-r!"

"If that's the case—and it certainly looks like it," said Tom Merry—"it's a rather serious matter. If that ruffian is following us, it can only be for one reason—theft."

"You couldn't have any other reason," said Blake.

"You remembah perfectly well that Charley bolted to keep from speakin' to that ruffian, Blake."

"Unless that was a blind."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"I don't like distrustin' him, as I said," went on Blake. "But it looks to me as if he avoided speaking to the man in our presence, and dropped behind to speak to him alone afterwards. And he's gone to see him again now, I believe."

"Wubbish!"

Arthur Augustus spoke warmly; all the more so because he could see that the rest of the party were of Blake's opinion. The fact was that the circumstances were obvious enough; there was no other explanation of Charley's peculiar looks and peculiar conduct.

The caravanners were in a decidedly uneasy mood.

They liked Charley, and wanted to help him. But it could not be forgotten that he had acted like a young rascal when serving Cutts & Co. It was possible that the kindness of the caravanners and Gussy's moral precepts had had an improving effect upon Master Chipps. The vanners certainly hoped so. But his present conduct required a good deal of explaining.

"It's rotten!" said Tom Merry, after a long silence. "But we can't run the risk of the horse being stolen while we're asleep. And—and we can't distrust a fellow and keep a civil face to him at the same time. We'd better speak out when the kid comes in."

"Wats?"

"Look here, Gussy—"

"I insist upon not a word bein' said to Charley!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly. "It was through me that he joined this party, and I have a wight to wufuse to allow his feelin's to be hurt. I am quite suah that he is as true as steel!"

"I don't say he isn't," growled Blake.

"But he's keeping up a secret communication with a drunken thief and blackguard, and you know it—or ought to know it!"

"Nothin' of the sort!"

"Then where has he gone?"

"He said he was going for a stroll!"

"Oh, ratt!"

"Here he comes!" said Dig quietly.

"Then we'll speak out—"

"You'll do nothin' of the sort, Tom! If you distrust my young fwiend, he will stay awake to-night and keep wate. But I will not allow Charley's feelin's to be hurt by suspicions."

"It isn't a suspicion—it's a certainty!" growled Herries.

"Wubbish!"

"I tell you—"

"Wats!"

"Oh, let Gussy have his way!" said Tom Merry resolutely. "It's barely possible that he's right, and I should be sorry to hurt the kid's feelings without cause. Keep mum, if Gussy wants us to."

"Yass, wathah!"

Charley joined a very silent circle of campers. But he did not notice their silence; he was evidently in a troubled state of mind himself. He sat down without a word.

"Better turn in," said Tom Merry abruptly.

And the caravanners rose.

CHAPTER 8.

Very Mysterious!

MASTER GUSSY! The Terrible Three were putting up the tent, with the aid of Blake and Herries and Dig. Charley was still sitting in glum silence, apparently forgetful of his duties. As a rule, he was the most active when work was to be done. But now he did not seem to observe that Tom Merry & Co. were erecting the tent.

"Yass, kid!" said Arthur Augustus very kindly. Gussy was going to join the other vanners to help, when Charley spoke to him in a low voice, and he turned back.

Charley did not meet his eyes.

"You—you said, Master Gussy—"

"Yass!"

"You—you said—"

Charley.

He seemed unable to proceed. His face was crimson. Arthur Augustus looked at him very curiously in the dim starlight.

"My dear kid, you can speak quite frankly to me," said the veel of B. Jim's gently, in his most fatherly manner. "If you have anythin' to tell me, Charley, pway go ahead."

"You—you said, Master Gussy—"

"Yass, wathid did I say, Charley?"

"You—you said you was going to give me something for workin' about the van, sir," said Charley hesitatingly. "I told you as I wouldn't take any money from you, sir. Would you mind, Master Gussy, if I changed my mind?"

"Not at all, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "You have done more of your fair share of work, Charley, than you are entitled to a salary."

"I don't want to be paid, sir," blurted Charley. "Tain't that, sir, but if you would give me a quid, sir—"

"You are entitled to that, Charley."

"I don't mean—I-I don't mean more'n ower, sir! I don't mean as I want any wages for 'elpin' about the van, sir. But you—you said—and—and I do want a pound, sir, had. I wouldn't go for to ask you, sir, only—"

Charley's voice trailed off.

"It's all wight, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus was surprised; he

could not help being surprised. But he took out his little pocket-book and extracted a pound note therefrom.

Charley took it hesitatingly.

"Pray don't look so confused, kid!" said Arthur Augustus. "You are quite entitled to some money."

"I ain't, sir," said Charley; "and I wouldn't take no money from you, sir, no—only—"

"Only what, deah boy?"

"Nothing, sir!" gulped Charley.

"Are you going to lend a hand, Gussy?" yelled Blake.

"Yass, deah boy!"

"Well, get a move on then, lazy-bones!"

"I am not lazy, Blake! I am talking to Charley—"

"Can't you give your chin a rest while we're putting up the tent?"

"Wate! Come and lend a hand, Charley!"

"Yessir!"

Charley lent a hand, and the tent was finished. Jack Blake fetched the horse nearer to the van, and tethered him to one of the wheels for the night. The mysterious conduct of Charley had made him uneasy for the safety of the horse.

If Fur Cap was looking about in the shadows it was quite possible that circumstances might disappear in the night and leave no trace behind.

Blake and Herries and Dig turned in in the bunks in the caravan; and the Terrible Three took the tent. Arthur Augustus took out his sleeping bag into the grass. He intended to keep watch; rather as a reproach to his chums than because he thought it necessary. And he disposed himself in the warm bag—to keep awake.

Charley generally slept in rugs in the tent; but he did not enter the tent now.

Tom Merry called to him.

"Bed-time, Charley!"

"I'll sleep in the hopen-to-night, if you don't mind, sir," answered Charley.

Tom Merry started.

If he had not been uneasy before, this sudden decision of Charley's would probably have made him so.

"Look here, kid, you'd better come

into the tent," he said, after a pause.

"You've got no sleeping-bag."

"I shall be all right, sir!"

Arthur Augustus chimed in:

"Bettah go into the tent, Charley. There will be dew on the grass, and you may catch a cold."

"I—I—"

"Pray take my advice, Charley, and bunk down in the tent."

It was scarcely possible for Charley to argue further. The Terrible Three were watching him rather grimly from the opening of the tent. If Charley insisted upon camping in the open, it would scarcely leave any doubt that he had some secret intentions for that night.

But Charley stammered "Yessir!" in answer to Arthur Augustus, and went into the tent.

He rolled himself in a rug, and was soon breathing steadily and regularly.

The Terrible Three settled themselves down to sleep.

But in their uneasy mood sleep did not come easily. Whether Master Chipps was falling back into roguery or not, it was clear enough to them that he was keeping a secret, and that he probably had some surreptitious plan for that night which was frustrated by his having to sleep in the tent with the Shell fellows.

Manners and Lowther slept at last; but Tom Merry remained awake for some time.

He was dozing off at last, when something startled him into broad wakefulness.

He sat up, rubbing his eyes.

It was pitchy dark in the tent; he could not see an inch from his nose. The low, regular breathing of Manners and Lowther came to his ears. But the deeper sound of Charley's breathing, on the other side, was no longer to be heard.

Tom's heart beat.

"Charley!" he called out.

There was no answer.

Tom Merry stretched out his hand in the darkness. The rugs were there, still warm; but they were empty. Charley Chipps was no longer in the tent.

"Wharrer marrer!" came a sleepy murmur from Menty Lowther.

"Wake up, you chaps!"

"What's up?" muttered Manners.

"Charley's gone!"

CHAPTER 9.

A Night Alarm.

TOM MERRY was hurrying on his clothes. Manners and Lowther were on their feet in a moment.

"Gone!" muttered Lowther.

"He's not in the tent."

"My hat!"

"The young rascal!" muttered Manners. "What has he gone for? For good, do you think?"

"He can't have cleared off for good. If he wanted to go, there was no need to sneak off in this way; he could have left us any time he pleased."

"Then why—"

"If he's gone for good," said Tom, "he's only got one motive for going like this—he's robbed us. But I can't think that of him. I simply can't understand it. But I'm fed up with these dashed mysteries, and I'm jolly well going to know what he's up to, and Gussy can go and eat coke!"

The Terrible Three, hastily dressed, emerged from the tent.

A dim starlight fell on the caravan camp.

Arthur Augustus—who was to keep watch—was fast asleep in his sleeping-bag. But the Shell fellows' first thought was for the horse. To their relief, they found Circumstances sleeping and safe in the grass beside the van.

There was no sign of Charley about the camp.

Master Chipps had vanished.

"Is he coming back, I wonder?" murmured Manners.

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

"The goo-zee's all right!" said Lowther. "Nothing else he could bag except that. He couldn't take anything from the caravan without waking the fellows there."

"I can't believe he's a thief," said Tom. "It's too beastly. But—but why should he clear off like this? If he's only gone to meet that rotter Fur Cap—but why should he?"

"Give it up—unless it's to fetch him here to steal."

Tom Merry shuddered.

It seemed the only possible explanation; and yet the captain of the Shell shrank from it. Only the most complete proof would make him believe that Charley was in league with a thief.

"We'll stay awake now, anyhow," said Manners.

"Oh, yes, rather!"

The chums of the Shell were hardly feeling sleepy now. They were too disturbed and anxious for that.

They leaned on the caravan and waited.

It was a quarter of an hour later when a soft and stealthy footstep was audible in the grass.

A shadowy figure came slinking into the camp and headed for the tent.

It was Charley!

Evidently under the impression that the Shell fellows were still asleep in the tent, Charley entered it stealthily, careful not to wake them. Wherever he had been, he had not been gone long; it was doubtless his movement in leaving that had awakened Tom Merry from his uneasy doze.

"He's come back!" muttered Manners grimly.

"Come on!" said Tom.

The chums of the Shell advanced towards the tent. The flap was open, and as they reached it Charley's startled face looked out. He had just made the discovery that the tent was unoccupied.

Charley gave a little gasp as he met the Terrible Three face to face.

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A FREE PARDON!

Master (who has detected Dawker engaged in "Chuckles"); "I do not intend to punish you for laughing in class. Dawker, for when I come to look into the matter there is something here really worth laughing at."

TAKE THE TIP!

"Oh!"
 "Well!" said Tom Merry.
 Charley gasped.
 "I-I ain't been doing no 'arm!" he stammered.
 "Where have you been?"
 "Only down the road, sir," muttered Charley.
 "To meet that man in the fur cap?"
 Charley gave a cry.
 "Ow did you know?" he gasped.
 "Then that was it!"
 "I-I—"

Charley's voice trailed off, and he blinked wretchedly at the accusing faces of the juniors.

It was a confession, and it confirmed the suspicions of the St. Jim's juniors. For Fur Cap had followed the caravan; he was looking about the camp, and Charley had been busy secretly to meet him while he deemed the caravaners asleep. There was no further doubt on that subject.

"You young rascal!" said Tom Merry, rather sully than angrily. "And you dropped behind to meet that man when you pretended you were gathering blackberries!"

"Oh, sir!" mumbled Charley.
 "You went out to meet him again after supper?"
 "I-I—"

"And now you've been to meet him for a third time," said Tom. "We've told you the man is a thief and a rascal, Charley!"

"Well, what have you been dealing with him for?"

"I ain't been doing no 'arm," said Charley, with a tremble in his voice.

"Then you can tell us what you have been doing."
 "I-I—"

"You've known that man before?" said Tom.

"Ye-es, sir."
 "Then you know the kind of man he is!"

"I-I s'pos so, sir."
 "Well, what game are you up to with him?" demanded Manners. "Have you fixed it up with him to rob the place while we're asleep?"

"I ain't!" muttered Charley.
 "Is he coming here?"
 "No."
 "Where is he, then?"
 "He's gone, sir."
 "Gone!" exclaimed the Terrible Three together.

"Yes, he's gone now!" muttered Charley. "I-I-I ain't been doing no 'arm, sir. I swear I ain't! And he's gone. You won't never see him ag'in, and I 'ope I won't, either!"

Tom Merry looked searchingly at the troubled, crimson face.

It went against the grain with him to suspect anyone; but Charley's conduct was rather too mysterious and suspicious for much reliance to be placed upon him now. If he had any explanation to give there was no reason why he should not give it, so far as the juniors could see. And he did not offer any.

"I'd like to believe you, Charley," said Tom Merry at last, "but—but it's a bit hard. That man is a thief and a rascal, and he's followed us, and he can only have one reason for doing that. You can turn in, and we shall keep watch."

"'Wot for?" asked Charley.
 "'For your friend Fur Cap!" said Monty Lowther.

"He ain't coming 'ere, sir!" said Charley eagerly.

"Well, if he does come we shall be ready for him. You can turn in."
 "I-I—!" stammered Charley.

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"Talking's no good!" said Tom Merry. "I believe that man intends to rob us, if he can, to-night, whether you know it or not. We're going to keep watch. You can turn in or not, as you like; but you're to keep quiet, anyhow!"

"Yessir!" said Charley humbly.
 Master Chippis retired into the tent, though not to sleep. The Terrible Three waited in the deep shadow of the caravan on the watch. Overhead the stars twinkled in the dark sky.

An hour passed.
 Tom Merry was beginning to wonder whether he had been over alert when a sound came to his ears. It was the sound of the horses stirring on the other side of the caravan.

"The chums of the Shell caught their breath."
 "Quiet!" breathed Tom Merry.

Silent as spectres the three juniors trod round the caravan in the grass. The horse was on its feet now, and they caught a glimmer of a knife as it was drawn across the tethering-rope.

The rope parted.
 A shadowy figure rose from the grass beside the horse and took hold of the halter to lead him away. The glimmering starlight fell upon an evil face and a ragged fur cap.

But for the fact that the Terrible Three were on the watch they would certainly never have seen the caravan horse again, and Fur Cap would have bagged a valuable prize. But it was not to be. As the tramp drew the horse away from the van three juniors rushed forward and leaped upon him.

There was a wild yell as Fur Cap went down into the grass with a crash, with the three Shell fellows on top of him.

CHAPTER 10.

Charley's Secret!

"O H! Ah! Yah!"
 "Down the cad!" gasped Lowther.

Fur Cap was already downed. He gasped and wriggled spasmodically under the Terrible Three, howling dimly.

"Yow-ow! Oh! Ah! Blow me! Blow you! Yow-ow!"
 "Bai Jove! What's the mazzah?"
 "What the thump—"
 "What the dickens—"

Blake and Herries and Dig came jumping out of the van in their pyjamas. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed on the scene with a blanket round him. There was a buzz of voices in the starlit caravan camp.

Fur Cap was grasping and groaning. Monty Lowther had a knee on his neck, and Manners another on his chest, and Tom Merry had him by the ears. Never was a pilferer so completely bagged as Fur Cap at that moment.

"Got him!" gasped Manners.
 "Gwrat Bost! Who is it!"
 "Fur Cap!" yelled Blake.
 "He was stealing the horse," panted Tom, "but we jolly well stopped him in time!"

"Groogh! Ow! Wow!" came from Fur Cap. "Let a bloke gerrup! Oh, gerruff my neck, you young 'ound! Ow!"

"I'll keep on your neck for a bit, old top!" answered Lowther. "You're going to choky for this, and it's high time you did! See that the gee-gee doesn't wander off, Blake. He's loose."

"The gee's lying down, and he's going to sleep!" grinned Blake. "Catch him wandering!"

"Is that wascal weally Fur Cap?" asked Arthur Augustus, with a very grave expression.

"Can't you see it is, fathhead!"
 "Yass, I can see it is now that I look at him. The uttah wotah must have followed us from the othah side of Wosdin."

"I told you so, nas! And that you was rascal, Charley, knew—"
 "Wubbish!"

"He went out to meet him—"
 "Wats!"
 "He's confessed it!" yelled Merry.

"Bai Jove! You've been dreaming, deah boy!" Arthur Augustus was not to be convinced. "Charley knows nothin' whatever of this affair. I am perfectly certain of that!"

"Fathhead!"
 "Weally, Mammah—"

Charley, with a pale face, came through the crowd of caravaners. His lips were quivering, and he seemed on the verge of tears.

"Did he try to pinch the 'orse?" he asked, in a breathless voice.

"Yes, he did!" growled Blake.
 "I never knowed nothing about it, gents!"

"I am suah you know nothin' whatever about the mazzah, Charley."
 Grunt from Herries.

"If that unintelligible sound implies doubt, Hewwies—"
 "Fathhead!"

"I refuse to be called a fathhead! And I wepeat," exclaimed Arthur Augustus sternly, "that Charley knew nothin' whatever about this wascal comin' heah!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Charley. "I never knowed. I thought he was gone. He said he would, arter I giv' 'im the quid."

Arthur Augustus jumped.
 "The—the what?" he exclaimed.
 "The quid, sir," mumbled Charley.

"Gwrat Bost! Do you mean to say that you asked me for that sovereignty to give to this uttah wuffian?"

"Ye-es, sir! I-I—"
 "Oh, deah!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye and stared at Charley, almost dumfounded. He had refused to have his faith in the little vagrant shaken, but now—

"Will you gerruff my neck?" howled Fur Cap. "Charley, you young 'ound, you lend me a 'and, can't you?"

"No, I won't!" said Charley. "You said as 'ow you'd go, and you broke your word, and came 'ere to steal the 'orse! I don't care wot 'appens to you now, so there!"

"You young raskil—"
 "Shut up, my man!" said Monty Lowther.

And, as he enforced the command with a jab with his knee at Fur Cap's neck, that unfortunate gentleman shut up promptly with an agonised gurgle.

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

He fixed his eyes sternly upon Charley, who hung his head. Arthur Augustus was still staring, dumfounded, at his protégé.

"Why should you care what happens to this seconded, now or any time, asked Tom Merry.

Charley's lips trembled.
 "I s'pose I'd better out with it now," he said. "You won't never speak to me ag'in, I s'pose, arter you know."

"Fwaw speak up, Charley!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy quietly. "You are among friends heah, who can make allowances for your watah bad moral twainin', my poor kid!"

"I ain't done nothing wrong," said Charley.

"I trust so. But—"
 "I knowed he was a follerin' of us," said Charley drearily. "I saw him from

the back of the van. I—I dropped he'd intend to speak to 'im, and ask 'im to clear off. He said he wouldn't, and followed on. I spotted 'im 'anging about on the corners, and that's why I went out for a stroll, sir. I—I offered to give 'im some money for booze if he'd go."

"I said I'd give 'im his davy he'd go and make it a quid," said Charley. "He says he's solemn davy, sir, so I asked 'im for the quid, and arter you was all 'ere I crep' out to give it to 'im. Then he started, and I reckoned he was gone back to heading to look for a dose. I never knowed he meant to come 'ere stealing all the same. I swear I never knowed!"

"I am quite sure of that, Charley," said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"Tom Merry & Co. looked dubiously at Master Chippy.

"But what did you want to have anything to do with the man at all for?" asked Tom Merry.

"I didn't want to, sir."

"Then why did you?"

"He—he—I-I-I s'pose I better own up!" mumbled Charley.

"You had certainly better!" grunted Blake.

"Paw! be quite frank, Charley!"

"He—he's my uncle, sir!" gasped Charley, banging his head. "Now you know, and I s'pose I'd better 'ook it!"

"Your uncle?" exclaimed all the juniors together in consternation. They understood at last.

Charley had confided to them before that he possessed only one relation—an uncle who was a "reg'lar corker." For 'un as evidently was the regular corker who was Charley's uncle.

"Oh!" said Tom Merry blankly.

"He's a bad lot, he is," said Charley tearfully—"a useful bad lot! And he's been in the stone jug, too. I ain't seed 'im for a long time, and you could 'ave knocked me over with a feather, sir, when we passed him this afternoon on the road!"

"Four old Charley!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I quite comprehend now."

"He reckoned as 'ow I would 'elp 'im rob you young gent's," said Charley. "That was his game, and that was why he followed us. But I wouldn't, and I told him so straight. I warned 'im off, I did, and he said he'd mizzle for a quid. And I give him the quid what Master Gussy give me. He's got it about 'im now. And now—"

Arthur Augustus looked loftily at his chums.

"I think you will remember, dear boys, that I remarked that Charley was true blue," he said. "I don't want to say 'I told you so,' but really—"

"Where are you going, Charley?" exclaimed Tom Merry, as Master Chippy turned away.

"You don't want me no longer, sir," said Charley. "You don't want the savvy of a thief and a good-bird here. I knows that."

"Step where you are, you young scoundrel!"

"I better go," he said, though it was very clear that he wished to stay.

"You'll always be thinkin' that you can't trust me now."

"Wot! Wubbish! Wot!" said Arthur Augustus emphatically. "You are certainly staying, you young daff! You have proved that you are to be trusted—not that that was necessary. I am afraid, Charley, that your uncle is an awful wascal!"

"He is that, sir," mumbled Charley.

"I'm sorry I doubted you, kid," said

Tom Merry. "But you really asked for it, you know. You ought to have told us this at first."

"Yass, walah!"

"I—I thought, sir—"

"Let that rotter get up," said Tom. "We can't very well give him in charge if he's Charley's uncle."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Charley.

For Cap staggered to his feet. He gave his nephew an evil look, and scowled at the juniors.

"Now, you rascal," said Tom Merry, "you ought to go to prison, and you know it! You've been worrying your gopher, what's worth a thousand of you, and getting money out of him! Give him back the pound you screwed out of him!"

"I don't want it, sir!" stammered Charley.

"You're dead in this act, Charley. We're running this show. Hand out that pound at once, Fur Cap!"

The ruffian gritted his teeth.

"Get a rope, Blake. We'll give him a rope's ending!"

"Ew's your blinkin' pound!" cried Fur Cap savagely.

And he sang the currency note into the grass.

"Take it, Charley!"

"Tain't mine, sir," said Charley. "Mister Gussy give it to me, and I wouldn't 'ave took it, only to make Uncle Joe mizzle, sir. I ain't taking it!"

"Give it to Gussy, then."

"Wolly, Charley—"

"It's yours, sir."

"Oh, very well!" said Arthur Augustus. "Certainly it would be w'ong to allow that dishonest wascal to keep it. Have you any strong objections, Charley, to your relative gain' to prison?"

"Oh, sir!"

"Fathoad!" said Blake. "He's not going to chivy. I dare say he'll hand there in a week or two without our help. You fellows remember how we first met him. He tried to rob Figgins, and they tied up one of his hands and sent him hopping. We'll give him some more of the same!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You can go back to bed, Charley," said Blake. "We'll take care of your merry uncle. Buzz off!"

Charley hesitated.

"Oh, sir! If—if you'd be so kind, sir—"

"Well, what is it now?"

"He's my uncle, sir," mumbled Charley.

"Oh, my lad!"

The juniors looked at one another. Then Jack Blake raised his hand and pointed to the road.

"Cut, you rotter!" he said briefly to Fur Cap.

And Fur Cap, with a savage scowl at all the caravanners, "cut." The St. Jim's party were glad to see the last of him, and not the least glad probably was his nephew Charley.

CHAPTER 11.

A Chance for Charlie

"HAILO, GUS!"

It was a week or so later, and the St. Jim's caravan was winding along a leafy lane in Hampshire, when three juvenile cyclists came buzzing along and slackened down to keep pace with it.

The caravanners were now near to the stately home of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, which was their next stopping-place.

Charley was driving, as usual, with a very cheery face. Fur Cap had vanished from his life as suddenly as he had re-entered it; nothing had been seen of the

ruffian since the parting that night on the common in Berkshire. And nothing had been seen of him on the following days. And the caravanners had been very kind to Charley since, to make up for their doubt, though that was really Charley's own fault.

Arthur Augustus was walking beside the van, looking up to Charley and talking to him, when the cyclists came alongside. One of them reached out and tilted Gussy's Panama-hat over his noble nose as if he hated him.

"Yawwooh!"

"Hi, ha, ha! Fancy meeting you, Gus!"

Arthur Augustus clutched his hat off his eyes and glared round.

"'Hal Jove! Wally!" he exclaimed.

It was D'Arcy minor, of the Third Form at St. Jim's. His companions were Reginald Masters and Levison minor, also of the St. Jim's Third.

"Hallo, Reggie, you young reggie!" said Masters, with a brotherly grin at his minor.

"Hallo, old top!" responded Reggie. "Still on the road—what? You haven't been run in yet for selling brooms and mats and things without a licence?"

"You young ass!"

"Coming home, Gussy?" asked Wally.

"Yass."

"I'm afraid it won't do, Gus!"

"And why not, pway?" demanded Arthur Augustus warmly.

"Tramps and gipsies ain't admitted to the grounds!" explained D'Arcy minor. And his comrades roared.

"You foolishly cheeky young wopwops!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in great wrath.

"Hi, ha, ha!"

"Wash your face before you come in, Gussy, anyway!" urged Wally. "The water's away with Conroy somewhere; but the pater's at home, and if he sees you wash a face like that—"

"If you are askin' for a fashful thrashin'—"

"Hallo! Got a new driver?" asked Wally, looking up at Charley. "I thought you'd never manage the horse, you fellows! I'd have come with you to drive only those kids were carrying home with me for the vac. How many accidents have you had so far?"

"We have not had any accidents, you young ass! And Charley is not a divalch; he is a fawn of curs!"

"A bomsen pal!" said Blake.

"Charley, dear boy, this is my young broethah, Wally. Wally, this is my friend, Charley Chippy."

"Oh, my eye!" said Charley. "Werry glad to see you, sir!"

"My only Aunt Jane!" ejaculated Wally. "What have you been up to, Gussy?"

"Charley is comin' home with us to see the pater, Wally. If you are goin' on you may as well mention to the governor that we're comin', and that we're goin' to camp in the park."

"And I'll warn the lodgekeeper not to turn you off as tramps!" promised Wally.

"You young wascal!" roared Arthur Augustus.

Wally chuckled, and rode on with his comrades. Arthur Augustus frowned after them majestically, while Tom Merry & Co. chuckled.

An hour later the St. Jim's caravan was camped in the park of Eastwood House.

Arthur Augustus carefully removed all signs of travel-stain from himself before he led his chums up to the house. Charley went with them in a state of considerable trepidation. Wally met them in the hall with a grinning face.

"The governor's in the library," he

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 102.

said. "He's putting on his best smile for your pals, Gussy. You have caught him in a good temper!"

"You are a disrespectful young wop-wopato, Wally! Fwyaw come with me, deah boys! This was Charlay! Is anythin' the mstahh, kid?"

"Nunno, sir!" gasped Charlay. Arthur Augustus led his numerous flock into the library, where Lord Eastwood was seated. His lordship rose and greeted the caravanners with grave courtesy, his glance lingering a little on Charlay Chipps.

Charlay, much awed by the tall, grave gentleman, held on to Arthur Augustus' sleeve. Arthur Augustus glanced round in surprise to see what was pulling his sleeve, and then smiled.

"This is my friend, Charlay Chipps, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, presenting the late stable-boy of St. Leger Lodge.

"I am very glad to meet your friend Charlay Chipps, Arthur!" said Lord Eastwood gravely.

"This is my fathah, Lord Eastwood, Charlay!"

"Oh crickey!" said Charlay. Lord Eastwood started.

"I—I—did not quite catch your friend's remark, Arthur!" he said.

"What did he say?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh lor!" said Charlay, evidently overcome.

"Bless my soul!" said his lordship, puzzled.

"The fact is, sir," said Arthur Augustus, "my friend Charlay is a little nervous; I really do not know why. He was not at all nervous when he was goin' for Cutts with the fryin'-pan—"

"What?"

"I—I mean—ahem! Charlay is a new acquaintance, sir!" explained Arthur Augustus. "I met him a few weeks ago in Bucks. He was a stable-boy—"

"Eh!"

"He was employed in the stables, sir, at a place in Bucks."

"Bless my soul!"

"I was not at all satisfied with the suwwoodin' of a youngstah of his age. The moral influence he received there was very fah from wight and wropow for a mere kid."

Lord Eastwood looked at his son. Tom Merry & Co. looked at the floor. They did not want to laugh in the awe-inspiring presence of a peer of the realm. But it was a little difficult to keep grave while Arthur Augustus made his explanation.

"Upon reflection, sir," continued Arthur Augustus cheerily, "I decided that it wouldn't do, and I have taken Charlay in charge, sir, with a view to placin' him in bettah suwwoodin'. He is weally one of the best, and has washed wegalahly evah since he has been with us—"

"Wha-a-ai?"

"Neck and ears, sir, every day!" said Charlay eagerly.

"Bless my soul!"

"We shall be campin' heah for a few days, fathah, and in that time, I am suah, you will think of somethin' for Charlay."

"Really, Arthur—"

"And I am suah, sir, that you will approve of my action in takin' him away from his fomah suwwoodin' when I mention that he was thwown among a set of howwid, smokin', dwinkin', and gamblin' wotahs!"

There was a pause, and Lord Eastwood looked hard at the cheery Gussy. Then he smiled.

"I certainly approve if the matter is as you say, Arthur!" he said. "Please leave Charlay with me, and I will have a little talk with him. Sit down, my lad!"

"Vewy well, sir!"

Arthur Augustus & Co. retreated, leav-

ing Charlay sitting and blinking at his lordship.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Tom Merry when they were outside the library. "It's very lucky your pater isn't subject to fits, Gussy!"

"Why, deah boy?"

"I think you'd have given him oom"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "Now, it fortunately happens that we are in time for lunch, and it will watah a twast to have lunch undah woot. "I trust the patah will not keep Charlay long!"

Charlay joined the caravanners before lunch was over. His face was beaming.

"Well, how did you get on with the governah, kid?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Ain't he a top-'ole old bloke!" said Charlay admiringly.

Arthur Augustus coughed.

It was the first time he had heard his noble pater referred to as an old bloke.

"And he's going to put me to work with a farmer on this 'ere estate!" said Charlay enthusiastically. "I'm going to be a farmer myself when I grow up! Wot do you think of that?"

"Bravo!" said Tom Merry.

"Prime, ain't it!" said Charlay.

And the caravanners agreed that it was prime.

A couple of days later the St. Jim's caravan rolled on its way with the merry caravanners, leaving Charlay to his new life. Arthur Augustus mentioned several times to his comrades—giving Charlay's case as an instance—that they could always rely upon him to tell them the right and proper thing to do. And the caravanners grinned, and agreed that they could.

THE END.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS.

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

CHAPTER 12.

Oh Duty!

MARTIN CLIFFORD and Frank Richards meant to decoy me, by hook or by crook, into the green country lanes.

"It can't be done!" I said.

"I've heard that too before," said Martin Clifford. "How does the chorus go?"

"Oh, come along!" said Frank Richards.

And, before I realised what his little game was, he had elosed my roll-top desk with a slam.

"Now, it's like this," he said. "If you choose to come quietly, all well and good. If not, we intend to carry you bodily downstairs and into the street. Picture the indignity of it! A real, live editor being carted off by two of his contributors—three, I should say. How do you do, Conquest?"

For Owen Conquest had come in at that moment.

"You people seem to be enjoying yourselves," remarked the "Boys' Friend" author.

"Go right ahead. Never mind me. I appealed to the new-comer."

"These fellows are trying to drag me out. As a conscientious editor, I feel bound to eject them. Will you give me a hand?"

Owen Conquest grinned.

"You're the one who's going to be ejected," he said. "Far be it from me, the humble originator of Jimmy Silver, to perpetrate assault and battery; but unless you make up your mind to come quietly I shall have no alternative!"

And then it dawned upon me that Owen Conquest was abetted in the conspiracy.

My three chief authors had put their heads together and decided to give me a day's outing.

"Are you coming?" inquired Martin Clifford, picking up the coffee pot.

"Yes!" I growled. "Put that poker down, Martin, in company with the contrail as injury."

Frank Richards committed his watch.

"We'll give you three minutes to get ready," he observed.

I promptly called in one of my sub-editors, and handed over to him, as completely as I could, the duties for the day.

Then, in company with the three authors, I started off on the excursion.

It is possible to think of a hundred diversions more pleasant than cycling through London. Traffic, traffic everywhere. Every time we avoided one lot it was only to plunge into another. A good many bus-drivers and taximen exercised their vocabulary at our expense as we dodged in and out.

Owen Conquest, in particular, rode with reckless abandon. At any moment I expected to see him meet a dreadful fate.

"Where are we going?" I inquired, as we emerged at length into a less-crowded thoroughfare.

"Where the spirit moves us," said Frank Richards.

The spirit seemed to move us in the direction of the south-western suburbs.

We flashed through Wimbledon and Raynes

Park, and presently emerged into the leafy Surrey lanes.

Martin Clifford stretched out his hand and caught Frank Richards by the shoulder as they sped along.

"I'll have a little wager with you, Franky!" he said.

"I'll wager, then!"

"I'll wager you one quid that during the next twelve miles of our journey we come across more boys reading the 'Gem' than the 'Magnet.' Is that a go?"

Frank Richards nodded.

"And I'll wager both of you," chimed in Owen Conquest, "that we see more boys reading the 'Boys' Friend' than the 'Gem' and 'Magnet' put together!"

"How much?" asked Martin Clifford.

"Ten bob each."

"That's a go!"

"Hear, hear!" said Frank Richards. "The editor will not only hold the stakes, but he'll act as judge."

"Delighted!" I said.

We had not proceeded very far when I caught sight of a small boy seated on a wall. He was absorbed in a periodical of some kind, and he was positively cringing with delight.

"This is where I score my first point," chuckled Martin Clifford, jumping off his machine.

"My first point, I think!" said Frank Richards.

"I know it can't be mine," said Owen Conquest, shaking his head sadly, "because the 'Boys' Friend's' a green paper, and this kid

is reading a white one." Alack! My luck's out."

We had all dismounted by this time, and we approached the boy on the side.

He was so interested in his paper that he failed to notice us until we were almost upon him. And then the sudden shock of seeing four people stalking towards him nearly caused him to topple backwards over the stile.

When he had recovered, he thrust the paper into his pocket and stared at us defiantly. "Woterywan?" he growled.

Martin Clifford produced a sixpence. "Here you are, sonny!" he said. "Now, just look out that copy of the 'Gem' you were reading!"

Frank Richards produced a shilling. "Kindly unearth that copy of the 'Magnet' which is in your possession!" he said.

"The man who pocketed the sixpence—like wise the shilling. Then he laughed.

"I ain't got no germs or maggots about me!" he said.

"But you had a paper!" protested Martin Clifford. "No it's an article of Gussy which caused you to look so amused just now?"

"Gussy? Who on earth's Gussy?"

"It must have been Billy Hunter," said Frank Richards. "Or Coker, perhaps."

"I suppose you weren't reading a whitewashed copy of the 'Boys' Friend'?" exclaimed Owen Conquest.

The small boy plucked his hand into his pocket and produced the paper.

We all gave a gasp as we caught sight of the title. And Martin Clifford and Frank Richards gazed most of all.

"It was not the 'Gem.' It was not the 'Magnet.' It was not, as Owen Conquest had suggested, a whitewashed copy of the 'Boys' Friend."

"It was the 'Temperance Record'!"

"Oh, help!" moaned Martin Clifford.

And Frank Richards called in a strangled voice for water.

"You both got badly left that time!" I said laughing.

"Ye gods!" murmured Martin Clifford. "I can't get over it! The 'Temperance Record'!"

And he kept on repeating the name like a charm.

Having recovered in some measure from the shock, we resumed our ride.

For upwards of a mile we made no fresh discovery.

Then Martin Clifford gave a sudden shout. "Here we are!" he exclaimed. "I knew the jolly old 'Gem' would set the ball rolling!"

A youth was coming towards us with a copy of the "Gem," clutched in his hand.

We knew it was the "Gem," because part of the cover was displayed to view.

Once again we dismounted from our machines.

"Good-lad!" said Martin Clifford, clapping the youth on the shoulder. "Your article in this issue is highly commendable. Instead of soaking yourself in the adventures of Nineteen-Stringed Jack, the highwayman, you follow the main exploits of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's."

This speech had a bewildering effect upon the youth. He blinked at Martin Clifford.

"Would you mind sayin' that little lot over agen, sir?"

Martin Clifford smiled.

"I read it, I read it, a staunch reader of the 'Gem,'" he said.

"The youth shook his head.

"I ain't never read it in me life!" he avowed.

"Then why the merry dickens are you carrying a copy about with you?" demanded Martin Clifford.

"Oh! Oh, I happened to find this 'ere copy lying in the roadway, an' I thought it would come in useful for rubbin' some of the mud off me boots."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Richards, Owen Conquest, and I laughed heartily in unison.

Martin Clifford didn't laugh. His face was ashen.

"You—you—" he stammered.

The youth passed on, stopping a few yards down the road to clean his boots in the manner aforementioned.

"Well, I'm agitated!" gasped Martin Clifford. "Such a fine article! Still, that's one point to me, anyway."

"Nonsense!" said Frank Richards. "According to the terms of the wager, the boy had to be actually reading the paper in his possession. Is not that so, Mr. Editor?"

"Do you wish me to give a decision?" I asked.

"Certainly!"

The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are:
THE MAGNET. THE BOYS' FRIEND. THE GEM. THE PERRY POPULAR. GOSSETTS.
 Every Monday. Every Monday. Every Wed. Every Friday. Every Friday. Every Friday.

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS GLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.

For Next Wednesday.

"STRANDED!"

By Martin Clifford.

The above is the title of next week's long complete story, and it deals with the further adventures of Tom Merry & Co. during their caravan tour. At the opening of the story the caravan is badly stuck in the mud, and the united efforts of the caravanners and Circumstances, the horse, fail to get it on the move again.

But a visitor appears in the form of Coker of Greyfriars, who, at a request from the St. Jim's juniors for help, proceeds endeavours to take over the management of affairs.

The result will, without doubt, prove most interesting and amusing to all my readers, and Tom Merry & Co.'s further encounters with Coker are exceedingly funny to the reader—if not to the caravanners. Don't fail to read.

"STRANDED!"

It is one of the finest stories of the St. Jim's juniors that has ever appeared in the GEM.

TIME FLIES!

—and so can we in these days. But that's not the point. "The great thing is that we are a week nearer to October, which is to see the return of the 'Greyfriars Herald'."

Things have been moving at a great rate since I wrote your last note. The first number of the famous school journal is now well on the way.

The past week has been an exceedingly busy one for me, but I am compensated for my labours by realisation of the fact that this new edition of the "Greyfriars Herald" is going to be the finest thing in school journals that has ever been produced.

THE "GREYFRIARS HERALD"

was looked upon before by all my readers as the best thing going; but, if hard work and careful thought can make it so, this next edition is going to be the greatest success of modern times in the way of a school paper.

When you pass your copy of the GEM on to a chum, point out to him or her the Editor's Chat, and let them read for themselves the good news that the great journal

REAPPEARS IN OCTOBER!

If your chums never knew anything about the old "G. H." tell them all about it; also that the new edition is going to be heaps better than the old one was.

You are delighted to know that Harry Wharton's famous paper is coming out again, aren't you? Well, then, see that all your chums get a share in your pleasure. They certainly will if you spread the good news wherever you go.

DON'T FORGET!

When a chum greets you with "Hallo, old son!" your reply should be, "Cheerio! Have you heard the news? The 'Greyfriars Herald' is coming out again in—"

OCTOBER!"

Remember, also, when writing to your cousins or chums in the country or at the seaside, to include in your letter a word about the "G. H." By doing so you will be giving valuable help towards making the paper a real success.

PEACE—AND LARGER PAPERS!

A reader who signs himself "Magnetite" has written calling me severely to task about the size of the "Magnet" and the GEM.

In the course of his letter he says that "practically every daily and weekly periodical has returned to its pre-war number of pages."

"Magnetite," but I am afraid he is rather out in his statement. There are many periodicals that have not yet been able to return to their pre-war size. He goes on to say that "It appears that the severe paper restrictions are now almost totally withdrawn."

He is again a little bit out in his ideas. There are still many difficulties to be contended with in obtaining the paper necessary to print all the periodicals which emanate from The Fleetway House.

What I most regret about the letter is the implication that I am not doing my best for my readers. Nothing could be wider of the mark. It has always been, and always will be, my aim to do my very utmost for the benefit of my readers, and I am now able to announce that the "Magnet" and GEM will be increased in size by four pages at the end of September.

A BITTER COMPLAINT.

I have received the following letter this week, minus any name or address:

"Dear Editor,—The GEM Library this week is the worst ever been printed; it is very unfair. The book called 'The King's Highway,' where Tom Merry & Co. take Gussy's clothes, is a bit rotten because if Gussy was to touch any of Merry's clothes, he—Merry—would kick up a fuss about it, and probably bump him, with the aid of others. My friends also think that it is silly to put Tom Merry as angel of the school, as if he could not do anything wrong."

"As a rule we all read the GEM, but this week is an exception. And if you are not afraid to own up to it put this letter in next week's GEM.—Yours truly, 'GUSY A READER.'"

The writer of that letter will probably realise henceforth that I am not afraid to publish anything he writes. Also, I am perfectly certain that he and his friends are quite alone in their opinion of the story he mentions.

I can always rely upon my loyal readers to criticize anything which appears in the Companion Papers in a civil manner, and no name is put upon it to criticize "The King's Highway" adversely.

I think I am safe in declaring, too, that the rest of my readers are quite satisfied with Tom Merry & Co. The leader of The Terrible Three has never been represented as an unscrupulous man, but like a boy to be straightforward, honest, and fearless.

YOUR EDITOR.

NOTICES.

Correspondence, etc.

F. Penn, 125, Dartmouth Park Hill, N. 19—with readers interested in foreign stamps.

L. E. Lawrence, 72, Whistler Street, Highbury, N. 5—with readers anywhere, Colonies included, 17-19. All letters answered. F. G. Scott please note and write.

Miss Frances Hill, 36, Duke Road, Rochester, Kent—with readers anywhere, 16-18.

Seymour Kirchin, 6, Beaumont Square, Mile End, E. 1, wants readers and contributors for the 'Movies' Amateur Magazine.

James Edward Croxall, 10, St. James's Street, Dublin, will help all editors who write to him, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope.

W. Carpenter, 25, Merrion Street, Dublin, will help all editors who write to him, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

(Continued from page 15).

"Then I think Martin Clifford should gain his point. I think it was understood at the time that a boy need not necessarily be reading the paper, provided he had it in his possession."

"That's my agreed Owen Conquest."

"But—" protested Frank Richards.

"Silence, Frank! Haven't you been a journalist long enough to know that the Editor's decision is final?"

Frank Richards acquiesced, and we rode on again, with Martin Clifford leading in the three-cornered contest by one point to nil.

"I'm hoping," murmured Owen Conquest, as we sped along, "that we shall shortly encounter a couple of jaundiced scrubbers out for a walk, and that they will all be lovingly clasping a copy of the 'Boys' Friend'."

Unfortunately for the author of the Book-wood-stories, this hope did not materialize. Nothing happened for the next three miles.

Then we came across two boy cyclists taking a rest by the roadside.

They were eating sandwiches, which rested on a couple of periodicals lying on the grass.

"Cheers!" exclaimed Frank Richards.

"I've come into my own at last!"

"Same here!" murmured Owen Conquest.

For one of the periodicals happened to be the 'Magnet' Library, and the other was a copy of the 'Boys' Friend'.

"That is one point each," I remarked.

And we resumed our ride.

The next boy we met—a good-looking youngster, sporting a school cap—altered no outward or visible sign of being in possession of a paper. He came jauntily along, humming a merry tune.

Martin Clifford promptly jumped off his machine.

"Excuse me," he began, addressing the schoolboy, "but we're having a rest a little farther on, and I've got something to read. I wonder if you could come to my rescue?"

"Certainly, sir," said the boy at once.

And he drew a periodical from his breast-pocket and handed it to Martin Clifford.

An exclamation of astonishment burst from our lips. For it was a copy of the 'Gem' Library.

Martin Clifford smiled sardoniously at his colleagues.

"Another point to me, I think," he said.

But the others weren't beaten yet.

"I wonder," said Frank Richards, turning to the schoolboy, "if you could lend me something to read, too?"

"Likewise, sir," said Owen Conquest.

"With pleasure," said the boy.

And then, to the delight of Frank Richards and Owen Conquest and to the disgust of Martin Clifford, he produced a copy of the 'Magnet' and the 'Boys' Friend'. The former he handed to Frank Richards, and the latter to Owen Conquest.

"Splendid!" I exclaimed. "You're all square now!"

And I thought I'd stolen a march on these boasters!" growled Martin Clifford.

"That boy," said Owen Conquest, as he watched the retreating form of the benefactor, "deserves a party, too. He reads at least three copies of the Companion Papers."

"Not," said Frank Richards. "He reads

the 'Magnet' Library only. He bought the other two to take home to his younger brothers, who aren't so intelligent."

"Why, yes—you" spluttered Martin Clifford and Owen Conquest together.

"Enough!" I said sternly. "We don't want three celebrated authors to play pitch-and-toss with each other on the public highway. You've bagged two points each, so far, and you ought to be perfectly happy. Add now, who says lunch?"

"Lunch!" said the trio, at once.

When we reached the next village we adjourned to a comfortable-looking inn.

Owen Conquest gave a sudden yell as we entered.

"Great jumping crackers!"

"What's up?" we demanded.

The author of the Book-wood stories pointed to the door-step, on which was outspread a copy of the 'Boys' Friend', with the written injunction:

"PLEASE WIFE YOUR FRAT."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Frank Richards and Martin Clifford.

"Even the 'Boys' Friend' has its uses!" I said.

"Of all the cheek—" gasped Owen Conquest. "Still, it's another point to me."

"How do you make that out?" demanded Martin Clifford. "No human being is in possession of that copy. It's the property of the waiter!"

"I claim a point."

"You're ruled out!" I said firmly. "We can't allow points for stray copies which are scattered about on doorknobs."

"Hear, hear!" said Frank Richards.

And we passed into the quiet little dining-room, Owen Conquest muttering to himself the while.

Lunch was served—and a very excellent lunch it was.

The only drawback was the inattention of the waiter, who was immersed in something behind the scenes.

Frank Richards had his eye on that waiter, and presently he sprang to his feet and rushed out of the room, returning a moment later with a triumphant smile on his face and a copy of the 'Magnet' Library in his hand!

"I guess I'm a point to the good!" he said. "That waiter's a man of wonderful discernment. He buys the 'Magnet' Library every week."

"You don't score a point there!" said Martin Clifford.

"Indeed! And why not?"

"Under the terms of the wager the reader of the paper had to be a boy—not a bald-headed waiter!"

"Hear, hear!" said Owen Conquest.

Frank Richards appealed to me.

After some deliberation, I decided in his favor.

"When the wager was contracted," I said, "I think we all intended that a point should be awarded when we saw anybody reading a copy of one of the three papers concerned. We did not confine ourselves to boys."

"Good man!" said Frank Richards. "That puts me in front!"

"We finished our lunch, and Frank Richards, Owen Conquest, and I departed ourselves in the small billiard-room, with Martin Clifford

work to the telephone. "Why be used that hated instrument was not apparent to us until afterwards.

Presently, 'as the guests refreshed, we stepped out into the summer sunshine.

Frank Richards had a puncture—he generally managed to get one every mile or so—but Owen Conquest, who was something of a mechanic, soon did the necessary repair.

"At the present moment," I remarked, as we resumed our ride, "Frank Richards has two points, and Clifford and Conquest have one each. When we reach Woking we shall have completed the twelve miles mentioned in the wager."

"That's so," said Martin Clifford.

And I heard him quickly checking to himself.

Even when Owen Conquest came upon three boys, seated in a row reading the 'Boys' Friend', Martin Clifford was still concluding.

Frank Richards owned:

"Nothing to laugh at, Martin!" he said.

"That boulder has left us both standing! He's got four points!"

"Well, you needn't look so solemn as a bulldog and about it, Frank! It's only a friendly wager, after all."

A male father on we heard an uproarious laugh from behind the hedge, and a voice exclaimed:

"That fellow Coker will be the death of me!"

Frank Richards' frown changed to a beautiful smile.

"This is where I come into my own!" he said.

Reclining in a grassy meadow were five boys.

Two of them were reading the 'Magnet' Library; and Frank Richards let out a whoop like an Indian water-buffalo.

A moment later, however, we face left.

For the other three boys were reading the 'Gem'!

"That makes us all square," said Owen Conquest. "We've got four points each, unless," he added sardoniously, "three kids happen to have snatched copies of the 'Boys' Friend' stowed away in their pockets!"

But when inquiries were made the boys shook their heads.

"We don't read the 'Boys' Friend,'" said one of them.

"Why not?" I demanded.

"Because, although it's not a bad sort of rag on the whole, there's a lot of piffle each week by a fellow called Owen Conquest!"

We all laughed heartily—all, that is to say, with the exception of Owen Conquest, who appeared to be on the verge of an apoplectic fit.

"This fellow Conquest," continued the boy, blissfully unconscious of the fact that he was addressing the gentleman in question, "is a fitting candidate for Coker's Hatch! His stories about Jimmy Silver fairly set a chap's teeth on edge!"

At this Owen Conquest made such hideous grimaces that the boy barked away in alarm.

"Is—is the best weather affecting you, sir?" he stammered.

"Not so much as your crossing criticisms!" said Owen Conquest.

The boy smiled.

"Are you interested in the 'Boys' Friend, sir?"

"Just a little. You see, I happen to be Owen Conquest!"

(To be continued.)

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