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**ONLY GUSSY'S WAY!**



**TOM MERRY & CO. AT THE ELECTION MEETING.**

*(An Exciting Scene in the Splendid Long Complete School Tale in this Issue.)* 9-9-19.

# ONLY GUSSY'S WAY.

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

BY

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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## CHAPTER I.

### Looking for a Camp.

"It looks like wain!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, glanced at the sky as he made that remark.

The St. Jim's caravan was following a leafy lane, shut in by high hedges and trees, on the borders of Somerset and Devon.

The sun was sinking behind the Devon hills, and the caravanners were getting tired. For some miles they had been looking out for a suitable spot for camping, but without any luck so far. And the overcast sky certainly did look like rain, and plenty of it.

A general grunt from the caravanners answered Arthur Augustus' remark.

They were quite aware that it looked like rain, and had been aware of it for some time; though the fact had only just dawned on the great Gussy.

"You don't say so!" remarked Monty Lowther sarcastically.

"Yass, wathah, deak boy!"

"Gussy's as good as a barometer," said Jack Blake. "He will be telling us next that it's close on sundown!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Gee-up!" rapped out Tom Merry, giving the horse's head a gentle jerk. Circumstances, the horse, seemed inclined to go to sleep, and it was not yet bed-time for Circumstances.

"It's about time we camped, you know," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Go on!"

"Gussy is making discoveries," said Monty Lowther. "How does he do these things?"

"I repeat, Lowthah, that I considah that it is time we camped!" said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"We've been looking for a camp for an hour past," grunted Herries. "Are we to camp in the middle of this lane?"

"Wats!"

"I'm getting jolly hungry!" observed Herries.

Monty Lowther made a pencil note on his out.

"You!" he said.

Herries stared at him.

"What do you mean, ten!" he demanded.

"That's the tenth time you've said you're getting hungry."

"Look here, you funny ass—"

"Bai Jove! I think we're all gettin' wathah hongwy," said Arthur Augustus, "and I think we ought to camp. You see, it looks like wain."

"Fathead!"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead, Blake! There is a very nice field on the other side of the hedge, and it would suit us admirably. There is probably a farmah or somebody somewah of whom we can ask permish."

"Where?" snorted Manners.

"I weally do not know, Mannahs. I am not personally acquainted with the weseedness of all the farmahs in Somersetshire. However, I considah—"

"Hallo, there's a gate!" exclaimed Digby.

"And somebody sitting on it!"

"Good!"

"Gee-up!" exclaimed Tom Merry, giving Circumstances another jerk.

The caravanners pushed on hopefully. They were all getting tired and hungry, and they would have been very glad to camp before the rain came on. But the lane was narrow, with a mere strip of grass beside the road, and there was no camping there.

"Ahead of the van, at some distance,

a gate could be seen in the hedge, with a youth sitting on it.

The setting sun glimmered on a large pair of spectacles that adorned the nose of the youth on the gate.

He had a book and a pencil in his hands, and seemed very busy with them.

"We'll ask that chap," said Tom Merry. "I dare say he belongs to the place. Anyway, he can tell us where to find the owner."

"Yass, wathah!"

The caravanners regarded the youth on the gate rather curiously as they approached him.

They could not see his face very clearly, but there was something familiar in his aspect.

"I've seen that kid before somewhere," said Manners.

"Yass, wathah! I was about to make the same remark," said Arthur Augustus. "His specs seen wathah familar."

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

"Skimmay!"

"Bai Jove!"

The youth on the gate looked up as the caravan lumbered almost of him. It was Skimpole, of the Shell at St. Jim's. He blinked at the caravanners through his big glasses, and nodded.

"Fancy meesah you beah, Skimmay!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Where did you drop from?" asked Monty Lowther.

"My dear fellows," said Skimpole, still blinking, "I am very pleased to see you. This encounter is indeed a source of very considerable satisfaction to me."

"Ho, ho, ha!"

The caravanners chortled.

They had not seen Skimpole of the Shell since the school had broken up

for the summer holidays, and, as a matter of fact, had not bestowed a thought upon the genius of St. Jim's. But they had not forgotten Skimpy's peculiar manners and customs, and they were entertained to hear once more his ponderous mode of address. Skimpy of the Shell never spoke in words of less than three or four syllables if he could help it.

"I have been indulging in the harmless and necessary recreation of a country walk," said Skimpy. "If you are going on to Tuckleton, you may afford me a lift in that capacious vehicle. I am somewhat fatigued."

"How far to Tuckleton?" asked Tom Merry.

"The distance probably exceeds three miles, my dear Merry."

"We're not going three yards if we can help it," remarked Jack Blake.

"We're looking for a camp, Skimpy."

"You would find Tuckleton a very interesting place for a stop," said Skimpy. "The bye-election takes place to-morrow."

"The which?"

"Probably you have heard of the Tuckleton bye-election. My uncle is standing for election to the House of Commons," explained Skimpy. "I am here to assist him in canvassing for votes. My uncle, of course, is the Socialist candidate."

"Does Socialism run in the family?" grinned Monty Lother.

The juniors chortled again.

Skimpy of the Shell had many wild and weird "isms," on which he talked at great length whenever he could find a listener. Socialism was one of them.

"Your caravans," proceeded Skimpy, unheeding, "could be of considerable service in conveying voters to the poll. The other party have a larger number of motor-cars, which places us at a disadvantage. I am sure you would be delighted to lend your caravan for such a noble and patriotic purpose."

"To help a new gash in the House of Common!" chuckled Lother. "I don't think!"

"Wathah not!"

"My dear fellow, you misapprehend. My uncle, Mr. Chinn, is the Socialist candidate, and stands for the nationalisation of the coal-mines, and the land, and—"

"And caravans, perhaps?" asked Lother.

Skimpy reflected.

"Yes, no doubt," he answered. "Under Socialism all caravans would be nationalised. We are simply beginning with the coal, my dear friends. Every thing else will follow in time. I am now making some notes for a speech I hope to deliver to-morrow in Tuckleton. I will read you what I have written so far. It will not occupy more than an hour and a half—"

"Mercy!"

"Or say an hour and three quarters. It begins with the remark—'Yaroo!'"

Skimpy of the Shell did not mean that his great speech began with that extraordinary ejaculation; he uttered it involuntarily, as the gate upon which he was seated swung open under a push from Monty Lother.

Skimpy's feet flew up, and his notebook flew in one direction, his pencil in another, and Skimpy himself landed in the grass, roaring.

## CHAPTER 2.

### In Camp.

"YAROOH! Oh dear! What has happened? Oh! Ah! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear fellows— Ow."

Herbert Skimpy sat in the grass and gasped. He was not much hurt, for the gate was low, and the grass was thick. But he was very much startled, and he blinked wildly over his big spectacles, which had slid down his bony nose.

"Do that again, Skimpy!" suggested Monty Lother. "I didn't know you were such an acrobat. Have you taken up gymnastics in the vac?"

"My dear Lother— Ow!"

"Wally, Lother, you are wathah a wuff ass!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely, and he gave the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's a hand up. Skimpy staggered to his feet.

"It was the only way!" explained Monty Lother. "Skimpy was going to read us a Socialist speech. At such a time anything is justifiable short of manslaughter."

"Hear, hear!" grinned the caravanners.

"Now, the question is, can we camp in this field?" said Tom Merry. "Do you know whether we can, Skimpy?"

"Certainly, my dear Merry!"

"Oh, good!" said Tom. "It's pasture land, from the look of it, and we sha'n't hurt it. No cattle in it at present. Just the place we want, if we can camp here. Do you know who the owner is, Skimpy?"

"Certainly—a Mr. Griggs, of Griggs' Farm," answered Skimpy. "I have called upon him with reference to the Tuckleton election."

"And there's no objection to our camping in the field, you think?"

"None whatever!"

"That's good!"

"Hold on a minute, though," said Manners. "We know what a silly ass Skimpy is. Do you know for a fact, Skimpy, that there's no objection to our camping in the meadow?"

"Most decidedly, Manners! I can answer for it!"

"Well, that seems all right," said Blake. "I'm blessed if I can tramp much farther! Let's get in!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come and have supper with us, Skimpy," said Tom Merry hospitably.

"Yaas, we shall be delighted, Skimpy."

"Oh, do!" murmured Lother.

Herbert Skimpy blinked benignantly at the caravanners.

"My dear fellows, I accept your invitation with pleasure. I may be able to enlighten you a little on the important subject of Socialism and the nationalisation of industries over supper."

"Look here—" began Herries.

"My dear Herries, do not be alarmed. I will explain the matter in quite simple terms, suitable to your intellect."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you silly ass—" roared Herries.

"My dear fellow—"

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Never mind Skimpy's gas! Gee-up, old hoss!"

Circumstances condescended to gee-up, and the St. Jim's van was led into the field.

It was an excellent place for camping. Across the field was a brook, shaded by big trees; and the caravan halted under the trees. The sky was growing darker and darker, and a few drops of rain fell as the van halted. Jack Blake regarded the sky with a dubious glance.

"No good lighting a fire," he said.

"The blessed rain would put it out. We can manage with the stores."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We're pretty well sheltered under these trees. Now, then, let's get some supper. I'm famished!"

"Same here!" said Herries, with deep feeling.

The stores were soon going merrily, and there was steaming-hot coffee to wash down cold viands. The rain was pattering down in the field as the rangers began supper; but over the caravan camp thick branches were interlaced together, and hardly a drop fell on the rangers. Tom Merry & Co. felt their spirits rise again under the influence of rest, supper, and hot coffee. Even the rain was agreeable to watch, now that they were sheltered from it.

"This is wathah comfy!" Arthur Augustus remarked, with satisfaction. "Another slice of ham, Skimpy!"

"Thank you, my dear D'Arcy. On reflection, I find that I am quite hungry," said Skimpy. "I have very little time, of course, to devote to the needs of the body. The nationalisation of—"

"Oh, give us a rest on that!" grunted Herries.

"Hewwic, deah boy—"

"Well, fathead!"

"Skimpy is our guest, Hewwic!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "And a guest is allowed to talk any silly wot he likes, even Socialism. Pray wun on, Skimpy!"

Herries grinned again, and devoted his attention to ham and hard-boiled eggs. Skimpy did not need telling twice to "run on." Like a true Socialist, he was prepared to run on to any length, at any time, and in any place.

"I have here some bills that I have been distributing," he said, beaming.

"Look, my dear fellows!"

The caravanners grinned as they glanced at Skimpy's handbills:

### "VOTE FOR CHINN!"

The coal-mines for the people!

Chinn stands for Nationalisation!

### VOTE FOR CHINN!"

"These leaflets have been scattered all over the constituency," said Skimpy. "I drew up this bill myself. I flatter myself that I have been of great assistance to my uncle in his campaign."

"I believe I could suggest an improvement," said Monty Lother seriously.

"I hardly think so, Lother; but it is true that wisdom sometimes comes from the mouths of babes and sucklings," said Skimpy.

"What would you suggest?" Monty Lother took out a pencil, and put in his improvements. Skimpy blinked at the leaflet when Lother had finished. It ran:

### "NATIONALISE THE COAL-MINES!"

"The coal-mining industry can be made to support 20,000 officials and their families in idleness. There are only 1,000,000 officials in the country at present. Nationalise the mines, and have 20,000 more."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jore! I suppose that is what nationalisation really means!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully.

Skimpy blinked at the amended leaflet.

It seemed to afford him food for thought.

Like most advanced reformers, Skimpy was not much given to reflecting upon his stunts.

"Isn't that about it, Skimpy?" asked Jack Blake, laughing.

"My dear Blake, nationalisation means the coal for the people," said Skimpy.

"But there are about forty million people," said Lother. "They can't all

get together to manage the coal industry, can they!"

"No! They would manage it through their elected representatives, my dear Lowther."

"That is, the Government!"

"Exactly!"

"And the Government is the politicians!"

"Ye-es!"

"And what's to prevent the politicians from raising the price of coal, and paying themselves whopping salaries out of the plunder?"

Skimpole rubbed his nose thoughtfully. But the usual argument of the Socialist reformer came put to his lips.

"Look at the Post Office!" he said triumphantly. "The Post Office is nationalised. That's a case in point!"

"You bet it is!" agreed Lowther. "And they've raised the price of stamps and telegrams to the public, and there's nobody to stop them!"

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "I had certainly not looked at it in that light before. But—but coal is different—"

"Not a bit of it. Nationalise the coal, and the first time the Chancellor of the Exchequer is pushed for money he will raise the price of coal. And, as the politicians always spend all the money they can lay their hands on, it's quite certain to happen. The coal for the people sounds very nice, but the coal for the jobbers and place-hunters is rather a different proposition. And that's what it means."

Skimpole, for once, was silent.

Before he could think of any answer to Lowther's remarks—not that there was any answer to be found—there came an interruption.

A big man in coat and gaiters came striding across the field in the rain towards the caravan camp, with a whip under his arm and a very hostile and threatening expression on his face.

The juniors rose to their feet as he arrived at the camp. The big man's look boded trouble.

"What are you doing here!" roared the big man.

"Camping!" answered Tom Merry.

"And who gave you permission to camp on my land?"

"Oh, my hat!"

## CHAPTER 3.

### Marching Orders!

TOM MERRY & CO. exchanged glances of dismay.

On Skimpole's assurance that there was no objection to the caravanners camping in the meadow, they had camped there; and as he had met Mr. Griggs, the farmer, they had supposed that Skimmy knew what he was talking about.

Evidently that was a mistake.

The big man cracked his whip.

"Clear off!" he roared.

"Bai Jove! Wrealy, you know—"

"Aro you Mr. Griggs?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, I am!" snorted the big gentleman. "And I order you off my land, and if you don't go at once I'll lay my whip round you!"

"But—but—"

"Clear off!"

"Look here, we understood that we could camp here," said Tom Merry.

Skimmy, you see, you told us—"

Skimpole nodded calmly.

"You are quite right, my dear Merry. There is no objection to your camping in this field—none whatever. I assure you on that point."

"No objection!" howled Mr. Griggs wrathfully. "Ain't I to have any objection, when it's my land!"

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"Certainly not!"

"Eh!"

"You see, my good man," said Skimpole, with compassionate patience. "It is not really your land!"

"What!"

"Land is national property," pursued the cheerful Socialist. "In a very short time land will be nationalised, and will thus return to its original owners. Meanwhile, all landowners are practically trespassers."

"Trespassers!" stuttered Mr. Griggs.

Evidently it was Mr. Griggs' first lesson in Socialism, and he did not quite catch on.

"Certainly, trespassers," said Skimpole, blinking at him. "Land is really common property, my good man, and you have no more right here than we have. Is that clear?"

"You—you—your frabjous idiot!" howled Blake. "Do you mean to say you told us we could camp here on Socialist principles?"

"Certainly, my dear Blake."

"Oh, you thumping chump!"

"You—you—you blighted Bolshevik!" gasped Manners. "You ought to be boiled in oil!"

"My dear Manners—"

"Bai Jove! Skimmy is a dangerous maniac!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

He really ought to be placed undah restraint.

"So—so I'm a trespasser on my own land, am I?" gasped Mr. Griggs. "I'll show you whether I'm trespasser or not, you cheeky young rip!"

Whack!

Mr. Griggs' whip was a big and heavy one, and he laid it round Skimpole with a powerful arm.

The unfortunate Socialist hopped and yelled.

"Yaroooh! Stoppt! I am perfectly prepared to argue the point with you, my good man— Yaroooooh!"

Skimmy might have been prepared to argue the point, but the angry farmer wasn't. He relied on his whip to make his meaning clear, and he certainly made it clear enough.

Whack, whack, whack!

Tom Merry & Co. looked on cheerfully.

They had no sympathy to waste on the egregious Skimmy just then. He had landed them into the position of trespassers with his absurdity, and they thought—that a severe lesson would probably do him good.

The hapless Socialist hopped and roared and dodged frantically as the whip lashed round his bony limbs.

He made a break at last, and fled across the meadow for the gate, giving up all idea of arguing with Mr. Griggs, and proving to the farmer that he was in reality the trespasser.

After him went the big man, still letting out with the whip, Skimmy crossed the field, jumping like a kangaroo, and uttering a scendish yell at every jump.

How he reached the gate Skimmy never knew, but he reached it, and tumbled headlong over it into the lane.

There he sat and roared.

Mr. Griggs, breathing hard after his exertions, strode back towards the caravan camp.

The caravanners were already busy. Whether land was, in strict justice, national property or not, it was pretty clear that they couldn't remain on the land at present owned by the irate Mr. Griggs.

In haste his wife harnessed the horse to the caravan, and pitched their property into the van.

Quick as they worked, however, they were not finished when Mr. Griggs came striding back.

The farmer brandished his whip round them.

"Clear off!" he roared.

"Oh, give us a minute!" growled Tom Merry. "We're going, bless you!"

"Yaa, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, indignantly. "I should uttably refuse to remain on your propwathy, air, aftah your inhospitable conduct."

Whack!

"Yawoooooh!"

It was plain enough that the caravanners were going, but Mr. Griggs did not seem to think that they were going fast enough. So he started in with the whip.

"You uttah wuffian!" shrieked Arthur Augustus in great wrath. "If you touch me with that whip again—"

Whack!

"Oh, ewikey!"

"Keep off, will you?" roared Blake.

Whack!

Blake caught the whip with his legs, and roared.

"We've had enough of this!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Collar him!"

"Yaa, wathah!"

The caravanners were as angry as the farmer by that time. Leaving the horse and the van, they made a rush at the irate gentleman.

Mr. Griggs laid round him with his whip with great vim. There were loud yells from the vanners as they caught the lashes. But they rushed on, and collared the big man on all sides.

Crash!

Mr. Griggs came down on his back with a concussion that knocked all the breath out of his body. He lay in the wet grass and gasped.

"Wag him!" shouted Arthur Augustus in great excitement.

"Roll him!"

"Sit on his head!"

"Oh, dang my buttons!" gasped Mr. Griggs. "Gerroff! Oh, my eye! I'll have you locked up! I'll have you run in for this! Ow-ow! Gerroff!"

The exasperated caravanners did not heed his threats. They rolled him in the grass and bumped him till Mr. Griggs was reduced to a state of dazed bewilderment. Then they left him, gasping and spluttering, and returned to the van. Blake taking the precaution to pitch the farmer's whip over the hedge.

Circumstances was harnessed, and the caravanners started through the wet grass and the rain. The caravan rumbled and clattered away towards the gate. Mr. Griggs set up in the grass trying to get his breath, and blinking dizzily after the van.

Digby opened the gate, and the van jolted through into the lane. Dig kicked Skimpole, as a hint to get out of the way. Skimmy staggered up, and set his spectacles straight on his bony nose.

"My dear fellows—" he gasped.

"Gerraway, you idiot!"

"The—the man was most unreasonable," stuttered Skimpole. "I pointed out to him with irrefragable force that he was really the trespasser—"

But the St. Jim's caravanners had had enough of Socialism. They fell on Skimpole of the Shell and smote him. Once more Skimmy found that argument, however irrefragable, was futile. He took to his heels, and disappeared into the gloom.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I do not believe in 'bin' wuff with a silly idiot, but I weally considah that Skimmy ought to have a fearful thrashing."

"The man as—"

"Come back and have some more, you dummy!" roared Blake.

But Skimpole of the Shell did not come back. He had had enough, and he vanished.

The rain came down in a steady deluge. Through the rain and the thick



There were loud yells from the vanners as they caught the lashes of Mr. Griggs' whip. But they rushed on and outflanked the big man on all sides. (See chapter 2.)

ing darkness, the hapless caravanners pursued their way, with feelings towards the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's that were little short of Hunnish.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### Very Wet!

**W**HAT a life!"  
"Oh, cwombs!"  
"Blow the rain!" groaned Herries. "Blow the van! Blow caravanning! Blow everything!"  
"Jever see so much mud at once!"  
"Oh, my hat!"  
"The St. Jim's caravanners were not happy.

Circumstances was tired, and he proceeded at a snail's pace. It was not much use, to urge him on. He couldn't go faster if he wanted to, and most assuredly he did not want to. And with a fatigued horse and a hilly road it was not much use for the juniors to pile into the van for shelter. That would only have caused a dead stop. Wrapped in macintoshes, and with umbrellas up, the caravanners tramped on through mud and rain and darkness.

It was an exasperating thought that, but for the meeting with Skimpole of the Shell, they might have found a hospitable

camping-place before nightfall. It was fortunate for Skimmy that he was no longer with the St. Jim's party.

High hedges, and trees dim in the gloom and the rain, were all the caravanners could see. They came out on a high road at last, and a sign-post announced that they were two miles from Tuckleton—Tom Merry climbing the sign-post before he could read it in the darkness.

—And the rain was coming down thicker than ever.

The caravanners had had plenty of fine weather in their tour, but the weather was making up for it now. The road was swimming in mud, under their feet.

"We can't keep on like this!" growled Tom Merry, at last. "We'd better stop by the roadside and chance it!"

"Yaas, wathah! I am weally tired enough to dwoop!"

"What's the time?"

"Nearly eleven."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bai Jove! Heah comes somebody!"

There was a trot of hoofs on the road, and a horseman came dimly into view. He drew rein by the halted caravan, and a plump and ruddy face looked down at the dripping vanners from under a bowler hat.

"Lost your way?" the stranger inquired.

"Not exactly," said Tom Merry. "We're looking for a camp. If you could toll us where to find a place to stop for the night we'd be much obliged."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Caravanning, hay?"

"Yes."

"Very enjoyable, I should think!" said the plump farmer, with a smile.

"Oh, topping!" groaned Blake.

"You can camp in my field if you like. Turn in at the white gate up the road."

"Thank you very much, sir!" said Tom Merry gratefully.

"Yaas, wathah! You are weally a Duviton."

"You're welcome. You won't do any damage to my field, I reckon. Don't go into the next field, though. I keep my black bull there, and he doesn't like strangers. Mind you don't open the gate between."

"We'll be careful of that."

"Well, good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The cheery farmer rode on, leaving the Caravanners feeling very much relieved.

"Good Samaritan, and no mistake!"

said Monty Lowther. "Let's get on. I shall be jolly glad to camp, for one."  
"What ho!"

The vanners pushed on, and in a few minutes they found the white gate. Tom Merry opened it, and the van was led into the field.

Darkness lay round them, and thickly-dropping rain. The ground was rough and uneven, and the van jolted and clattered over it. Tom Merry peered round him through the rain.

"There's trees yonder," he said. "Better get what shelter you can. Get up, you blessed old ho!"

"Get a move on, you beast!" growled Blake, addressing Circumstances. The horse had stopped, and showed an inclination to lie down. He was persuaded to start again, and the van rumbled on over the grass, and came under the trees in the field.

The branches overhead afforded some shelter, which was a relief. Fatigued as the juniors were, they had to put up the tent. There was no accommodation for seven in the van. Up went the tent by lantern-light, and the tired vanners were able to turn in at last.

The Terrible Three took the bunks in the van, and Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy occupied the tent. They turned in, and in about a minute they were fast asleep.

The rain lashed down, but they did not hear it. Seven caravanners, tired out, were sleeping the sleep of the just.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who awoke first, suddenly. The darkness in the tent was impenetrable when he opened his eyes, and sat up.

"You uttiah ass!" he murmured drowsily.

"Mmmmm!" came a sleepy murmur from Blake.

"Blake, you ass!"  
"Hallo! Go to sleep!"  
"Was it you, Blake?"

"Eh? Was what me, fathead!"

"Somebody bumped into me and woke me up," said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I refuse to have practical jokes played on me when I am fearfully tired and sleepy."

"Bow-wow! Go to sleep, ass! You've been dreaming!"

"I repeat, Blake, that somebody bumped me—fearfully hard!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Was it you, Hewy-wice!"

"Snore!"  
"Hewy-wice!"

"Shurrup!" came in a sleepy but ferocious voice from Robert Arthur Digby. "Can't you let a chap sleep when he's tired?"

"I have been woke up!"

"Fathead!"

"Bai Jove! There it is again!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Somebody has just given me a fearful shove."

"I'll give you a fearful eye if you don't shut up!" growled Blake.

"I refuse to be treated in this manner!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "If I am shoved again I shall strike—Oh ewumba!"

There was another shove as Arthur Augustus spoke, and he punched out angrily. To his surprise, his fist came in contact with the tent. He was on the outside of the row, and there was nobody on the side whence the shove proceeded—only the tent canvas.

"Oh cwikey!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "It is somebody outside the tent playin' tricks!"

"Oh, go to sleep!"  
"I repeat, Blake, that somebody—"  
"You're dreaming! Dry up!"  
"It is one of those Shell boundahs playin' tricks!"

Arthur Augustus raised his eyes. "If that is you, Tom Merry, I—"

There was a sound of a movement outside the tent. Jack Blake heard it this time, and he sat up.

"My hat! There's somebody outside!" he exclaimed.

"It is one of those Shell boundahs playin' tricks!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"You silly ass! Go back to bed!" roared Blake.

There came another bump on the canvas, and the whole tent shook. Blake & Co. started up from their blankets. For a moment they thought that the whole tent was coming down on them.

"The silly chump!" gasped Herries. "Let's go out to him! The tent will be over next!"

"Yass, wathah!"

With wrathful faces Blake & Co. swarmed out of the tent. The rain was still falling, but they did not heed it for the moment. The darkness was intense, unbroken by a single gleam of a star. They could just make out the dim shape of the canvas close at hand.

"Are you there, you silly fathead!" yelled Herries.

There was no answer from the darkness; but there came the sound of a movement in the wet grass. The juniors heard it, but they could see nothing. The night was dark, and in the shade of the trees it was black as a pit. Blake compressed his lips.

"It's a fatheaded joker, of course," he said. "And, of course, it's one of those Shell bounders. Let's go for them!"

"What ho!"

The four juniors had huddled on their macintoshes before leaving the tent. Bareheaded and barefooted they ran across to the van through the rain and swarmed up the steps. The door was closed, but Jack Blake hurled it open.

"Now, you chumps—"  
"Hallo!" came a sleepy voice. "What the thump—"  
"Rout 'em out!"

The interior of the van was as black as the inside of a hat; but the Fourth-Formers knew their way about well enough. In a couple of seconds three yelling Shell fellows were grasped and bumped out of the bunks and landed sprawling on the floor.

CHAPTER 5.

A Mystery of the Night!

"WAG the boundahs!"

"Bump them!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wild yells rose from the Terrible Three of the Shell. The contact with the floor of the caravan had been neither grateful nor comforting. Blake grabbed an electric-torch from the pocket of his macintosh and turned on the light. It revealed three astounded and infuriated faces staring up from the floor.

"Wag them!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"You petty duffers!" howled Tom Merry. "What are you up to?"

"Lemme gerrat them!" gasped Manners.

"Perhaps you'll think twice before you play tricks on the tent again!" grinned Blake.

"You silly ass, who's been playing tricks on the tent!" howled Lowther.

"You have!"

"You fjabrious jabberwock, I've been fast asleep!"

"So have I!" gasped Manners. "You've been dreaming!"

"Wats! I was severely bumped through the canvas—"  
"You'll be bumped again in a minute, you crass dummy!" stuttered Tom

Merry, struggling in the grasp of the Fourth-Formers.

"Weally, Tom Mewry—"  
"Keep 'em down!" said Blake cheerfully. "Which of you chumps was the practical joker? We're going to rag the practical joker, and teach him to keep his little jokes for a more suitable time. Which was it?"

"None of us, you ahrieking ass!"

"Oh, come off!" growled Herries. "You newly huffed the tent over."

"We didn't!" roared Tom Merry.

"Well, if you didn't who did?"

"How should I, know, ass? Most likely you dreamed it, fathead! Ger-rolf!"

"Bai Jove! If you fellows say you did not play tricks, we are bound to accept your assurance," said Arthur Augustus. "There must be some othah silly ass hangin' around."

"Oh!" said Blake. "Some tramp, perhaps—"  
"Yass, wathah!"

The Terrible Three were allowed to re-enter. Even Blake was satisfied by this time that the assault on the tent had not proceeded from his fellow-caravanners.

"Sorry!" said Blake politely. "Of course, we thought it was you—"

"You thought!" howled Monty Lowther. "You can't think! You apology for a babbling idiot—"

"Weally, Lowthah, it was a very natural misapprehension undah the ciroos—"

"Kick them out!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Look here—"  
"Bai Jove!"

The Terrible Three were wrathful; which was perhaps natural under the circumstances. Whether any tramp with a peculiar sense of humour was lurking about the camp they did not know. But they knew that they had been suddenly bumped out of bed, and that was enough for them. They fairly jumped at the heroes of the Fourth, and drove them out of the van with a terrific onslaught.

There was not much room for scrapping in the van, and the charge of the Shell fellows drove Blake & Co. toppling out. Herries and Digby landed in the grass, yelling; and Arthur Augustus sprawled on the steps, adding his dulcet-tones to the din. Jack Blake had hold of Manners, and was struggling; but Tom Merry and Lowther came to their chum's aid, and Blake was forcibly detached and rolled out.

He brushed Gussy from the steps as he rolled, and they landed in the grass together. And louder yells from Herries and Digby testified that there was a collision in the grass.

Tom Merry banged the door of the caravan and locked it.

"Now those silly asses can sort themselves out!" he said.

"Bother 'em!" growled Manners.

"Blow 'em" gasped Lowther.

And the Terrible Three turned in again, heedless of the din outside. Jack Blake rushed up to the door again, and hammered on it; but it was locked, and it did not yield. After breathing a series of blood-curdling threats, Blake jumped down.

In spite of their macintoshes, the four juniors were decidedly damp by the time they scuttled back to the tent for shelter.

"Bai Jove! What a night!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "It weally appears that it wasn't those fellows at all! It was very wet!"

Blake snorted.

"It's somebody who's come along here," he said. "I wish I was near enough to the funny idiot to hit him."

I'd teach him to play rotten jokes on caravaners!"

"Suppose we search for the wotiah, and—"

"Oh, blow him! I'm wet enough already."

"He seems to be gone, too," remarked Dig. "Anybody know where there's a towel?"

With remarks that were both loud and deep, the caravaners dried themselves, and turned in once more.

There was no further alarm in the camp; the practical joker—practical for it was—had apparently sunk into the Fourth-Formers' ranks into the arms of Morpheus once more, and they slept soundly until morning.

They were awakened by the tent-flap being withdrawn, letting a flood of early sunshine into the tent. Tom Merry's sneaky face looked in: The rain had ceased before dawn, and the sun was up, shining merrily over wet fields and dripping trees.

"Turn out, slackers!" called in the captain of the Shell. "Do you know it's past seven o'clock!"

Blake yawned.

"Seen anything of anybody about the camp?" he asked.

"No," said Tom, laughing. "Last night four lunatics came into the van, but we turned them out all right."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"There was somebody about the camp last night, pushing at the tent," said Blake. "We thought it would come down once."

"You were dreaming, old chap!"

"Look here, you chump—"

"Well, if there was anybody here, he's gone now," said Tom. "Turn out! We've got the stores going. Brekker in ten minutes!"

"Wight-ho!"

The caravaners turned out. The bright sunshine of the summer morning cheered them up, though there was still plenty of wet about. It was hopeless to think of a camp-fire, but movement and the sunshine soon warmed them.

Circumstances came trotting up cheerily; and he looked as if he had found a dry resting-place for the night.

While the other fellows were busy with preparations for breakfast, Arthur Augustus stared across the field to the gate on the opposite side with a very interested air. Jack Blake gave him a poke in the ribs.

"Lend a hand, lardyboyes!" he said.

"Ow!"

"What are you star-gazing for?"

"You uttah ass, I am not star-gazin'! I was veggin' that wate—"

"Oh, bother the gate! Cut up the loaf."

"The gate is open, Blake."

"Well, let it stay open. Blow the gate!"

"That farmah chap told us last night, dear boy, that there was a dangerous bull in the next field, and warned us not to open the gate. But somebody has left the gate open."

"Oh!" ejaculated Blake.

The caravaners looked across the meadow. A high hedge and a ditch separated it from the next field—and they could see no farther than the hedge.

But the wooden gate in the hedge was half-way open—and if there was a bull in the adjoining field there was nothing to prevent him from joining the caravaners at breakfast if he wanted

"Better cut across and shut the gate, think," remarked Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! I have an ideal—"

"I'll go," said Blake. "Some careless ass has left it open—or perhaps it was left unclatched, and blew open in the night. May as well shut it."

"I have an ideal, dear boys. You wemembah that practical jokah who bumped on the tent duvin' the night—"

"The bull!" ejaculated Herricks.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The juniors instinctively glanced round them. If the bull had wandered into the caravan camp during the night, it was possible that he was still in the field. It was a rather startling thought—the farmer's description of the black bull.

"Hally! What's the matter with the hoas?" exclaimed Manners suddenly.

Circumstances had suddenly raised his head, and stared round him. He threw up his heels, and galloped across the meadow.

"Look!" yelled Digby.

There was a rumbling roar in the still morning air. Close by the hedge, and a dozen yards from the caravaners' camp, a huge, dark form loomed from behind a clump of willows.

There was a general gasp from the caravaners.

"The bull!"

## CHAPTER 6.

## Up a Tree!

**B**ELLOW! The St. Jim's caravaners stared at the bull, transfixed.

It was a huge animal, and they did not need telling that it was savage. The bellowing roar and the red gleam in its eyes were sufficient evidence of that.

The bull was pawing the grass as it glared at the frozen caravaners. No wonder Circumstances had taken to his heels.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Wun for it, dear boys! He's comin'! Wan like anythin'!"

The black bull started towards the camp.

That he intended to attack the caravaners was plain enough. He came on with lowered head at the charge.

"Into the van!" yelled Blake.

"Wun for it!"

"Oh crumbs!"

The caravaners scattered in desperate haste. It was death or serious injury, to face the horns of the bull, and they had no weapon against the ferocious animal.

Blake and Dig, who were nearest the caravan, bolted in. Arthur Augustus dodged round the van and clambered on top, followed by Herricks. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther ran for the trees.

Bellow!

Behind them sounded the thudding hoofs and the deep roar of the bull.

Tom Merry went up the nearest trunk like a monkey. Lowther clambered up another tree. Manners was following Tom Merry, but he slipped and fell back, panting.

Tom Merry, in the lower branches of the tree, looked down.

"Manners!" he shouted. "Buck up!"

Manners made a desperate spring for the trunk, and clambered up. The bull was close behind him now.

Tom leaned down and caught his chum by the collar, and by main force dragged him up into the lower branches.

Manners sprawled in the boughs, clutching hold and gasping for breath; and the baffled animal bellowed below.

"Oh! Ow! Oh, my hat!" spluttered Manners breathlessly.

"Hold on, old chap!"

"Oh dear!"

The black bull raged to and fro under the tree, his red eyes gliding up at the Shell fellows of St. Jim's.

But the Terrible Three were safe among the boughs, and they were not

likely to let go. The bull turned away at last, and careered towards the camp. Jack Blake, who was looking out of the caravan door, promptly shut it.

The bull careered round the van, bellowing, and Arthur Augustus and Herricks watched him from the roof, with palpitating hearts.

Finding no victim there, the bull started for the tent and charged it, bringing it down in a tangle. He pitched over among the canvas, and roared with fury as he extricated himself.

"Nice for the tent!" muttered Monty Lowther.

"And nice for our pots and pans!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Look at the beast!"

The bull was investigating the caravaners' breakfast.

He trampled recklessly on pots and pans and crockery, and there was a sound of crashing and smashing.

The oil-stove was kicked over, and a boiling kettle pitched against the bull's hind leg; and to judge by his frantic bellowing he did not find the contact agreeable.

He caught sight of Circumstances in the distance at last, and careered off towards him, the horse promptly taking to flight.

The caravaners watched the chase breathlessly.

The black bull was in a murderous mood, and it would have gone hard with poor Circumstances if the cruel horns had come near him. But Circumstances kept the lead, and when he was cornered in a corner of the field, he dodged round his pursuer and took up his flight again, with the clumsy monster raging after him.

He jumped a hedge at last, and vanished—and the bull halted and roared. The hedge, fortunately, was too much for him.

He came loping back towards the caravan camp. Tom Merry, who was thinking of sliding down the tree, changed his mind and clambered back into the branches.

"What the thump are we going to do!" exclaimed Tom, in dismay and perplexity. "The beast means business."

"He do—he does!" agreed Manners.

"Tom Mewwy!" Arthur Augustus shouted across to the trees from the roof of the van. "Tom Mewwy, dear boy! What are we going to do?"

"Is that a conundrum, Gussy?" called back the captain of the Shell.

"Weally, you ass—"

"If it is, I give it up," said Tom Merry.

"The howwid beast is w'ekkin' the place," said Arthur Augustus. "Suppose we all wash on him at once—"

"Stay where you are, fathead!"

"I'll see that he stays here!" said George Herricks grimly. "If he tries any rushing bizney I'll take him by the neck."

"Weally, Howwies, I should uttally refuse to be taken by the neck—"

"Bow-wow!"

"We shall have to wait till help comes," said Tom Merry. "They'll discover at the farm that the bull is loose, soon—they're bound to."

"This is a wathah undignified posish to occupy, Tom Mewwy."

"I'm not thinking of my dignity, old bean—I'm thinking of my skin!" answered Tom Merry.

There was evidently nothing to be done but to wait. The bull was master of the situation, and tackling him was out of the question. He was prowling round the camp, occasionally jerking at the tent-canvas with his horns, only too plainly indicating what would happen

to the caravanners if they came within his reach.

In the distance smoke could be seen rising over the trees, showing where the farmhouse was. Tom Merry & Co. waited and watched. There was no escape for them till help came; and they had to bear the unpleasant situation with what philosophy they could muster.

Half an hour passed, and the bull did not yet seem to be tired of watching the caravanners; though they were heartily tired of watching him. The remarks they made to the bull were frequent and emphatic, but they did not affect him in the least. He only blinked at them with his red eyes as he held restlessly about the camp.

"If I'd only foreseen this!" murmured Manners regretfully.

"Eh, what?" granted Tom Merry. Manners frowned.

"I'd have had my camera slung on if I'd known—"

"Your camera?"

"Yes. I'd like to take a snap of the bull now. What a ripping picture it would make to hang up in the study at St. Jim's!"

"Fatehead!"

"There's a good light, too," said Manners. "I could take him as easy as anything from this tree."

"Lucky he can't take you from this tree!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Hallo! Here comes somebody!" called out Morny Lowther.

"Thank goodness!"

In the open gateway across the field a rather elegant figure appeared. At the first glance the juniors supposed it was a farm-boy dressed with unusual neatness. At the second glance they recognised the new-comer as a "land-girl."

The young lady was in gaiters and a short skirt, and looked very trim and workmanlike. She stood in the gateway looking across the field, and the juniors guessed that she was looking for the bull.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in alarm. "She is comin' this way, you fellows! She will win into the bull!"

"I dare say she knows how to handle him," said Herries.

"Wate! I presume that a gal could hardly handle that feathal beast, when we had to wun away from him!"

Arthur Augustus stood on the roof of the caravan, and waved his eyeglass excitedly at the land-girl, who was coming across the field with swinging strides.

"Keep back! Pway wun away! The bull! Look out!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

The land-girl glanced at him, and showed a set of white teeth in a smile, and came on unconcernedly. Arthur Augustus, in consternation, brandished his eyeglass frantically, and yelled and shouted; but the land-girl still came on cheerfully towards the caravan camp.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Alto!

"DANGAH!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Look out for the bull!" shouted Tom Merry.

The bull was looking round towards the land-girl with lowering eyes. The juniors could not help feeling alarmed for the girl's safety. They were by no means wanting in pluck, but they had had no recourse but to run from the dangerous animal. But if the bull attacked the fearless girl, they intended to rush at once to the rescue, whatever the danger.

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Arthur Augustus watched the advance of the land-girl in growing consternation.

"Bai Jove! The poor young thing must be dead!" he murmured. "She does not appear to heed my remarks!"

"She grinned at you," said Herries.

"She smiled, Hewwies!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Looked to me like a grin."

"I am afraid, Hewwies, that you are wathah a wuffian. It was a smile, and a very sweet smile."

"She knows the bull, I expect, and he knows her," said Herries. "He won't hurt her, or she wouldn't be running the risk."

"Wats! She is wumin' into feathal dangah, and I am not goin' to let her be hurt by that howrid beast!"

"Stop where you are, you ass!" roared Herries.

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy swung himself down from the van. There was a rumble from the bull as he observed the swell of St. Jim's. The land-girl called out hastily:

"Get back at once, please!"

"Weally, my deah young lady—"

"Got back!"

"You are in dangah—"

"Nothing of the kind! You are, if you do not get out of reach! Get back at once, while I take the bull away!"

"But, weally—"

The black bull had started towards Arthur Augustus, and the swell of St. Jim's had to dodge round the van. He

had just time to clamber back and reinjoin Herries.

"Didn't I tell you she could handle the bull?" grunted Herries. "You're an ass, Guesy!"

"Oh, deah!" gasped Arthur Augustus breathlessly. "Bai Jove! I—I weally think you are wright, Hewwies!"

"Of course I am, ass!"

There was no doubt about it, for the land-girl, armed only with a switch, was turning the bull away. The juniors watched the scene fascinated. The land-girl was completely at the bull's mercy if he had chosen to attack her; but he did not. The girl flicked him with the switch and called to him, and he lumbered away obediently.

The land-girl followed him with her easy stride, driving the huge animal across the field to the gateway.

Tom Merry & Co. breathed more freely when their terrible enemy was gone.

The bull disappeared into the adjoining field, and the land-girl closed the gate after him and fastened it. Then she came back towards the caravan camp.

The St. Jim's juniors had descended from their various perches by that time, and they looked rather sheepish as the girl came up, smiling.

"I am sorry you have been alarmed," said the land-girl in a soft voice, softer and pleasanter by reason of the musical West-country burr. "I hope the bull has not done much damage."

"Only to the crows, miss," said Tom Merry. "Thank you very much for taking him away."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The gate was left open last night," explained the land-girl. "There was nobody in this field then. Mr. Weston told me this morning that some caravanners were camping here, so I came at once."

"It was vevy kind of you," said Arthur Augustus. "I was feathfully alarmed for you!"

The land-girl smiled.

"I was in no danger," she said. "I drive the bull every day."

"Bai Jove!"

"But he does not take to strangers, and he has a bad temper," said the land-girl. "You are all right now. He will not get into this field again while you are here."

"We're starting after breakfast," said Tom.

"Fowwaps—" murmured Arthur Augustus, as the land-girl was turning away.

She glanced at him, and smiled again.

"Fowwaps—"

"Yes!"

"Fowwaps you would bonah us by joinin' us at bwakfast?" suggested Arthur Augustus, blushing.

The girl hesitated.

"Oh, please do!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, please do, miss!" said all the caravanners.

"You haven't had your brekker yet!" asked Herries, who was always practical.

"No. I was going back to the farmhouse—"

"Then pway join us, miss. It will be weedy in a few minutes, and we shall be vevy much honahed!"

The land-girl smiled again. She had a very pretty smile, which showed her very pretty white teeth.

"I shall be vevy pleased, if you wish," she murmured.

"Good!"

"Pway take this camp-stool."

The caravan camp was busy in a moment. Breakfast preparations had been interrupted by the bull, and the juniors were hungry. But their chief thought was for their pretty guest.

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The caravanners scattered in desperate haste as the bull, with lowered head, charged at them. "Wun for it!" shouted D'Arny. "Wun like uspin!" (See chapter 4).

Arthur Augustus excelled himself just then. The swell of St. Jim's was always a squire of dames, and at the present moment he showed to the best advantage.

There was, fortunately, a further supply of crocks in the caravan, and breakfast was soon going strong.

There was no doubt that the land-girl enjoyed the novelty of breakfast with the caravanners.

The juvenics learned that her name was Alice Brown, and Arthur Augustus was of opinion that he had never heard a prettier name.

Certainly Alice Brown was a very pretty girl, and it was no wonder that the susceptible swell of St. Jim's was in a state of supreme happiness as he waited on her.

Breakfast was nearly over when a ruddy-faced gentleman appeared in the coffee. It was the farmer who had given the juvenics permission to camp in the field. He smiled a jovial smile as he saw Alice Brown breakfasting in the camp, and he offered a cup of coffee proffered by Tom Merry. The farmer stayed a few minutes chatting with the caravanners, and when he went his way Alice Brown accompanied him, evidently with work to do. Arthur Augustus jammed his celebrated monocle into his eye, and looked after the graceful form of the land-girl with fixed attention till she disappeared into another field.

Blake gave him a slap on the shoulder, and Arthur Augustus jumped and howled.

"Wow!"

"Wake up," said Blake pleasantly.

"It's time to take the road!"

"You wuff ass—"

"No time for star-gazing, Gussy; you're always at it. Lend a hand with the gear. He's come back."

"I've been thinkin', you fellows—"

"Draw it mild!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Iligh time we started," said Tom Merry.

"Now, then, gee-up, you beast!"

"I've been thinkin', Tom Merry, that—"

"All serene. Let's get on!"

"This is wathah a pleasant spot for camping, isn't it?" pursued Arthur Augustus.

"Especially when wild bulls wander into the camp, and bump on the tent in the night!" grunted Herries.

"Lucky we didn't run into him in the dark last night!"

"Yaas, wathah! But the bull is all wight now. Mr. Weston is a vevy pleasant man!"

"Topping!" said Tom Merry.

"Everything in the van, you chaps!"

"Psway allow me to finish, Tom Merry. We have been pushin' on for a long time, and we have awwired in a

vevy agreeable spot. Why not west beah for a few days?"

"What rot!"

"If you chawctewise my wemarks as wot, Tom Merry—"

"Utter rot, old chap," said the captain of the Shell. "We've got to have a look at Devonshire before the end of the vac; and we're not in Devon yet."

"We could easily do Devon next vac, Tom Merry. Besides, there is lots of time. I am only proposin' to stay heah a few days!"

"What for?"

"Well, the scenery is vevy nice," said Arthur Augustus, colouring a little.

"In fact, it is wippin'. And—and—"

"Well, wot else?"

"The farmah is a vevy agreeable chap, and I am sush he would give us permish to camp heah for a few days!"

"Anything else?"

"Land-gurrs, frinstance!" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus crimsoned.

"You uttah asses! I see no weason watherah for this wibald leughth!" he exclaimed. "I considah—"

"You consider it's time to start!" chuckled Tom Merry. "So do we! Gee-up, old boss!"

And the caravanners started.

Arthur Augustus seemed rooted to the

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ground, however. The van was in the road, and rumbling on towards Tuckleton, before the swell of St. Jim's made a move. Then he breathed a deep sigh, and followed his comrades—very slowly.

### CHAPTER 8.

#### Election Day!

"HALLO! There's something on!"  
"Looks like it!"  
The St. Jim's van was rolling along cheerily in the morning sunshine. As it drew near to the little town of Tuckleton, it was clear to the juniors that something was "on."  
Pedestrians were thick upon the road, all converging towards Tuckleton. Vehicles of all sorts passed the van-crowded. There were farmers' carts and traps, rickshaws, and motor-cars, and they were all filled. From some of the vehicles flags were waving.  
"Must be a holiday of some sort," said Jack Blake. "Perhaps another war has come to an end, and we're having another Peace Day. Lemme see; how many wars are going on just now?"  
"Only two or three," said Tom Merry.  
"Looks like a Bank Holiday—only it isn't one. Hallo! There's a giddy red flag!"

A motor-lorry came grinding up the road, crammed to its fullest capacity with a variety of humanity. Over its crowded cargo floated a red flag—the sign of revolution in less common-sensible countries than England; and in England the sign chiefly of unlimited "gas." There was a burst of melody from the crowded lorry; the occupants were singing "The Red Flag"—a weird ditty much favoured by gaseous persons of revolutionary tendencies. As half of them did not seem to know the melody, and the other half sang it more or less out of tune, the effect was not pleasing to the ear. A big canvas sign on the lorry bore the inscription:

#### "VOTE FOR CHINN!"

Then the juniors remembered. It was not a Peace Day or a Bank Holiday. It was polling-day at Tuckleton, and the electors of that constituency was to decide, by means of the ballot-box, which of two active chin-waggers they were to send to Westminster. The juniors remembered Skimpole of the Shell, whose existence they had once more forgotten. Mr. Chinn, the Red Flag candidate, was Skimpole's uncle, and he was standing for Parliament on the coal stunt. Evidently the motor-lorry was bearing some of his supporters to the scene of action.

"We're right in the middle of it," remarked Monty Lowther. "We'd better vote for somebody while we're in Tuckleton. Back your fancy, gents!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"I should certainly vote against Skimmay's uncle," remarked Arthur Augustus. "But we cannot vote, Lowther. There is a residency qualification, or somethin' or othah. There are wules for elections just the same as for football and cricket."  
"Go on!"

The motor-lorry ground by, and the caravan followed, with a good many lighter vehicles round it. Jack Blake uttered an exclamation as he caught sight of a bowy face and a large pair of spectacles on the crowded road.

"There's Skimmay!"  
Skimpole it was! The genius of St. Jim's was walking, and he looked very warm and tired. There were five or six persons with him, apparently voters whom he was leading to the poll, to cast their votes for his avuncular relative.

Blake, who was driving, touched him playfully on the back of the neck with his whip, and Skimpole blinked round in surprise.

He smiled graciously as he saw the St. Jim's fellows.

"I am excessively pleased to see you, my dear friends!" he exclaimed. "You have arrived just at the right time. These gentlemen will be very glad of a lift into Tuckleton."

"Good-bye, Skimmay!"  
"I shall be exceedingly obliged, Merry, if you will lend us your caravan. You fellows can proceed on foot—"

"I don't think!" grinned Tom Merry.  
Skimpole caught Tom Merry by the buttonhole, in the objectionable way he had.

"My dear Merry, it is most important," he said impressively. "I have the greatest difficulty in getting these worthy men to Tuckleton. They avince a strong desire to stop at every alehouse we pass, and so they are delayed."

"Ha, ha!"  
"And they seem to expect me to pay for their drinks," said Skimpole. "It is a most distressing position for me. If you will allow us the use of your caravan—"

"You'll have to wait till caravans are nationalised, old top!" said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"It is a very pressing matter. The election will be very close," said Skimpole. "The rival candidate is using the hang-the-Kaiser stunt, which is very popular."

"Well, surely the Kaiser ought to be hanged," said Tom. "He's done harm enough!"

"Undoubtedly, my dear Merry; but my uncle also would be perfectly prepared to hang the Kaiser, after he has nationalised the coal. We want every vote; it will be very close. People here seem to have some objection to nationalisation of coal-mines because it will make coal scarce and dear. They are so very unintelligent, you know. It is really an important matter, because if coal is nationalised, my uncle hopes to secure a post as under-secretary in the Coal Board. There will probably be fifty under-secretaries at a thousand a year each—"

"Oh, my hat! That accounts for the milk in the coconut," said Monty Lowther. "Where is all the money coming from?"

"From the coal industry of course—and profits will no longer flow into the pockets of idle shareholders," said Skimpole.

"They'll flow into the pockets of fifty under-secretaries instead!"

"Ahem! You—you see—"

"I see," said Tom Merry, laughing. "And I think it will be better for everybody, Skimmay, if your merry electors stop at the alehouse. Gee-up!"

"But, jay-dear fellow—"

"Good-bye!"

The caravan rolled on. Skimpole would have followed, to continue his arguments, but his companions were getting impatient. There was an alehouse by the roadside, and they wanted to quench their thirst—though they looked as if they had been quenching it pretty liberally already. Skimmay was detained by his merry electors, and the caravanners pursued their way.

There was quite a press as the van entered Tuckleton. In the market-square banners were displayed from a platform where a meeting was being held. Progress was very slow, and the caravanners decided to halt till the meeting was over. Over the platform was a

big sign—"Vote for Chinn!"—which indicated that it was the Socialist candidate who was addressing the meeting. Tom Merry & Co. locked the caravan into a side street, backed it, and joined the crowd in the square. This was the first election they had happened on during their caravan tour, and they decided that they might as well see the fun.

### CHAPTER 9.

#### Mysterious!

"GENTLEMEN—"  
"Hear, hear!"  
"Boo!"  
"Yah!"

A little, plump, bald-headed gentleman was on the wooden platform, with several supporters, when the St. Jim's juniors joined the meeting. He was addressing the electors of Tuckleton; and he was meeting with a rather mixed reception.

Hostility seemed to have the upper hand, and most of the speaker's remarks were drowned by interruptions from the crowd. But Mr. Chinn was sticking valiantly to his guns. In an agricultural constituency the coal stunt was naturally not very popular; but Mr. Chinn pushed it for all he was worth. Possibly he believed that nationalising the coal would be a good thing for the country. Certainly he believed that it would be a good thing for himself. So he turned on his eloquence like gas—which, indeed, it resembled—and kept up a steady outpouring in spite of "Boos" and "Yahs" from the worthy electors.

"Look at the Post Office!" came in a jerk from Mr. Chinn.

"The old, old stunt!" sighed Monty Lowther. "These blessed gasbags treat that out as if they thought it was an argument."

"Boo!"

"Go 'ome!"

A carrot flew through the air. Mr. Chinn dodged it gracefully, and resumed. "Is not a Post Office nationalised. Is it not a success? Follow it with the coal, then with the shipping, the land, and—all industries."

"I'm going to put a question to the candidate," said Monty Lowther. "Bank me up!"

"Bai Jore!"

Tom Merry and Manners, laughing, bunched the humorist of St. Jim's on their shoulders. The juniors had worked a way quite near the platform. Mr. Chinn had paused to drink a glass of water, and in the pause Monty Lowther made his voice heard. On Tom and Manners' shoulders, he was above the crowd, in quite a commanding position.

"Will the candidate answer a question?" shouted Lowther.

"Go it!"

"I am here to answer questions," said Mr. Chinn, blinking at Lowther over his glasses. "However, a schoolboy—"

"A schoolboy can ask questions you won't find it easy to answer," said Lowther. "Gentlemen! allow me to pin down the candidate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're going to nationalise all industries like the Post Office!" demanded Monty Lowther, having gained attention.

"Certainly," smiled Mr. Chinn. "I suppose you read the papers," said Lowther. "If you do, you'd know there was a loss of two million pounds the working of the Post Office last year. Suppose you nationalise all other industries, and run them by officials, and there's the same loss on the lot of them at the end of the year, who's going to pay the losses?"

Mr. Chinn blinked at Lowther.

There was a roar of laughter from the crowd.

For once the ready tongue of the professional orator was at a loss.

"Isn't it a fact," pursued Lowther victoriously, "that all nationalised industries are run at a loss, owing to official incompetence, and that the losses have to be borne by industries that are not nationalised!"

"Ah! Ahem!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Isn't it a fact, too, that the whole stunt was invented by chaps who want to get official jobs to run the industries when they are nationalised?" continued Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Chinn pulled himself together. Home truths like these were of no use to him on election day. What he wanted was votes, and this was certainly not the way to get votes.

"I am not here to answer frivolous questions put by a schoolboy!" he said severely. "Gentlemen—"

"Yah!"

"Doo-hoo!"

"Rats!"

"Go 'ome!"

"Gentlemen, I beg— Yaroooooh!" roared Mr. Chinn, as an egg that was assuredly not new-laid caught him on the necktie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The egg was followed by several others, and a cabbage, and a few carrots. The agricultural electors seemed to have provided themselves with agricultural products for the occasion.

There was quite a fusillade, and Mr. Chinn and his supporters had to retreat from the platform. A dozen soldiers took possession of the platform, and pulled the red flag to pieces amid cheers from the crowd. There was plenty of good humour on all sides, but the Tuckleton folk had evidently had enough of Mr. Chinn and his eloquence.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, when the St. Jim's juniors wedged their way out of the crowd. "Your remarks were really very bright, Lowther. You are really not such an ass as I have always supposed!"

"Sorry I can't say the same of you, old top," answered Lowther cheerily.

"Weally, you ass—"

"We can get along now," remarked Tom Merry.

"Yass," eloquence."

"Wathah! wathah! But—"

"Well!"

"The cthah candidate is addressin' a meetin'— Mr. Jawkins, you know. Few- waps we had bettah heah both sides."

"What's rot! Same kind of gas, most likely, on a different stunt," said Tom.

"I'm fed up, for one!"

"Yes, rather!"

"However, I think we ought to remain in Tuckleton to-day—"

"What for?" demanded Blake.

"Well, it would be wathah-interestin' to heah wethah Skimmay's uncle is elected or not!"

"Both Skimmay's uncle!"

"Yass; but—"

"Look here, you duffer, we're getting an into Devonshire!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"What's the good of hanging 'round in this little town?"

"You wathah—"

"Let's get along!"

Caravan was able to cross the square now, and the juniors led the way on his way. Arthur Augustus followed slowly. For some reason, best known to himself, the swell of St. Jim's did not want to proceed on the road that day.

"Bai Jove! That is a wathah nice

inn!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Suppose we stop there for lunch? It will save us cookin' by the roadside."

"Better get on," said Herries.

"I will ordah lunch," answered Arthur Augustus. And he walked into the inn before his comrades could stop him.

"Guay!" bawled Blake.

But Arthur Augustus was gone.

"Well, it won't do us any harm to have lunch here," remarked Tom Merry.

"Blessed if I know why Guay wants to stop, though. May as well let him have his way."

"Oh, all right!"

The caravan was taken into the inn yard; and the vanners found an excellent lunch ordered by Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's was rather silent and very thoughtful as he sat at the festive board.

His comrades eyed him very curiously. Some change had apparently come over Guay during the morning, and he plainly had a fixed desire to remain at Tuckleton. His affection of interest in the result of the poll was rather too feeble as an explanation. Besides, the result would not be made known that day. Arthur Augustus was finished before his comrades, and he rose briskly from the table.

"May as well have a look round the town!" he remarked.

"Don't wander off," said Blake.

"We're starting again, you know!"

"No hurry, dear boy!"

Arthur Augustus left the inn. Ten minutes later Tom Merry & Co. followed him out, but Arthur Augustus was not to be seen, and neither was the bike, which was usually carried on the van.

"He's gone off on the jigger!" ejaculated Blake. "The silly ass! Now we've got to wait for him!"

"Well, let's wait a bit!" said Tom Merry cheerily.

But it was more than a bit that the caravanners had to wait. An hour passed, and another hour, and there was no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. And the St. Jim's caravanners, with growing exasperation, went on waiting.

#### CHAPTER 10.— Light at Last!

**T**OM MERRY & CO. stood in a group outside the little inn, watching the street, as the dusk deepened over Tuckleton. They were exasperated, and they were getting a little alarmed also. It was possible that some accident had happened; indeed, that seemed to be the only way to account for his prolonged absence.

"If nothing had happened to him, where was he?"

Manners suggested making inquiries at the police-station. But the juniors still waited and hoped to see Guay's come in sight. The dusk was growing deeper.

"If he doesn't turn-up by dark, we'll go along and inquire!" Tom Merry decided.

"Too late to start again to-day, anyhow!" grunted Herries. "We'd better arrange to stay here to-night!"

"Yes, I suppose so. I'll see the inn-keeper."

Tom Merry went into the inn, and found it easy enough to make the arrangements for the night's stay. Then he rejoined his chums in the street.

Just as the caravanners were making up their minds to proceed to the police-station there was a whir of a bicycle in the street, and a dusty and muddy youth rode up.

It was Arthur Augustus.

Relieved of all their alarm by the appearance of the swell of St. Jim's, the juniors forgot that they had been

shamed at all, and only remembered that they were exasperated.

"Here's the howling ass!" exclaimed Blake.

"Where have you been, you chump!"

"What have you been up to, fat-head?"

"Loch him!"

Arthur Augustus jumped off the bicycle. He looked very tired, and he was very muddy. The bike looked dusty, but Guay himself had been gathering mud.

He glanced at the incensed caravanners.

"Hallo, dear boys!"

"Where have you been?" roared Blake.

"I have been on the bike, Blake."

"What for?"

"To wide it!"

"To—to ride it!" stammered Blake.

"The thumping ass is being funny. Do you know you've kept us hanging about all the afternoon?"

"I am very sorry!"

"We couldn't go on without you, could we, fathead?" snorted Digby.

"You would probably have landed in some mischief if you had," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"However, you might have had a nice walk about the town. It is quite an interestin' old town, I believe, and there is an election goin' on, too."

"We didn't come here to walk around the town and look on at silly elections. Where have you been?"

"The fact is, dear boys, I have been workin'," said Arthur Augustus.

"Workin'!" repeated Blake dazedly.

"Yass. I have been diggin' potatoes, if you weally wish to know what I have been doin'."

"Diggin' potatoes!"

"And you've kept us kicking our heels here for half a day while you wandered off to dig potatoes!" shrieked Blake.

"You—you—you—" howled Tom Merry.

"Fwy do not wear at me, dear boys. It quite throws me into a fluttah when a fellow wears at me."

"Bump him!" yelled Herries.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus dodged into the inn and escaped. The caravanners followed him in a state of simmering fury.

Inside the inn it was scarcely possible to deal with Guay as he manifestly deserved, but his comrades looked at him as if they could eat him.

"We had bettah stay the night heah," Tom Merry said, Arthur Augustus remarked.

"I've fixed that up already!" growled Tom.

"Good!"

"We're starting at dawn" added Tom. "If you're not on the scene, Guay, we shall start without you."

"Wats!"

"Why don't you tell us where you've been?" breathed Blake sulphurously.

"On a farm, dear boy!"

"You've been helping a farmer to get up his spuds?" asked Lowther.

"Yass!"

"And keeping us waiting about half a day while you did it?"

"I am sorry, but I forgot all about you."

"Eh!"

"You slipped my memory entirely, you know!"

"Why, you—you—you—"

"However, it is all right. I wathah think I will go up to bed erly, as I am very fatigued."

And Arthur Augustus went to bed early.

He left his comrades in a state of great

astonishment and wrath. How to account for Gussy's mysterious conduct was a mystery to them.

Evidently, he did not intend to give them the details of his afternoon's excursion, though they could not even guess at the cause of his sudden and mysterious secretiveness.

The caravaners went to bed early. Blake and Digby had beds in the same room as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and that noble youth was asleep when they came in.

"He was murmuring in his sleep, and Blake and Digby stared at him curiously. There was a beautiful smile on Gussy's aristocratic face as he slumbered."

"What on earth's up with the silly ass, I wonder?" Blake remarked.

"Dig shrugged his shoulders.

"Give it up!" was his reply.

And Jack Blake had to give it up, too, and he went to bed. Blake was a sound sleeper, and he did not wake again till the sun was shining in at the latticed window. He yawned and looked round him, and was surprised to see Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fully dressed.

"Hallo! Up already!" grunted Blake.

"Yes, dear boy!"

"Don't wander off again."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Mind, if you wander away, we shall start without you!" said Blake impressively.

"You are at liberty to start without me if you desire to do so, Blake. I will follow the caravan later!"

Arthur Augustus opened the door, and Jack Blake bounded out of bed.

"Stop!" he shouted.

"I am in washab a hurry," answered Arthur Augustus from the landing outside. He apparently did not intend to trust himself within reach of his excited chum.

"Come back!" yelled Blake.

"I am just going out—"

"Come back, I tell you—"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus stepped down the stairs, leaving Jack Blake gasping with wrath. In his pyjamas, Blake could scarcely follow him, and he made a jump for his clothes.

He bundled on his clothes in record time, but he was not quick enough. By the time he was downstairs, the bike was gone, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was gone with it. The swell of St. Jim's had gone off on another mysterious excursion. Blake made some expressive remarks, and returned to the inn. Tom Merry & Co. came down, and were apprised of the remarkable departure of their noble chum. There was a general exclamation of wrath.

"We'll start without him, then, if he's not back by brekker!" said Mappers. Blake hesitated.

"The silly chump is up to something," he said.

"Look here! We can't hang around for the rest of our natural lives while that howling dummy plays the giddy goat!"

"Nunno! But—"

"Where the thump can he have gone?" exclaimed Tom Merry in perplexity.

"He wanted us to stay in Tuckleton, you know, and he seems to have made up his mind to stay by himself, if we won't stay. But what's the attraction? He can't want to see Skimpole again, I suppose!"

"Ha, ha! Not likely!"

"Then why—"

There was a sudden yell from Monty Lowther.

"I've got it! Ha, ha, ha! I've got it!"

"Well, what have you got?" growled Blake.

"The land-girl!"

"Tib which?"

"Miss Brown!" gasped Lowther.

"Gussy went back to Weston's farm yesterday afternoon, and he's gone back to Weston's farm this morning. I'll bet my hat! Gussy's spoozy again!"

The caravaners stared at Monty Lowther. Arthur Augustus had been "spoozy" before. It was a state the swell of St. Jim's was liable to fall into at any time. The caravaners gasped, and then they burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

## CHAPTER 11.

### Rescuing Gussy!

MONTY LOWTHER had evidently hit on the truth:

It was the charming land-girl who was the attraction that held Arthur Augustus to the spot like a magnet.

Frobly the young lady herself was quite unaware of it. But that was it. There was no doubt about that.

The caravaners laughed till they almost wept. It was a simple explanation of the mystery, and very like Arthur Augustus. Until Miss Brown discerned how matters stood, and gave him a curt dismissal, the swell of St. Jim's was likely to hang round Weston's farm like a fly round the honey-jar. But the caravaners were not likely to wait so long as that.

Tom Merry wiped his eyes.

"The howling ass!" he gasped. "That's it, of course. We can't go on and leave him behind now. We've got to rescue him."

"His, ha, ha!"

"This is about the tenth time Cupid has tripped him up. But Cupid will have to be choked off this time. We can't stay here for the rest of the vac while Gussy plays Romeo. We'll go after him after brekker."

"What-oh?"

The caravaners breakfasted at the inn, and then started out to follow on the track of their missing chum. They had no doubt of the route to follow. Gussy had evidently spent the previous afternoon in helping Miss Brown to dig potatoes, and the juniors fully expected to run him down in a potato-field. That was rather an unromantic spot for Romeo and Juliet; but this was evidently a case of all Romeo and no Juliet—and Miss Brown was plainly not the kind of young lady to languish on a balcony while a lover bumbled below.

"Hallo! Here's Skimpole!" remarked Blake, as they came across the market-square.

Skimpole of the Shell was walking there with a moody brow, and a very discontented look generally. He blinked solemnly at the St. Jim's juniors.

"Well, how did it go?" asked Lowther. "Has your uncle won in a canter, or did the other gasbag beat him by an innings?"

"The result is not yet known, my dear Lowther; but I am afraid that the electorate have once more failed to rise to a glorious opportunity," said Skimpole sadly. "Coal will, no doubt, be nationalised, but I doubt whether my uncle will secure a post as under-secretary for the Coal Department."

"Too bad!" grinned Blake.

"It is really a serious matter, as Uncle Chinn has spent a good deal on this election," said Skimpole. "Of course, under Socialism all election expenses will be paid by the nation. Unfortunately, they are not yet under Socialism. It's a dead loss to him; such is the nature of my dear fellows, of high-minded, interested service to humanity. They have had a very unpleasant experience. Those persons you saw me with yesterday—I found that they were coming simply in the expectation of imbibing liquid refreshment at my expense."

"Go bon!"

"It is said but true, my dear Fellows."

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And when I refused to pay for the noxious fluids they desired to imbibe, they treated me in a manner that I can only describe as barbarous. And one of them actually took away my watch, on the plea that watches ought to be nationalised as well as coal, and that, therefore, it was as much his as mine."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, my dear fellows—"  
But the juniors did not stay to hear the rest of Skimpole's tale of woe. They left him blinking sadly and seriously, and marched out of the town on the track of Gussy.

"What are we going to do when we run Gussy down?" asked Manners.

"Collar him!" said Herries.

"Yank him away by his neck!" said Blake.

"H'm! That will be rather a startling scene for Miss Brown, won't it?"

cried Manners.  
"Well, we've got to get the chump away somehow," granted Herries. "We didn't come to Somerset to see Gussy canoodle!"

"We'll be guided by circumstances," decided Tom Merry. "Anyhow, Gussy has got to come away with us!"

"Hear, hear!"

The caravanners kept their eyes open as they drew near Weston's farm. They remembered having seen a big potato-field along the road, and they scanned it through gaps in the hedge, as they came along. And suddenly through the hedge the voice of the fellow they sought came to their ears.

"Pway allow me to cawwy it!"

"Too heavy for you!" came in reply, in the pleasant voice of the land-girl.

"Weasly, you know—"

"You can dig some more, if you like."

"I shall be vewy pleased to do so."

The juniors halted. Only the hedge separated them from Arthur Augustus and the land-girl in the potato-field.

Through the twigs they could catch a glimpse of the elegant form of Arthur Augustus, fork in hand.

They caught a glimpse, too, of Alice Brown, who was regarding the swell of St. Jim's with a rather puzzled and amused smile on her pretty face.

"Are you fond of land work?" the girl asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But wewer not caravanning?"

"Oh, yaas! But—"

"You have not left your friends?"

"Oh, no; not at all! They are stavin' in Tuckleton for a time, you see. You—  
you—see, the scenery round here is vewy nice, and—and—" Arthur Augustus stammered.

"It is very kind of you to come along to help me with the potatoes, but—"

"Not at all, Miss Brown. It is a pleasure; in fact, an honah. It is vewy kind of you to allow me."

"But why do you do it?"

"I—I—I—"

The juniors grinned on the other side of the hedge. This question was a poser for Arthur Augustus, and he really did not know what to say. Certainly he could not explain to Miss Brown that her charms had struck upon his susceptible heart with irresistible effect. It was only possible that Miss Brown would have a hearty, laughing if Gussy had given an explanation.

Tom Merry looked at the swell of St. Jim's rather oddly, and his cheeks burned with pleasure.

He did not repeat her question, but picked up a sack of potatoes and carried it away across the field.

Arthur Augustus stood leaning on the heavy fork and gazed after her.

"Sweet creature!" the juniors heard him murmur.

That was too much for Tom Merry & Co. There was a yell of laughter from the road that made Arthur Augustus spin round towards the hedge.

Six grinning faces looked at him through the hedge.

Arthur Augustus gazed at them as if transfixed.

"Here we are, here we are, here we are again!" sang Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, Gussy!"

"You uttah asses!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus wrathfully. "What are you doin' heah? I wewuse to be wathched in this mannah! I wewquest you to cleah off immediately!"

"Request away; we're not going, old top!" grimped Blake. "We're staying!"

"Pway wethah at once!"

"Bow-wow!"

Arthur Augustus' eye glittered through his eyelashes.

"If you fellows desah me to continue to weward you as fwends, you will wethah at once!" he exclaimed.

"The caravan's waiting."

"Wats! You fellows can start without me!"

"Aren't you going to invite us to the wedding?" inquired Monty Lowther, in an injured tone.

"Hear, ha, ha!" shrieked the caravanners.

"You—you wibald wuffan!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I weward you with the utmost despah—I mean contempt! I wewuse to allow you to wemah heah! Miss Brown will weturn in a few minutes—"

"That's why we're here!" said Monty Lowther seriously. "We're going to warn Miss Brown!"

"Warn her, you uttah ass!"

"Certainly!" said Lowther warmly.

"It's only fair to Miss Brown to tell her that you have a prior attachment to the young lady in the bun-shop near St. Jim's!"

"Wah-a-t!"

"I regard that as my duty!" said Monty Lowther firmly.

"You—you feashful ass! There is nothin' whatevah betwween me and the gal in the bun-shop, as you know vewy well!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As your friends, Gussy, we cannot allow you to go around breaking hearts in this reckless manner, like a bull in a china-shop. We feel it our duty to warn Miss Brown!"

"We do!" said Blake.

"We does!" assented Dig.

Miss Alice Brown reappeared in the distance. Arthur Augustus glanced at her, and then looked again at the six grinning faces in the hedge. He turned red, and pale, and red again.

"Will you cleah off, you howwid wottahs!" he gasped. "Miss Brown will see you in a minute!"

"We'll keep in the road," said Monty Lowther. "If you don't join us there in two minutes, Gussy, we shall all begin to sing at once. Do not heed him, gentle lady!"

"You—you you awful wottah—"

"Mind, that's a go!" said Lowther.

And the six faces disappeared from the hedge. Arthur Augustus, perspiring and palpitating, turned towards Miss Alice as she came up. The colour was coming and going in his cheeks. He was only too well aware that Monty Lowther would keep his word, and the ridiculousness of the position was very apparent to the unfortunate Gussy.

"Why, you have not dug any more potatoes!" said Alice Brown, with a smile, as she came up.

"This—this is vewy neah the woad, and—"

"What does that matter?"

"I—I—" stammered Arthur Augustus. He really could not explain to Miss Brown how it mattered.

There came a cough from the other side of the hedge. It was a warning cough.

Arthur Augustus trembled.

But still he did not make a move. The two minutes had elapsed, but the juniors were generously giving the swell of St. Jim's a few seconds' grace. Still he did not come through the hedge. Miss Brown was looking at him very curiously, surprised by the weird and mysterious fluctuations of colour in Gussy's cheeks. Then suddenly through the hedge came the sound of six youthful voices singing in unison:

"Do not heed him, gentle lady,  
Though his voice be low and sweet!  
Lady, shun that moony duffer,  
Lowly kneeling at thy feet!"

It was enough for Arthur Augustus. He jumped.

"I—I—I think my fwends have come for me, Miss Brown!" he gasped.

"Pway excuse me! Good-bye!"

Arthur Augustus made a frantic bound through the hedge, leaving the land-girl staring blankly.

Gussy landed in the road with a crimson face, and shook an infuriated fist at the singing juniors.

"Shawwup, you feashful wottahs!" he gasped.

"Are you coming home, Bill Bailey?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"I wewuse to stir a step—"

"Chorus, gentlemen!" said Lowther.

"I—I—I mean, I am comin'!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"That's right!"

And with suppressed feelings the swell of St. Jim's accompanied the caravanners.

Miss Brown was possibly surprised at the sudden departure of Arthur Augustus. But she was a busy land-girl, and she went on digging potatoes with cheerful acquiescence. Probably she had forgotten Arthur Augustus' existence within a quarter of an hour.

But Arthur Augustus was not likely to forget so easily. The image of Miss Brown was imprinted upon his heart, to remain there for—several days!

Tom Merry & Co. marched out of Tuckleton with the caravan, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy marched with them.

Arthur Augustus' noble brow was moody and cloudy as he marched, and he did not deign to address a single word to his fellow-van-ners.

They bore it stoically.

Indeed, they kept up a cheery conversation on the interesting topics of early engagements and prior attachments, to the growing wrath and confusion of the hapless Gussy.

The sun went down that day upon the wrath of Arthur Augustus. But the next morning he seemed on the road towards recovery. And a few days later, when the St. Jim's caravan was threading the leafy lanes of Glorious Devon, Arthur Augustus was quite himself again.

THE END.

(Don't miss "RUCTIONS ON THE ROAD!"—next Wednesday's Grand Long Complete Story of St. Jim's—By Martin Clifford.)



"Our Martin must have made a capture!" said Owen Coopers.

We could tell, even from a distance, that Martin Clifford was, in a sense, a physical wreck. His hair was rumpled, his garments were dishevelled, and he was exhausted through much running between the wickets.

The other batsman was a very slim youth—almost a twinkling in appearance; but we were told that he had kept his end up manfully for upwards of an hour, while Martin Clifford smote.

And now only one run was needed to give the Gentlemen the victory!

The bowler took his run, and the "Magnet" batsmen were straining like greyhounds on the leash, each hoping and praying that Martin Clifford would knock up a catch.

But the "Gem" author's reputation as a batsman lay largely in the fact that he always kept the ball low. And he did not depart from his golden rule on this occasion.

Crack!

There was a sound of ball meeting ball, and away went the leather—away and away—till it landed with a thud at our very feet.

A scene of great jubilation followed.

There weren't many spectators, but the few there were cheered loudly enough for a Cup-tie.

The Gentiles, fighting an uphill battle all the way, had won—thanks to a certain batsman whose name had been inscribed in the scoring-book as "A. N. Other."

Frank Richards rubbed his eyes.

"I could never have believed it possible!" he said.

But the miracle had happened; and Frank Richards was the first to congratulate his colleague as Martin Clifford was carried off the field by the overjoyed Gentiles.

"Well played, Martin!"

"A splendid innings, by Jove!" said Owen Coopers.

Martin Clifford laughed breathlessly.

When the spectators had finished with him, we made him comfortable on some cushions in the pavilion.

"Better rest for half an hour, old man," said Frank Richards. "You must be just about whacked."

"No fear!" said Martin Clifford, with a grin. "It was the Magnetists who were whacked!"

We were still chatting in the pavilion when Howell, the captain of the "Gem" side, came in. He carried a document in his hand.

"Congratulations, Mr. A. N. Other" he said. "I've just written a report of the match."

"For the local paper?" I asked.

"No; for the editor of the 'Gem' Library. He's bound to be interested."

And Howell handed me the report, which was very well written, and contained a glowing reference to the unknown batsman who had helped the "Gem" players over a very awkward crisis.

I read the report, and then folded it up and put it in my pocket.

"Hold on!" said Howell. "That's for the editor of the 'Gem.'"

"It's come to the right quarter, then," I said, with a smile.

"Eh?"

"I happen to be the editor of the 'Gem.'" Howell regarded me with a whose-top-are-you-swallowing expression.

"It's a fact," said Frank Richards. "This gentleman has the misfortune to be the 'Gem' editor."

"In that case," said Howell, turning to me, "would you be good enough to show that report to Martin Clifford, sir?"

"Certainly," I said.

And, producing the report, I handed it to the "other."

"What's on earth—" began Howell.

"It so happens," I said, by way of enlightenment, "that the gentleman on my right, who carried his hat for a century and won you the match, is Martin Clifford."

Howell gasped. He flatly refused to believe me until he received corroboration from Martin Clifford's own lips.

"Well, I'm beggared!" exclaimed Howell. "I could knock me down with a feather!"

Through Mr. Martin Clifford's was a very old boxer with a flowing beard.

"I'm another fifty years or so!" murmured Martin Clifford.

Howell stood blinking at the "Gem" editor for some moments. Then he did what a good many other fellows would have

(Continued on page 18.)

# The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are 1  
**THE MAGNET.** **THE BOYS' FRIEND.** **THE GEM.** **THE PINKY POPULAR.** **CHUCKLES.**  
 Every Monday. Every Monday. Every Wed. Every Friday. Every Friday.

**YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS GLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.**

## THE OOMING TREAT!

Yet another week's hard work has been put in on the "Greyfriars Herald," and everything is going splendidly.

I have no longer any doubts as to what you will think of the first number when it appears. You will, I am absolutely certain, say that it is the finest school paper you have ever seen.

As many of you will remember, the "Greyfriars Herald" made its first appearance in 1915, and, in spite of the fact that we were in the very midst of the war, its success was instantaneous.

It got right there, notwithstanding the immense preoccupation and trouble of those terrible days.

It was voted by all its readers the greatest school paper on record—that is to say, of its particular kind.

## THE "GREYFRIARS HERALD"

never competed with the rest of the Companion Papers, for they, of course, stand quite alone. It struck an entirely new note, and supplied a great need.

Everything was going famously, and the success of the "G. H." grew and grew as the weeks went by.

Due to my construction, a difficulty which nobody had foreseen began to make itself apparent—the paper shortage!

This got so acute that, as most of you are aware, it became absolutely necessary to cease publishing the "Greyfriars Herald." And this a paper which had sprung to the fore as a popularity had to be withdrawn after a few short months.

However, I am getting gloomy, and that won't do at all. The gloomy days are past, thank goodness, and once again the great school journal is going to appear, this time I trust and firmly believe, to be stopped by naught.

## OCTOBER

is drawing nearer and nearer, and in that month No. 1 of the new edition will be published. Although I thought in 1914 that it was impossible to make the "Greyfriars Herald" any better than it was then, I am certain now that the new edition is going to be even better than the first.

## A SPECIAL TREAT!

I will mention this week just one feature that is going to be revived—and which I know will give all my GEM readers a thrill of delight—that is the Tuck Hammer Competition!

Immediately the "G. H." is restarted, every reader is going to have an opportunity to win a Tuck Hammer. This feature was a tremendous success in the old days, and gave unbounded delight to members of Tucky rounds.

Now once again, and very soon, too, you will all have renewed opportunities of winning a magnificent Tuck Hammer. Just think of it!

Now, don't forget to spread the news, and remember that October is the month.

I hope to give you more news about the nature of the

## "GREYFRIARS HERALD"

next week.

## CHERRING ME UP.

A few weeks ago I published a letter from Miss Mignon Kennedy Smith, of Lenarkshire, in which she criticised some of the GEM stories rather severely.

Well, I have now received an exceedingly nice letter from her, in which she shows quite plainly that she did not really intend to be so hard on us. So we will not scruple to publish the letter in full, but the following is an extract from it:

"I must congratulate you on your style of stories now; that's the stuff I give 'em, isn't it? When I asked for travel I wasn't aware of what was to come, now, was it?"

Thank you, Miss Mignon! I am glad that you have seen fit to repeat somewhat of your previous harsh criticism. Your last letter has quite cheered me up. Letters like the first one give me the "blues" awfully badly.

YOUR EDITOR.

## NOTICES.

### Correspondence.

Peter Hayes, 16, Lane Road, Bootle, Liverpool—with readers anywhere, 16-18.

Miss Rose May, 12, Cornwall Road, Gillingham, Kent—with readers anywhere, 16-18.

### BOOK NUMBERS.

F. Bottomley, 48, Downhill Park Road, Philip Lane, Tottenham, N. 15, has thirty "Gems" and "Magnets" for sale.

C. C. Jackson, 24, Copnor Road, Portsmouth—Companion Papers with coloured covers wanted. Write before sending.

C. V. Aldrich, 3, Redehall Terrace, Harlowton, Norfolk, offers 14. each for first two numbers of "New Series" "Penny Popular."

Write first.

Jack Harby, 46, Athillery Street, Small Heath, Birmingham, wants second number "New Series" "Penny Popular." 3d. offered.

Write first.

Alfred Goudry, 25, Tennyns Terrace, Crook, Durham, offers Companion Papers for sale. Also wants "Magnets," "Gems," and "Boys' Friend" Library below 30d.

Frank Torton, 21, Farrar Road, Abbeydale, Sheffield, has Companion Papers for sale.

Fred Hudson, 97, Middleton Road, W., Middleton Junction, near Manchester—wants "Big Library," Write first.

George Lowe, 20, Lansdowne Road, St. Luke's, Southampton, has old numbers of "Boys' Friend" and "Chuckles" at 2d. a copy.

W. J. Mawley, 99, Trafalgar Road, Cambridge, wants "Schoolboys Never Shall Be Shaven," "Bob Cherry's Herring Out," "Bob Cherry's Search for His Father," "Figgins' Pig Pudding," and "Postal Order Conspiracy."

H. Foster, 22, Merchant Street, Bow, E. 3, offers 500 all different foreign stamps for sale—from 12s.

J. O'Dea, Clare Castle Co. Clare, Ireland—Nos. 2 and 3 "Penny Popular," 2d. offered.

L. C. Barton, 35, Warner Road, Hillborough—Magnets, wants "Gems" and "Magnets" of each in the old covers.

Write first, stating price.

A. Thomson, 54, Southampton Road, Kenilworth Town, N.W.—"Boy Without a Name," "School and Sport," "Rivals and Chums," 4d. each offered. Write first.

Robinson, 61, Vine Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, wants "Bob Cherry's Herring Out," "Clive the Rebel," etc. Write first.

Harold Clemence, 65, Goldsworth Road, Woking, Surrey, wants stories dealing with the Boundary, Levison, and Garden, including "Boy Without a Name," "Figgins' Pig Pudding," "The Toff," etc. Write first.

L. Dubber, 41, Windmill Road, Brentford, Middlesex, has back numbers for sale. "Magnets," 25s-57s, "Gems," 45s-52s.

What's new?

Cecil McBride, Belfast Bank, Shaftesbury Square, Belfast, wants "School and Sport," "Call of the Past," "Const. Ethel's School-days," and several more. Write first.

H. H. Milner, 27, Torrance Street, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, wants stories about Buster and the Remove, and "Jurassic Singh's Peril."

## PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

(Continued from page 15).

Some in similar circumstances. He produced his autograph-book.

"Sign, please!" he said. "I've been waiting for a chance to get hold of your autograph for years—ever since I was a small kid, in fact. I know I could have got it by sending my autograph-book to the editor; but that wasn't good enough. I wanted you to give it to me personally."

"Martin Clifford signed his name with a flourish.

The book was then handed to me.

"I've already got your autograph, Mr. Editor, because you've written to me on several occasions," said Howell. "But I want it again!"

"You mean you're, then," I said, making the necessary interpolation.

Howell surveyed our signatures with keen satisfaction, but there was something wistful in his expression.

"If only I could get Frank Richards and Owen Conquest!" he murmured.

"The cricketer in question," I said, "will doubtless oblige."

"Howell's eyes opened wide in wonder.

"You mean to say they're here?" he gasped.

"At your service!" said Frank Richards and Owen Conquest together.

"Great Scott!" gasped Howell. "I suppose Warwick Reynolds and C. H. Chapman aren't round the corner by any chance?"

"No," said Frank Richards, smiling. "In the words of the poet, we are few."

"May I tell the other fellows?" said Howell, when his autograph-book was handed back to him.

"Certainly!" I said, little dreaming what I was letting my colleagues and myself in for.

Howell disappeared, and we had the pavilion to ourselves for about ten minutes.

And then something startling happened.

We were besieged by quite an army of boys—and girls, too—each carrying an autograph-book.

Quite a queue lined up outside the pavilion.

It seemed as if all the surrounding villages had disgorged their inhabitants.

Our fountain-pens were busy for upwards of an hour.

(Autograph-books of all shapes and sizes were thrust into our hands; and as I had to write the words, 2 Editor of the Companion Papers" after each signature, I was truly busy.)

"I don't know which was the bigger ordeal—this or the cricket-match!" murmured Martin Clifford.

But he good-humouredly continued to sign.

Our respective tasks were completed at last, and we fondly imagined that we should be able to proceed on our way without let or hindrance.

But we were wrong!

Try as we would, we could not dodge the enthusiastic crowd.

A tremendous procession of boys and girls accompanied us along the village street, and waving hands took our bicycles in tow.

Invitations were showered upon us from all sides.

Would we care to have supper at the rectory? Would we adjourn to the village-green and make speeches? Would we organise

a concert, and give impersonations of certain-popular characters in the Companion Papers?

"If we're not jolly careful," murmured Martin Clifford, "we shall be—forever detained in this village for a week!"

"We must escape somehow!" muttered Owen Conquest.

"I think I can manage it," I said.

"When we reached the village green, I stood upon an inverted tub and faced the buzzing crowd.

"Speech!" they yelled.

"Ladies and gentlemen—" I began.

"Hurray!" they yelled.

"On behalf of the three popular authors who are at present supporting me on this tub, I should like to express thanks for this cordial demonstration—"

"Cheers!"

"I thank you for your loyalty to the papers which I have the honour to edit—"

Lead cheer!

"Much as we should like to avail ourselves of the numerous invitations which have been heaped upon us—"

"Hear, hear!"

"I fear that we must be responsive to the call of duty! There is work—loads of it—waiting to be tackled in London. My editorial chair has already been vacant for two days—"

"Oh!"

"And I am afraid I cannot desert my post any longer. My friend Mr. Martin Clifford—"

Thunderous applause!

"Ladies and my friends Messrs. Frank Richards and Owen Conquest, must abandon the delights of the countryside and return to their respective typewriters. We should very much like to stay—"

"Yes of 'Do!"

"But the call of duty is paramount! Time, tide, and printers wait for no man! The welfare of the Companion Papers must no longer be neglected. The home-fires must be kept burning at all costs. We must, therefore—albeit reluctantly—bid you an adieu!"

We shall take back with us very happy memories of this whole-hearted reception!

The tub collapsed just as I finished my speech, but, fortunately, Frank Richards and Martin Clifford brought off a brilliant catch, and I reposed safely in their arms.

The crowd cheered till they were hoarse. But they made no further demands for our society. My speech had revealed to them the pressing need for our return to London, and our bicycles were duly handed over.

Then we started on the long, long trail to the metropolis.

We were soon lost to view; but the cheers of the crowd were still borne to our ears on the evening breeze.

"The end of a perfect day!" murmured Frank Richards.

And we all heartily agreed.

London was not reached that night. But we proceeded along the famous old Bath Road until we came to Houslow, where we spent the few hours which remained until dawn.

By ten o'clock in the morning I was back in my sanctum, smoothing the ruffled feathers of the sub-editor, who had carried on in my absence, and murmuring profuse apologies on the telephone to the foreman printer, who was still as amiable and anæmic as ever.

The cycling tour, though brief, had been immensely enjoyable, and—so far as Martin Clifford was concerned—it had not been without achievement.

Martin Clifford is certainly a Cricketer (capital "C," please, O illustrious setter-up of type), and I often tell the popular "Gem" author that they'll collar him one day for the Comedy:

## CHAPTER 16.

## Working Under Difficulties.

IN the chapter entitled "Going to Press" I stated that on only one occasion had I received a belated manuscript—namely, when Martin Clifford was ill, and my sub-editor had to dash post-haste to his bungalow on the South Coast.

I now find that I have overlooked another occasion, no less memorable, when a manuscript only arrived at my sanctum in the nick of time.

Frank Richards was the unwilling culprit. On the Thursday before we went to press with the "Magnet" Library one of my sub-editors burst into my apartment like a cyclone.

"Are you aware, sir," he said, "that Frank Richards has let us down this week?"

"Nonsense!" I retorted. "Frank Richards never lets us down!"

"Well, he's done so now, with a vengeance! We're without a 'Magnet' story!"

"I at once began to sit up and take notice. This is extraordinary!" I said. "Are you sure the manuscript hasn't been delivered to another editor, by mistake?"

"Quite sure, sir! I was in the postal department when the morning mail arrived, and there was nothing from Frank Richards."

I at once turned to the telephone and rang up Frank Richards' house at Hampstead.

For fully ten minutes nothing happened.

"Look here," I said to the operator, "my line's precious!"

"Hold on, sir," replied a soothing voice.

"That's precisely what I have been doing for ten minutes!"

There was a brief pause, then the voice of the operator announced:

"You are through, sir!"

Buzz-z-z-z!

I raised my voice to a roar—a roar so powerful that the office cat turned a back-somersault into the wastepaper-basket out of sheer fright.

"Franky! Frank Richards! Are you there?"

"The sound of children's voices floated to me across the wire.

It seemed to me as if an argument was in progress, for, listening intently, I distinctly heard the following:

"Bob Cherry could lick Peter Todd blindfold, with his hands tied behind his back!"

"Nonsense!"

"If you say 'Nonsense' to me, young Midge—"

"But up, Jimmy! Peter Todd's easily the better boxer of the two!"

"I tell you Bob Cherry—"

"I tell you Peter Todd—"

At this stage the conversation broke off abruptly, and a series of dull thuds followed.

Jimmy or Midge—or both—seemed to be going through the mill.

(To be continued.)



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