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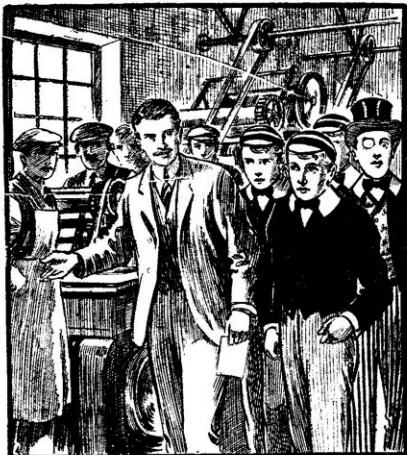
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THE SCHOOLBOY EMPLOYERS!



TOM MERRY'S TERRIBLE ORDEAL!

A Thrilling Incident in the Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale in this Number.



THE SCHOOLBOY EMPLOYERS!

A Magnificent Long Complete Story dealing with the Adventures of Tom Merry and Co., of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

The Proposal!

"POSITIVELY rotten!"

Thus spoke Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy spoke very emphatically, so very emphatically, indeed, that Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby, his chums, looked up quickly.

They should have been working at their prep, but D'Arcy had thrown aside his work some minutes before he made that remark.

"What's rotten, old son?" asked Jack Blake.

D'Arcy frowned. The swell of St. Jim's looked unusually serious.

"This beastly out-of-work question, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

Jack Blake snorted, and took up his pen again.

"If you're going to start politics before you get in the House of Lords, my noble Gussy," he began, "you'll—"

But Arthur Augustus waved his hand impatiently.

"It's so serious, Jack Blake, that I cannot even see the humour of your remark!" he said. "It's the local boys I am thinkin' about."

Jack Blake looked at Herries and Digby in a puzzled manner.

"Rambling again!" said Herries shortly. "Shut up, Gussy, and let a chap do his prep."

"Weally, Hewwies— Howevah, I will wefwin fwon tellin' you off," said D'Arcy magnanimously. "But if you fellahs don't take any interest in the life of the boys who gave their all for their country—"

"My hat!" ejaculated Jack Blake. "Don't you say we're not interested in the boys, Gussy! It's everybody's duty to think of them, you know. The King has issued a proclamation about employin' the disabled chaps wherever possible."

"That's just it, Blake," said D'Arcy distressfully. "Theah are vevy few employahs who seem to have taken any notice in Wylcombe, at any wate."

Jack Blake nodded.

"I see, Gussy!" he said quickly. "You think we ought to wake up the Rylcombe tradesmen a bit—oh?"

"Somethin' of the sort, deah boy," agreed Arthur Augustus. "Of course, I could go wound and tickle them up myself, but—"

"But you'd get the biggest pair of fat ears you ever heard about!" laughed Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies, I don't think the Wylcombe twadespeople would take exception to my callin' their attention to his Majesty's proclamation—"

"They might think you're poking your nose into their business, Gussy!" suggested Jack Blake.

Arthur Augustus paused.

"Pewpaws you are wight, deah boy," he agreed, after a moment's thought. "Pewpaws you are wight. I shall have to think out a scheme—"

"Think out your prep, Gussy," said Digby. "That'll do you more good than studyin' the labour question."

"Weally, Digbaw— Howevah, I shall think of that before I take up my pen to do my pewp!" declared D'Arcy. "Pway proceed with your own, deah boys. I shall not intewrupt you again!"

Jack Blake took one keen look at his aristocratic chum before he took up his pen. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy settled down in his chair, with his hands deep in his trousers-pockets, and a frown puckering his brow.

Arthur Augustus was the son of a noble earl, but, in spite of this fact, he had no airs and graces. He was one of the best-natured fellows at St. Jim's, and had far more friends than enemies.

D'Arcy had many peculiar ways which endeared him to his chums, and not the least of these was his thought for those in trouble. Arthur Augustus forgot everything on such occasions—forgot even such important things as his "twoahs."

And Jack Blake knew, as he looked at his chum, that D'Arcy would not rest until he could think out some scheme whereby the unemployed ex-soldiers and sailors in Rylcombe were working at some good and remunerative job.

Blake, Herries, and Digby would help D'Arcy to the utmost of their abilities—if they saw that something might come of the scheme.

Arthur Augustus was still deep in thought when the door of the study was suddenly thrown open, and four smiling juniors came into the room. They were Tom Merry & Co. and Bernard Glyn.

"Chuck that stuff away!" said Tom Merry quickly. "We've got a big stunt on here. We may require your help!"

That caused the Fourth-Formers to look up quicker than they might otherwise have done. For Tom Merry to come to their study and enlist their aid, it pointed to something big.

"Well?" asked Blake quickly.

Manners and Lewther, Tom Merry's chums, packed the Fourth-Formers' books and papers to one end of the table, and seated themselves before any answer was given to Blake's question.

"This is a very important matter," said Tom Merry seriously. "Glyn has—ahem!—been kind enough to draw our attention to it, and—"

"My hat! I like that!" exclaimed Bernard Glyn. "Why—"

"We'll pass that over, old top!" said Tom Merry, with a hasty wave of his hand. "You'd better leave it to me now—now—"

"All the work's done!" Glyn finished up with a snort.

Blake brought his fist down on the table with a thump that brought Arthur Augustus D'Arcy out of his reverie with a jump.

"Bai Jove! Bai Jove! I say, deah boys—"

"Shut up, you chumps!" interrupted Blake. "First of all, Tom Merry and Glyn choose our study to argue something silly, and then the one and only goes and puts in his spoke! I'll—"

D'Arcy seemed to become aware of the presence of the Shell Juniors for the first time.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy!" he ejaculated. "I was not awah you had come into our study—"

"Go to sleep again, Gussy!" said Monty Lewther, with a chuckle. "You're much nicer asleep!"

"Weally, Lowthah, I should be sowwy to have to thwash you—"

"You'd be sorerrier still afterwards, old son!" interrupted the Shell junior.

Arthur Augustus frowned again.

"However, in view of the vewy important matta on hand, Lowthah," he said, "I shall not ask you to put up your hands."

"Saved!" said Lowther fervently.

Arthur Augustus affected not to have heard that remark.

"But, look here—" began Tom Merry.

"Excuse me, Tom Mewwy, but I was about to wemak—"

"Yes, yes; that's all right, old chap," interrupted Tom Merry. "I'll excuse you later on."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I must point out that this is my studay—"

"Oh! And haven't we a voice in the matter?" demanded Jack Blake.

Tom Merry groaned.

"We shall have to give up the idea of getting these chaps to help us, Glyn," he said. "They're going to have another argument now! Well ask Figgins & Co. instead—"

"My hat! Merry, you chump—" began Blake, Herries, and Digby in unison.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were New House fellows, and the rivals of Tom Merry & Co., and Jack Blake & Co., who were in the School House at St. Jim's.

"Don't you dare—" hooted Blake excitedly.

Tom Merry waved his hand admonishingly.

"Well, you chaps will quarrel when we come to you and ask point-blank for help—" he began.

"It's that ass, Gussy—" said Merry.

"Weally, Blake, I don't—" said Merry.

"Well, don't!" snapped Blake. "Can't you see we're getting left out of something good here?"

Arthur Augustus turned to Tom Merry—turned so that his back was towards Jack Blake.

"Excuse Blake, deah boy, for a few moments while I chastise him," he said calmly. "I cannot have—"

"Let us get out of the study first!" said Tom Merry, rising, and taking up the paper he had placed before him on the table.

"We'll leave you chaps to quarrel," Figgins & Co. will help us."

Jack Blake caught D'Arcy by the shoulder, and swung him round.

"Gussy!" he said. "Do you know you're being jolly rude to our visitors?"

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Oh! Bai Jove! Pway accept my apologies Tom Mewwy!" he said hastily.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Right! I don't understand exactly how Blake makes that out; but, all the same, we don't mind accepting your apologies, old son," he said.

"Nor do I!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I believe the wottah was pulling my leg!"

Jack Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"If you don't think it rude of you to stop Tom Merry & Co. talking when they want us to help them," he said—"well, I'm sorry for the noble house of Eastwood and their manners."

"If you mean to insinuate—" began Arthur Augustus hotly.

"I'm not!" interrupted Blake. "Can't you see that you're stopping Tom Merry speaking now?"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Pway proceed, Tom Mewwy! I will talk to Blake aftah you have gone!"

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry. "Now to get to the biz. We've thought out a scheme—"

"I have!" said Glyn slyly.

"Well, we've improved upon it!" declared Tom Merry.

"Rather!" assented Manners and Lowther warmly.

"Who's quarrelling now?" grunted Digby.

"Shut up, you chaps!" said Tom Merry quickly. "To get to the bizz, Blake, a scheme has been thought out—how does that settle the question, Glyn?"

"Top-hole!" said Glyn, with a grin.

"Then we've come to the conclusion that there's too many Rylcombe ex-soldiers and sailors—" went on Tom Merry, but D'Arcy interrupted him with an ejaculation of surprise.

"Bai Jove! Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter now, Gussy?" "Nothing, deah boy—only I was sayin' the same thing to Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby a few minutes before you came in!"

"Must be a case of great minds thinking alike."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, I see no cause wath-eva for laughin'!"

"I do, though! Fancy you trying to think!"

"Bai Jove, Blake—"

"Shut up!" roared Tom Merry.

"What does it matter who thought about it, as long as somebody did?"

"Yaas, but—"

"Look here, Gussy!" said Glyn quickly. "We've no time to waste in talking. We want to get to work. It's serious—this bizz of our ex-service men being out-of-work. I was talking with Tom Merry & Co. about it—"

"Whoa-back!" interrupted Tom Merry hastily. "I'm telling this yarn, Bernard Glyn!"

"Well, get on with it!" growled Glyn.

"You take such a time to say a few words!"

"My hat, you— However, we're going to do something for the boys of Rylcombe, you chaps," went on Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I was thinkin' of a dance, only they might think that would be chivvity!" put in D'Arcy.

"They would!" said Tom Merry emphatically. "We're going to avoid that by giving them work!"

"Work? My hat!" ejaculated Digby.

"What do you mean? Are you thinking of having a valet?"

"Fathead! Of course not! I mean, Glyn is going to open up a factory—"

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"And we're going to help Glyn, you see. Now, all you chaps know that before there was a fellow who used to have a factory for making heads for gardening implements?"

"Rather!"

"Wathah, deah boy!" chimed in D'Arcy.

"Well, the fellow who owned the business was killed in the war, and that's how it is so many of the Rylcombe ex-service men are out-of-work. So Glyn is going to get his millionnaire-papa to lash out with some cash, and we—not that—we are going to employ the boys in Rylcombe."

"My hat!"

"Stunning!" said Jack Blake enthusiastically.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy warmly.

"I am surprised I didn't think of that myself, deah boys!"

"We're not!" said Monty Lowther, the irrepressible humourist of the Shell.

"You see, we've got what you lack."

"Eh?"

"Brains—bivains, deah boy!" said Lowther, mimicking Arthur Augustus' drawl.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, I must ask you to widdwah—"

"Rats!" said Lowther shortly. "Stop talking, Gussy, there's a good chap!"

"Bai Jove! If you say 'watts' to me—"

"I didn't!" said Lowther.

"Bai Jove! Everybody heard you!" said D'Arcy hotly.

"No, I said 'rats,' Gussy—r-r-rats!" said Monty Lowther, with another chuckle at the disgusted expression of D'Arcy's aristocratic countenance.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen!" shouted Tom Merry, thinking things had gone on long enough. "We have to wait and see if Mr. Glyn will let us have the necessary cash to start the business. We'll pay him back out of the profits, you see. But the point is—are you chaps willing to lend a hand if it's necessary?"

"We are!" said Jack Blake & Co. in unison.

"Then all we ask you to do is to keep the thing secret until we get the word 'go!'" said Tom Merry. "We just want to know whom we can count on, that's all."

"Count on us, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy warmly.

"Rather!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry.

And, with a cordial nod, the Shell juniors left the Fourth-Formers to think over the proposal.

CHAPTER 2.

Mr. Glyn's Reply.

"TOM MERRY!"

Tom Merry broke off his conversation with his chums,

Manners and Lowther, to turn to the speaker.

They were returning from the football-field, having had a few kicks at goal. The light was too bad for them to play very much after tea, but Tom Merry & Co. lost little chance of a "punt!"

It was Bernard Glyn who called, and he came running up as the juniors were entering the School House.

"I've heard from the pater!" said Bernard Glyn excitedly. "Here you are, you chaps, you can read the letter!"

Tom Merry took the proffered letter and read aloud:

"My dear Bernard,—Your letter received. Of course, I shall be delighted to set the factory you propose on its legs. Unless the building which was used previous to the war is now vacant, I'm afraid you will experience great difficulty in securing premises such as you require for the carrying out of your scheme. However, you can use my name for whatever purpose you like. I must say I am very pleased to know that you and your friends are so keen on helping the men to whom we all owe so much.—

Your affectionate,

Father."

"He's a brick!" said Manners, when Tom Merry had finished. "One of the best!"

"Rather!" said Lowther and Tom Merry together.

"Then we can get Blake & Co. to come to your study," said Glyn, "and get on with the main details of the bizz. That right, Tom?"

"Go on, Tom Merry heartily.

"Go and fetch 'em along, Glyn, and we'll be cleaned up by the time they're there!"

"Right-ho!"

And Bernard Glyn hurried off to Jack Blake & Co.'s study.

Tom Merry was as good as his word, for Jack Blake & Co. had only just arrived with Bernard Glyn when the chums of the Shell put in an appearance. "Good!" said Tom Merry at once. "Well get to business straight away!" "Yas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy quickly. "I propose that Glyn be appointed managing-director." "Secunded," said Tom Merry heartily. "Suppose we sit down before we start?" suggested Monty Lowther mildly. Tom Merry grinned. "Not a bad idea, Monty," he said. "Draw up your chairs, you chaps, and make yourselves at home!"

There was a bright fire burning in the study, for Tom Merry had banked it up before he and his chums took the footer down to the field for a game.

In a very few minutes the eight juniors were seated in a half-circle round the fire.

"Now, Gussy's proposal to make Glyn managing-director is a sound one," said Tom Merry. "Bernard knows more about machinery than all the rest of us put together—"

"Oh, I say!" murmured Glyn confusedly.

"It's a fact!" said Tom Merry warmly. "I have succeeded Gussy's proposal. Anybody any objections?"

"No one had. Bernard Glyn was eminently suited to the job they were appointing him to, for he was undoubtedly very clever at all things mechanical.

"Right! Carried unanimously!" said Tom Merry, and carefully wrote it down on a piece of paper ready for that purpose. "Now, I think we ought to name our factory before we settle anything more."

"Yas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I suggest we call it the 'Wylcombe Helwoss Factory!'"

The juniors shook their heads. The appellation did not appeal to them at all. "Glyn's Implements Factory?" suggested Digby.

"No," said Bernard Glyn firmly. "No names like that, please!"

"Glyn's quite right," said Tom Merry, with a sage nod of the head. "Why not something like 'The St. Jim's Company,' or 'The St. Jim's Agricultural Implement Company?'"

"That's better!" said Jack Blake quickly. "I second the last-named be the name of our co.—. It's rather a long name, but that doesn't matter."

"Wathah not?"

The juniors agreed upon Tom Merry's suggestion, and the name was written down on Tom Merry's paper.

"I'm not one to hrag," said D'Arcy, reddening a little, "but I beg to propose myself as managah!"

"Manager?" echoed Monty Lowther. "Gussy, you couldn't manage pussy!"

"Weedly, Lowthah!" exclaimed D'Arcy warmly. "I should be sowwy to disturb the harmony of this business meeting, but unless you withdraw that remark, I shall have no recourse but to administer a fearful thwacking!"

Monty Lowther looked very solemn for a few moments.

"I'm sorry, Gussy!" he said at last. "I withdraw that remark just as far as the meaning is concerned. You could just about manage a pussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hussy excess me, deah boys—" began Arthur Augustus slowly, but with a word of determination in his voice.

"Gussy," said Jack Blake solemnly, "you are in another fellow's study, remember!"

D'Arcy was touched upon his most tender spot—etiquette. He sat down in the chair he had left a moment before.

"I'm sowwy," he said to nobody in particular. "But I should just like to say that I wegard Lowthah as a waggin' wotthah!"

"I don't wag," said Lowther. "I'm not a dog, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, if you persist—"

"Order, please!" said Tom Merry sternly. "The manager of the St. Jim's Agricultural Implement Co. has now to be appointed, please. I suggest Jack Blake!"

"A sound suggestion!" said Jack Blake warmly. "I second it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can't, fathhead!" said Tom Merry, with a laugh. "One of the other chaps must do that."

And Jack Blake, flushing furiously, sat back in his chair to wait for somebody to second Tom Merry's proposal.

"Wait a minute, you chaps," said Digby slowly. "Without any reflection on Jack Blake's abilities, I really think we might make Tom Merry manager. After all, it was he and Glyn who asked our help."

Jack Blake was the first to remark upon that suggestion. There was no

—when they got time, of course," said Bernard Glyn. "That leaves, of this party, Gussy and Blake and Herries. I think the first two could assist in interviewing travellers, etc."

"Wathah!" said D'Arcy, but with very little enthusiasm.

"You see, Gussy, it requires a fellow with tact and judgment to sell goods," said Monty Lowther diplomatically.

D'Arcy looked sharply at the Shell fellow.

"You weally think so, Lowthah?" he said slowly.

"Certain sure!" said Lowther calmly.

"Then I shall be pleased to undertake the duty," said D'Arcy. "Peawwos you're right, Monty!"

"I always am!" said Lowther cheerfully.

D'Arcy did not reply to that.

"Herries could perhaps give me a hand," said Glyn. "I shall have to work with the engines most of the time."

"Very pleased to do so!" said George Herries warmly. "I'll do anything to help those chaps—even sweep the works out after they've gone home!"

"Yas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy heartily. "That's the spiwit, deah boys!"

And D'Arcy's tones lacked nothing in the way of enthusiasm in that remark.

"Now, to-morrow is a half!" said Tom Merry. "We've no match on, so I vote we go down and see about that factory."

"It's empty. That's all I can say," said Bernard Glyn quietly.

"Eh?"

"I was there before breakfast this morning," explained Glyn. "You see, there's nothing like striking the iron while it's hot, and I knew what the pater's reply could be. We can see the landlord to-morrow."

There was a knock at the door, and Tom Merry held up a warning finger.

"Come in!" he called out.

The door opened, and Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House came into the study.

"We're in!" said Figgins cheerfully.

"Quite a family gathering, Tommy!" Tom Merry nodded. He was watching the New House juniors. One never knew when George Figgins and his chums were on the warpath until something happened.

"Well, Figgys?" asked Tom Merry quietly.

"Not a rag, Tommy. Don't get frightened!" began Figgins.

The eight School House juniors stood up as if someone had given a word of command, and three New House fellows backed to the door as if they, too, had received a separate word of command.

"Pax!" said Figgins hastily.

"Did you say something about getting frightened?" asked Tom Merry, very quietly.

Figgins & Co. grinned.

"Well, in a way we meant to say—"

said Figgins.

"Yes, rather!" said Kerr and Wynn hastily.

"So long as you are not throwing down the giddy sunnet," said Monty Lowther severely, "we're prepared to hear what you came over to this respectable place for."

Figgins & Co. grinned again, and came farther into the study as the School House juniors resumed their seats.

"We've no match on for this Saturday or Saturday week," said Figgins. "We wondered if you chaps would give a game?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry quickly. "That's good, Figgys, for we've nothing on either. Oh—"

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jealousy in Blake's nature, and he answered promptly.

"Carried!" he said warmly. "Another sound suggestion!"

"You second that, Blake?" asked Tom Merry quietly.

"Rather!" said Jack Blake.

Tom Merry nodded, and felt a thrill of pleasure run through him as he realised how much Jack Blake would have liked to have been appointed manager.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, after having proposed himself and suffered Monty Lowther's humorous remarks, did not press his claims to the position.

"Now secretary. I propose Digby," said Tom Merry.

That was seconded and carried.

"Of course we shall have the aid of one or two good fellows. I mean business chaps," said Tom Merry hastily.

"We just want to have—to have a sort of controlling interest in the business."

"Now I further propose that Manners and Lowther assist in the cashier's office

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Fatty's face was quite white as he turned to Monty Lowther as he opened the door. "If you think I should scoff the grub belonging to men like our ex-soldiers and sailors—you'd better leave me out of it!" (See Chapter 2.)

He broke off suddenly as he remembered the St. Jim's Agricultural Implement Co., just formed, and his face fell.

"I—I—I—I'm sorry, Figgis, old son—" he stammered. "Got something on?" said Figgis lightly, but his face showed that he did not feel as cheerful as his words implied. "Of course, we don't mind, Tommy!"

Tom Merry looked appealingly at Bernard Glyn and the other School House juniors. Despite the rivalry which existed between the Co.'s of the School House and those of the New House, there was a warm friendship between the juniors of both Houses.

Figgis & Co. were rattling good fellows, and none knew that better than the School House juniors.

The latter nodded to Tom Merry. "Well, it's something in which you, Kerr, and Wynn might like to join, Figgis," said Tom Merry.

"A jape!" asked Kerr. "A feed?" asked Fatty Wynn, drawing in his breath sharply.

"No," laughed Tom Merry. "Something far more serious. In fact, we're going to start the St. Jim's Agricultural Implement Co."

"My hat!" exclaimed Figgis & Co. in unison.

"A factory at St. Jim's?" ejaculated Kerr.

"No—in Rylcombe!" said Tom Merry. "Here, squat down in front of the fire, and I'll tell you all about it!"

Figgis & Co. lost no time in making themselves comfortable. Tom Merry soon explained the scheme to assist the ex-service men in Rylcombe, and when he had finished there were no more enthusiastic juniors in the study than Figgis, Kerr, and Wynn.

"A rattling idea, you chaps!" said Figgis heartily. "Jolly good luck, and all that!"

"Would you care to join in?" asked Tom Merry.

"What ho!" said Figgis & Co. "Put me down as the factory dustman!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Perhaps you'll run a canteen for the workers?" suggested Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Trust Fatty Wynn to think of that!" said Tom Merry, with a laugh. "But still, Fatty, that's not a bad idea!"

"Perhaps he'll scoff half the grub!" suggested Monty Lowther humorously.

Never had Monty Lowther more regretted his words. He had meant nothing whatever in his remark, but Wynn took it to heart.

Without a word he rose to his feet and walked towards the door. His face was quite white as he turned to Monty Lowther as he opened the door.

"If you think I should scoff the grub belonging to men like our ex-soldiers and sailors—and when I'm trusted with it, too," he said bitterly, "you'd better leave me out of it!"

"Here!" gasped Monty Lowther. "Come back, you ass!"

But Fatty Wynn had gone, and the door was closed quietly behind him.

For one moment Monty Lowther looked at the juniors in acute dismay, the next he was flying down the corridor after the indignant New House junior.

"He—he—he didn't mean anything, Figgis!" stammered Tom Merry. "Monty wouldn't think anything rotten in connection with Fatty!"

Figgis nodded calmly.

"Wynn is a bit touchy sometimes," he said, passing the matter over lightly. "He'll come back!"

Fatty Wynn came back all right. In fact, he and Monty Lowther came back arm-in-arm. They were both smiling cheerfully.

"We'll find you a job, you chaps!"

said Tom Merry. "In the meantime, it wouldn't be a bad idea to drink the health of the St. Jim's Agricultural Implements Co. in hot lemonade!"

"Good enough!" said Monty Lowther.

And, perhaps wishing to atone for the remark he had unfortunately and unthinkingly made, Monty Lowther insisted on doing all the work in connection with the making of eleven glasses of lemonade with the juice of fresh lemons and hot water.

When it was ready the steaming liquid was raised high in the air, and Tom Merry called the toast.

"All success to the St. Jim's Agricultural Implement Co.!" he said.

"Hear, hear!"

And the toast was drunk with enthusiasm, but cautiously. Monty Lowther's lemonade was piping hot!

CHAPTER 3. Getting to Work.

"READY?" Bernard Glyn poked his head into Tom Merry's study to make that remark.

Tom Merry & Co. were ready, and informed Glyn as much.

"Then come on!" said Glyn enthusiastically. "This is where we got to work!"

It was Wednesday afternoon and a "half" at St. Jim's. Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, and Glyn were going down to Ryecombe to see the landlord of the long-disused factory.

It did not take them long to find the landlord when once they reached Ryecombe. They went straight to his private address, which the juniors obtained from the notice-board outside the factory.

His name was Francis Dudley, and he received the juniors quite cordially.

"Well, young gentlemen," he said, with a smile, "what can I do for you?"

Tom Merry & Co. seated themselves before they answered.

"It's about your factory," said Tom Merry quickly. "We've come to see you about renting it for—"

"You—renting my factory!" ejaculated the landlord, in surprise. "Are you aware how much the rent is?"

Bernard Glyn shook his head.

"No; and we don't very much care," he said lightly. "All we know is that we are going to have it!"

Mr. Dudley smiled.

"Ahem! Might I ask you—purely a business point, of course—might I ask you how you are going to pay for it?" he said.

"My name's Glyn, son of Mr. Glyn, of Glyn House," said the Shell junior quietly. "He is going to see to the cash side of our little scheme!"

Mr. Dudley's expression changed at once. Everybody knew Mr. Glyn, the multi-millionaire of Glyn House.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" he said hastily. "I did not know that you young gentlemen had such powerful backing."

As a matter of fact, though, I have a gentleman in the next room who is also after the factory."

"Then he can't have it!" said Bernard Glyn emphatically. "You may as well tell him so!"

Mr. Dudley frowned.

"I'm sorry, in a way," he said slowly. "He didn't exactly want the factory. He wanted to employ some of our ex-service men."

"That's what we want it for!" broke in the juniors with one voice.

"Oh! Goodness me!" exclaimed Mr. Dudley. "Why, you are only schoolboys! You cannot know how to employ men! Schoolboy employers! I never heard of such a thing!"

Bernard Glyn sat forward in his chair suddenly.

"Look here, Mr. Dudley! Are you a business man?" he asked.

"Certainly! But—"

"Then we—that is to say, my father—will pay you twenty pounds a year more for that factory than will the gentleman next door!" said Glyn calmly. "What's your business idea of that?"

Mr. Dudley hesitated before he replied.

"Of course, as a business man, you would naturally expect me to let the place to the highest bidder," he said slowly. "What are you going to turn the old factory into?"

"We are going to revive the old industry—implement-making, in fact!" said Tom Merry at once.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr.

Dudley. "Here, excuse me one minute, young gentlemen!"

And Mr. Dudley hurried from the room, to return in a couple of minutes with another gentleman. He was a fine, upstanding man of about thirty-five years of age, and his bearing seemed to suggest that he had spent more than one day on a military parade-ground.

"This is Mr. Foy, late manager of the factory you have been speaking about," said Mr. Dudley, introducing the gentleman he had brought into the room.

"Pleased to meet you, gentlemen!" said Mr. Foy, and shook hands heartily with the juniors from St. Jim's.

"They're after you—I should say, the factory," Mr. Foy said Mr. Dudley.

"They want to start the implement industry again, apparently with the express desire to help the ex-service men of Ryecombe."

Mr. Foy started.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "That is an extraordinary proposition to come from schoolboys!"

"Nevertheless, it's very true!" said Lowther coolly. "We're not anxious to take the matter out of your hands, Mr. Foy. In fact, we should like to hear your side of the case. We're both after the same place, you see."

Mr. Foy nodded.

"You are quite right," he said, "as a matter of fact, I want to raise sufficient money to start the old industry again, and find work for our ex-service men at the same time. I had the honour of being manager before the war. Our employer was killed, poor chap, in the first Battle of Ypres."

"Rotten luck!" said Tom Merry sympathetically. "And, I take it, you came to ask Mr. Dudley to give you a helping hand?"

"That's the position, young sir," said Mr. Foy.

Tom Merry looked at Bernard Glyn, and the latter nodded quickly. It was evident they were thinking of the same thing.

"Well, look here, Mr. Foy," said Tom Merry. "I'll make a suggestion—just a suggestion, you understand. We do know that we're taking on a big job when it comes to employing men, but we're banking on finding one or two of the original company's men to help us out."

"Exactly!" said Mr. Foy, as Tom Merry hesitated.

"We are, moreover, tied down for time," went on Tom Merry. "Now for the suggestion. Will you take on the job of manager at the St. Jim's Agricultural Implement Company?"

"Why, gracious me, have you already named the company?" exclaimed Mr. Foy. "You're not letting the dust gather round your shoes, sir?"

"St. Jim's chaps seldom do!" said Manners calmly. "When we get a stunt in our nappers, Mr. Foy, we get right at it!"

"Excellent!" said Mr. Dudley warmly. "The spirit which won the war!"

"What-ho!" said Monty Lowther, with a chuckle. "It's a rum spirit, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, Monty! Don't feed these gentlemen on your rotten puns!" growled Tom Merry.

"Yes; this is a business meeting, not a nursery show!" said Glyn, with a frown. "Now, Mr. Foy, how about my friend's suggestion?"

"I'm more than willing," said Mr. Foy heartily. "You see, I was already trying to get Mr. Dudley to open the factory again. I'm sure the profits will repay

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Mr. Railton lowered his paper and when he turned to the juniors, there was considerable amusement on his face. "My dear boys, you can't employ men!" he said sharply. "I greatly admire the spirit in which you have undertaken to do so, but I can assure you it is impossible!" (See Chapter 4.)

anybody who takes on the business again."

"Ahem! About salary?" murmured Tom Merry.

Mr. Foy waved his hand.

"Let that go for now," he said quietly. "You'd better wait and see how things go."

"Then will you see about some advertisements—I take it Mr. Dudley is letting us have the place—and tell all the people who used to work at the factory that there's work for them as soon as we can get the machinery in?" said Tom Merry.

"Ah, that's something you don't know, gentlemen," said the landlord, with a smile. "The machinery is still there, every bit of it. No doubt it wants looking over—"

"My hat! Rippling!" exclaimed Bernard Glyn, his eyes shining. "Charge the seat of those machines to the governor, Mr. Dudley. I'll go over and have a look at the engines, especially the driving motors."

"That's the idea!" said Tom Merry delightedly. "You get on seeing about the men, Mr. Foy. Old Glyn'll have the machines ready. You'll find us at St. Jim's any time you want us."

"What-ho!"

The juniors, now that the main business details had been settled—or, rather,

taken for granted as being settled—were only too anxious to get into their factory.

"Excuse us," said Monty Lowther, with a laugh. "We're off!"

And the St. Jim's juniors hurried away, leaving Mr. Foy and Mr. Dudley to stare at one another in surprise.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Foy. "Schoolboy employers! I never heard of such a thing!"

"Neither have I!" declared Mr. Dudley. "But—but it seems as though they're dead set on the business, doesn't it?"

"I—I— I suppose they're not having a joke?" murmured the newly-appointed manager of the St. Jim's works. "It's really extraordinary!"

"No, I know the boys by sight," said Mr. Dudley. "The one they called Glyn is the son of the millionaire of the same name."

"Oh, that explains a lot!" said Mr. Foy. "Well, Mr. Dudley, it was sheer good luck that I came here to beg you to give us a start. I can assure you that, whether my employers are schoolboys or not, I'm going to do my very best to make things a success."

"And good luck go with your efforts," said Mr. Dudley heartily.

And the two men shook hands heartily and parted.

Meanwhile, the juniors had quickly

made their way to the factory, which was erected just outside the village. There they found they had left Francis Dudley without asking for the key.

Manners volunteered to fetch it, and while he was away the juniors examined the exterior of the building. Notebooks and pencils were produced, and such details as broken guttering or cracked rainpipes were, carefully noted with a view to repairs.

"Hero's Manners!" said Tom Merry suddenly; and as his chum came up with the key he led the way to the main entrance to the building.

The door was soon opened, and the juniors went into the old factory.

The floors were thick with dust, as were the windows. The latter were quickly opened to let in fresh air, for the place smelled rank and mouldy.

Bernard Glyn lost no time in reaching the first machine. He was no novice as far as machinery was concerned, and it did not take him long to know that all that was apparently needed was a good clean up.

The motor which drove the machinery was next subjected to examination, but as the current had been cut off at the main Glyn could not get the machine going.

"No juice yet?" asked Tom Merry.

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"No; but that can soon be fixed up," said Bernard Glyn. "I'll phone the company about it. Now, what do you chaps say to having a clean up?"

"Sure!" chimed in the juniors. And brooms were found, and the building was swept out. The juniors thought that if they did all the donkey work prior to their employes coming in, they would be able to start the real work right away.

They were tired and hungry before Tom Merry called a halt for tea, and never did the juniors feel more like doing justice to a feed as when they sat down to their meal in the village tuckshop.

"We can do nothing more to-day, you chaps," said Bernard Glyn. "I vote we go back to St. Jim's and see Mr. Railton."

"Mr. Railton? What for?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Well, it might help us a bit," explained Glyn. "He might give us a few late passes next week, when he knows what we want them for. Besides, we ought to let Jack Blake & Co. and Figgins & Co. know what we're doing. I must also write to the gov'nor, and tell him to expect a business letter from Mr. Dudley."

Tom Merry nodded agreement; and after they had finished their meal the seniors went back to the old factory to lock up. They found that Mr. Foy was there, taking a look round.

"Leave the key with him, Glyn," suggested Manners practically.

Glyn nodded.

"Yes, I think that's the best thing to do, old top," he agreed. "I guess this Mr. Foy is a good fellow. He has the interests of the Service men at heart."

"Rather!"

The key was duly handed over, and Tom Merry & Co. went out of the building in high spirits. Things were bucking up.

Jack Blake & Co. were waiting in Study No. 10 for their return, and had the fire and made tea.

"Hallo, you chaps!" said Digby, as the shell juniors appeared. "Haven't had your tea, have you?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry. "We've been working!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "You don't mean to say that you've already got things going?"

"No. But we've swept out the place, fixed things up with the landlord, and employed the manager—a real, live, working manager!" said Tom Merry. "I tell you, the St. Jim's Agricultural Implement Co. is going strong!"

And, amidst great enthusiasm, Tom Merry explained all that had been done during the afternoon. Later, when Figgins & Co., of the New House, came over, he had to recount their doings all over again.

"Well, I consider things are going jolly well," said Fatty Wynn, when Tom Merry had finished. "There only remains the canteen to fix up!"

A remark to which Monty Lowther did not offer any humorous reply.

"That can be done any old time, Fatty," said Glyn. "We'll leave that to you—say, for instance, you make the arrangements on Saturday?"

"That's it," said Figgins. "Leave that to our fat tulip!"

And the bell for bed put an end to the discussion for that day. There still remained Bernard Glyn's letter to be written, and the advice and help of Mr. Railton solicited.

CHAPTER 4.

Mr. Railton Helps.

"COME in!"

Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House at St. Jim's, lowered his paper as there sounded a knock at his door.

The door opened, and Tom Merry, followed by Manners, Lowther, D'Arcy, and Bernard Glyn, came slowly in.

"In trouble?" asked Mr. Railton kindly.

"No, sir, thank you," said Tom Merry. "The fact is, sir—"

"Yaas, the fact is, sir—" began D'Arcy.

"Perhaps it would be better if one of

No. 9.—ERNEST LEVISON.



Of the Fourth. Formerly at Greyfriars, from which school he was expelled in disgrace. He consorted often enough, both at Greyfriars and St. Jim's, with the ends, but his reform was very real. The old Levison is no more morose, moody, and obstinate when crossed, or suffering under the smart of injustice. The Levison of nowadays is a splendid fellow in every way—the ideal of British boyhood. Has a minor in the Third. (Study No. 9.)

you speaks," suggested Mr. Railton, with a smile. "It really is difficult to understand two juniors at the same time!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "The fact is—"

"Shut up, Gussy!" whispered Tom Merry. "Let me speak. Sir—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy," expostulated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, fixing his monocle, and subjecting Tom Merry to a freezing stare. "I wot—"

"Please explain, Merry," interrupted the Housemaster quietly.

After that remark, of course, it was impossible for the swell of St. Jim's to

attempt to explain the reason of their visit without being rude. And being rude was about the last thing Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would ever think about.

"Well, sir, we're sorry to take up your time," said Tom Merry hastily. "But—but we thought you wouldn't mind giving us some advice."

"Very pleased, I'm sure," said Mr. Railton kindly.

"We're opening a factory, sir—"

"Gacious! What did you say, Merry? A factory?"

"Yes, sir; a factory to find work for the ex-Service men in Rylcombe. You remember, sir, there used to be an agricultural implement factory in the village?"

"Yes; but—"

"The owner was killed in the war, sir, and many of the chaps who've come home haven't got any work to do. The King has asked all employers to help the discharged and disabled—"

"Yes; but Merry—"

"So, as there's no employer to help our lads, sir, we're helping them ourselves," wound up Tom Merry.

Mr. Railton lowered his paper, and when he turned to the juniors there was considerable amazement on his face.

"But, my dear boys, you can't employ men!" he said sharply. "I greatly admire the spirit in which you have undertaken to do so, but I can assure you it is impossible."

"We've the factory already, sir," said Bernard Glyn.

"Glyn, you surely don't mean to say you've taken a factory?" gasped Mr. Railton. "Bless my soul—"

"My pater is paying for it, sir," interrupted Bernard Glyn quietly. "He's footing the rent—I mean, paying the rent, sir. I—ahem—I know a little about machinery, sir."

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Railton. "Have—have you done anything else, my boys?"

"We've taken on the old manager of the factory, sir," said Tom Merry. "He's going to see about getting the men to work, and—and—and all that, sir."

"But, my dear Merry, you can't possibly conceive how great a business it is employing men!" remonstrated Mr. Railton. "It was a good step to get the old manager—it was a Mr. Foy, if I remember rightly—"

"That's the name, sir!"

"He's going to take charge, I suppose?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir—" began Arthur Augustus D'Arcy enthusiastically.

"Then, pray, how can I help you?" asked Mr. Railton.

Tom Merry coughed slightly.

"Ahem! We thought, perhaps, sir—ahem!—you might see your— That is to say, you would be kind enough—" he stammered.

"Don't be nervous, Merry!" said Mr. Railton kindly. "Speak out, my boy!"

"Well, sir, if you could give us a late pass for a few nights, so that we can devote our evenings to helping the—the manager and the clerks—"

said Tom Merry, and broke off in confusion as he realised what he was asking for.

It was nothing new for the juniors to be given a late pass, but it was only occasionally they asked for them. Tom Merry was now asking for a pass for the juniors, not for one-night, but for several.

"That's a serious question, Merry," said Mr. Railton, frowning a little.

"I've no wish whatever to upset your arrangements, astonishing though they are, and I've still less inclination to prevent the ex-service men of Rylcombe from obtaining lucrative situations. But what you ask is rather a lot, isn't it?"

"I'll look aftah them, sir!" burst out D'Arcy.

Mr. Railton smiled. "And who is going to look after you, D'Arcy?" he asked quietly.

Arthur Augustus flushed. "Oh, weally, sir, I do not wequire nobody to look aftah me, sir!" he said. "I'm vewy capable of lookin' aftah these chaps as well as myself, sir!"

"Well, we'll see!" said Mr. Railton, with another smile. "I suppose you've no objection to my speaking to Dr. Holmes about this—this extraordinary idea of yours, Merry?"

"It was Glyn's idea, really, sir!" said Tom Merry generously. "I'm—I'm just carrying it out in the proper manner. Glyn doesn't mind, I'm sure, sir!"

"Not at all, sir!" said Bernard Glyn, and added hastily: "You—you don't think he'll wind up the St. Jim's Agricultural Implement Company before—before it's really started, do you, sir?"

"The—the what, Glyn?" gasped Mr. Railton.

"The St. Jim's Agricultural Implement Company, sir!" repeated Glyn firmly.

"Bless my soul! N-n-no. Glyn, I don't think Dr. Holmes will offer many objections. He'll probably require to know that there are capable men—ahem—employed by you juniors."

"Twist us, sir!" said D'Arcy. "I—I will, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Railton, who seemed to be unable to grasp the fact that some of the juniors under his control were actually employing men.

"Thanks vewy much, sir!" said D'Arcy, with a slight but graceful bow. "I think there is no need to twouble you further, sir!"

"No, thank you, sir!" said the juniors in unison.

"Then I will let you know my decision later on, my boys," said Mr. Railton, and he rose to open the door for the juniors.

"I might say this, I should be only too willing to help you in every possible way. In fact, I should be proud to help the discharged and disabled!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy softly. "We'll let you know how we get on, sir!"

"Yes; rather, sir!" assented the juniors.

And, with a nod, the kindly Housemaster ushered the juniors from his study.

"He's a topper!" said Tom Merry emphatically, as they walked down the corridor.

"Absolutely the best!" agreed Manners. "Good old Railton!"

And the juniors went to Tom Merry's study in high spirits.

Their visit to the Housemaster had been successful, and they had not been "ticked off," as Monty Lowther had suggested earlier in the day would be their fate when they told Mr. Railton of their scheme.

"Now we can do nothing until we hear from Mr. Railton," said Bernard Glyn. "Once we get the late passes, we can see what is happening down at the factory."

They were not kept waiting very long for the Housemaster's decision. It came along to them by the House page, in the shape of a piece of paper on which was written:

"The juniors who are employing men at the St. Jim's Agricultural Implement Company's works, have permission to go into Rycombe immediately after dinner daily, until further notice. Thomas Merry to be in charge of the party, and responsible for their behaviour.

"V. RAILTON, Housemaster."

"My hat! Every afternoon until further notice!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What a brick old Railton is!"

"Accepted!" said Monty Lowther seriously. "Shake!"

D'Arcy took the proffered hand, and Monty Lowther shook it heartily, using

"Good old Railton!"

"Bully for the Housemaster!" shouted Monty Lowther, leaping into the air in sheer delight—to land upon Arthur Augustus's toes, who also leapt into the air—in sheer pain.

"Ow! Yowow!" roared D'Arcy. "Ow! My toes, Lowthah, you dummy!"

"Never mind, Gussy!" said Manners, slapping D'Arcy enthusiastically on the back. "Think what you've done for us!"

D'Arcy rubbed his injured toe ruefully. "Ow! I'm pleased to know that my influence has worked the owdale!" he groaned. "But, Lowthah, you boast—"

"Oh, Gussy!" murmured Lowther distressfully. "After my delight at the

No 10.—MR. PHILIP G. LATHOM, B.A.



Master of the Fourth. Figures less prominently than the Head, Mr. Railton or Mr. Ratcliffe, but one of the nicest masters at St. Jim's. He is liked and respected by his boys, administers fines and lickings as freely as some of his colleagues. At the same time, he can punish with severity when occasion demands.

great thing you've done for us—oh, I cannot bear your remonstrances!"

The juniors hid their faces as much as possible as D'Arcy looked up intently into Monty Lowther's face.

"Weally, Lowthah!" said D'Arcy in milder tones. "I'm sorry to have to wemonstwat with you—I apologise, dear boy!"

"Accepted!" said Monty Lowther seriously. "Shake!"

D'Arcy took the proffered hand, and Monty Lowther shook it heartily, using

his other hand to wipe away imaginary tears.

"I believe you're wotting, you wottah!" snorted Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Bai Jove—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors could no longer restrain themselves, and the study rang with their laughter.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fixed his monocle firmly in his eye, and, with his head held high in the air, he coldly surveyed the juniors.

"I wegard you fellahs as waggin' wottahs!" he said icily. "I wegret I shall have to leave the Agwicultaw—tuwuw—Agwicultaw—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wottahs—wottahs of the first watah, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus, feeling quite incapable of pronouncing the word "agricultural," and furiously angry with himself for not being able to subject the juniors to an icy denunciation, stamped out of the study and slammed the door behind him with a clatter that shook the walls.

"Ha, ha, ha! Poor old Gussy!" said Lowther, wiping the tears of merriment from his cheeks. "Agwicultawwment! Company—ha, ha, ha!"

It was some time before the juniors could once more examine the pass which Mr. Railton had sent them. The Housemaster had done far more than they expected. A late pass for the evenings was the most they dared hope.

But here was a pass which would allow them to go out immediately after dinner every day.

"That means to say that we can vamoose into Rycombe right away," said Manners. "Come on, you chaps!"

"Here, let's rout out Figgy & Co.," said Tom Merry. "They are included in this pass. And don't forget you are in my charge!"

"Rats!"

"Piffle!"

"Eh? Now then, young Lowther, if you don't want to go, you've only to say so!" said Tom Merry warmly. "You can go into classes if you'd rather!"

"Brrrr! Don't mention it!" growled Monty Lowther. "I'm going over for Figgins."

"I'll gather in Jack Blake & Co.!" said Bernard Glyn. "Meet at the gates in five minutes."

Five minutes later, and the juniors were on their way down to Rycombe, including Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Monty Lowther had solemnly apologised, and the honour of the D'Arcys was satisfied.

"This is a ripping stunt!" said Figgins enthusiastically. "Fancy old Railton getting us off as well as you chaps!"

"He saw the Head, I expect," said Tom Merry. "But I'll bet this pass won't be ours very long!"

"Weally, Tom Merry, I hope you're not premeditating doing something which will force Mr. Wailton to take the pass away!" said D'Arcy severely.

"Ass!" said Tom Merry witheringly. "But what do you think our respective paters are going to say if they hear their noble sons are employing men in a factory instead of swotting in a class-room?"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"You wouldn't!" said Kerr, with a sniff.

"Did you?" demanded Arthur Augustus sharply.

Kerr flushed. "Ahem! Good job we're nearly there, isn't it?" he said hastily. "It's

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grand—having one's works near one's residence. Ahem!"

As they approached the works the juniors became aware of a slight humming noise, and it was not until they were actually outside the door that they realised what it was.

The St. Jim's Agricultural Company were actually at work!

"M-m-my hat!" stuttered Tom Merry, in surprise. "Mr. Foy's got the place going!"

"Great Scott!"

"Inside!" said Bernard Glyn briefly. The juniors opened the door, and walked quickly inside.

The huge room, which had seemed so cold, rustic, and desolate the evening before, was now a veritable hive of industry.

Men stood at all the machines, which were working at full-speed—five, up-standing men, in shirt-sleeves and aprons. The humming noise the juniors had heard on their way was the droning of the electric-motor which drove the machines.

"My hat!" exclaimed Figgins. "This manager chap is mustard!"

"Rather!"

Mr. Foy saw the juniors at that moment, and came hurriedly forward. His face and hands were smothered in thick grease; there was no need to ask what he had been doing.

"Good-afternoon, young sirs!" he said respectfully. "Bit of a surprise for you—what?"

"Rather!" said Bernard Glyn. "Motor going all right?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Foy. "I held a little meeting in the village last night—I got all the men I wanted. Then I went to the manager of the electric-light company, and got him to send men along first thing this morning to put on the current."

"Splendid!"

"Then we found there was enough old material left here. Not very good stuff, but good enough to make a cheap line of implements," went on the manager.

"And here we are, going at full-speed!"

"Ripping!" said Tom Merry heartily.

"I've taken the liberty of ordering tons of iron and steel," said Mr. Foy. "I suppose that was all right, Mr. Glyn?"

"Certainly!" said Bernard Glyn. "My pater will foot everything until we start getting paid for the work."

"Thank you! Perhaps you would like a look round, gentlemen?" suggested Mr. Foy.

The juniors agreed, and they went round the works with the manager.

The men looked at them curiously as they walked round the machines, and were told how each different implement was made. It must have seemed peculiar to them that they should be employed by mere schoolboys.

But they didn't mind who employed them, so long as they had work to do and money to draw each week.

And when they had been all round, the St. Jim's juniors went to their respective jobs allotted them in Tom Merry's study the night the scheme was first of all discussed, and worked with a will and a spirit which inspired all who saw them.

Fatty Wynn, needless to say, soon set to work to arrange for the men's catering, and before the work's bell rang for tea he had all but completed the main part of the business, and went with Tom Merry & Co. to Rykcombe to order the stock.

CHAPTER 5.

A Midnight Adventure.

BOOM! Boom! Boom!

The clock was striking eleven at St. Jim's, and the deep notes of the bell had hardly died away before there was the sound of someone moving in the Shell dormitory.

It was Bernard Glyn!

He had been waiting for the clock to chime eleven before he got out of bed. He made no noise as he got up, and only a slight sound as he quickly pulled on his trousers.

Anybody who had seen the schoolboy inventor getting up at that time of night would have received a shock. Bernard Glyn was not of the kind that breaks gates and burns the midnight oil in some secluded spot, playing cards, or otherwise gambling.

He left the dormitory a few minutes later, and quickly made his way downstairs to the staircase window. This he opened noiselessly, and equally as noiselessly he climbed out.

There was a drain-pipe attached to the wall, which everybody at St. Jim's knew was the easiest way down to the quad.

THE PENNY POPULAR

OUT ON FRIDAY,

Contains a splendid story of TOM MERRY & CO. in which Arthur Augustus D'Arcy figures prominently.

YOU WILL ENJOY IT!

range. Bernard Glyn was not the first, by any means, that had used the pipe to get out of the School House.

Once safely on the asphalt of the quad, Bernard Glyn sped lightly across the open space into the shadow of the trees that grew beside the school wall.

Here again it was the work of a moment to get on top of the wall, and to drop down the road outside.

Glyn did not stop to look round to see if he was observed. He put his arms to his side, and ran quickly and almost silently down the road.

He did not stop until he reached the works of the St. Jim's Agricultural Implement Company.

Suddenly he pulled up with a jerk.

There was a light gleaming in the yard in which the works stood. It was not a bright light; Glyn guessed it came from a small bullseye lantern.

"What's this little game, I wonder!" he murmured. "Perhaps it's the police having a look round."

But that it was not the police Bernard Glyn soon found out. For he was able to discern the forms of two men who were moving about the yard, and they were certainly not dressed in the uniform of the police.

They had ordinary civilian clothes, and both wore velvet hats pulled down well over their eyes.

The light from a lantern, held by one of the men, was every few moments flashed on to the building or to a window.

"Something wrong here!" said Bernard Glyn, under his breath. "I'm going a bit nearer and see what's happening!"

Cautionally the junior made his way along the hedge which enclosed the yard, until he was almost opposite the men, and not more than ten yards away from them.

"Should be a simple job," said one suddenly.

"Easy as pie!" assented the other, with a sniff.

"Shall we do it to-night, or shall we wait?" asked he who had first spoken. The other hesitated a moment before he replied.

"Perhaps we'd better wait until they get all the machinery going," he said, in a low voice. "May as well make a good job of it while we're at it."

"Burglars!" thought Glyn, but changed his mind the next moment.

Burglars do, not, as a rule, wait until all the machinery is installed in a factory before committing a robbery. Machinery fails to interest them, as it is impossible to carry such heavy articles under one's arm!

Then, if it wasn't robbery, what could it all mean?

Bernard Glyn had to think more of his safety than of that question for the time being, for the light suddenly swung round in his direction.

Fortunately for him, perhaps, the white beam did not quite rest to him before it was turned back. All the same, Glyn thought it wiser to move farther away.

It was that move which proved his undoing.

For he had scarcely moved a yard before his foot came in contact with an old tin someone had thrown over the hedge into the yard.

There was a loud metallic sound, and instantly the light of the lantern was upon him.

"Get him!" said one of the men furiously.

Bernard Glyn turned and ran for safety.

But, surprised as he was by the suddenness of the disclosure, he stood for a moment spellbound.

That moment was sufficient for the men to gain three or four yards, and Bernard Glyn was caught before he could reach the roadway. He felt the grasp of one of the men on his shoulder, and he turned round savagely, prepared to fight.

But the rascals were evidently used to tougher game than he, for one of them swung his fist round, catching Glyn with brutal force on the side of the head.

The St. Jim's junior collapsed like a heap of cards in the roadway, and lay still.

"He nearly got away!" breathed one of the rascals. "My stars! Fancy getting copped by a blessed schoolboy!"

"Perhaps it's one of them what owns this 'ere place," suggested the other.

They looked nervously about them as they spoke, quickly lifting the insensible form of the junior from the ground, they bore him into the yard.

"At the back of the building, Wesson!" said one sharply.

Bernard Glyn was carried round the building away from the road and the possible sight of any passer-by. There he was laid upon his back whilst the two rascals peered at each other intently for a moment.

The same thought was running through both their minds.



D'Arcy looked round and down, and nearly jumped out of his skin. "Ow! Yow!" he cried. "Take the feahful beast away, Hewwies!"—(See chapter 6.)

"No, Carter!" said Wesson, with a slap of his shoulders. "That wasn't in the game."

"Then we shall have to take him to the cottage," said Wesson. "He can be released when we have blown the place up!"

Bernard Glyn came to consciousness just in time to catch the last part of Wesson's remark, and his blood boiled.

"That was the game, then!"

These men were intent upon nothing less than blowing up the works!

"You rotters!" he said, in a weak voice. "You utter bounders!"

"Hallo!" said Wesson, turning swiftly and bending over the junior. "The young varmint has woke up!"

"I'll wake you up—soon!" said Bernard Glyn, between his teeth.

"You're not going to blow our works up—don't think that!"

"You've won't be the first, young shaver!" said Carter, with an evil laugh. "Anyhow, you ain't going to get free until it's done and we're well clear!"

"You—you—you—"

Words failed Glyn, and he could do nothing but lay and stare up at the callous rascals—a bitter, contemptuous stare.

Bernard Glyn realised quite a lot in the next few minutes. He was picked

up again after a muttered conversation between the two men, and carried out of the yard into the village.

And Glyn knew now how it was that many mysterious explosions had taken place in great works all over the country. There was some evil hand at work—and an evil hand that destroyed factories and works so that trade should stop.

There had been rumours of foul play before, but nothing had ever been proved. Bernard Glyn knew now that these works had been intentionally destroyed with some definite object.

That object could only be one—dislocation of trade. It followed as a matter of course that the master-mind behind the outrages was not a Britisher's.

Bernard Glyn was carried down the village, past many familiar spots, until his bearers pulled up before a small cottage.

This cottage had had a board marked "To Let," outside the front door only a day before, for he had seen it himself.

"Top room, Wesson!" said Carter curtly.

The door was opened by Carter, who carried the latchkey. He had to drop Glyn's feet to feel for the key, and the

junior took the opportunity for one desperate attempt at escape.

No sooner had his feet touched the ground than Bernard Glyn, with a swift acrobatic movement, grasped Wesson's arms, and brought his legs up towards the man's face.

"Crash!"

"Ow! Jiminy!" gasped Wesson, staggering back.

Glyn's boot had caught him full on the nose, and the suddenness of the blow, as much as the blow itself, caused Wesson to drop Glyn as if he had been a lump of red-hot iron.

But before Glyn could struggle to his feet, Carter was upon him. Glyn tried to shout, but a huge, dirty hand was thrust over his mouth, and he was whirled into the dark passage of the cottage.

"Come on, Wesson!" panted Carter. "This kid fights like ten demons!"

Never did Bernard Glyn fight with so much desperate strength. But with the arrival of the enraged Wesson he might just as well have tried to obtain the heavy-weight championship of Europe.

In less than two minutes he was securely bound hand and foot, and Carter and Wesson stood up to wipe

away the results of the heavy blows that had landed on their faces.
"Geo-whiz! I'm glad he's tied up!" said Carter. "These 'ere boys know too much about fighting for my liking!"
"I've half a mind—" muttered Wesson.

"Then cut it out!" snapped Carter. "We're doing nothing like that—I tell you straight! It's bad enough as it is."

"It'll be a jolly sight worse when my chums find I'm missing!" said Bernard Glyn between his teeth.

Carter laughed ironically.
"Your chums will know when they get up in the morning that you're missing," he said. "But I don't think they'll know where to find you."

"But if you're very good, perhaps we'll send a postcard to your school when we've had the pleasure of blowing up your works," put in Wesson, with another laugh.

"Wait!" said Bernard Glyn bitterly. "Just wait! You'll come to the end of your tether very shortly!"

Carter and Wesson did not reply to that. They nodded at each other, and carried Glyn upstairs, where they left him. Glyn heard their footsteps descend the stairs.

He lay on the floor for nearly an hour, listening to the deep, murmuring voices down below, but after that time the murmuring died away.

Carter and Wesson were asleep. Bernard Glyn's absence was discovered very soon after rising-bell had sounded at St. Jim's the next morning.

Tom Merry was the first out of bed, and in his four rounds the dormitory to wake up his chums, he came across Glyn's empty bed.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated. "Old Glyn has gone out!"

Manners and Lowther were quickly by his side.

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther, with a slight shiver. "Blessed if I can understand chaps getting out of bed so early these cold mornings!"

"Glyn wouldn't mind the cold," said Manners. "Perhaps he's only just gone down."

Tom Merry felt the sheets. They were quite cold.

"No; he's been out some time, you chaps," he said slowly. "The sheets are stone cold. They would be warm if he'd only just gone out."

"So they would," admitted Manners. "Never mind, Tommy; we'll see him at breakfast."

"That's so," said Tom Merry.

The juniors returned to their own beds, and proceeded with their dressing. But when the juniors assembled for breakfast in the great dining-hall, and there was still no sign of Bernard Glyn, Tom Merry began to grow anxious.

It flashed across his mind that the missing junior had gone to the Factory, in which case he was not playing the game. Mr. Railton had given them a pass which extended their liberty far more than they dared hope, and to leave the school at any other hour than those specified in the written pass was asking for the pass to be revoked.

It was not Bernard Glyn to do that sort of thing, and Tom Merry dismissed the matter from his mind.

But when it was time for morning lessons to commence, and Glyn was still absent, Tom Merry's anxiety grew the more acute.

Mr. Linton called the roll, and everybody answered until he called Bernard Glyn's name.

"Glyn!" said Mr. Linton sharply. There was no reply.

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The Form-master looked up quickly. "Has anybody seen Glyn?" he demanded.

Still there was no answer, and Mr. Linton laid the roll on his desk and looked towards Tom Merry.

"Merry!"
"Yes, sir!"

"You are, I believe, captain of the Shell?"

"Y-yes, sir."

"Then can you not tell me what has happened to Bernard Glyn? Perhaps he is not well?"

"I—I can't say, sir," stammered Tom Merry. "He's disappeared."

Mr. Linton started.

"Disappeared!" he repeated sharply. "What do you mean?"

No. 11.—BAGLEY TRIMBLE.



Known throughout St. Jim's as "Baggy." Very similar in character to Billy Bunter of Greyfriars. Not unlike him in appearance. Enormous appetite—always ready to eat. May often be found with an ear close to the keyhole of some other fellow's study. Is part and parcel of St. Jim's, as is Billy Bunter of Greyfriars. Cannot be said to be anyone's chum, but provides all St. Jim's with a great deal of amusement. Shares Study No. 2 with Percy Mellish.

"Well, he hasn't been seen this morning, sir," said Tom Merry.

Mr. Linton's lips came together tightly.

"I suppose this business of the factory has completely driven from Glyn's mind the fact that he was sent here to study," he said coldly. "I must see Mr. Railton about the matter. Turn to page seventy-nine of your history-books, boys, and peruse it carefully until I return."

And Mr. Linton, frowning ominously, left the class-room.

Manners looked at Tom Merry dismally.

"That puts the giddy lid on it!" he said morosely. "Glyn is a silly ass to play the giddy goat like this!"

"The dummy!" snorted Monty

Lowther. "Old Railton will cancel our pass now, that's dead sure!"

Tom Merry nodded. He was as dismayed as his chums at Bernard Glyn's apparent lack of thought.

Mr. Linton came in a few minutes later, and the frown was still on his brow.

"Glyn!" he called sharply.

Tom Merry looked up from his book.

"Yes, sir!"

"It appears Glyn has not been to your works," said Mr. Linton. "Mr. Railton has been on the telephone, and is informed that nothing has been seen of Glyn since yesterday afternoon."

"My hat! I mean—that's extraordinary!" gasped Tom Merry.

Mr. Linton looked sharply at the captain of the Shell.

"You are quite sure Glyn has not told you where he intended going?" he asked.

Tom Merry flushed.

"Quite sure, sir!" he said coldly.

"Then—then it is indeed mysterious!" murmured Mr. Linton. "However, as Mr. Railton is now with Dr. Holmes, the incident is closed as far as we are concerned."

There Mr. Linton was mistaken. He might have considered that he now had nothing to do with Bernard Glyn's disappearance as the Head had the matter in hand, but he made a mistake when he said that Tom Merry & Co. also would have nothing to do with the incident.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther thought of nothing else during morning lessons, and when they answered the various questions put to them by their form-master in a far-away manner, then Mr. Linton was right in thinking that the juniors' thoughts were anywhere but in the class-room.

CHAPTER 6.

An Important Discovery.

"B-A-I JOVE!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, made that exclamation in a tone of great surprise.

He had reason to be surprised, for Tom Merry had just finished recounting what had happened since he had found that Bernard Glyn had mysteriously disappeared.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus again. "It's really remarkable!"

"It is," agreed Tom Merry. "Old Glyn is not one of the chaps—the silly asses, I might say—who do a bunk just to cause a sensation. Something's happened to Glyn, you mark my words!"

"But what can have happened, Tommy?" demanded Jack Blake, mystified. "He can't have fallen through the earth!"

"I find him all right," said George Herries. "H Towser—"

"Towser!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Don't you dare to bring that mongrel out when we go looking for old Glyn!"

"Yas, wathah! I must say I agreee with you thab, Tom Mowry," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Towsh is a wotten mongrel!"

"Don't you call my Towser a mongrel!" began Herries hotly.

"Pwat desist, Hewwies! Towsh has no respect whatever for a fellow's trousers, so he must be a mongrel!" interrupted D'Arcy.

"My hat! I'll—"

"You'll shut up!" snapped Jack Blake.

"That's what you'll do. We want something to help us—"

"That's just what I say—Towser's the one to help!" said Herries triumphantly.

"It's a junior we're after, not a herring, Herries!" said Monty Lowther severely. "If Glyn kept a fried-fish shop, Towser might possibly find him."

"Look here——"
"But as a bloodhound Towser is right off the map," wound up Monty Lowther coolly. "Well——"

"I'll bill you, Lowther!"
"Pax, you two!" interposed Tom Merry. "For goodness' sake, let's talk sense!"

"I am," said Monty Lowther cheerfully.

"You're not!" snorted Herries indignantly. "And I'll——"
"Bump 'em outside," said Tom Merry tersely. "This is a serious biz, and we can't afford the time to haggle over Towser and his abilities."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy.
But Lowther and Herries ceased to argue when they saw they stood in eminent danger of getting bumped out of the study.

Tom Merry once more turned to the subject of Glyn's disappearance.
"We know that Glyn went out pretty early this morning, if not last night," he said. "The sheets of his bed were stone cold, as I pointed out to Manners and Lowther. If he'd been between them a short time previously they would have been warm."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I regard that as a very good argument, Tom Merry."
"Good old chum!" Herries chuckled Digby. "You don't happen to know what he was wearing from the fact that the sheets were cold, Tommy?"

"Aas!" said Tom Merry witheringly.
"I really think you should leave this to me, Tom Merry," said Arthur Augustus quietly. "I'm not a fellow to boast, but I regard myself as wathah a good detective."

"Rats!"
"Bai Jove! If you say 'Wats' to me, Tom Merry——"

"I do—I have—I will!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Rats; or, if you like, 'Wats'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Bai Jove——"

"Shoo, Gussy!" said Jack Blake severely. "You pride yourself on being something of a detective, yet you stop investigations while the scent's warm!"

"Rather!" Just wait until I get Towser—— began Herries excitedly.
"I will conduct investigations on my own account," said D'Arcy loftily. "You fellows waste too much time."
"Oh, my hat!" said Tom Merry indignantly. "I like that!"

"Why are you not on the road to——" began D'Arcy severely.

"Rain!" Monty Lowther finished up for him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Bai Jove, Lowthah——"

"Who's wasting time?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not stop to be accused again of wasting time. He snatched up his topper, and hurried from the study in high dudgeon.

"Gussy's on the track!" chuckled Jack Blake.

"About time we were, too," said Tom Merry curtly. "Come on!"

He did not say where he proposed going. It was not until the juniors had turned out of the gates into the roadway that he informed them that he considered the best place to start for was the factory.

"He went there all right," he explained. "Glyn wouldn't go to any old public-house, he's too decent. He went to the factory all right, and something happened there."

"Very likely," admitted Jack Blake.
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy must have also thought of the same thing, for the juniors saw him stopping out at a great rate towards Rylcombe, and not five hundred yards ahead of them.

"Gussy will have solved the mystery by the time we get there, perhaps," said Digby, with a chuckle. "But I say, you chaps, that pass old Raitton gave us has come in pretty useful, hasn't it?"

"Rather!" said Jack Blake. "If ever I go into Parliament, I'm going to introduce a Bill which will compel House-masters to give passes, like the one old Tommy has got now, to all juniors!"
"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Tom Merry. "I should think you'd get it passed!"

None of the juniors had yet even considered that there was a possibility of Bernard Glyn being in dire peril. They

No. 12.—RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW.



Grandson of Lord Reckness, a curious mixture of good and bad. When the bad is predominant, however, he is capable of tricks for which all the decent fellows at the school despise him. He is in every way a remarkable character, and a favorite of all, most likable and popular. Shares Study No. 9 with Levison and Clive.

were so glad to avail themselves of the pass Mr. Raitton had given them, and to miss afternoon classes, they never seriously considered that Glyn could be any thing else but safe and well.

They reached the factory to find that D'Arcy was already scouting round the outside of the building.

He looked round as the juniors approached the works; but, beyond suspecting them to a freezing state, D'Arcy took not the slightest notice of them.

The juniors stopped to gaze with admiring eyes, whilst Arthur Augustus walked from door to door, and window to window, at each of which he peered intently—not through a magnifying-glass, but his monocle.

"He's using his monocle!" roared

Monty Lowther. "Here, Gussy, Sherlock Holmes didn't have a monocle, he had a magnifying-glass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy slipped the offending monocle into his pocket, and turned a flushed and furious face towards the humorist of the Shell.

"Weally, Lowthah, I wish you wouldn't address me," he said cuttingly. "I have no intention of recognising you in futu——"

"Found the giddy kidnappers yet?" asked Lowther cheerfully. "You'd better let us help you, Mr. D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove, Lowthah, if you're wotting again——" began Arthur Augustus angrily.

"Silence, base knave!" said Monty Lowther dramatically. "I know thee not!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Such a scene was a commotion down the lane, and the juniors turned to see George Herries, doing his best to drag Towser, his pet bulldog, to a walk.

But Towser's afternoons out were so few that he resented the strong steel chain that was attached to his collar at one end, and held by his master at the other.

"Hallo! Here comes your bloodhound, Mr. D'Arcy!" said Monty Lowther, with a laugh. "In charge of your merry servant!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Towsy! Good old Towsy!"

Herries could be heard pantingly entreating his pet to walk, but Towser only dragged the harder.

"Dear old Towsy! Stop, you beast! Towser, old man—— Brrr!"

"Talk about mixed love!" chuckled Lowther. "There's a shining example for you!"

The juniors watched George Herries and Towser.

The bulldog did not stop when he came up to the juniors. He darted straight into the gateway leading to the main door of the factory, and where Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was examining the locked door to see if it had been tampered with.

D'Arcy had turned his back upon the humorous Lowther in the most disdainful manner, and took no notice whatever of what the juniors were doing.

The first intimation of the fact that Towser had arrived on the scene was the bulldog's nose rubbing his trousers. D'Arcy looked round and down, and nearly jumped out of his skin.

"Ow! Yow!" he cried. "Take the fearful beast away, Hewwies!"

Herries snorted.

"It seems to me that you know more about Glyn's disappearance than we think!" he growled.

Towser growled, too, and D'Arcy jumped again.

"Grrr!"
"Yow!"

"There you are, you chaps!" shouted Herries excitedly. "Towser never makes a mistake! He's picked out D'Arcy! He's the giddy miscreant!"

Towser rose on his hind legs. Perhaps he wanted D'Arcy to stroke his massive head. But Arthur Augustus took a far more serious view of the matter.

"Yow! I shall be bitten!" he wailed.

"Hewwies, you beast, take your beastly dog away!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The juniors roared with laughter.

"I'm not satisfied——" began Herries firmly.

"Take him off, you ass!" growled Jack Blake. "Glyn is perfectly harmless, and you know it!"

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"Woolly, Blake—"
 "Don't you think it time we set to work?" asked Tom Merry mildly.
 "Yes, come on!" said Jack Blake briskly.

The juniors went into the factory yard, and, at Tom Merry's suggestion, they searched the ground. As he further remarked, they were positive that Bernard Glyn's love of machinery had drawn him to the building so that he could have a look round when all was quiet.

The mere idea that Glyn had broken gates for the sake of an evening's outing in any place out of bounds to the St. Jim's fellows was tabooed.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who found the first clue. He was near the hedge where Bernard Glyn had had the misfortune to kick against a tin when moving away from Carter and Wesson, and here he found footmarks.

Aethic Augustus was bristling with suspicion in a moment.

"Hooh, dear boys!" he cried excitedly.
 "Bai Jove!"

The "dear boys," ran towards the swell of St. Jim's, and gathered round him.

"See there!" said D'Arcy quickly.
 "Bai Jove! Notice the heavish right foot—the left can hardly be seen. Somebody either stood there on one foot, or stumbled, and came down heavily with the right!"

"Gussy's right—for once!" said Lowther excitedly.

"Woolly, Lowther—"
 "That doesn't prove anything!" said Tom Merry, frowning. "We can't say that mark was caused by Glyn. We'd better look about just here—along the wall of the factory, for instance. Glyn might have stood here and watched somebody else."

The juniors ran to the side of the factory, and there, sure enough, they could make out the footmarks of two men, who had apparently walked by the side of the wall.

Moreover, they traced the marks right round the building, losing them only at the well-trodden path from the gate to the main door.

"Looks mighty like dirty work!" said Jack Blake between his teeth. "Two men—Bernard Glyn missing—somebody walking round the building—all jolly suspicious, to my way of thinking!"

"Yass, wathah!" said D'Arcy quickly.
 "But—but that doesn't help us very much!"

"Unfortunately, no!" assented Tom Merry. "But I tell you what we can find out. We'll go inside with Mr. Foy, and see if anything was found to be missing this morning. If not, then I guess we'll have to come out here every night!"

"Every night?" repeated Jack Blake.
 "What on earth for?"
 Tom Merry sighed.

"My dear old top," he said slowly, "can't you see that, if the men were intercepted in their work last night, they will return to finish it?"

"Bai Jove! That's wathah cleavah deduction, dear boy!" said D'Arcy approvingly. "I couldn't do bettah myself!"
 "You couldn't, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther.

D'Arcy ignored that remark.
 "Burglars wouldn't find very much in our factory," said Digby. "I shouldn't dare thought it worth while to risk imprisonment for a few sheets of old iron!"

"Whatever the men were here for, they were not successful last night," said Tom Merry practically. "That's the point we've got to work on!"
 "Yass, wathah, Tom Merry!"
 "Yes, wathah, Tom Merry!"

"Then let's go and see Mr. Foy!" said Horrie.

George Herries still had great hopes that he would be able to show Towser something which would eventually prove to belong to the men, whoever and whatever they were.

Herries had great faith in his canine friend, if nobody else had.

The juniors went into the works, where they found the men working hard. There were a large number of gardening implements already finished and awaiting purchasers.

Mr. Foy came up to them as he saw them come in the works.

"Afternoon, young gentlemen!" he said cheerfully. "As you see, we've already got a goodish bit of work done!"

"Yes, but we've something more serious to speak about!" said Tom Merry hastily. "Is anything being missed to-day, Mr. Foy?"

The manager stared.
 "Goodness me, no!" he exclaimed.

"Why?"
 Tom Merry quickly explained how they had missed Bernard Glyn, and their subsequent discoveries in the factory-yard.

The manager's face depicted first incredulity, and then amazement, as Tom Merry proceeded. "What—what does it all mean, Guss?" he stammered.

"That we have yet to find out!" said Tom Merry tersely. "Look here, Mr. Foy, we're going to keep watch on this place to-night—in fact, we're going to break gates to do it!"

"Dear me! I am amazed!" said Mr. Foy. "We must see the police about it at once!"

"Right!" said Tom Merry sharply. "We'll be here to-night!"

Mr. Foy, with a nod, hurried away to get his jacket, preparatory to going out to interview the police. It was likely that when Tom Merry and the other juniors reached the factory that night they would find there were others present besides themselves.

These being nothing more they could do, Tom Merry & Co. returned to St. Jim's, the only disappointed junior being George Herries, who very much wanted to display the powers of Towser before his chums.

CHAPTER 7.

Bravo, St. Jim's!

"WAKE UP!"

It was Tom Merry who made that remark. It was pitch-dark in the Shell dormitory at St. Jim's, for it was nearly eleven o'clock.

Manners, to whom the remark was addressed, turned over in his bed, but made no effort to get up.

Tom Merry shook him.
 "Come on, Manners!" he whispered.
 "We shall be late!"

"Wharner narner?" mumbled Manners. "Leave it till to-morrow night, Tommy!"

"Get up, you ass!" snapped Tom Merry, in a fierce whisper. "Blake & Co. and Figgis & Co. will be waiting for us!"

Manners muttered something under his breath about being silly asses to get up on a cold night like this, and tumbled out of bed.

Monty Lowther was already awake and dressing when Tom Merry reached his bedside.

"Good!" muttered Tom Merry.
 "Hurry, Monty!"

Five minutes later Tom Merry & Co. were peering down the dark road that led to the main gates of St. Jim's.

There was no sign of either of the other two Co's.

Boom, boom, boom!
 The clock struck eleven, and the deep, rumbling tones of the bell had hardly died away before Tom Merry made out several figures hurrying towards them.

"Against the wall—quick!" he whispered.

The juniors darted to the wall, and pressed themselves back in its shadows.

But it was only Jack Blake & Co. and Figgis & Co. They had met in the quadrangle.

"Blake!" whispered Tom Merry.
 "What-ho!" said Jack Blake, in a low voice. "Brrr! It's cold!"

"Without further ado, the juniors of both Houses stepped out briskly towards Rylcombe.

D'Arcy had brought a cap with him, although Blake had had to use considerable energy to persuade him to leave his topper behind. Fatty Wynn munched sandwiches as they walked along in silence.

"Now I think it's safe to talk!" said Tom Merry at last. "Have you chaps brought any weapons?"

"Yes, I have!" said Monty Lowther. Tom Merry started. He had not seen his chum take up anything to protect himself should occasion arise.

"What did you bring, Monty?" he asked, in surprise. "A cricket-stump?"

"No. My flats!" replied Monty Lowther. "What more does a chap want?"

"Ass!" growled Tom Merry.

The juniors chuckled. Even in the cold Monty Lowther could not resist an opportunity to make a humorous remark of some kind.

"When we get to the factory, you chaps," said Tom Merry, who assumed command of the little party as a matter of course. "Spread out around the building, give the alarm—if there is any cause for one—by crawling towards your nearest neighbour, and touch him twice on the shoulder. Don't speak—your words will be heard, even if you only whisper. They always do in a confined space!"

"But you can't call a factory yard a confined space, Tommy!" said Manners. "You know what I mean. Whispers seem to rebound off the blessed walls!" said Tom Merry. "Anyhow, you know what to do."

"What-ho!" said Digby.
 "I wish I'd brought Towser with me!" said Herries dismally. "He'd have given the alarm all right. A wonderful nose has Towser!"

"Yes, and a wonderful habit of growling when he's not wanted to!" sniffed Jack Blake disdainfully. "Jolly good job for you that Towser isn't here! We'd have sniffed you if he gave the game away!"

"Keep quiet now, you chaps!" said Tom Merry quietly. "We're near the factory."

The juniors saw the wisdom of remaining as silent as possible, and there was no more talking, save for an occasional whisper exchanged here and there.

Tom Merry called a halt some little way from the factory, and went on ahead alone.

He came back to the others in a few moments.

"Nothing doing yet!" he whispered. "Come on, you chaps, and get into the yard!"

The juniors walked quickly and noiselessly towards the factory, and spread themselves out along the hedges beside the wall.

Once Tom Merry tread on a tin, and the resultant clatter seemed loud enough to wake the whole village. Tom Merry felt his way more cautiously after that.

The juniors had been silent nearly ten minutes before there came to their ears

the slight sound of somebody walking some way down the village.

The footsteps grew nearer and nearer, and the juniors' hearts beat fast.

Were the mysterious men coming? Monty Lowther could have shouted with excitement when a bright beam of light fell upon the main door of the building. He got ready to crawl to his nearest neighbour to give the alarm.

But it was only the village constable, as Lowther could see a moment later. The officer's helmet and white metal buttons could be seen in the dim light reflected by the door.

It is to the credit of the juniors that nobody moved, or the alarm must have been given prematurely, with the consequent certainty of spoiling whatever chances they had of capturing the mysterious men.

The village policeman turned away and went back into the village, and the juniors found themselves listening eagerly for every sound of his footsteps. Even that broke the monotony of the watching.

Tom Merry heard someone blowing on his hands, and he frowned anxiously. A movement or sound like that was sufficient to set the alarm.

Suddenly he started, and stared hard at one of the windows.

It appeared to him that he had seen a momentary flash of light. The light had scarcely vanished before he thought he heard a very faint tinkling, as if someone had dropped a tool inside the building.

He hesitated, hardly knowing what to do.

Then he crawled slowly towards his right.

"St. Jim's!" he murmured, so low that he hardly heard his own words.

"Hallo!" came a faint whisper from out of the shadows.

"Who's that?"

"Figgins!"

Tom Merry crawled up to the New House junior.

"Did you see a light on that window a moment ago?" he whispered.

"No. Did you?"

"I—I don't know. I thought I did. Figg!"

"Yes?"

"Could you give me a bunk up, so that I can see in the window?"

"Yes. But pass the word round first, Tommy. The chaps'll rush us if they don't know what we're going to do!"

"Good!"

Tom Merry did not waste time in words. He crawled slowly and noiselessly back, and found that Jack Blake was the first junior he came across.

It was only necessary to warn the juniors who would be likely to see them as they climbed up, and in a moment Jack Blake was told the plan, and was on his way to his neighbour.

Tom Merry crawled back to Figgins, and the two waited a few minutes, giving the other juniors a chance to let their neighbours know what was going to happen.

"Come on, Figg!" said Tom Merry at last.

It was the work of a moment to cross the short space separating the factory from the hedge. Figgins bent down, and Tom Merry clambered on to his back.

Tom Merry raised himself cautiously, and peered into the interior of the building.

For one long minute he stared into the building in silence, and then Figgins heard an ejaculation break from his lips.

"M-m-my only hat!"

Figgins felt like jumping up and peer-

ing in himself. But if he did that Tom Merry must fall.

He had not long to wait to know what was happening inside the factory.

Tom Merry jumped down noiselessly, and clutched Figgins by the shoulders as the New House junior stood up.

"Figg," said Tom Merry, between his teeth, "there are two scoundrels in there, working by the faint light of an ordinary oil-lamp."

"Yes!" said Figgins breathlessly, as Tom Merry passed.

"They've evidently got bonks!"

"My hat!"

"Bombs in all parts of the factory, all fused up and connected to a battery in the centre of the building. It may be a clockwork affair; very likely it is, as they will have to make a run for it themselves to get away!"

"My hat!" said Figgins, in alarm. "Then there's not much chance of saving the place!"

"Isn't there?" said Tom Merry fiercely. "Look here! Gather in the chaps, Figg, and we'll go down the road for a minute to discuss the best thing to do. There's not much time, and don't make a row."

Figgins, in less desperate circumstances, would probably have stopped to argue with Tom Merry on the point of making a row. But Figgins realised that time was valuable, and he went off to do as Tom Merry asked.

Three minutes were taken to get all the juniors under the cover of a hedge just outside the factory, and two more minutes were absorbed by Tom Merry's explanation as to what he had seen.

"So the thing is, what are we going to do?" said Tom Merry when he had finished.

"I suggest rushing them!" said Monty Lowther, in a business-like manner.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No good!" he said. "That would probably lead them to explode some of the bombs and trust to their luck to get away in the confusion. There's going to be some bang, I might tell you, when that little lot goes off!"

"Don't let it go off!" said Herries. "That's the business we've got to stop somehow."

"Yes, but how?"

"Excuse me, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus. "I have a proposition to make."

"Go ahead!" said Tom Merry lightly.

"Well, suppose we wait until the washes come out of the factory," said D'Arcy. "Then rush the scoundrels—at least, some of us wash them, whilst two or three other chaps rush into the factory and smash up the giddy battery!"

Tom Merry nodded in the darkness.

"I get you!" he said quickly. "That's a top-hole stunt, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus loftily. "Trust me to get you out of a beastly mess, dear boy!"

"My hat! You cheeky ass! I'd have thought of it myself in another fifty of a second!" said Tom Merry indignantly.

"Cut the cackle and get to the horses, Tommy!" said Figgins curtly. "While you two are jawing each other's heads off the giddy dynamites are carrying on their rotten work!"

There was sound sense in that remark of Figgins.

"Right you are, old son! I vote we take up Gussy's plan, and collar the scoundrels when they come out," said Tom Merry quickly. "Get ready, you chaps, and I'll bunk inside when they appear, and kick the battery to pieces."

"No, that's my job!" said Jack Blake determinedly.

"Rot!" said Figgins tersely. "That naturally falls to me."

"I must say you're wrong there, Figgins," said Kerr quietly. "I'm the chap to go inside."

Every junior present seemed to think that it was his job to rush inside the building and destroy the battery, or clockwork, and to their credit he stated that they thought only of the danger to the one who did perform the work.

The bombs might go off at any minute—any second—and there would be little hope for anybody inside the building.

But Tom Merry was very firm on the point.

"I'm leader here," he said evenly. "I'm going inside. Don't argue, there's good chaps, because I'm going."

And, knowing Tom Merry as they did, the juniors realised the uselessness of further argument upon the question, and remained silent.

"Then back we go to the factory!" cried Tom Merry. "We'll wait there until the chaps come outside, rush them, I go inside, out goes the battery, and, hey presto! things are all right!"

He led the way back to the factory yard, and the juniors concealed themselves in the yard against the hedges.

Tom Merry was quite prepared for a long, weary, and cold wait. But he was greatly mistaken.

The juniors had hardly time enough to get into the shadows before they saw the door open an inch. Fascinated, they watched it whilst it moved, very slowly, until a head was poked round the corner.

For a full minute a man peered into the darkness, and then, seemingly satisfied, he turned his head, and nodded. The next moment the door was opened another yard, and two men came out into the open.

Breathless with excitement, the juniors watched, instinctively waiting for Tom Merry to give the word to rush.

Tom Merry waited until the door had been partially closed, and the two men were a few yards away, then he gave the word.

"Rush 'em!" he shouted.

The men turned, gasping with surprise and fright.

"Heavens!" said one, and he made a dash for liberty.

But the juniors were on them like a pack of hounds, bearing them to earth in one powerful rush.

Tom Merry did not stop to see how matters were going outside the building. He knew he could safely leave that to the juniors.

He dashed into the building, and paused, staggered to find that there was no light.

Where was the battery?

Furiously he tried to calm himself to think.

Tick, tick, tick!

There it was, the sound of the clockwork that would reach its appointed time any second. Tom Merry heard it, and the cold perspiration rolled down his brow at the realisation of his terrible danger.

He ran in the direction of the ticking, but it seemed to his frantic mind that it was eluding him, was running away from him. Never did he seem to get near it. It was always yards and yards away, where, he could not see.

"Oh, heavens!" he gasped.

"Run—run for your lives!" he heard someone shout, in tones that rose to a shriek.

Tom Merry turned. He instinctively decided to obey the summons from the unknown voice.

But—

Suddenly he stumbled as he walked aimlessly between the machines.

He fell to his knees, and his outflung hands touched something. Feverishly he felt over it. It was a box, from which he could feel wires stretching in all directions.

With a gasp Tom Merry rose to his feet, and the next second his boot-heel was dashed with all his strength into the midst of the wires.

At the same moment there was a blinding flash from the far end of the factory, a terrible roar, something seemed to leap up at his head, and Tom Merry collapsed to the floor of the building, insensible to everything.

Outside the factory, the struggle with the men was sharp and of short duration. The juniors were all too many for the scoundrels, and in a very few moments they found themselves under the weight of two or more juniors.

It was then that Carter had shrieked for them to run for their lives, the shriek that Tom Merry had heard.

Jack Blake and Figgins, seeing that their help was no longer needed, rose to their feet, and dashed simultaneously for the interior of the factory.

They had not stepped five yards inside, when the blinding flash and the dull roar of the explosion filled the air.

They were swept off their feet by the concussion, and for a moment lay there, unable to grasp what had happened, or what was happening.

"Tommy!" cried Figgins, in a tremulous voice.

There was no answer.
"The place is on fire, at the end, Figgs!" shouted Jack Blake. "Tell the chaps, I'll hunt for Tom Merry!"

Figgins dashed away, and Jack Blake stumbled blindly forward in the hope of finding Tom Merry.

There was, indeed, a fire at the end of the factory, and it was the red glow from the flames that enabled Jack Blake to find Tom Merry.

Although weak with the intense excitement and the effect of the explosion, Jack Blake picked up Tom Merry as if he had been a sack of flour, and staggered towards the main door.

He passed out, with a gasp of relief, into the open air, and laid Tom Merry by the gateway, not six yards from where the two scoundrels were lying.

"Got him?"
It was Manners who called out, and there was a wealth of anxiety in his tones.

"Yes, he's knocked out!" gasped Blake. "And I'm jolly near done!"

"Stop where you are!" said Manners. "Herries and I have about knocked the breath out of this rascal. Dig and Cussy have got the other rotter."

Blake did not answer. The reaction had set in, and he felt more like fainting than he ever had done in his life.

But he was able to grasp the fact that Figgins & Co. were fighting the flames at the back.

The noise of the explosion had awakened the village, and in a very few minutes men, women, and children began to arrive. Many carried lanterns, and as the men saw that the juniors were holding down two men they did not stop to ask questions, they leant a hand.

"I'll keep this one!" said a burly man who worked in the factory.

"Get the fire out, please!" cried Lowther.

"P'wag, hold this wascal!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally must see if my friend Blake is all wight!"

"Good old Gussy!" murmured Jack Blake, and raised his voice. "I'm O.K., Gussy!"

"Wipping!" replied D'Arcy. "I thought, pewwaps—"
D'Arcy did not finish that sentence. Perhaps he dared not say what he had thought about.

Tom Merry was carried to the nearest cottage, and with him went Blake.

The two men—Carter and Wesson—were escorted to the police cells by enough men to eat them should they attempt to escape. They did not speak.

Meanwhile, Figgins & Co. had worked like fury against the flames, and when help came they soon got the fire under control. Not so much damage had been done as Figgins expected.

But as he shuddered when he thought of what would have happened if the whole lot of bombs had exploded.

Half an hour later the fire was extinguished. The villagers returned to their beds, only a few knowing what had actually happened, and what a terrible catastrophe had been averted by the juniors of St. Jim's.

"We'd better get back to St. Jim's, I think," said Figgins. "We shall be found out, of course, but I'm blessed if I care!"

"What about Tom Merry?" asked Lowther anxiously.

"Well, suppose you two go and find out what's happening to him and Blake, and we'll go back. I think we shall find half the school on the road to Rylecombe."

Figgins was right.
On the way back to St. Jim's they met a party of St. Jim's fellows, led by Mr. Railton, proceeding at a trot towards Rylecombe.

They stopped when they saw the St. Jim's juniors, and Figgins related the extraordinary incidents that had occurred. Nobody spoke whilst he was talking, everyone was literally hanging on to every word.

"Then we can do nothing," said Mr. Railton, when Figgins had finished. "You juniors must hurry back to bed.

There will be time enough to go further into the matter to-morrow!"

The St. Jim's fellows had heard enough to acquaint them with the fact that the three Co.'s had done well that night, and as they turned towards the school they gave vent to their enthusiasm in loud shouts of delight.

"Bravo, St. Jim's!"

"For they're jolly good fellows!"

Somebody started the song, and it was kept up until they reached St. Jim's, one cheering, singing mass.

The fellows went to bed, and Mr. Railton went to the Head to inform him of what had happened.

Tom Merry was back at the school early the next morning, and with him was Bernard Glyn. The address of Carter and Wesson had been secured, and there Glyn was found, gagged, and bound.

Neither of the juniors was much the worse for their experiences, Tom Merry coming through with the fattest head he'd ever had in his life, as he expressed it.

Carter and Wesson were never heard of again by St. Jim's. Nobody knew their fate.

Of course, Dr. Holmes decided that something must be done for the St. Jim's Agricultural Implement Company. The juniors of St. Jim's could not continue to be allowed a pass out every afternoon.

The present was a suitable time to fix matters up in his opinion, and with the aid of Mr. Glyn, business was so arranged that every employee in the factory had a share in the profits.

Not one of the juniors were punished for breaking gates, not even Bernard Glyn, when he candidly confessed that his one desire was to see how everything worked in the factory. Perhaps Glyn escaped because it was his disappearance which ultimately led to the undoing of Carter and Wesson.

Some time later there was a tremendous feed held in honour of the juniors, a feed at which even Patty Wynn found there was too much!

And it was the ex-service men who held the feed. They were grateful for all that had been done for them.

Three cheers were given with a right good will—three cheers for the School-boy Employers—and it was a happy band of juniors who made their way back to St. Jim's that night—tired, but wonderfully happy that everything had turned out so well!

THE END.

(Another long complete story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's entitled — "THE LOVE-LORN GRUNDY!" Next week.)



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THOSE TWO MINUTES.

I am writing these few lines at the time everybody is thinking of those two minutes during which all work ceased in honour of the glorious battalions which have marched on, never more to be seen by us.

It is the sort of subject one hardly likes to talk about much, though it put into a form of action something concerning which we all of us often do think. Memory is very keen in association with the good friends who left their work, their play, their home, and all that was, humanly speaking, dear to the heart, in response to the call. And who shall say but that the old route to the West is not made golden by the very thought of those who have passed that way? The friend who was so good at cricket; the man one looks for at the club—in vain; the comrade who could keep a table in a roar.

But it seems to me we ought to keep those two minutes as a sort of national and racial property. It would be a good little spell of time to bring into play before some personal quarrel was made absolute and irrevocable by a cutting insult. Those British two minutes! It would mean giving the other fellow a chance to explain away a misunderstanding. These would be real gratitudo atrewards.

But I am afraid this humble little paragraph is getting the semblance of a homily, and that kind of thing would be out of place on the Chat page.

A WHOLE CROWD OF THINGS.

There are echoes which come to my room from all over the world—letters which prove finally that there is far more imagination knocking round than some would think. The coming generation is something to marvel at and be cheery over.

Do I sleep, do I dream, or is visions about?
Is civilisation a failure, or is the Caucasian played out?

Well, if Brief Haite was in doubt, nobody need be so any longer. The cross-grained folk are heard saying the world belongs to the young. They make this remark enviously. But there isn't any reason why the world should not be in such safe ownership. Neither the Caucasian nor civilisation need be in any fear for their safety while there are such youngsters as we have now—brilliant and brainy fellows and girls, able to see what is going forward, and why.

They also understand how to push things on when the pace is slow. If some of the oldests feel that their time has come to retire, they had better give place to the younger generation. The latter will take office in kind all right. I get enough common-sense, dry wit, keen observation, and friendliness

hurled into my office every day of the week, via the mail-bags, to equip a regiment of political thinkers.

It is a pleasure to refer to this. Sometimes I give the disgruntled grouser a run for his money in this page, but that is only by the way. The grouser is in the minority. The appreciative reader is thousands strong.

Good luck to him! He offers bright ideas. He criticises, but in the comfortable, helpful spirit. That is the kind of criticism I want. For what these good-natured correspondents see crystal clear is that the characters are lifelike. Oh, they are! We will take it as read—just as the "Gem" is read.

Now, if genuine human nature is put down on the printed page, you have got the essence of everything. You may say this character or that is distasteful to you, but anyway he is real. Mr. Martin Clifford writes about humanity. That's why his yarns have been read by millions, because though a purely fanciful tale may get a certain popularity for a time, the lying soon fades. But nobody ever grows weary of human nature, for human nature is himself, and people like reading about themselves.

I do admire my correspondents, though sometimes I get a face in the shape of a query which is baffling, or the sort of question one hates to answer because it means a lump of chagrin to the questioner.

WHAT ABERDEEN THINKS.

A correspondent in the Granite City— one calls Aberdeen this, and I hope the noble Aberdonians do not object—thinks that Tom Merry ought to have a more decided role. He is neither a hero nor a villain.

Just think of that! But it is the way with the majority of people to be neither heroes nor villains. And yet there are occasions when Merry has played a hero's part.

Personally, I would rather characters were not labelled in this way, but it is all according to taste. Then Merry Lowther is all right except that he is always making rotten puns! Still, this is quite all right. Some people like puns, some do not; but in the main Aberdeen goes solid for the Companion Papers, and for this bright news, and for his letter generally. I thank my friend in the canny North.

A FRIENDSHIP CLUB.

It has been suggested to me that such a club might be started in connection with one or other of the Companion Papers, and the idea strikes a pleasing, homely note, though, as a matter of fact, all the supporters of the papers form a club as things are. It is a club of mutual interests. There are no tickets of membership other than a copy of one of the weeklies, and I am not at all sure we can improve on this plan.

For two "Magnet" readers meet and find they have an interest in common, as with readers of the "Boys' Friend," the "Gem," the "Penny Popular," the "Chuckles," the "Greyfriars Herald," or the "Holiday Annual." But I should like to know what my chums think. Is a Friendship Club likely to be popular?

A FRANK OPINION.

A Girl Guide says the "Gem" is the best book that ever was published, and, what is more, the best that ever will be published. Reginald Talbot is her favourite.

He walks, as all athletes, with easy strides,
And under a bushel his light he hides;
He had a dark and dreary past,
But of that we've seen the last.

That's how my girl correspondent puts things, and I think her opinion is good, for she has read all the stories, and knows each character thoroughly.

"Potty" is the word, in her view, for those who run down Cardew. But there it is. Let's hope that differences of opinion will never alter friendship. Cardew's sarcasm will inevitably annoy some people.

"INTELLECTUS, BELFAST."

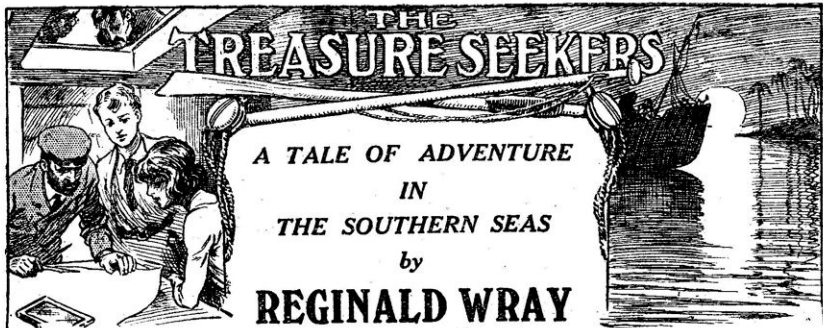
No, it is not a telegraphic address, but the non-de-plume of a correspondent who considers that a single flogging is insufficient for Bunter's theft of several pounds. He also thinks that to tell the literal truth in order to convey a false impression is bad. So do the rest of us.

The same correspondent thinks that Johnny Bull should have had scruples about betting five bob with Skinner, and there are several other points which, taken on the broad issue, are so right that there is nothing more to be said. But this critic will see plainly enough that things are often done to give reality to the yarns. There are slips among the best.

I doubt if the characters in the tales would go home so well, and convalesc folk, if there never happened to be a false move. "Intellectus" has chosen a name which fits his fine letter.

He has high praise for the "Greyfriars Herald," and he wants a bottle of ginger ale in his tuck hamper so that he may drink to the Companion Papers. I am sure he will do that, tuck hamper or not, and I certainly hope I am the man he imagines me to be.

Your Editor



SYNOPSIS.

Dick Danby, a stalwart lad of sixteen, obtains the promise of partnership from Captain Morgan Kidd, skipper of the auxiliary schooner Foam, and his daughter Stella, in a treasure cruise to the wrecked Pathan. Dick is the sole survivor of the Pathan, which was torpedoed, and is lying, half-submerged, off an island in the South Seas. In the strong-room of the ill-fated ship is two million sterling in bar-gold and money, and the Dragon's Eye—a wonderful diamond.

Otto Schwab, posing as a Dutchman—though in reality the commander of the U-boat which sank the Pathan—and Sulah Mendoza, a villainous Malay, are their unscrupulous rivals for the treasure.

Harry Fielding and Joe Maddox join the expedition, also Wang Su, a Chinese boy. They reach the island off which the Pathan is sunk, and a fierce encounter with the Red Rover takes place, in which our friends are victorious. Later, Dick and Stella go for a swim round the island. During their absence from the ship a cyclone approaches, and the Foam has to leave them and make for safety.

The Red Rover is sighted, and later Stella and Dick hear the sounds of firing. They return to the Foam, and find that Captain Kidd has been slightly wounded.

That night Wang Su visits the Islanders' Temple, with the head of their Snake god drawn over him. The Islanders flee from him in fright, and he is left master of the village.

(Now read on.)

Wang Su's Return.

WANG SU was delighted at the success of his visit, though it had not panned out exactly as he had thought.

In fact, his idea had been to steal unperceived into the village, only donning the feathered mask in case he was detected.

His delight was turned to dismay as the door of the Guest House was thrown hastily open, and Otto Schwab, Mendoza, and a crowd of Malays, armed with rifles, rushed out.

Clinging to the German, the priest pointed with trembling hand at the fearful apparition which had so alarmed him.

The next moment the Chinaman was gazing at a line of levelled rifles pointed straight at him.

It is doubtful if Wang Su had ever even heard of the Zulus, certainly he had never heard their war chant.

Yet great minds often think alike, and as he gazed down the threatening muzzles of the rifles he thought:

"Wang gooe folward. Wang dies!"

Wang gooe backward, Wang dies!
Wang gooe folward!"

Emitting a loud, sepulchral howl, the brave little Chinaman moved towards the Malays and their European companions.

"Wang dies! Pool Wang!" thought the Chinaman as spears of flame shot out of the muzzles of the rifles.

But the bullets whistled harmlessly over his head, and the next moment the superstitious Malays fled back to the Guest House, carrying the German and the Portuguese with them.

Cries of dismay from the huts proclaimed that the islanders had witnessed the—to them—miraculous escape of their god, and howls of rage and shouts of vengeance arose against the men who had dared to fire on their miraculously-returned deity.

Delighted at his unexpected escape, Wang Su strolled slowly to a plantation of cocoanut-palms, intending to plunge into its deep shadows, and thus reach the temple.

Nor did he quicken his steps when the deep, sullen report of a service revolver heralded a bullet that struck the ground by his side.

On the contrary, he came to an abrupt halt, and, turning round, shuffled straight to where Otto Schwab was standing outside the door of the Guest House, taking pot shots at him, with a revolver.

Twice more did Otto Schwab fire at the feathered snake-head within which Wang Su was concealed.

But anger, fear, or perhaps the uncertain light caused him to miss his mark, and ere he could fire a fourth shot a volley of spears from the adjacent huts warned him that he was making himself unpopular with the islanders by taking liberties with their lord, the Snake god.

Dropping his pistol, the German disappeared inside the building, and Wang Su, acknowledging the services of his worshippers with more or less stately inclinations of his head, or, rather, the serpent's, walked slowly towards the temple.

The patterning of many feet in his rear warned him that he was being followed.

As this was the last thing in the world he desired, he turned swiftly round, and with low moans and fearful hissings drove the superstitious natives back.

Once more he commenced his slow retreat to the temple.

A score yards or so from its doors he uttered an ejaculation of annoyance, for he had stepped into a shallow stream that ran from a crack in the rock alongside the temple doors towards the rear of the village.

The savages saw the fall of their god with cries of dismay, changed to shouts of delight as it stood upright once more, though only its head and a portion of its neck could be seen.

For a moment it stood facing them, then sank gradually lower and lower until at last it disappeared entirely.

For a few minutes they hesitated, then crept to the river, the priests leading the way, and all prepared to run for their lives if their god resented the intrusion.

Great was their amazement on reaching the river to find no trace of the Snake god.

Immediately they fell to discussing, as only excited South Sea Islanders can, this further proof of their deity's wondrous powers.

None thought to look towards the temple, or they might have seen the astounding sight of a half-naked Chinaman, a limp mass of gaudy feathers under his arm, disappear beneath the stone portico.

Needless to say, it was Wang Su, who, having lowered his weird mask by crouching in the stream until it was lower than the bank, had followed the course of the stream to the precipice, in the shadow of which he had gained his goal.

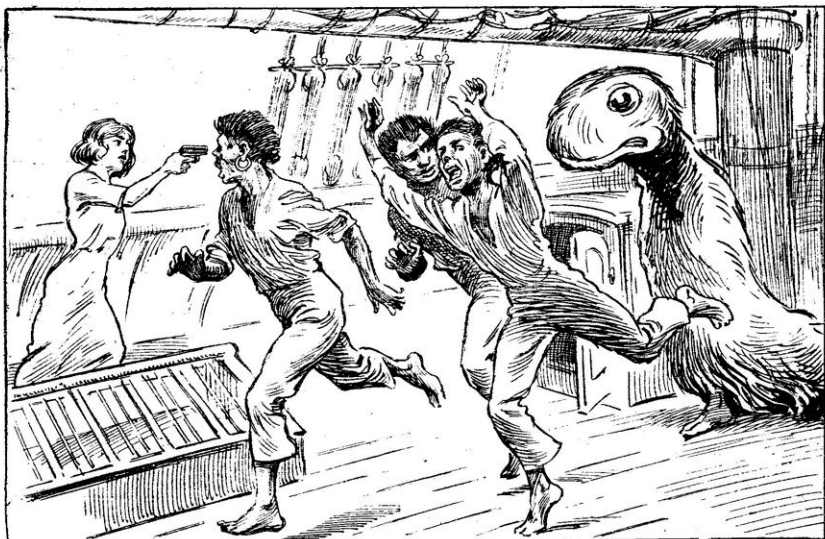
An hour later, the Kanakas, sleeping in a huddled heap in the bow of the good ship Foam, awoke to find a fearful, large-eyed, green monster, its huge jaws agape, rising slowly above the bulwarks.

Howling with terror, they fled aft, the grisly monster close behind them, until Stella sprang from the mattress on which she had been sleeping, an automatic pistol pointed at the astonishing apparition.

Taking rapid aim she fired at the monster's head.

Fortunately, she recognised the weird souvenir in time, and jerked the muzzle of her pistol up.

For the moment she thought she had been too late. A frantic yell came from within the mass of feathers as it sprawled on the deck, writhing about as though in its death agonies, until, first, a pair of skinny legs, then blue nankeen shorts, and, finally, a yellow body, ending in a



Howling with terror, the Kanakas fled aft, the grisly monster close behind them. Stella sprang from the mattress, an automatic pistol in her hand, and taking rapid aim, she fired at the monster's head. (See Page 18.)

very frightened, almond-eyed face, emerged, and Wang Su stood revealed. "No shootee—no shootee! Mis onlee makee funn!" whimpered the Chinaman. "Fun—fun!" Scythes and scimitars! "I'll makee funn!" roared a deep voice behind Stella, as Captain Kidd, aroused by the yells of the startled seamen, hurried from below.

It needed but a single glance to take in the supplicating Chinaman, and the feathered mask, to tell him what had happened.

Seizing Wang Su by the neck with his uninjured hand, he tucked the culprit's head between his knees, and smacked him long and lustily.

"There, you imp of yellow mischief, that'll teach you not to come aboard the Foam scaring the lives well-nigh out of those white-livered Kanakas of mine!" he cried, releasing the squirming Chinaman, who dropped heavily to the deck, but only to spring up with a yell.

"Oh, he! Me vellee sole! Chinaman! Pool Wang sittee down nevel no mole!" he gasped, dancing about the deck.

"Serve you right!" growled the skipper.

"Do you mean to say, Wang, you swam all the way across the lagoon, and risked the sharks, on purpose to play a stupid practical joke on the Kanakas?" asked Stella, who had a shrewd suspicion that the Chinaman would never have taken all that trouble for nothing.

Wang Su pouted like an angry child. "Me no telle!" he declared sulkily.

"What won't you tell us, Wang?" asked the girl, with a warning glance at her father, who showed symptoms of taking the matter into his own hands.

"Me no telle dat Schwab, Mendoza, and the Malays all makee big friends with islanders," replied Wang Su.

Stella laughed merrily at the way she

had trapped Wang Su into disclosing his supposed secret.

But the Chinaman only smiled. The fact is, he was a thorough little sport, and, having had his fun out of the Kanakas, and paid the price, he was quite willing to let bygones be bygones.

Seated on the cushion which had formed Stella's pillow, he proceeded to give so quaint a description of his adventures on the island that soon, despite the gravity of the news, both Captain Kidd and his beautiful daughter were roaring with laughter.

Even the Kanakas forgot their resentment at Wang Su's trick, whilst they indulged their natural love of laughter to their heart's content.

But when Wang had brought his tale to a conclusion Captain Kidd and his daughter anxiously discussed what they had just heard.

To a certain extent they were in more peril from their foes than before the Red Rover had been driven on the rocks.

Then, so long as they could keep the Malays off with the quickfrier, and prevent them running alongside, they had the advantage.

Now, they might at any time be attacked by a fleet of war canoes. These might not have proved very formidable so long as they had only the primitive weapons of the savages to dread; but now, backed up by the rifles of the Malays, they might well prove very dangerous foes.

"Get back to the cave, Wang, and tell Master Dick what you have told us. Tell him to get to work on the wreck as quick as he can, and be ready to clear the Chair Rock and hide in the caves at the first shot from the Bull Pup!" commanded the skipper, shortly afterwards.

The Chinaman nodded, and, tying the head of the Snake god round his neck,

plunged overboard, and swam to the reef, unharmed by sharks or by any other prowling monster of the deep.

The Last of the Giant Lobster.

BEFORE daylight the following morning Wang Su, who seemed endowed with the gift of doing without sleep, had prepared breakfast, and had ruthlessly awakened the three white boys.

"Why this unwanted energy, O my Chinese friend?" demanded Harry Fielding, as, rubbing the sleep from their eyes, the three chums gathered round Wang Su's fire.

"Cap'n's ordels!" replied Wang, as he poured the steaming coffee into four tin cups, and handed them round.

"First I've heard of them, and I saw him last!" mumbled Dick Danby, with his mouth full of baked yam.

Wang Su shook his head with the vigour he always placed into that notion of dissent.

"Wang see skipper last nightee," he announced.

"Wang been at wiskee bottlee," mocked Joe Maddox.

"Tluth!" insisted the Chinaman, nodding his head as vigorously as he had shaken it a moment before.

Dick Danby seized the Chinaman's pig-tail, and hung on to it as he cried:

"Keep that yellow head of yours still, and tell us what you mean!"

"Wang see Gelman lottel Schwabs! Wang see Poltugee lottel Mendoza. Wang see one, two, dozen Malay lottels last night!" he declared.

"Where?" demanded the three boys simultaneously.

For answer the Chinaman jerked his

thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the Island.

Dick was so astounded that he let Wang's pistol go, and allowed the Chinaman to scramble out of reach.

"What Wang Su gotee hele?" demanded the Chinaman, tapping his forehead.

Dick suggested chewed paper, Harry boiled turnips, and Joe water.

"Whoz, allee ylong! Blains! Muehee

blains! Mole blains than allee white boys evel boln!" announced Wang complacently.

Then, as the boys looked about for stones with which to avenge this insult to the whole white race, Wang Su squatted on a rock and related his adventures, winding up with Captain Kidd's message.

"Phew!" whistled Harry Fielding. "It looks as though we were in for trouble, and plenty of it."

"That's so," agreed Dick. "And as the sky is beginning to turn grey above our heads I vote we get to work."

Throwing off all their clothes, except the shorts which they wore in lieu of bathing costumes, the three boys plunged through the submerged tunnel, and swam to the Chair Rock.

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