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THE GEM

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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A NOVEL LONG COMPLETE STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO.—

The Schoolboy Airmen

by MARTIN CLIFFORD

CHAPTER 1.

Baggy's Wheeze!

"I SAY, you chaps——"
 "Buzz off, Baggy!"
 "Oh, really, Blake old chap——"
 "Seat!"

Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, snorted an indignant snort.

Baggy had just put his head in at the door of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage. Jack Blake, the leader of the Fourth, was busy in the study with his prep; so were Herries and Digby and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's. The four were seated round the table with their books before them, and pens in their hands—and it was quite clear from the reception he had received that Baggy was not welcome!

"Shut the door behind you, Baggy," suggested Digby, glancing up from his Latin grammar.

"Rats!" snorted Baggy wrathfully. "Listen to me——"

"Pway cleah off, Twimble!" snapped Arthur Augustus.

"Can't you see we are busy with our pwep?"

"Look here, Gussy——"

"Wats!"

Baggy glared at the swell of St. Jim's, and rolled obstinately into the study. He was clutching a newspaper in his fat hand. With a podgy forefinger he impressively tapped it.

"I've been reading this——"

"You can read, then?" queried Herries, in apparent surprise.

"Ass!" hooted Baggy.

"Listen to this——"

Blake rose to his feet, and picked up a cricket-stump that had been leaning up in a corner.

"Seat!" roared Blake, brandishing the cricket-stump warningly. "Hop it! Make a noise like a hoop and bowl away! We're busy, porpoise!"

"Look here," bawled Baggy wrathfully, "you might listen to a chap! I've got a wheeze to get the Head to give the school an extra half-holiday. I—— Yaroooop!"

Baggy's rather surprising explanation for his visit to Study No. 6 came a fraction too late! Already Blake had hurled the cricket-stump. It caught Baggy amidships, and the Falstaff of the Fourth collapsed backwards into the passage with a wild yell.

"Oh! Yoooop!"

Baggy sat dazedly in the passage on the hard, unsympathetic linoleum, and roared.

Herries and Digby roared, too—with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries jumped up to slam the door upon Baggy. But Blake stepped quickly forward.

"Half a jiff!" he exclaimed. "What was that the fat ass said about an extra half?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his celebrated monocle and fixed a gleaming eye upon the breathless, sprawling figure of Baggy Trimble.

"What were you sayin' about an extwah half, Twimble?" demanded the swell of St. Jim's curiously.

"Ow! Grocooh!"

Blake, grinning, stepped out into the passage and yanked Baggy to his feet.

"Out with it, porpoise!" urged Blake, propelling the breathless Baggy into the study. "What was that about the Head giving an extra half?"

Baggy rubbed his waistcoat at the point where the end of the cricket-stump had landed, and glared at the leader of the Fourth, with feelings almost too deep for words.

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"Oh! Grocooh! Beast, Blake! I'm hurt!"
 "Oh, rats!" grinned Blake. "Nothing could hurt you, old fat man—you're too armour-plated with fat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!" Baggy sniffed wrathfully. "I tell you I'm hurt! My back's broken in two places, I think——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway do not be an uttah ass, Twimble," said Arthur Augustus severely. "We want to know what you were sayin' about an extwah half-holiday——"

"Think I'll tell you now?" roared Baggy. "Yah! I shan't tell you, so there! Beasts! Rotters!"

With a glare and a snort, Baggy turned to stamp sulkily from the study. But Blake caught his fat shoulder in a grip of steel.

"Out with it, Baggy!" grinned Blake. "You're not going to come here and tantalise us with jaw about an extra half, and then buzz off without explaining! If you don't buck up and tell us about it you'll get bumped! See?"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Herries heartily.

Baggy snorted. But he did not mean to risk being bumped by the cheery quartet who occupied Study No. 6; and besides, he was very eager to tell his wonderful wheeze.

"Well, don't be so jolly quick to chuck things!" grumbled Baggy. "It's like this——"

He broke off to gather up the fallen sheets of his newspaper. His eyes were gleaming excitedly as he turned again to Blake & Co., who were eyeing him curiously.

It was quite clear to them that Baggy had some tremendous idea.

The chances were that it was some ridiculous idea—but there was a chance that it might be a sensible

one, if only by way of a change from the usual run of Baggy's wheezes. In any case, extra half-holidays were rare enough at St. Jim's for the juniors to feel interested in even the faintest possibility of one!

Baggy tapped the newspaper eagerly with a fat forefinger. A greasy grin had appeared on his fat countenance.

"Now will you listen, you asses?" exclaimed Baggy.

"Just take a look at this!"

He held out the newspaper. The paragraph he was indicating with his podgy finger was headed, in thick type:

"LONE AIRMAN'S GREAT FEAT! RECORD FLIGHT TO AUSTRALIA!"

"There you are!" hooted Baggy excitedly. "What about that?"

Blake took the paper wonderingly from Baggy's hand. As he scanned the paragraph, his bewilderment grew. It gave a long account, apparently, of a record England-Australia flight made by a young airman named France. It had been a splendid feat; but what it had to do with Dr. Holmes, the headmaster of St. Jim's, granting an extra half-holiday to the school was a mystery!

"What the thump——" ejaculated Herries.

"Bai Jove! Are you twyin' to pull our legs, Twimble?" demanded Arthur Augustus severely. "I weally fail to understand——"

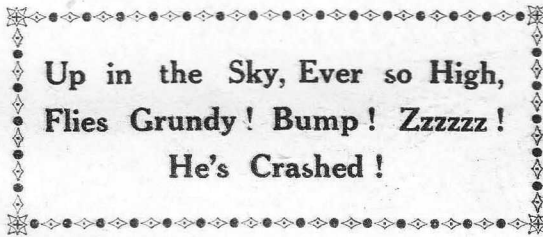
Blake tapped his head sadly.

"Poor old Baggy!" he murmured. "I've seen this coming for a long time, mind you. I think his nurse must have dropped something on his head when he was very young. Well, it's come at last. He's raving!"

"P'r'aps it's fatty degeneration of the brain," suggested Dig. "I believe there is such a thing——"

"Why, you—you burbling asses!" hooted Baggy.

He glared round at Blake & Co., crimson with indignation.



—THE POPULAR CHUMS AT ST. JIM'S!

"Weally, Twimble, I uttahn wefuse to be addresssed as a burblin' ass——"

"You silly chumps!" Baggy was almost dancing with exasperation. "Don't you see? That chap Prance is an old St. Jim's chap! He was captain of St. Jim's once, years ago—his name's up in the list in Big Hall——"

"Bai Jove!"

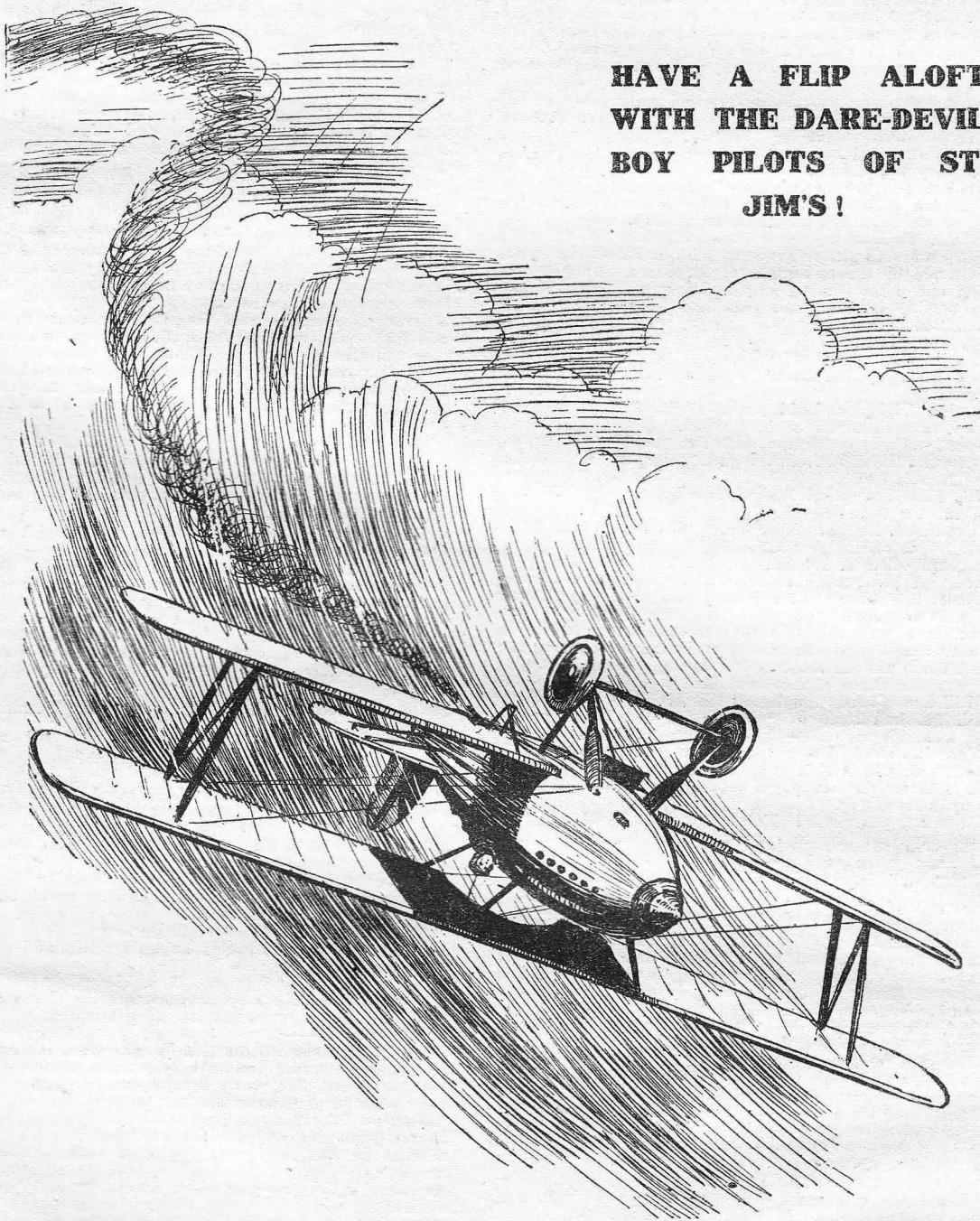
"Blessed if Baggy hasn't got glimmerings of sense, after all!" ejaculated Herries.

"Oh, really, Herries——"

"Not quite such a fool as he looks," agreed Dig. "But then, of course, he couldn't be quite such a fool as all that——"

"Oh, really, Dig——"

HAVE A FLIP ALOFT WITH THE DARE-DEVIL BOY PILOTS OF ST. JIM'S!



"My hat!"

The light of understanding had leapt into the faces of Blake, Herries, Dig, and Arthur Augustus. Now they understood!

"And his father's one of the school governors!" went on Baggy eagerly, forgetting his exasperation in his excitement over his great wheeze. "Sir Rollo Prance—he lives near Wayland, too, so Taggles was telling me! I jolly well think the Head ought to give an extra half in honour of this giddy flight, so there!"

Baggy broke off, breathless. Blake & Co. stared at one another with gleaming eyes.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his gleaming monocle.

"Baggy, deah boy, it is a wippin' wheeze! I considah that the Head should be wequested at once to awwange for an extwah half-holiday in honah of this gweat event! As a fellow of tact and judgment, I am willin' to put the mattah before the Head myself, deah boys——"

"Rats!" grinned Blake. "You'd make a muck of it, Gussy, and more likely get a half taken away than given us!"

"Bai Jove! Pway do not be an uttahn ass, Blake. I considah——"

"Br-r-r!"

"Look heah, Blake—"

"Oh, do ring off, Gussy!" Blake turned to Baggy, and thumped the Falstaff of the Fourth on the back with such force that Baggy almost collapsed: "Good old Baggy! It's a great scheme, this! I'd never have thought you had it in you!"

"Ow!" Baggy retreated hastily, out of range of any further enthusiastic thumps from the leader of the Fourth. "You silly ass, you've jolly nearly busted my spine!" He rubbed his back indignantly. But a moment later a fat grin appeared once more on his greasy countenance. "Yes, I'm the chap for ideas! Brains, you know—that's what I've got."

"Of course, the great thing is to tackle the Head in the right way," put in Herries eagerly. "He's not too keen on dishing out extra halves—"

"As a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy!"

"Look heah, you boundah—"

A sudden exclamation from Blake broke in upon the wrathful words of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Blake had picked up the newspaper again, and taken it to the window to glance again at the account of the great flight made by the ex-captain of St. Jim's. But he was staring out of the window now, and it was evidently something outside in the quad that had brought the quick exclamation to his lips.

"My hat! Look!"

"What's up?" asked Herries.

"It's him!" yelled Blake, with more excitement than grammar.

Herries, Digby, and the swell of St. Jim's, decidedly puzzled, hurried across to the window.

A portly elderly gentleman, with a large white moustache, was crossing the quad from the gates, going in the direction of the Head's house.

"It's him!" repeated Blake excitedly.

"What the thump—"

Blake thrust the newspaper under his chum's eyes.

The article on the Australian flight was illustrated by a photograph—that of the young airman's father, Sir Rollo Prance. A photograph of the airman himself not being available, the Editor had evidently had to satisfy himself with that as second best.

And there was no doubt that the gentleman with the large moustache who was at that very moment crossing the quad outside was the subject of the newspaper photograph.

It was Sir Rollo Prance himself!

"Well I'm blowed!" muttered Herries.

"I'll bet he's come over to see the Head and swank about what his son's done!" cried Blake breathlessly.

"Yaas, wathah! The old boy looks pvetty pleased with himself," nodded Arthur Augustus sagely.

Blake threw the newspaper down, and turned gleaming eyes upon his chums.

"Come on, you chaps! Now's our chance! We'll tackle the old boy—get him to suggest to the Head about that extra half!"

"Bai Jove—"

"Rather!"

With excited faces, Blake, Herries, and Digby dived for the door, followed by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Baggy was in the way, and before he could get out of it Herries had cannoned into him, and for a second time that evening Baggy Trimble went flying out backwards through the doorway of Study No. 6, and collapsed with a gasp and a yell on the linoleum outside.

"Oh! Yaroooooop!"

Baggy sat up, dazed and panting.

"Grooooh! Oh, you rotters! Cads! Yah! I'm hurt!"

But Baggy's indignant protests fell upon the desert air, so to speak. Already the four chums of Study No. 6 had vanished along the passage—off to tackle Sir Rollo!

CHAPTER 2.

The Wheeze that Failed!

"WHAT the dickens—"

"What the thump—"

Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, and his two chums, Manners and Lowther, were strolling past the end of the Fourth Form passage as Blake & Co. raced round the corner; and the Terrible Three stopped and stared at the excited faces of the chums of Study No. 6.

"What's all the giddy hurry?" ejaculated Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"No time to explain now, deah boys—"

"Rats! We'll tell 'em!" gasped Blake, halting breathlessly. "They can come along, too!"

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It had occurred to Blake that this was a case of "the more the merrier!" With Tom Merry & Co. to back them up, their suggestion that an extra half be granted in honour of the great flight made by the old captain of St. Jim's might carry more weight.

"Well, what's all the blessed excitement?" grinned Monty Lowther. "Knox after you?"

Knox was a prefect—the most unpopular prefect at St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove! Wathah not! It's like this, deah boys—"

"Dry up, Gussy! It's like this, you chaps—"

"Weally, Hewwies! Allow me to explain—"

"There's a chance of an extra half!" exclaimed Blake, breaking in on his noble chum's weighty words. "A chap who was once captain of St. Jim's has just done a record flight to Australia, and his pater, who's one of the school governors, is out in the quad now, and we're going to ask him to ask the Head to dish out an extra half in honour of it—"

"My hat!"

"Oh, good egg!"

"Come on!"

The Terrible Three needed no further explanations! They turned and raced off with Blake & Co. towards the stairs.

Like the chums of the Fourth, Tom Merry & Co. felt that this was an opportunity not to be missed!

Down the stairs they raced!

It was unfortunate that at that moment Frederick Burkett, the hefty bully of the Shell, happened to be coming up the stairs in company with Crooke, his chum and study-mate—unfortunate, that is, for Frederick Burkett!

There was a terrific crash as Burkett and the group of rushing juniors collided, and another crash as Burkett went flying.

"Yarooooogh!"

Crooke, too, went spinning, and gave a wild yell. He clutched frantically at the banisters, and Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. poured over him, leaving him battered and dishevelled, and gasping.

Burkett was sprawling on the stairs in a dazed way.

"Oh, m-my giddy aunt! I'll slaughter you—"

"Out of the light, Burkett, old hoss!" chuckled Blake.

But there was scarcely time for the gasping bully to heed that injunction! As he tried to scramble up, red with wrath, he was bowled over again by the rush from above. With a succession of mighty bumps the bully of the Shell went rolling down the stairs into the hall below, arms and legs waving wildly.

Crash!

Burkett landed at the bottom almost too breathless to yell.

"Grooooooh!"

"Hard luck, Burkett!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gasping feebly, Burkett was left seated at the foot of the stairs, blinking dazedly, apparently wondering whether it was an earthquake that had visited St. Jim's or only a thunderbolt. Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three raced on, chuckling.

Down the steps into the quad they hurried.

The portly figure of Sir Rollo Prance could be seen nearing the Head's front door.

"That's the old bird!" panted Herries.

"Good egg!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Collar him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Steady, you chaps!" warned Tom Merry.

And it was at quite a polite pace that the chums of the Fourth and Shell approached the old gentleman.

"Excuse us, sir—"

Sir Rollo had reached the Head's door when the voice of Jack Blake addressed him in a very civil, though slightly breathless, tone. The portly baronet turned, with a kindly smile on his florid countenance.

"Well, my boys?"

It was quite evident from the expression on Sir Rollo's face that he was feeling very pleased with himself just then.

As Blake & Co. had guessed, it was in order to brag to the Head of his son's feat that he had visited St. Jim's that evening. And the father of the famous young airman had plenty of reason to feel proud of his son—and, consequently, of himself!

Sir Rollo twirled his moustache gaily.

"Well, my boys?" he repeated genially. "And what can I do for you?"

"Pway allow me to explain, sir!" beamed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We have been wondahin' whethah you—"

"Dry up, Gussy!" hissed Blake fiercely. "Leave the jawing to me, you ass!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake—"

"You see, sir—" cut in Tom Merry eagerly.

"It occurred to us—" began Manners.



With a mighty crash the swell of St. Jim's collapsed, dragging Sir Rollo with him!

"It's weally wathah an important mattah—"
 "Oh, cut the cackle, Gussy, for goodness' sake! The fact is, sir," went on Blake, ignoring his noble chum's frigid glare, "we've just learnt about your son's ripping flight to Australia, beating all records and things—"

"And so we thought—"
 "Seein' how proud the school is of his gweat feat—"
 "Ass!" muttered Herries. "Don't be so jolly rude! I don't suppose his feet are any bigger than yours, anyway, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass, and surveyed Herries with a withering look.

"Pway try not to be an uttah ass, Hewwies! I was wefewwin' to his gweat feat—not to his feet!"

Sir Rollo was beginning to look decidedly bewildered.
 "Really, my boys, I'm afraid I do not quite gather your purpose in approaching me!" he exclaimed, twirling his heavy moustache with an air of growing impatience. "I should be obliged if you will kindly make it clear!"

"Oh, wathah, sir! As I was wemarkin'—"
 "The whole thing is, sir," cut in Tom Merry quietly, "the school feels jolly proud of your son's fight! As he was once captain of St. Jim's, it's a big honour for the school—"

"Hear, hear!"
 "We'd like to congratulate you, sir," added Tom Merry. Sir Rollo beamed and twirled his moustache more energetically than ever.

"Very kind of you to say so, my boy—very fine feeling on your part!" exclaimed the old gentleman, almost purring with pleasure, as Monty Lowther remarked afterwards. "I thank you—I thank you! This is a very proud day for me—"

"And for the school, sir, don't you know?" put in Arthur Augustus, with a beaming smile.

"For the school, too, I imagine," agreed Sir Rollo jauntily. "I repeat, I thank you! I appreciate your feelings in the matter! Hurrumph! Chrrrm! Good-evening!"

He turned to the Head's door. Evidently he considered the matter finished. But so far as the juniors were concerned, it was by no means finished.

"Half-a-jiff, sir!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Ahem! I mean, excuse us another moment—"
 "We've been wonderwin'—"

"Ring off, Gussy!"
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "The fact is, sir," cut in Tom Merry, colouring a trifle, "we thought it would be rather a good wheeze—that is, a good idea—for Dr. Holmes to celebrate the occasion by dishing out a half—I mean," he corrected himself hastily, "by giving an extra half-holiday in honour of the event!"
 "Hear, hear!" murmured Manners.

Sir Rollo twirled his moustache and surveyed the juniors thoughtfully. They watched him with anxious eyes.

"If the suggestion came from you, sir, the Head might be more ready to agree to the idea than if we put it to him," ventured Digby hopefully.

"Hurrumph! Chrrrm!" Sir Rollo nodded gravely. "A half-holiday, eh? Humph! Not a bad idea. In fact, I consider it a very excellent suggestion. It is only right that Dr. Holmes should allow the school to signify its appreciation of my son's—ahem—splendid accomplishment in such fitting manner. Yes, I will request the Head to grant a special half-holiday!"

Sir Rollo beamed at the juniors. They beamed back at him.

It had worked!
 "That's jolly good of you, sir!" exclaimed Blake gratefully. "Thanks awfully!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"
 But what Arthur Augustus D'Arcy considered was never heard.

From behind the little group had come the sudden thunder of heavy feet. The next moment the roaring voice of Frederick Burkett, like the bellow of an angry bull, burst upon them.

"So there you are!" bawled Burkett. "I'll slaughter you! I'll jolly well teach you! I'll—"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Digby.
 Burkett thundered up.

His face was crimson with wrath. Apparently he had not noticed the presence of Sir Rollo Prance—or if he had, he did not care. He was still bruised and aching from his meeting with Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three on the stairs in the School House, and he was out for blood!

"I'll smash you! I'll slaughter the lot of you!"
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The next moment Burkett was in among the startled chums hitting out right and left with his great fists.

"Look out!" panted Manners.

"Burkett, you ass!" yelled Tom Merry. "Keep off, you silly ass! Can't you see—"

Biff!

Tom Merry got no further.

One of Burkett's waving fists caught the captain of the Shell on the jaw, and Tom Merry sat down very suddenly.

"Ow!" gasped Tom faintly.

Biff! Biff!

"Oh! Yoooooop!"

Burkett was hitting out right and left, and the startled group of juniors were flying over like ninepins, too surprised to defend themselves for the moment.

Blake sat down on the Head's step—more by accident than design—and Herries toppled on top of him. Monty Lowther collapsed with Digby in his arms, and then there was a wild yell from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as one of Burkett's leg-of-mutton fists landed on his aristocratic nose.

"Yawwooh!"

The swell of St. Jim's went flying.

Sir Rollo had been watching Burkett's descent upon his schoolboy companions like a wolf on the fold, with goggling eyes. He had tried to find his voice, but a few "Hurrumphs" and "Chrrrms!" were all he had managed to produce.

But now there came a wild yell from the gallant baronet. Arthur Augustus, staggering back, had clutched wildly at the nearest support—and that support proved to be Sir Rollo! With a mighty crash, the swell of St. Jim's collapsed, dragging the gasping baronet with him.

"Oh, gad! Whooop!"

Sir Rollo gave a roar of anguish as his trousers smote the Head's front step.

"Gwooh! Oh, bai Jove—"

Arthur Augustus sat with his arms still lovingly entwined round the breathless baronet, and blinked dazedly at Burkett.

"Oh, yawwooop!"

"Gad!" gasped Sir Rollo feebly. "Oh, gad! Ow! Chrrrm! What in thunder—"

Tom Merry scrambled to his feet.

"You burbling ass, Burkett!" panted Tom. "Oh, you dummy! Now you've done it!"

Burkett was staring at the seated, dishevelled figure of Sir Rollo as though he could scarcely believe his eyes.

The portly baronet was not a tall gentleman, and Burkett really had not noticed him among the juniors until it had been too late. Now, it was clear Burkett would have given a great deal for the earth to open and swallow him.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Burkett. "My—my hat!"

Sir Rollo scrambled to his feet.

His face was purple, his eyes seemed almost to be sticking out of his head. He glared round like a hungry tiger in search of prey.

"You—you—you young hooligans!" spluttered the old gentleman, in a choking voice. "I—I—dash it, I'll—"

He fastened a ferocious eye upon Burkett. Grasping his stick firmly in his right hand, the angry gentleman sprang forward and seized the bully of the Shell by the scruff of the neck.

Whack!

"Oh! Yoooooop!"

Burkett roared as the stick fell across his burly form.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yow! Yaroooooop!"

Burkett danced and yelled. But the stick landed a good many times before he succeeded in breaking away. With a final desperate effort, however, the bully of the Shell succeeded in wriggling clean out of his jacket. He dashed away at top speed, vanishing round the corner of the building in his shirt sleeves, leaving the irate baronet brandishing his stick in one hand and the empty jacket in the other.

"Young hooligan!" spluttered Sir Rollo Prance, living up to his name by fairly prancing with rage as he spoke.

"Young ruffian! Chrrrrmph! Gad, I—"

"Awfully sorry this happened, sir," broke in Tom Merry quickly, anxious to mollify the seething old gentleman. "I'm sure Burkett didn't know you were there, though. Quite a mistake! I—"

"Balderdash!" roared Sir Rollo, glaring at Tom Merry in a way that showed he was not to be mollified. "Young hooligans, the lot of you!"

"Bai Jove, sir, I weally must pwoest—"

"Hooligans!" bellowed Sir Rollo. "After this, I totally decline to ask your headmaster to grant you an extra half-holiday! I refuse!"

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And with a final glare at the aghast juniors, Sir Rollo Prance stamped towards the Head's door.

The juniors watched him in utter dismay.

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Blake.

"All through Burkett!" said Manners glumly.

"Oh deah!"

"Come on, you chaps," grunted Monty Lowther in gloomy tones, as a trim maidservant opened the door to Sir Rollo, and the still fuming baronet stamped into the house. "Better not be hanging round here—he may tell the Head!"

And the chums of the School House departed hastily from the scene.

The coveted extra half had been snatched from under their very noses, so to speak. Their faces were long as they tramped into the School House.

"I considah—"

"Dry up, Gussy!" roared Blake.

And with a sniff, and a freezing glance at his disgruntled chum, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dried up.

But though it looked as though they were not to get that extra half-holiday after all, had they only known it, the visit of Sir Rollo Prance to St. Jim's that day was fated to be the cause of far more important occurrences than a special half!

There was going to be amazing consequences to Sir Rollo's visit to St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 3.

No "Stick-in-the-mud"!

"BALDERDASH!"

Sir Rollo's tone was emphatic.

"I beg your pardon!"

Dr. Holmes, the headmaster of St. Jim's, gave that gasping ejaculation. Dr. Holmes was not used to people saying "balderdash" to him.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" he repeated a trifle stiffly.

"I said 'balderdash!'" snapped Sir Rollo firmly. "I consider, Dr. Holmes, that your objections to my idea are absolute balderdash!"

"Bless my soul!"

The dignified old Head passed a hand a little dazedly across his lofty brow.

Dr. Holmes and his guest were seated in the Head's study, and for the last quarter of an hour Sir Rollo had been expounding his great theory—a theory which the old Head seemed incapable of agreeing with. The Head's objections had exasperated the choleric old baronet, drawing from him at last the retort that had so astonished Dr. Holmes as to leave him staring quite blankly at his fiery visitor.

"Bless my soul!" repeated the Head faintly. "Balderdash?"

"Absolute balderdash, my dear sir!" nodded Sir Rollo emphatically. "My suggestion is simply that a limited number of boys—picked boys—receive flying instruction during their spare time at the hands of qualified pilots. There is no danger—the boys will not, of course, be allowed to pilot the planes single-handed."

"But, my dear sir—"

"There are no 'buts' about it!" snapped Sir Rollo vigorously. "I have come to the conclusion that every British boy should receive flying instruction, so that he will be in a position to become a qualified pilot as soon as he is of necessary age! My own son's great feat—"

"Yes, yes!" The Head was growing a trifle weary of hearing about Sir Rollo's son's great feat. It had been rubbed into him a good deal during the last quarter of an hour. "No one, my dear sir, applauds your son's wonderful flight more than I—"

"We must educate the boys of the nation to follow in his footsteps!" broke in Sir Rollo proudly. "I—chrrrrmm!—do not wish to boast of my own son, of course—"

"Of course not," said the Head, rather dryly.

"Then what are your objections to my proposal?" demanded Sir Rollo quite fiercely.

The Head sighed.

"I have already made them clear, I imagine, Sir Rollo. If I understand you correctly, you wish to institute the practice of instructing boys at St. Jim's in the—er—art of flying aeroplanes. But the danger involved, and the great expense, make such a project utterly out of the question! Utterly, my dear sir!"

The Head's tone was final.

He could understand Sir Rollo's enthusiasm for flying as a result of his pride in his son's achievement. And as one of the school governors, Sir Rollo's suggestions with regard to the school had to be listened to politely, at least. But

the idea of teaching his pupils to fly was altogether too much for the Head! Such a thing had never been done before at any school, so far as he was aware—and he certainly did not mean to start it at St. Jim's!

"The parents might object!" he added eagerly, glad of another argument against Sir Rollo's astounding suggestion. "Nonsense!"

"Really, Sir Rollo—"

The baronet jumped to his feet. His fiery countenance was set with determination. He brought a fist crashing down on to the desk with such force that Dr. Holmes jumped.

"I consider your objections footling, Dr. Holmes!"

"Footling?" gasped the Head.

"There is no danger in modern flying!" urged Sir Rollo. "None at all, dash it! Dash it, it's safer than walking! Under qualified instruction the boys can come to no harm! The parents' permission might have to be obtained, but it would undoubtedly be given in nearly every case. After what my son has done, I feel convinced that if Britain is to lead in the air it is to the young we must look, Dr. Holmes, to carry on our noble traditions—hurrumph! My son's—ahem—great feat—churrrmmmm—has made me realise, dash it—"

"Pray control yourself, my dear sir!" begged the Head, for the baronet was getting thoroughly excited as he warmed to his pet subject. "I admit that perhaps in other circumstances it might not be a bad thing for some boys to receive flying instruction," he admitted reluctantly, "but—but at St. Jim's—really, my dear sir, it is quite out of the question!"

Dr. Holmes tried to sound firm. But he finished a little vaguely, nevertheless. It was difficult to argue firmly with Sir Rollo.

"But dash it, sir—"

"My dear Sir Rollo! Apart from anything else, consider the expense!" pleaded the Head.

"Dash the expense!" Once again the excited baronet brought his fist crashing down upon the desk beside him.

"Gad, sir, I'll tell you what! As a memorial to my son's—ahem—great feat, his splendid—churrrm—achievement, I will pay the expenses myself for boys at St. Jim's to receive flying instruction! Out of my own pocket, dash it!"

And Sir Rollo twirled his moustache with an air of utter finality as he stamped to and fro over the carpet.

For a moment or two the Head looked quite flabbergasted. His last line of defence, so to speak, had been crushed.

"Well, Dr. Holmes?" demanded the baronet.

"I—I am sure it is a very—ah—praiseworthy offer on your part, Sir Rollo!" said the Head rather faintly. "The school would be deeply grateful—if—"

"If what?" growled Sir Rollo.

"If—er—it could see its way to accepting your generous offer," added the Head hastily. "But I am afraid—"

"What are your objections now, sir?" inquired Sir Rollo, in a tone of ill-concealed exasperation.

"I—er—at the moment cannot specifically state, my dear sir, anything concrete against your suggestion," sighed the Head. "But the matter would have to be considered from every angle. I should have to think about it a great deal—"

"Balderdash!" roared Sir Rollo, his last shreds of patience exhausted. "The fact is, sir, you are a stick-in-the-mud. You are afraid to try anything new. If you are not careful St. Jim's will get behind the times. I repeat, you are a stick-in-the-mud!"

The Head opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again. A faint flush of indignation mounted to his face.

He rose majestically to his feet.

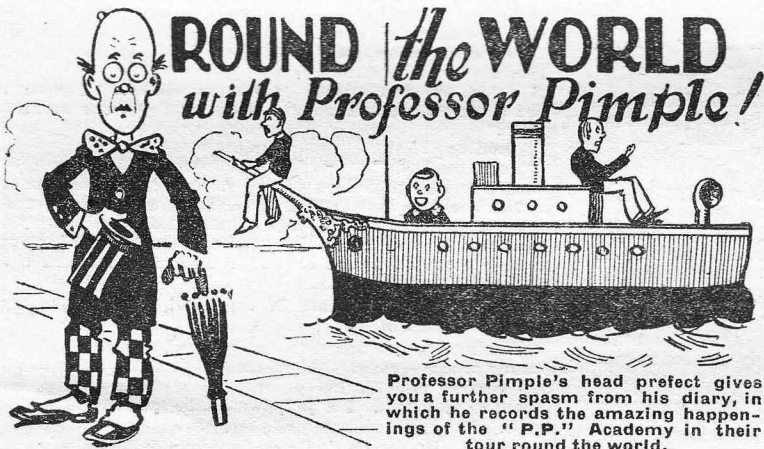
The Head had never been called a stick-in-the-mud in his life before, and he was determined to wipe out the accusation there and then.

"Sir Rollo," he said icily, "I am not a stick-in-the-mud! Bless my soul—far from it! A—a stick-in-the-mud! You are very wrong, sir!"

And Dr. Holmes took a leaf out of the baronet's book by bringing his fist crashing down upon his desk.

"Very well, Sir Rollo, I accept your offer. If you care to signalise your son's fine accomplishment by providing the instructors, and, of course, the necessary—er—flying machines, I will permit a limited number of the St. Jim's boys to be instructed in their control."

(Continued on next page.)



Professor Pimple's head prefect gives you a further spasm from his diary, in which he records the amazing happenings of the "P.P." Academy in their tour round the world.

forty-five narrow lanes running from the north and south quays in Yarmouth in right-angles, and that these lanes are called "rows." I said that I thought that was very interesting and I would try to remember the number and prove a credit to the academy, because me being eighty next birthday, I wouldn't have many more years as a schoolboy, and I wanted to learn as much as possible before I left.

He asked me what I was going to be when I left the academy, and I said I supposed I would be an old man by that time. He patted me on the shoulder and said he was sure I would be a success, and he had done his best by keeping me there all that time.

After breakfast we called the register and rowed ashore. At least, that was what we intended doing, but some of the kids, being rotten oarsmen, got the boat mixed up with the water, and we found ourselves under the pier in such a position that we couldn't get out from between the supports that held the pier up. So Buster said we had better try to climb up on to the pier from the boat, and after several hours we succeeded in doing this, and reached the pier in a very exhausted condition.

We had no sooner got safely on to the pier when a man in uniform came up and told Pimple he would have to pay twopence each for us, so Pimple said we had better come off the pier at once. The man said he wouldn't let us off until we had paid, and it looked as if we would have to stop on the pier for the rest of the holiday, when Pimple had a brain-wave, and told the man that if he let us off the pier without paying, he could have our boat.

This was clever of Pimple, and the man agreed and went to get the boat while we walked off into the town.

You'll hear all about it next week.

TUESDAY. I was on deck first thing this morning, and I found we had stopped moving, and in the distance I could see a lot of sands. The captain said that it was Yarmouth, so I said: "Now you will be able to make Yarmouth, as we're so near."

The captain said that he had, and the ship was laying to. All this puzzled me very much, as I couldn't see how he could have made Yarmouth if he was still on the ship, and I couldn't see how a ship could lay anything, either.

I didn't want the captain to think I was a simple kid, like some of the others, so I leaned over the side and asked him if there were many bloaters to be seen at that time of the morning. The captain roared with laughter and said they would be about later, when it got warmer. Then he said we might go ashore later on, because his crew would want to paddle, but he wasn't

moving the ship because he was anchored in Yarmouth roads, which were the safest place for a ship to stop in.

I looked round both sides of the ship, but I couldn't see any roads, of course, so I asked him where the roads were, as all I could see were waves and a pier on our left.

At this the captain laughed so much I thought he would choke, and he ran up to the bridge (I've found that is the name for the upstairs part), and told his man, and they both laughed together, and the ship began to rock violently.

The ship rocked so much that Pimple came running up on deck with a life-belt on, thinking there was a storm. Then Pimple pointed out the objects of interest on the shore, such as the Garibaldi and the gasworks, and he told me that there are a hundred and

Sir Rollo's face, which till that moment had been growing more and more purple with exasperation, broke in a moment into a beaming smile. He jumped forward and grasped the Head's hand.

"Dash it, sir, you're a sportsman, sir!" roared Sir Rollo, pumping Dr. Holmes' hand with a vigour that left the Head breathless. "I take back what I said. I apologise. You are not a stick-in-the-mud."

"I—I am glad to accept your apology, Sir Rollo," gasped the Head.

He passed a hand rather dazedly across his brow.

Now that he had burnt his boats, so to speak, the Head was thoroughly astonished to find that he had agreed to the baronet's proposal. But—well, a stick-in-the-mud! He would prove he was not that.

Sir Rollo glanced at his watch.

"I must get along, Dr. Holmes. I will communicate with you as soon as I have made the necessary arrangements. I congratulate you, sir, on your modern and go-ahead outlook. You are the kind of headmaster we want, dash it!"

And Sir Rollo went.

He left a very dazed headmaster indeed staring after him.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Dr. Holmes to himself. "What a man! Flying instruction! Really, I—I wonder if I did right to agree? But a—a stick-in-the-mud! No, I cannot open myself to being called a stick-in-the-mud!"

CHAPTER 4.

Mysterious Baggy!

"HALLO! Hallo! What the dickens—"

It was the following evening, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, clad in flannels, had just entered the School House with thoughts of prep after half an hour at the nets.

It was the surging crowd round the notice-board in the Hall that brought the exclamation of astonishment from Tom Merry's lips.

"What on earth—"

The Terrible Three dived into the crowd promptly, intent upon discovering the cause of the excitement.

It was soon clear.

"Haven't you seen the Head's notice?" gasped Kangaroo, the Australian junior, as Tom Merry elbowed his way into the throng. "Look! What do you think of that?"

The notice, written in the Head's familiar hand, was certainly the most surprising that had been pinned to the School House notice-board for a long while.

Tom Merry gasped as he read it:

"In honour of the recent record flight to Australia, made by Mr. E. F. Prance, an old captain of St. Jim's, his father, Sir Rollo Prance, has generously offered the school the necessary facilities for a certain number of boys to receive flying instruction.

All members of the Sixth Form who wish to do so may avail themselves of these facilities.

In addition, a further twenty boys from the other Forms will be permitted to receive flying instruction in their spare time. Should more than twenty applicants send in their names, the twenty to receive instruction will be chosen by competition. Names should be sent in at once. Parents' or guardians' permission will be necessary."

"My giddy aunt!" breathed Tom Merry.

"Gweat Scott!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had appeared on the scene, with Blake, Herries, and Dig. The Hon. Arthur Augustus had just perused the notice through his gleaming monocle. "Bai Jove! How wippin'! Fwightfully sportin' of Sir Wollo, bai Jove. I considah—"

"Considering again, Gussy?" grinned Monty Lowther. "You don't mean to say you'll send your name in? Why, your fancy waistcoats would kill with blessed fright all the birds in the air, if you started flying."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lowthah, you uttah ass!"

"I say, you chaps!" It was the excited voice of Baggy Trimble. "I'm going to send my name in. Shouldn't wonder if I'm a born airman, you know."

"Why, the plane isn't built that could lift you off the ground, you fat frog!" growled Burkett, who had joined the group.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Burkett—"

"I say, this is great!" Talbot of the Shell was reading

the Head's notice with shining eyes. "Great pip! Just think of it! How ripping to learn to fly a plane! I'm in for this!"

"Same here!"

"What-ho!"

"Three cheers for old Rollo!" yelled Blake jubilantly.

"He's an old sport, after all."

"My hat—yes!"

The news seemed to be spreading already, for with every moment fresh fellows were hurrying into the Hall to read the notice. And as they read it their eyes gleamed with excitement.

It was the biggest thrill St. Jim's had had for a long while.

But it was quite clear that many more than twenty fellows, apart from the Sixth, would be sending in their names. It seemed doubtful if there was a single St. Jim's fellow, from the Fifth to the Third, who would not apply.

"I'll tell you what," growled Wally D'Arcy, the leader of the Third. "It's a blessed shame that the Sixth Form asses should all be in on this! Talk about blessed favouritism! We men in the Third ought to have as much chance as they—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to cackle at, you asses!" roared Wally indignantly, as Tom Merry & Co. chuckled. "The Sixth won't learn to fly an aeroplane in a month of Sundays. Everybody knows they're a brainless lot of dummies!"

"Eh?"

Wally jumped, and turned his head hastily. The tall figure of Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, had entered the Hall just in time to hear Wally's disparaging remarks concerning the lofty Sixth.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Wally. "I—I didn't know you were there, Kildare!"

"I thought you didn't," nodded Kildare dryly, trying to conceal a smile that flickered for a moment at the corners of his firm mouth.

Wally, very red in the face, thought it wiser to retreat, and vanished in the direction of the fags' quarters. Tom Merry stepped towards the captain of St. Jim's.

"I say, Kildare, this is ripping!" he exclaimed eagerly.

"But it jolly well looks as if all the chaps will send in their names for flying lessons. That's the trouble. You don't happen to know how the Head means to choose the final twenty?"

Kildare shook his head.

"No idea, young 'un!"

With a nod, he strolled on.

"Come on, you chaps!" muttered Blake. "I vote we buzz along to the Head right away, and get our names in quick!"

"Good egg!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake & Co., and Tom Merry & Co., hurried off in the direction of the Head's study. A number of other juniors followed them eagerly. Talbot and Kangaroo, Bernard Glyn and Clifton Dane, Burkett and Grundy and Baggy Trimble were all in the crowd, as Tom Merry knocked on the Head's door.

Grundy, the burly dunce of the Shell, was looking very eager and excited.

"This'll suit me down to the ground, you chaps," said Grundy impressively. "I've always thought it would be jolly fine to pilot an aeroplane. I'll make a rattling fine pilot, too, I'll bet! I'll jolly well show you chaps how to do it!"

"Br-r-r! You couldn't fly a blessed toy balloon!" grunted Herries.

"What?" yelled Grundy. "Look here, Herries, you silly jay—"

George Alfred Grundy broke off, as, in answer to a summons from within, Tom Merry pushed open the door. Even the great George Alfred dared not continue the argument in the august presence of the Head!

The juniors filed in, and their names were duly taken. If there was a faintly worried frown on the brow of the old Head, they were far too excited to notice it. But possibly Dr. Holmes was still entertaining doubts as to his wisdom in ridding himself of the stigma of being a stick-in-the-mud by allowing flying lessons at St. Jim's.

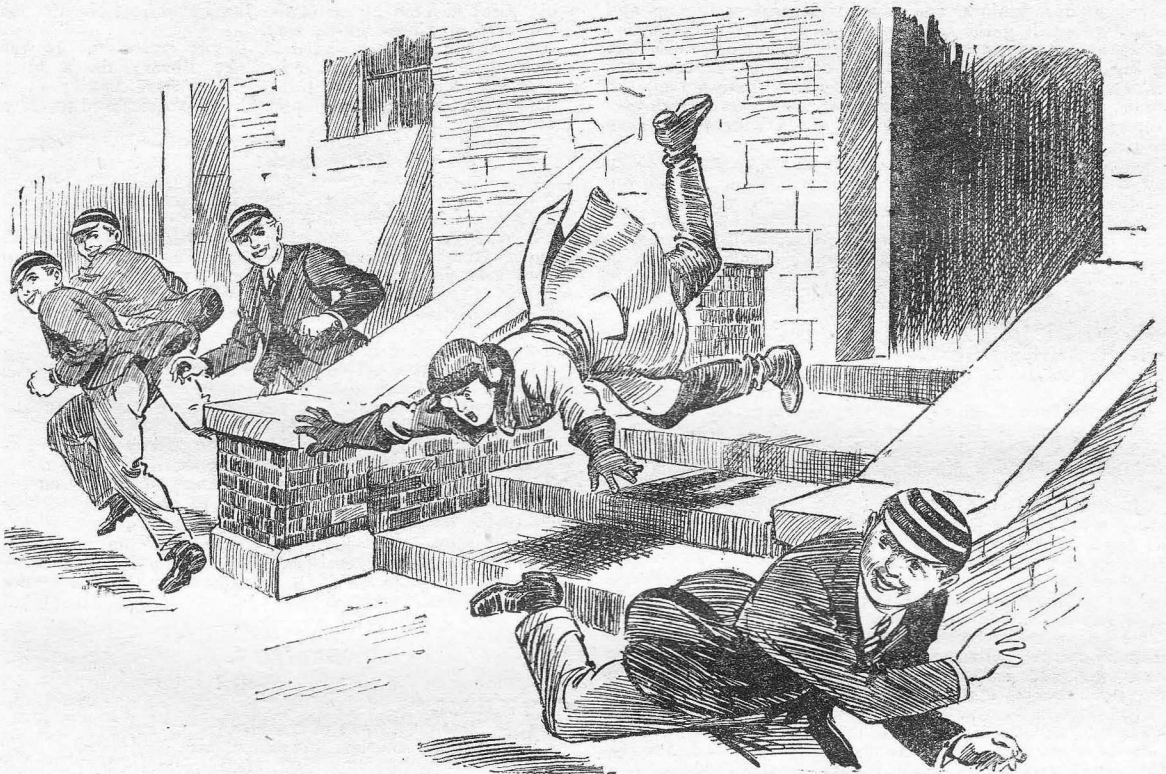
As the last name was taken there was a scurry of feet in the passage. Wally D'Arcy, followed by a dozen or more others of the inky-fingered fraternity, came crowding into the big room.

The Head raised his brows.

"Well, D'Arcy minor? What do you want?"

"P—please, sir—about the flying!" stammered Wally excitedly. "We all want to fly! Will you put our names down, please, sir?"

"Nonsense!" said the Head.



The next moment Arthur Augustus was flying to the bottom of the steps!

Wally's jaw dropp'd. So did the jaws of the other fags. "The Third Form are not eligible for flying instruction," explained the Head, with a frown. "You are all far too young."

"Well, I'm blessed!" breathed Reggie Manners, in utter dismay. "Of all the rot!"

"B-but, please, sir—" began Wally feverishly.

"There is no more to be said," interrupted the Head. "I should have mentioned in the notice that the Third cannot qualify. You may go!"

It was no good arguing with the Head. Even Wally realised that. With feelings too deep for words, and glares at the grinning Fourth and Shell fellows, the group of mortified fags departed, muttering darkly.

Tom Merry turned to the Head.

"If there are more than twenty applicants, sir—"

"I have decided, in that case, to set the applicants an essay to write on the subject of aeronautics," explained the Head. "The best twenty essays will qualify their writers for flying instruction."

"Oh!"

There were murmurs of interest from the crowd.

Tom Merry & Co., and Blake & Co. left the study. Other fellows were hurrying in as they went—Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows, and several stalwart Fifth-Formers. It was certain that the Fifth would send in their names to a man.

At the end of the passage the scuttling fat figure of Baggy Trimble caught them up.

"I say, you chaps," grinned Baggy eagerly, "essay writing is just in my line! I'm a dab at writing essays. I'm going to be one of the twenty!"

"You?" gasped Blake.

The Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6 stared at Baggy curiously. Baggy was a hopeless dunce in Form, yet the self-satisfied, smirk on his greasy countenance now seemed to show that the Falstaff of the Fourth felt curiously confident.

"The only thing you could write an essay on would be grub," grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats!" growled Baggy, with a sniff. "You jolly well wait! I'll bet a doughnut to a term's pocket-money I pull it off with this blessed essay!"

But, without waiting to see if there were any takers for his generous offer, Baggy rolled away.

Tom Merry stared after him curiously.

"Baggy seems jolly certain!" muttered the captain of the Shell. "Rummy! I wonder if the fat porpoise has got something up his sleeve?"

And there was a thoughtful frown on Tom Merry's face as the Terrible Three went off in the direction of the Shell passage.

CHAPTER 5.

The Planes Arrive!

Z O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O!

The roar of an aeroplane engine above their head caused the Terrible Three of the Shell to stare up from where they were standing at the top of the School House steps.

It was four days later—the following Wednesday afternoon. That evening the essays on "The Conquest of the Air," which was their official theme, had to be handed in to the Head by the applicants for flying lessons.

A good many of the juniors were already busy, with scratching pens, in their studies. But it was a glorious afternoon, and, keen though the Terrible Three were to win places among the lucky twenty, they did not mean to miss their afternoon's cricket practice. There would be time enough after tea to write their essays, and get them in to the Head.

It was as they were issuing forth into the quad, with bats under their arms, that a zooming plane came curving down over the old, sunlit quad.

"Look!" breathed Tom, with shining eyes.

The plane—a glittering blue and silver biplane, clearly British from the lettering under its wings—swept past above their heads, curving round in a steep bank. It roared over the old elms towards the playing fields, and began a wide circle, evidently preparatory to landing.

"It's coming down!" exclaimed Manners.

"There's another!" cried Monty Lowther eagerly.

A second glittering silver plane had appeared from the direction of Wayland, skimming down towards the roofs of St. Jim's.

Zo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!

With roaring engines, it passed over the heads of the Terrible Three, and the groups of other upstaring juniors in the quad, and curved over the elms.

"They must be the St. Jim's planes!" cried Tom Merry.

All round the quad windows were opening, and excited faces were staring out and up. Fellows had appeared as if by magic from the School House and the New House, from the gym, and from the tuckshop—all watching with fascinated eyes the swooping, glittering machines above the school.

Seniors, and juniors, and fags, and masters in cap and gown, were filling the quad now. Old Taggles, the school porter, armed with a broom, was standing outside his lodge, staring upwards. Even Mrs. Taggles had appeared in the doorway of her little tuckshop under the elms, among the group of fellows there, shading her eyes to watch the circling planes as they curved away in a wide sweep over the playing fields.

Somebody started a cheer. It was taken up on all sides, and a succession of roared "Hurrahs!" rang out in the old quad.

The Head had appeared at the window of his study, and he smiled—a trifle doubtfully, perhaps, but still he undoubtedly smiled, as he watched the excited, cheering crowd in the quad.

"They're coming down all right!" breathed Monty Lowther.

Though the juniors had not known that they were to arrive that afternoon, it had been known for a couple of days that Sir Rollo France had already arranged for two aeroplanes, fitted with dual controls for instructional purposes, to be brought to St. Jim's by two experienced flying-instructors, who would take up quarters at the school.

And now they had actually arrived!

"Come on!" cried Manners eagerly. "Let's watch 'em land!"

"Rather!"

And the Terrible Three raced down the steps and joined the excited crowd that was pouring across the quad in the direction of the playing fields.

One of the planes was already dipping down to earth at the far side of the playing fields as Tom Merry & Co. raced through the line of elms into view of them.

It alighted on the grass, and taxied to a standstill some distance away. As the swarms of eager fellows poured across the grass towards it an athletic figure swung out of the pilot's cockpit and climbed out on to the ground.

The second machine came dipping down, turning into the wind, and landed not far from the first.

In another minute the machines were surrounded, and the two young airmen, in their leather flying helmets, with cheery grins on their faces, found themselves being cheered to the echo.

"Keep back, you kids!"

The authoritative voice of Eric Kildare rang out, and a number of stalwart prefects got busy keeping the crowd back. Kildare stepped towards the two smiling pilots and held out his hand.

"Welcome to St. Jim's!" he said, with a laugh, as he shook hands. "My name's Kildare. I'm captain of the school. We are all jolly glad to see you!"

"Heah, heah! Bai Jove!"

It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's surveyed the two pleasant-faced young pilots through his monocle with great approval.

"Wippin'-lookin' fellows, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Their flyin' kit isn't quite as smart as it might be, pewwaps, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothin' to cackle at, you dummays!" sniffed Arthur Augustus. "A chap's flyin' kit is a most important mattach, I considah. Howevah—"

"Now then, make way, you kids!"

The juniors made a lane as Kildare led the two pilots through the crowd. He was taking them to the Head at once.

Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., Talbot, Kangaroo, and the rest watched them go with admiring eyes.

"Considering they're really new masters, they're quite human-looking!" grinned Kerruish of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather!"

Now that the pilots had gone, the crowd of fellows turned their attentions to the planes. They were handsome machines, and it needed all the energies of the Sixth-Formers present to keep the fellows from crowding too close.

Even the Terrible Three had forgotten all about cricket practice for that afternoon!

After they had examined the machines from all angles a good many of the fellows began to return to the quad, talking excitedly. Tom Merry touched Manners and Lowther on the arm.

"What about getting in and tackling our giddy essays right away?" he suggested. "And we've got to make 'em good! I wouldn't miss going up in those machines for anything!"

"Good wheeze!" nodded Manners. The Terrible Three hurried back towards the School House.

As they made their way to the Shell passage they passed the door of the library. It opened, and the fat figure of Baggly Trimble rolled out.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,165.

At sight of Tom Merry & Co. the Falstaff of the Fourth jumped in an almost guilty way.

Tom and his chums stared at Baggly curiously. It was not often that Baggly patronised the library on a half-holiday. The books contained in it were mostly of a "heavy" order—encyclopedias and dictionaries and massive histories.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "Baggy's turned into a swot!—Must have!"

"Oh, really, Lowther—"

"What's the idea, Baggly?" queried Tom, staring at him. Baggly coughed and shuffled his feet.

"Ahem! I—I just looked in to read up a bit of—of ancient Roman history," said Baggly hastily. "I—I'm rather keen on ancient Roman history, you know. Awfully keen on it! All those chaps like—like Cæsar and Rameses and—and Aristotle. Awfully interesting chaps they were, you know!"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh. "Why, you fat ass, Rameses and Aristotle weren't ancient Romans! You don't know a blessed thing about it!"

"Oh, really, Merry! I tell you they were!" sniffed Baggly, and rolled away rather rapidly.

"Off his rocker, I suppose!" grinned Monty Lowther, as the Terrible Three strolled on towards the Shell passage.

They were far too keen on their chances of qualifying for flying instruction to give two thoughts to Baggly's mysterious visit to the library.

Ten minutes later three pens were scraping busily in Study No. 10, as, with corrugated brows, the Terrible Three tackled their essays on "The Conquest of the Air"—the essays that meant so much!

CHAPTER 6.

Baggy's Essay!

"SILENCE!"

The deep tones of the Head rang out in Big Hall. Instantly the low murmur of talk died away.

It was two days later, after afternoon lessons, and the school had gathered, seething with excitement, to hear the results of the competition for places among the lucky twenty who were to learn to fly.

There was scarcely a fellow in the Fifth, Shell, or Fourth who had not applied, and it had taken the Head quite a time to get through all the essays submitted. But the task had been finished at last, and now St. Jim's was to learn the names of the twenty winners.

Zo-o-o-ooooom!

Faintly from outside came the hum of an aeroplane engine as one of the young pilot-instructors who had taken up their quarters at St. Jim's circled over the school buildings on a test flight.

It was a sound that thrilled the silent fellows as they waited breathlessly for the Head's announcement.

The Head, standing on the dais, with a number of papers on the table before him, coughed.

"I have here the names of the successful applicants for flying instruction," he said in a quiet voice. "In each case there has been no parental objection. Nine members of the Fifth Form have qualified, six in the Shell, and five in the Fourth Form."

"Oh crumbs!" muttered Blake gloomily. "Only five! Rotten!"

From outside the faint note of an aeroplane, high up, alone broke the hush as the school waited breathlessly for the names.

The Head began to read out the names of the nine Fifth-Formers. Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth, was one.

"Now for us!" breathed Monty Lowther excitedly.

"In the Shell," went on the Head, "the following will receive flying instruction. Glyn, Grundy—"

"Grundy!" gasped Manners. "Great pip!"

That Grundy had won a place among the enviable twenty was staggering enough, in the opinion of his fellow-juniors. But the great George Alfred did not look in the least surprised.

As a matter of fact, it was the note of tremendous enthusiasm that had filled his essay that had won him his place, despite its mistakes in grammar and spelling and punctuation. But Grundy felt convinced that it was on literary style that he had been chosen.

He grinned at the astonished Shell fellows loftily. But already they were turning their heads to the Head again, as Dr. Holmes continued his list.

"Lowther, Merry, Noble, and Talbot."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

But Manners' face had fallen. He had failed to qualify.

"Hard luck, old chap," whispered Tom sympathetically. Manners grinned wryly, and shrugged.

"In the Fourth," continued the Head, "the following:

(Continued on page 12.)

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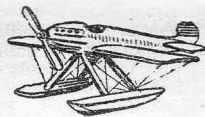
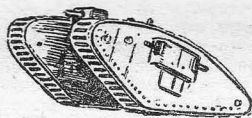
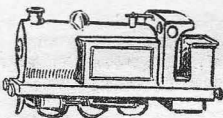
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These are only a few—there are many others—and they're for you, chums! All you have to do is to sign your name and address on the form below, and send it to "GEM GIFT SCHEME," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4. Then watch this page every week. If your name is published you simply fill in the special "CLAIM" FORM which you will find on page 16 of this issue, and send it to "GEM GIFT CLAIM," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4. That done, you simply sit tight, for the GIFT will be dispatched to you without any delay.

What do you think of the idea, chums? Great, isn't it? What-ho! Get your pens ready, and then—SIGN!!!



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The Schoolboy Airmen!

(Continued from page 10.)

Blake, D'Arcy major, Figgins, Redfern, and—er—Trimble!"

The gasp that followed the reading of that last name was so audible that the Head frowned austerely.

"Twimble!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in a dazed way. "B-b-bai Jove!"

"It must be a mistake!" ejaculated Blake under his breath.

"Oh, really, Blake!" Baggy blinked at Jack Blake in an injured way. "Didn't I say all along I should win a place? I'm a dab at essays—"

"Silence!" rasped the Head. He picked up a sheaf of foolscap from the table before him. "One of the essays, I may say, was so outstandingly good, so far ahead of all the rest, that I propose to read it aloud to you all as a model of what an essay should be. I confess—ahem—that I should not have expected such extraordinary merit from the boy in question, who is not in a high Form. But his essay stands in a class by itself. I refer to Trimble of the Fourth."

"Wha-a-t!" gasped Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry was staring at Baggy Trimble in a peculiar way. The Falstaff of the Fourth was smirking conceitedly.

He apparently imagined that the stares of dazed astonishment that were being directed at him from all sides were stares of humble admiration.

"I will now read Trimble's essay," came the voice of the Head. "Trimble, I must congratulate you upon an—ahem—astonishingly creditable performance."

"Thank you, sir," smirked Baggy oilyly.

Dr. Holmes cleared his throat and began. The wondering juniors listened in an almost stupefied silence.

"The Conquest of the Air! Though it is within comparatively modern memory that the first heavier-than-air machine left the ground under its own propulsion, the whole romantic story of the conquest of the air—the last of the elements to be harnessed to man's will—stretches back into ancient times. The first man to attempt imitation of a bird's flight—"

The Head's deep voice droned on.

"Gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus faintly.

"Baggy never wrote all that!" breathed Manners.

He glanced at Tom Merry. Tom's face had gone dark and stern.

"My hat!" breathed Tom. He gripped Manners' arm.

"That stuff's all familiar! I've read it somewhere before! Great pip—of course! I remember! It's word for word out of one of the encyclopedias in the library!"

"My giddy aunt!"

Baggy, glancing round, still smirking, as the Head read on, suddenly caught Tom's look.

"Baggy!" hissed Tom fiercely.

For a moment an uneasy look sprang into Baggy's face. He glanced hastily away.

"Among the long and tragic list of martyrs who have perished in the struggle to bring the upper air into man's domain—" came the Head's voice, as he continued to read from Trimble's essay.

Tom Merry, his face dark and grim, softly pushed his way to Baggy's side. He gripped the Falstaff of the Fourth by the arm in a vice-like grip.

"Baggy, you cad! You rotten fraud—"

"Leggo!" muttered Baggy uneasily.

"You didn't write that essay! It's word for word out of an encyclopedia!" hissed Tom angrily.

Baggy tried to look surprised and indignant. But Tom did not wait to hear his protest.

"Own up, you fat cad!" breathed Tom.

"I—I won't!" stammered Baggy. "I—I mean, I've nothing to own up about! I wrote that myself, every giddy word, so there—"

"You blessed fibber!"

Tom, in his anger, spoke a little louder than he had intended. The Head broke off reading, and looked up sternly. He fixed an austere eye upon Tom and Baggy.

"You boys were talking!"

"I—I'm sorry, sir!" stammered Tom. "Are you going to own up, Baggy?" he added in a fierce whisper.

"No!"

"Then I'll make you!" Tom turned a set face to the Head. "I think Trimble wishes to tell you something about his essay, sir," he said quietly.

Tom Merry was the last fellow in the world to be guilty of sneaking. But in a case like this he felt justified in forcing Trimble to own up, for the sake of the fellow, whoever it was, who had thereby been done out of his rights.

The Head, who had been looking decidedly angry, and evidently had been about to award some lines, stared at Trimble in astonishment.

"What do you wish to tell me, Trimble?"

"Nun-nothing, sir!" panted Trimble, turning almost green. "It's a mistake, sir! I don't want to tell you that my essay's out of the encyclopedia at all! It wasn't, sir. It's quite original—not a bit like anything in the encyclopedia, really, sir, I assure you. It's just an idea of Merry's, sir—quite a mistake!"

"Wha-a-at?" exclaimed the Head in an awful voice.

Baggy jumped.

"It isn't true, sir, really, sir! It didn't even occur to me to look at the encyclopedia, to crib things out of it, sir. Such a thought would never cross my mind! We Trimbles are the soul of honour—"

Baggy broke off, gasping. From the look on the Head's face it was quite clear to Baggy that something was wrong somewhere.

Baggy was not a very bright individual, and it did not occur to him for a moment that his very denials implied his guilt. But obtuse though he was, he realised that he had put his foot in it somewhere with a vengeance!

The Head's brow had gone thunderous.

"So that is the truth, Trimble!" The words were icy. "I was astonished at the excellence of your essay, but it never occurred to me that any boy would be so base as to submit work that was not original for the competition! I am staggered to know that you would sink so low, Trimble!"

"Oh, really, sir!"

"Your dastardly action shall meet the reward it merits, Trimble!" boomed the Head. "You will go at once to my study and await me there!"

(Continued on next page.)

Another Frolic with the Wigga Wagga Boys—



"Ow! B-but I—I explained that I didn't crib it out of the blessed encyclopedia!" howled Baggy.

"Enough! Your denials are useless! It is only too clear to me now. Go!"

And Trimble went, his face as yellow as though he had been in a particularly rough Channel crossing. He slunk from Big Hall, watched by the Head's glittering eye.

"So that's the wheeze Baggy had got up his sleeve all along!" grinned Monty Lowther. "The fat cad! I'll bet he'd just finished copying it all out in the library when we ran into him coming out that time! No wonder he looked so jolly guilty!"

"He'll catch it hot from the Head!" chuckled Talbot. "Serve him right!"

The Head held up his hand for silence. Clearly, the headmaster of St. Jim's had been decidedly shaken by his discovery of Trimble's fraud.

"Words fail me," said the Head sternly, "to describe my feelings! However, the disgraceful incident is now closed. Trimble, needless to say, will suffer severely for his base attempt at deception. The boy next on the list, who will now receive flying instruction in Trimble's stead, is—let me see—"

He picked up the papers on his desk, and glanced through them.

"Manners, of the Shell, I find, is the next best. Manners, therefore, will take Trimble's place among the twenty boys."

Tom Merry gripped Manners' arm. His chum had caught his breath, and his eyes were shining.

"Oh, ripping!" breathed Tom.

"Boys, dismiss!"

The fellows filed out. There were many disappointed faces; but, on the whole, the juniors who had failed to qualify were taking their bad luck well enough.

The Terrible Three were grinning cheerfully as they emerged into the sunlit quad, arm-in-arm.

They had all managed to get places among the fortunate twenty, and as they watched the humming aeroplane that was skimming over the playing fields high above the old elms, their eyes shone.

CHAPTER 7.

Arthur Augustus, Airman!

"MY hat!" said Herries.

"Oh, great pip!" said Digby.

"What does he look like, Dig?" murmured Herries.

"Goodness knows!" grinned Dig. "A cross between a deep-sea diver and some new kind of beetle, I should say."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy snorted an aristocratic snort.

Arthur Augustus was standing before the looking-glass in Study No. 6, surveying his elegant reflection. Herries and Dig were standing near him, surveying Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's certainly looked a thing of beauty and a joy for ever!

His new flying suit, direct from London, had arrived at the school that morning. It was the following Wednesday after the results of the essay competition had been announced, and one of the first things Arthur Augustus had done, by way of learning to fly, had been to write to his London tailors and order his flying suit.

The rest of the fellows were content with the helmets and leather coats provided by the instructors. But not so Arthur Augustus D'Arcy!

In his own opinion, the swell of St. Jim's looked very fine indeed in his brand-new flying suit. It was a nicely-waisted affair, with a belt, beautifully cut, and there was extensive fur round his collar. Arthur Augustus had been feeling very pleased with himself as he surveyed his reflection in the glass, until the rude remarks of Herries and Dig caused him to turn pink with wrath.

"Where does it hurt most, Gussy?" inquired Herries gravely. "It must hurt to wear a thing like that, I suppose?"

"You uttah ass, Hewwies—"

"Why not make an honest penny by having your photo taken in that, and selling it to all the comic papers?" suggested Dig.

"Why, you—you uttah boundah—"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle in his eye and glared speechlessly at his grinning chums.

Blake was not there. He had gone off a quarter of an hour ago to the flying ground—as a section of the playing fields where two small hangars had been erected was now being called. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had looked in for him, and they had all gone off together, for this afternoon was the first occasion on which the juniors were to have an actual flight—so far they had simply had lectures on flying from their instructors—and they had not felt inclined to wait while Arthur Augustus donned his weird and wonderful flying suit.

"Yes, 'Comic Cuts' would jump at a photo of Gussy in that rig-out," nodded Herries, with a chuckle.

"Look heah, Hewwies, if you are twyin' to be funnay—"

"Funny—me?" gasped Herries. "Why, dash it, it's you that's trying to be funny, isn't it?"

"You—you uttah—"

"You don't mean to say you're being funny accidentally, old chap?" queried Digby blandly. "I thought you were dressing-up to amuse the children at a kids' party, or something like that!"

"Bai Jove! I—I uttahly wefuse—"

Words failed Arthur Augustus. He clenched his fists and hurled himself at his facetious chums.

Biff! Biff!

"Yaroooooh!"

Herries gave a yell as his noble chum's knuckles came in contact with his nose, and he sat down in the coal-scuttle with surprising promptness. Digby, too, let forth a howl as the swell of St. Jim's punched him on the same prominent feature. Dig collapsed into the fender dazedly.

"Oh! My hat!"

"I tvust that will be a lesson to you, you uttah boundahs!" snorted Arthur Augustus. "I considah you both uttah asses!"

And with that withering comment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sailed from the study, leaving his chums gasping and rubbing their noses.

The swell of St. Jim's sailed away towards the stairs.

"My—my giddy aunt!"

Kit Wildrake of the Fourth turned into the passage just as Arthur Augustus was emerging from it. At sight of the swell of St. Jim's in his wonderful flying suit the boy from British Columbia staggered back and shaded his eyes with his hand.

"Oh, great Scott!" gasped Wildrake dazedly, staring in

A Question of "Wait"!



horror at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's garb. "Why on earth are you dressed up like a Christmas-tree? Christmas is months off!"

"You silly fellah!" hooted Arthur Augustus. "This is my flyin' kit!"

"Flying kit?" echoed Wildrake faintly. "Then you're not supposed to be Santa Claus, or good King Wenceslas, or anybody like that?"

Arthur Augustus glared at Wildrake as though he contemplated physical violence. But, with a furious snort, he stamped on towards the stairs, breathing very hard.

At the foot of the stairs a group of Sixth-Formers were standing. They stared at Arthur Augustus with a good deal of astonishment as he appeared, and smiled. The swell of St. Jim's noticed those smiles, and sniffed as he sailed by towards the sunlit doorway.

"Crumbs! It's old Gus!"

It was the astonished voice of Wally D'Arcy that greeted Arthur Augustus as he merged into the quad.

Wally was standing by the foot of the steps, with Reggie Manners, Frankie Levison, and Curly Gibson. The four fags surveyed Wally's major blankly.

A broad grin appeared on Wally's face.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Wally. "Joined the Portuguese army, or what, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or have they made you an admiral in the Swiss navy?" inquired Wally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wally, you howwid little boundah! I shall administah a feahful thwashin'!" gasped Arthur Augustus, crimson to the roots of his hair, so far as that fact could be seen in his dressy flying helmet. "I-I-I—"

"I know what it is, you chaps!" exclaimed Wally. "Gussy's been made Grand Jum-Jum and Chief Hokey-Pokey to the King of Siam!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Reggie, Frankie, and Curly shrieked.

With an almost purple countenance, Arthur Augustus rushed at the fags. But he missed his footing on the steps, and the next moment he was flying to the bottom, while the chortling fags vanished hastily to safety round the corner of the house. Arthur Augustus, winded and fuming, scrambled up to find that they had disappeared utterly.

"Young wuffians!" panted the swell of St. Jim's. "I shall have to administah a feahful thwashin' to young Wally!"

And after a hasty brush-down the outraged major of the scamp of the Third continued on his interrupted course to the flying field.

As an airman, Arthur Augustus meant to show St. Jim's what was what!

CHAPTER 8.

Flying I

"GENTLY with that joystick, young 'un!"

Tom Merry nodded.

Seated in the pupil's cockpit of one of the St. Jim's machines, telephonically connected with his instructor, the captain of the Shell was skimming high above the green playing fields, with the River Rhyl winding like a silver snake far below.

Tom Merry had been the first to go up that afternoon, and already he was getting the hang of the controls with astonishing skill.

He was having the time of his life. The feel of the plane, as it raced through the air with all the strength of five hundred horse-power behind the propeller, thrilled him. His eyes were shining behind their goggles as he peered down at the tiny patch that he knew to be the old quad of St. Jim's.

"Now for another turn, young 'un!" came the voice of Captain Benson, his instructor, in his earphones. "I'll leave it to you!"

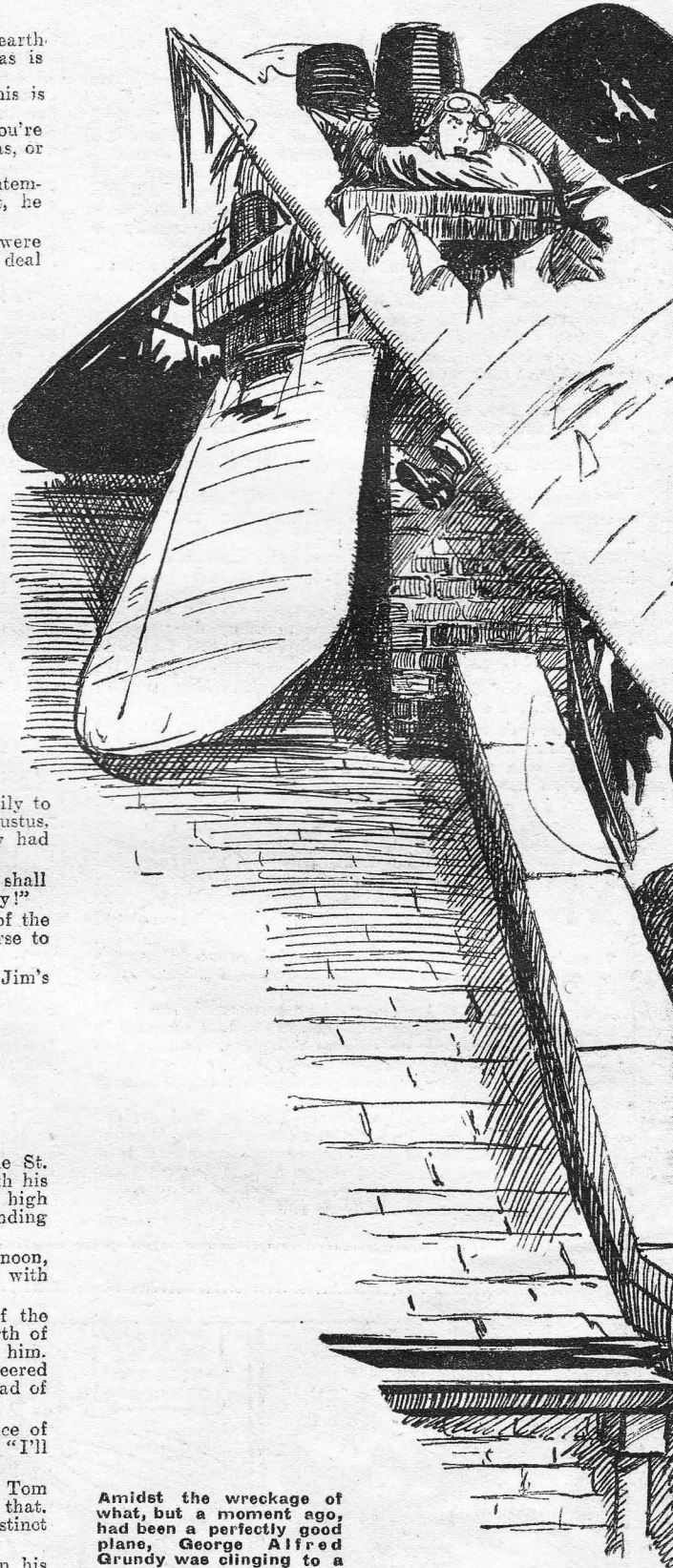
High up as they were, there was no danger even if Tom stalled the machine. But he was not likely to do that. He was already getting the "feel" of the plane—the instinct which every pilot must possess.

His feet on the rudder-bar, the joystick grasped in his hands, he brought the machine round in a wide sweep, working the controls in perfect unison.

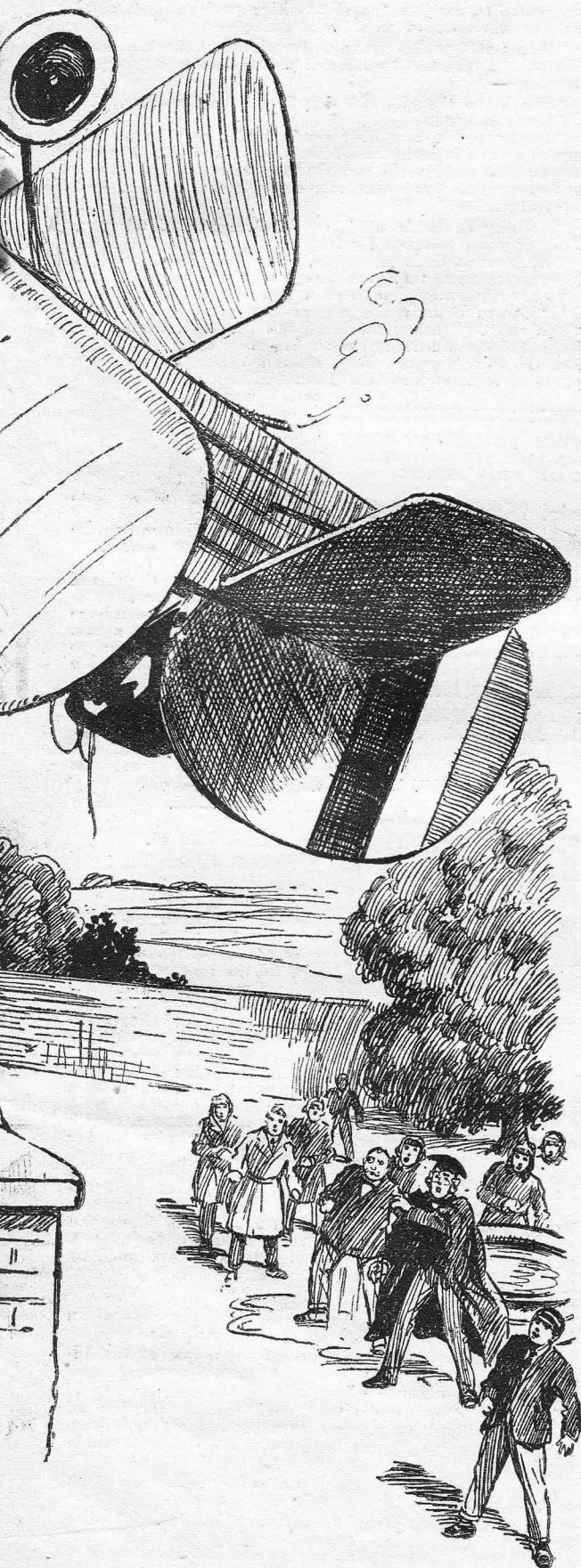
"Fine!" came the voice of the pilot. "Have to get down now—the others must have a go!"

Tom knew that landing a plane is the most difficult thing in flying, and, as he expected, his instructor took

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Amidst the wreckage of what, but a moment ago, had been a perfectly good plane, George Alfred Grundy was clinging to a chimney-pot!



charge of the machine again. They curved down, the ground seeming to rise to meet them. Soon he could make out the watching upturned faces of the fellows below.

Turning the machine into the wind, the pilot dived for the grass.

It was at that moment that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, gorgeous in his wonderful flying suit, appeared on the playing fields!

Had Arthur Augustus been less occupied with thoughts of his elegant appearance and more with looking where he was going, he would not have had the fright of his life that he then received!

The first the swell of St. Jim's realised of his danger was when a warning yell from a dozen throats rang out across the grass:

"Gussy, you ass——"

"Out of the light, you burbling dummy!"

Arthur Augustus, sailing over the grass towards the hangars, where the plane in which Reginald Talbot had been receiving instruction had just landed, gave a gasp as he suddenly caught sight of the second machine diving straight towards him.

"Oh cwumbs!"

Arthur Augustus gave a wild yell.

He turned and bolted for safety, his eyeglass flying, his mouth wide and gasping.

"Ha, ha, ha! Go it, Gussy!"

The watching juniors yelled. They could not help it. The sight of Arthur Augustus, in his weird and wonderful air rig-out, sprinting wildly across the grass to avoid the diving plane, struck them as funny!

Zo-o-o-o-ooooom!

The machine came humming down, the pilot turning to keep clear of the frantic figure of Arthur Augustus. It taxied to rest near the hangars, and it was a very breathless and gasping Arthur Augustus that staggered up to the waiting group of schoolboy airmen.

There had been no real danger—the pilot of the descending plane had seen to that. But Arthur Augustus was considerably shaken.

"Ow! Oh, bai Jove! I—I considah——"

"Better keep out of the light in future, young 'un," said the second pilot, whose name was Chalmers, sternly. "If you go day-dreaming over the flying field like that, you'll be getting hurt!"

Arthur Augustus sniffed, and glared at the grinning juniors and said nothing.

"Doesn't he look lovely, you chaps?" grinned George Figgins, of the New House. "I should think you could almost fly without an aeroplane in a rig-out like that, Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway do not be an uttah ass, Figgay!" snapped Arthur Augustus icily.

The juniors chuckled. But they turned from surveying Gussy's suit as Tom Merry and Captain Benson climbed out of the plane and crossed towards them.

"How did you like it, Tommy?" asked Manners eagerly.

"Ripping!" grinned Tom Merry, as he pulled off his goggles.

Benson clapped him on the shoulder.

"You'll make a fine pilot, young 'un!" he grinned. "A few more lessons, and you'll be good enough to take a pilot's certificate—as soon as you're old enough!"

Tom flushed with pleasure.

The pilot surveyed Arthur Augustus with a grin, his eyes resting on the wonderful flying-suit.

"What are you supposed to be, dressed up like that?" he inquired.

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Why—ah!—this is my flyin' suit, bai Jove!" he explained.

"Oh, is it?" Captain Benson chuckled. "All right; come along, and see what we can make of you!"

Ho turned back towards the plane, and Arthur Augustus hurried eagerly after him. The other pilot's eyes fastened on the rugged figure of George Alfred Grundy.

"I'll take you," he said. "Come on!"

"Good egg!" grinned Grundy.

The other juniors watched curiously as the two planes zoomed up into the air, climbing swiftly.

It was soon clear that George Alfred Grundy was giving his instructor a good deal of trouble. The plane in which Grundy was receiving instruction, once it was at a sufficient height for Grundy to take over, began to stall and roll and "pancake" in the most astonishing fashion.

"Great pip!" grinned Blake. "Look at old Grundy!"

Even as the juniors stared up, Grundy's machine got into a complete nose-dive. It righted itself—evidently the pilot had taken over again.

"I wouldn't teach Grundy to fly for a million giddy quid!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

The juniors chuckled. But they would not have chuckled could they have seen into the future! For George Alfred Grundy, now skidding wildly about far above their heads, was going to be an important factor with regard to flying at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 9.

Poor Old Grundy!

H EARD the news?"

Reginald Talbot put his grinning face in at the door of Study No. 10 in the Shell passage to ask that question.

It was after tea, more than a week later. The Terrible Three were clearing up the tea-things. But they paused in their task at Talbot's appearance.

"What news?" asked Tom Merry.

"About Grundy!"

"What's Grundy been up to?" grinned Monty Lowther.

"He's barred," chuckled Talbot. "Poor old Grundy! Barred from flying, I mean. Benson and Chalmers, the pilots, have told the Head he's hopeless—will never make a pilot, and that he isn't safe in an aeroplane. The Head's forbidden him to have any more lessons."

"Poor old Grundy!" grinned Tom Merry. "Well, I'm not surprised. He's as hopeless a duffer in the air as anywhere else."

"Rather!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "To watch old Grundy skidding about up there like a sick duck is enough to make a cat laugh. I should think he's pretty well turned the instructor's hair grey by now."

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather!" chuckled Manners. Talbot grinned and departed.

He had not been gone long when there was a heavy knock on the door. It flew open to reveal the rugged face of Grundy himself glaring into the study.

"Talk of angels," murmured Tom Merry. "Hallo, Grundy!"

Grundy strode into the study. Evidently he was looking for sympathy. His own chums, Wilkins and Gunn, had somehow failed to be very sympathetic. Instead, they had been humorous at Grundy's expense. Wherefore, Grundy had "walloped" them, and left them battered and dishevelled in their study while he sought other ears into which to pour his woes.

"I say, what do you think—" began Grundy, in a roaring voice.

"We've heard all about it, old chap," said Manners, shaking his head gravely. "Hard luck!"

"It's a shame!" sighed Monty Lowther, with a wink at his chums.

"You're right—it's a howling shame!" snorted Grundy. "The Head doesn't know what he's talking about! Neither do those blessed flying instructors! Pilots—them! My hat! Why, I could pilot them silly!"

"That's just about what you seem to have done, old bean," suggested Tom Merry, under his breath.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a howling shame!" repeated Grundy fiercely. "As Lowther says, it's a howling shame!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Lowther solemnly. "I mean to say, the chaps don't get so much fun in term time that they

can afford to miss the fun of watching you skating around the sky like a board on a bit of string—"

"Wha-a-at?" yelled Grundy. He glared at the humorous Monty. "Look here, Lowther, if you've been trying to pull my leg—"

"Perish the thought, old chap!" grinned Lowther. Grundy snorted.

"I tell you, I'm a rattling good pilot! I may have made one or two little mistakes. I don't say I haven't. I won't say I didn't accidentally loop the loop the other day, instead of turning—but that's a mistake any pilot might make—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to cackle at!" snorted Grundy. "I tell you, I'm not going to stand for it!"

"What on earth do you mean, Grundy?" ejaculated Tom Merry, staring at the great George Alfred in astonishment.

"I'm jolly well going to show I'm the best pilot of the lot!" hooted Grundy, his rugged face grim with resolve. "You wait! I heard the Head tell Ralton that old Sir Rollo Prance is turning up on Saturday afternoon to see how the flying's going. Well, when he's here, I'm going to prove in front of him that I can handle a plane with one hand behind my back! After that, he'll insist on the Head letting me carry on, if he's got any sense!"

Grundy stamped out of the study, leaving the Terrible Three staring after him blankly.

"What the dickens does he mean by that?" ejaculated Manners.

"Goodness knows!" grinned Tom. "Poor old Grundy!"

"Don't see how he can hope to prove he can pilot a bus, if they won't let him even go up in one!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, in utter bewilderment.

"Well, Grundy's got some wheeze up his sleeve, evidently!" chuckled Tom. It certainly looked as though Grundy had!

CHAPTER 10.

Grundy Shows 'Em!

Z OOOO-O-OM!

"Great Scott!" Kildare of the Sixth jumped, and gave that astonished exclamation as the roar of a distant aeroplane suddenly broke upon his ears.

The captain of St. Jim's was standing in the Head's garden in conversation with Dr. Holmes, Sir Rollo Prance, and the two young airmen who had become pilot instructors at St. Jim's.

It was early after dinner on Saturday afternoon.

Sir Rollo had come over to watch an exhibition by the budding pilots of St. Jim's, under the care of their instructors. Though Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, Talbot and Figgins and Blake and most of the others had readily picked up the knowledge necessary to pilot a machine, they were too young, of course, to be allowed by law to take a plane up single-handed.

Zo-o-o-oom!

From the direction of the playing fields the roar of an aeroplane's engines swelled out on the still air.

There was a startled exclamation from one of the instructors.

"What the dickens—"

They stared in utter astonishment towards the line of elms that fringed the playing fields. A few moments later a glittering aeroplane rose to view over the tree-tops, climbing steeply.

Kildare's face went suddenly set as he realised the truth of the situation.

"Good heavens!" gasped the captain of St. Jim's. "Some unauthorised person has collared one of the machines!"

The faces of the two pilots were a study. So was the face

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of the Head. Sir Rollo Prance, staring up at the aeroplane as it roared by above their heads, was looking utterly bewildered.

"I do not understand!" he barked. "Hurrmp! Churrmp! Who the dickens is in that plane? Dash it all—"

He broke off. The plane swept past above them, curving round above the quad. From all sides, fellows were hurrying out in utter astonishment.

The two pilots could be seen in the Head's garden—and without them there was no one at St. Jim's who might go up!

"Who on earth—" gasped Jack Blake, staring up from the School House steps.

The Terrible Three, Talbot, and Kangaroo, were standing on the steps with the chums of Study No. 6. From Tom Merry there broke a startled yell.

Suddenly a flash of intuition had told him the truth.

"Grundy!"

"Gwunday?" echoed Arthur Augustus, in bewilderment. Arthur Augustus was clad in his gorgeous flying suit, in readiness for the afternoon's flight. Tom Merry, Blake, and some of the others were carrying flying helmets. But Tom's helmet fell forgotten to the ground as he clutched Manners by the arm.

"Grundy!" he yelled. "It's Grundy, as sure as eggs! That's what he meant when he said he'd show the Head he was capable of taking a bus up! He's collared one of 'em, to show what he can do! Oh, the burbling lunatic!"

"B-bai Jove!"

"My only Sunday chapeau!" breathed Manners faintly.

"He'll kill himself!" gasped Kangaroo, his staring eyes fixed on the plane that, with Grundy at the controls, was now zooming past over their heads again.

"Look!" yelled Blake.

Though Grundy had, in some miraculous way succeeded in getting the machine into the air without mishap, it was quite clear to the watchers below that he had little more idea of how to pilot an aeroplane than, say, old Taggles might have had.

The machine was behaving in a weird and extraordinary manner, if ever an aeroplane did.

Skidding and staggering and rolling, it went lurching along through the air like a sick duck, in a way that had become familiar to the St. Jim's fellows during the last few days whenever they had watched Grundy taking instruction. Even had they not known of Grundy's mysterious threat, the way the aeroplane was being piloted would have been sufficient proof for most of the fellows that Grundy was at the controls.

From the School House and the New House, fellows were pouring into the quad to watch Grundy's amazing antics.

Pitching and climbing alternately in the most astonishing fashion, Grundy's aeroplane swept away over the playing fields once more, followed by scores of staring eyes.

"Look!" yelled Tom Merry.

The nose of the machine had suddenly shot into the air. With a great somersault, it looped the loop completely, and staggered on.

Grundy had not had the slightest intention of looping the loop. That had been one of Grundy's little accidents, as the onlookers all realised.

"He's coming back!" gasped Herries. "Oh, my hat!"

Grundy had turned again—whether by accident or design, he alone knew. Probably the manoeuvre had been an accident. When Grundy was in the air things seldom happened as he intended.

With roaring engines Grundy swept down upon the quad. He had seen the figures in the Head's garden—had recognised the Head and Sir Rollo, and was determined to impress them thoroughly.

"I'll jolly well loop the blessed loop right over their nappers!" grinned Grundy to himself, in the cockpit.

He got busy with the control column. But now that he wanted to loop the loop, he somehow didn't! The previous loop had been an accident pure and simple. On this occasion things went wrong again, to Grundy's great surprise.

Instead of looping, as he had hoped, he found himself diving down towards the figures in the Head's garden at a breathless pace.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Grundy.

He dragged frantically on the control column.

With a rush and a roar, the plane came swooping down upon the Head, Sir Rollo, Kildare, and the two stupefied pilots. Sir Rollo gave a wild howl, and bolted.

It was unlucky for the gallant baronet that the Head's fountain was near at hand.

He did not look particularly where he was going. All he wanted was to get clear of the path of the diving plane. He could hear it thundering down towards him, and gave a last frantic yell.

The next moment—as Grundy succeeded in rising again in the nick of time to avoid hitting the ducking heads of Dr. Holmes, Kildare, and the two pilots—Sir Rollo vanished with a mighty splash into the fountain.

"Yaroooooosh!"

Sir Rollo disappeared for a few moments beneath the surface. When he appeared again, his head festooned with water-weeds, Grundy was climbing rapidly over the School House, roaring up into the blue once more.

"Gad! Dash it! Yoooooosh! Yah!" panted Sir Rollo. "B-bless my soul!" ejaculated the Head faintly. "Kildare—quick! Assist Sir Rollo! Sir Rollo is in the fountain!"

The headmaster of St. Jim's passed a hand across his lofty brow. It was quite damp—though not half so damp as Sir Rollo's.

Kildare ran forward, and helped the spluttering, raging baronet from the fountain. As he did so, he heard a mighty crash.

There was a startled cry from the Head.

Kildare turned quickly, and gave a gasp.

George Alfred Grundy's amazing flight had ended—on the roof of the New House!

In trying to turn without sufficient engine-speed, the great George Alfred had side-stepped on to the chimney-pots of Mr. Ratcliff's House.

For a moment Kildare's face filled with intense alarm. But the next instant he saw that Grundy was safe enough.

George Alfred, half in and half out of the wreckage of what had, only a minute before, been a perfectly good aeroplane, was clinging to a chimney-pot in a dazed way—rather like a nesting cuckoo, as Monty Lowther said afterwards.

"Oh gad!" gasped Sir Rollo. "Oh, yaroooooosh! I'm soaked, dash it! Who was that blithering lunatic? If that's the way they teach flying at St. Jim's, dash it, that's enough! I withdraw my offer! Dash it, I won't stand for it any more! I will no longer finance the project, I tell you—"

"Calm yourself, my dear Sir Rollo," said the Head. His tones were very grim. "I fancy," he added, not without a note of triumph in his tone, "that this proves that my original contention was right! Schoolboys should not be allowed to learn the control of such dangerous machines!"

He fixed the distant figure of Grundy, still clinging to the chimney-pot, with a glittering eye that boded ill for George Alfred.

"That boy shall receive his deserts, Sir Rollo!" barked the Head. "And after this I can assure you that there shall be no further flying instructions at St. Jim's!"

CHAPTER 11.
Grave News!

"IT'S rotten!"

Jack Blake made that gloomy remark. Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby were seated in Study No. 10 with the Terrible Three.

The faces of all were long.

"All through that ass Grundy!" growled Manners.

"Trust Grundy to put his spoke in somewhere!" snorted Lowther.

"Wotten!" sniffed Arthur Augustus. "And with an almost bwand-new flyin' suit, too! Oh dear!"


"Blow your blessed flying suit!" snapped Blake. "It's the flying that matters!"

(Continued on next page.)

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And Arthur Augustus was too disheartened even to argue about that little point.

The edict had gone forth—no more flying instruction. Already the two young pilots who had grown so popular with the St. Jim's fellows had left. On the morrow a mechanic would arrive from the company that employed them to fly away the undamaged machine. The other was still a mass of wreckage on the roof of the New House, where Grundy had inadvertently landed it.

Grundy himself had come down from his lofty perch by way of a skylight, to a decidedly painful interview with the Head. Grundy had been bruised a good deal before that interview. After it, he had been still more bruised—in a place that made sitting down a very uncomfortable process for the great George Alfred!

Grundy had had the flogging of his life! But it was more the blow to his pride than the blows to his person that had upset him, and reduced him to a shamefaced penitent for once in a way.

He had made himself very scarce that evening. Though it was now nearly bed-time, the furious fellows who had been "done out of" their flying, thanks to him, and wished to point out that fact to Grundy, had been quite unable to find him.

"The burbling dummy!" growled Manners, for about the tenth time. "Wait till I get hold of him! I'll—"

There was a knock on the door. The next moment Eric Kildare had stepped quickly into the study.

Something in his face caused the juniors to stare at him.

"What's up?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Merry, I want you to bike into Wayland like mad, and fetch Dr. Harvey," said the captain swiftly. "The Head has been taken ill! As luck would have it, the phone went out of order this morning! Ride like blazes!" He glanced at the startled faces of the rest. "Get to bed, you others—it's bed-time!"

The captain vanished before any of the anxious questions on the lips of the juniors could be voiced.

"The Head ill!" breathed Herries. "Oh, great Scott!" Tom Merry's face had gone rather white. Kildare's manner had shown him that things were terribly grave.

But it was no time for wondering. He snatched up his cap, and raced from the study without a word, heading for the stairs.

There was a light burning in the window of what he knew to be the Head's bedroom, as the captain of the Shell sped across the dark quad towards the cycle-shed.

Two minutes later Tom Merry was pedalling furiously along the road to Wayland.

The Head ill—gravely ill, without a doubt!

Tom's heart was oddly cold as he rode at breakneck speed along the darkening lanes.

Dr. Harvey, the grey-haired little medical man from Wayland, stepped back from the bed where Dr. Holmes was lying with closed eyes, and shook his head.

There was something terribly ominous about that shake of the head, it seemed to Tom Merry.

Tom had come back in the doctor's car, anxious to learn of the Head's condition as soon as possible. Since no one had forbidden him—no one, perhaps, had thought of it, in the general anxiety—he had accompanied the doctor into the Head's room, and waited, silently watching.

"I am afraid—" muttered the medical man, and broke off.

"Tell me the worst, please," said Mr. Railton quietly.

Mr. Railton, the young Housemaster of the School House, and Mr. Ratcliff, were both in the room, together with Kildare and Darrell of the Sixth. Mrs. Locke was away from home.

The Head's faint breathing, as he lay unconscious on the bed, alone broke the stillness, as Dr. Harvey hesitated.

"Mr. Railton, I will not hide the truth. It is hopeless."

Tom Merry felt as though someone had struck him in the face. He saw Mr. Railton stiffen and grow deathly pale.

"There is only one man in the world who could save Dr. Holmes' life," went on the medical man quietly. "He is a French specialist—a Dr. Rivoli. He is at present at the Concorde Hospital, in Paris. With him here, to perform an operation that he alone can perform, Dr. Holmes' life could, I believe, be saved. Without that it is hopeless. And, of course, there is no time to fetch Dr. Rivoli. Unless the operation could be performed within eight hours, I—"

He broke off, with a hopeless shrug.

Eight hours! And the one man in the world who could save the Head's life in far-off Paris!

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Tom Merry, standing unnoticed in the shadow, felt sick with helplessness.

"Of course, it is utterly impossible to bring Dr. Rivoli here in time," Dr. Harvey was saying, in a voice that sounded strangely far away to Tom Merry. "I will do the best I can, of course, but I dare not attempt that operation myself. There is no man in England who would. It would mean certain death for anyone but this Frenchman to try—"

Dr. Harvey broke off, startled, as the sudden figure of a schoolboy, whose presence he had forgotten, leapt forward and grasped him by the arm.

Tom Merry's face was white; but his eyes were burning with a new light.

"The plane!" cried Tom hoarsely. "It's out there!" He flung out a pointing arm. "I'll fly to France and bring Dr. Rivoli back! I'll make him come—"

Mr. Railton stepped quickly forward.

"Nonsense, Merry! You do not know what you are saying! There is a storm brewing, apart from all else. Listen!" Even as he spoke a peal of thunder rumbled across the sky outside. "No, my boy, your idea is a wild one. It does you credit, but you had better get to bed."

"But, sir—"

"Go!"

Tom turned blindly and went from the room, closing the door behind him after a last look at the Head's still form. From outside came another crash of thunder, loud and ominous.

Tom Merry clenched his fists.

"I don't care!" His eyes were gleaming fiercely. "The Head shan't die—not if I can do anything to save him! I'm going to take that plane up, storm or no storm, and if I don't get to France to-night—if I crash—I'll, at any rate, know I've tried."

He broke into a run. Flickering lightning lit the passage through the dim windows as he raced along it from the room where the old Head lay—the room to which he must bring, within eight hours, a man from far-off France!

A few heavy splashes of rain were beginning to drop through the hot, storm-laden air as Tom Merry raced stumbingly across the playing fields towards the dim outline of the aeroplane hangars.

Before leaving the School House he had looked in at Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, and hastily donned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's famous flying suit. And on the sturdy figure of the captain of the Shell it certainly looked more businesslike than when adorning the elegant, monocled swell of St. Jim's.

A peal of thunder crashed out above his head as he arrived, breathless, outside the hangars.

Tom knew in which of them the aeroplane was. The big doors were locked, and he had no key, but there was a heavy, wooden block lying on the ground, and he seized it, raising it above his head.

Crash!

A few shattering blows were enough. A minute later Tom was dragging the great doors wide.

He raced into the darkness of the hangar. Turning on the electric lights—it was unlikely that their glare would be noticed from the distant school buildings—he set to work swiftly and quietly to prepare the plane for its long night flight.

Plenty of petrol was stored in the back of the hangar, and Tom Merry thought he had never seen petrol flow so slowly as he replenished the machine's tank, filling it to capacity. He found a heavy baulk of timber, and dumped it into the observer's cockpit, knowing—as Grundy had not known—that a human weight, or its equivalent, was needed there to ensure the plane's stability. He set the controls, and dragged round the big propeller.

The engine roared into life instantly, the propeller ticking slowly round.

Tom swung into the pilot's seat.

"Now for it!"

He quickened the engines, and the machine taxied slowly forward out of the hangar on to the dark grass.

Zo-o-oooom!

The engine revved up with a shattering roar, and the machine began to bump and run more swiftly over the ground. Faster and faster till the wheels lost contact, and graceful as a bird, the blue-and-silver plane, lit by the flickering lightning, skimmed off the grass and rose steadily into the still air.

Zooooo-o-oooom!

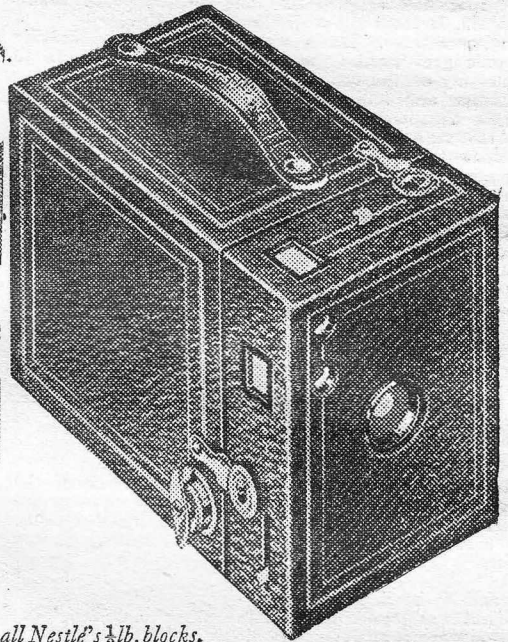
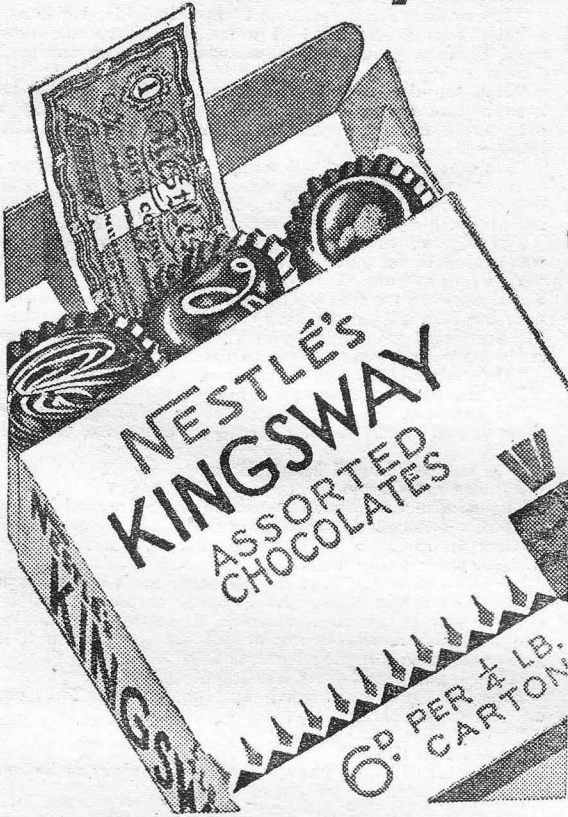
The machine seemed to fling itself at the sky as it

(Continued on page 20.)

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The Schoolboy Airmen!

(Continued from page 18.)

roared up steeply, skimming over the tree-tops, climbing fast. Round in a wide, banking curve it roared, till the quad lay below, with that light glowing in the Head's window, and the old buildings of St. Jim's black and silent in the gloom. Tom flung a swift glance down through his goggles, then set his face for the stars.

With whirling propeller and shrieking engines the plane curved away over the school, heading south.

CHAPTER 13.

Back at St. Jim's!

"HE is sinking fast!"

The low voice of the doctor broke the silence that had reigned for long in the room where Dr. Holmes lay with closed eyes.

It was hours later. Dawn was filling the quad outside with a pale grey light. A few sparrows had begun to twitter sleepily on the roof of the School House.

Mr. Railton and Kildare, seated with the little medical man by the Head's bed, their faces wan and drawn from their terrible vigil, glanced at Dr. Harvey without speaking.

They knew that all that could be done had been done. Nothing now but to wait for what seemed the inevitable end.

Kildare covered his face with his hands; his shoulders shook. The captain of St. Jim's was the last fellow to give way to emotion, as a rule, but the beloved old Head had been one of the best and finest friends Eric Kildare had ever known.

Mr. Railton laid a sympathetic hand on the captain's shoulder; he did not speak.

The face of the old Head, with its splendid, dignified features, was quiet and composed as he lay with closed eyes, scarcely seeming to breathe.

"Can nothing more be done, doctor?" muttered Mr. Railton.

His voice choked a little with emotion.

But the medical man shook his head.

Mr. Railton found himself listening to the twitter of the waking birds. And then, dimly at first, he became conscious of another sound forcing itself upon his attention—a faint, faraway hum, scarcely audible, rising and falling on the dawn wind.

"Hark!"

He turned his head, listening.

The sound was louder now. The hum of an aeroplane. Mr. Railton gave a swift exclamation.

"Can it be—"

He broke off and stood up quickly, striding to the window. He dragged back the curtains, and the grey light of early morning fell into the room, wan against the electric light that still burned brightly within.

Feverishly his eyes searched the sky.

"What is it, sir?" muttered Kildare.

"I thought I heard an aeroplane," breathed Mr. Railton hoarsely. "I wondered if it could be Merry—"

He broke off and flung out a pointing hand.

"Look!"

A tiny black speck in the sky had caught his eyes, high up. It seemed to grow in size as he stood staring out, his gaze riveted upon it.

Kildare came quickly to his side. The little medical man joined them. The three stood without speaking, watching, with breathless suspense, as the approaching dork speck drew nearer with what seemed amazing slowness.

The hum of the aeroplane's engines could be heard distinctly now.

The first rays of sunlight caught the high-up plane, and for a moment it glittered like silver in the sky.

"I do believe—" began Mr. Railton, but did not finish.

A wild hope had leapt into the eyes of Eric Kildare.

Not for a moment had any of the three imagined that Tom Merry could succeed in his desperate project. They had believed that, at best, he would be forced to land long before reaching Paris; at worst, that he would crash, and add another tragedy to that night. But now—

Nearer and nearer the glittering plane was undoubtedly speeding directly for the school. It was no longer a mere speck, but a distinguishable object.

Zo-o-ooooom!

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"It is!" panted Kildare suddenly. "I'll swear it is! It's our plane—"

From the bed behind him came a faint groan as the Head stirred in his unconsciousness. Instantly Dr. Harvey hurried to him. But Kildare and Mr. Railton stayed at the window, their eyes riveted on the glittering machine that was racing towards St. Jim's.

"It's coming down certainly!" breathed Mr. Railton.

"It's Tom Merry, sir! I know that plane all right!" cried Kildare, with an odd, unsteady laugh of excitement. "He's back—"

"But the doctor—the Frenchman! He cannot have brought him so soon from Paris!" Mr. Railton's voice was once again all but hopeless. "It must be that he turned back—"

"He may have done it!" snapped Kildare, with gleaming eyes. "The wind would be behind him all the way, and it dropped some hours ago altogether, we know, so it would not hinder him on the way back. He may have done it!"

The roar of the aeroplane's engines was loud now. It was diving down towards the quad, as if to crash into the very window from which Mr. Railton and the captain of St. Jim's were watching. But suddenly it turned, sweeping over the New House, rising a moment to keep well clear of the buildings. It roared over the elms, a great blue-and-silver shape, and vanished from their sight.

"He's landed!" breathed Kildare.

Dr. Harvey turned from the bed.

"If that boy has been successful in fetching Dr. Rivoli there is just time," he said quietly; "otherwise, the end is near."

"Go and see!" cried Mr. Railton.

Kildare raced from the room.

The captain's fingers were shaking as he dragged back the bolts of the School House door and ran cut on to the steps; he tore down them and across the dew-drenched quad towards the playing fields.

He could hear the roar of the aeroplane's engines somewhere beyond the trees. As he burst through the line of elms he saw it taxi to a standstill on Little Side. At once two helmeted figures swung out of the cockpits on to the grass and came hurrying towards him.

Kildare gave something like a little sob.

Tom Merry had returned—and not alone. That could only mean one thing.

"Merry!"

"Are we in time?"

Tom Merry's voice was strained and anxious as he came running towards the captain of St. Jim's.

"If that is Dr. Rivoli—yes!"

A shining light sprang into Tom's eyes. He turned quickly to his companion.

"Yes, this is Dr. Rivoli! This way, sir—"

Kildare found himself hurrying beside a lean, bearded man carrying a small black case—Dr. Rivoli. They broke into a run as they crossed the quad.

"Where is he—monsieur who is ill?" panted the Frenchman in very broken English.

"This way, sir!" breathed Kildare.

With Tom Merry at their heels, they hurried upstairs to the Head's room. Mr. Railton was standing at the end of the passage, and at the sight of Kildare's companion he gave an exclamation of wonderful relief.

Together they hurried into the sick-room.

Dr. Rivoli's eyes swept towards the bed. In a moment he was stooping over the Head, while the others watched in breathless suspense. Then the Frenchman nodded in a businesslike way.

"It is well," he muttered. "He can be saved." He turned to Dr. Harvey. "You, monsieur, are an Engleesh doctaire? Bien! You can administer the anæsthetic, please, for me. These other gentlemen, per'aps, will wait outside the room?"

"Very well," said Mr. Railton quietly.

Accompanied by Kildare and Tom Merry, the young Housemaster strode from the room, leaving the Frenchman peeling off his coat. He closed the door softly and turned to Tom Merry.

"Merry," he said in a steady voice, "you have saved Dr. Holmes' life. Thank Heaven you disobeyed me and went, in spite of me! I see now that I was wrong to try to prevent you. But I never dreamed you could be successful—not for a moment."

Tom flushed

"I—I thought I'd like to have a shot at it, sir."

Mr. Railton held out his hand. Tom gripped it. Kildare dropped a hand on to his shoulder in a way that told Tom very well what the captain thought, and again he flushed—with pleasure, this time.

"Come to my room," said Mr. Railton quietly. "We will wait there."

(Continued on page 24.)

100% Story of the Roaring West!



ONE TON WILLY

THE GHOST of the GULCH!

Adventure No. 3 as told by that dour old veteran of the saddle and plains, Johnny Carter, of Broken B Ranch.

CHAPTER 1. "Ghoshts!"

WELL, gents, this is Johnny Carter calling, and believe me, I sure have something to broadcast. You may remember how I done told you Hank Smith was plumb tired of One-Ton Willy, what had made hisself the Sheriff of Hammertoe Gulch, strutting about the place as if he was the real, dyed in the wool, gold-plated, best, all-fired sheriff as ever carried the silver star, when all the time he was only a fat bluffer, a quitter, and as full o' air as the empty space atween the earth and the sky.

Well, gents, Hank Smith wasn't more tired than anybody else in Hammertoe, but he done have better reasons for taking action along of One-Ton making him deputy sheriff, which sort o' put a heap o' responsibility on Hank. Hank allowed he'd think up a plan that 'ud show One-Ton to the whole world for what he was, and make him as tired of being sheriff as we was of seeing him sheriff.

Us boys was willing, and we scented a spot of fun, so we allowed we'd help Hank and stand by him all the way from Hammertoe to Holly-wood, and farther, if need be. Letting One-Ton become sheriff was sure a fine joke, but some jokes have a knack of becoming a bit more'n a joke, and it don't matter which happens along, One-Ton manages to come out on the right side of any luck what is going, which don't help to please us any.

And for the benefit of any gent what doesn't happen to know, let me say, here and now, that One-Ton Willy Wood is sure the fattest guy in the United States of America, Canada, Mexico, Long Island, Rum Row, and the whole dog-goned Continent! Leastways, hombes, if there is a guy fatter'n One-Ton, my advice to him is to take poison, shoot hisself plumb through the brain, if any, tie bricks to his neck, jump in the nearest river, and get run over by forty thousand railway engines. And if that lot don't do the trick, then let him kill hisself.

What I mean, one feller like One-Ton is one too many, and I don't mean, maybe! The funny part about it is that One-Ton's daddy and mammy are thin, dried up, wizened-up, sawed-off little beggars, about five feet high and two inches thick, whereas, the first time you done set eyes on One-Ton hisself you'd be pardoned for thinking that his daddy was an outside in elephants and his mammy was a whale with dropsy. Not that One-Ton stands high. He don't. But what he lacks in height he sure makes good in girth. That feller is so fat he can't hide under a gasometer without raising a suspicion!

I done read a lot in my time, and I've heard tell of tricks of Nature what the professors with most whiskers can't explain. And I guess One-Ton is one of them—the mysteries. I mean, not the professors. Anyway, he was Sheriff of Hammertoe Gulch, and Hank allowed he'd think out a plan that 'ud make One-Ton look such a prime, first-class sap

that he'd resign, leave Hammertoe, and sell hisself to the Air Board as a balloon, or something. All of which us boys applauds, endorses, and agrees, backs up, and supports to the best of our ability, which sure is saying a mouthful. The only trouble is that Hank thunks and thunks and thunks, and he thunks of everything except the wonderful plot he is trying to think of.

It sure is annoying, but there isn't no plan come to Hank's brain, though he thunks till he goes red in the face, and he grabs at every suggestion without making anything of 'em. To see Hank trying to catch an idea that way sure is like a rhino snapping at skeeters, and about as successful.

Every night us boys sits in the saloon talking things over, trying to find a way o' stinging One-Ton so hard he'd be falling over hisself to stop being sheriff. But not a thing could we think, until, one night, the saloon door is nearly burst off'n its hinges, and old Alkali Alf, the desert rat, comes dashing in, with his dirty, uncombed whiskers all standing straight out from his chin, and his bleary eyes bloodshot and bulging.

"Amer'can citizens!" he bawls. "Air you sthanding by an' see a poor old man robbed of his life's savings?"

"No, I guess not," drawls Red Ryan. "Us is a-settin' down, Alkali. Can't you see?"

Now, gents, don't think as how Red Ryan has no heart.

Red sure was the tenderest waddy as ever I met up with, when it comes to sentiment, but we knows as how Alkali Alf isn't the sort of hombra you'd trust as soon as look at him. No, sir, you'd look at him after you'd trusted him, and you wouldn't lose sight of him, neether!

But Alkali sure is in a state of mental agony and agitation.

"I bin robbed!" he howls. "I bin robbed! I done had a hundred dollars o' placer gold wropped in me old handkey-chief," he says, "and I bin robbed of it!"

Just then who should barge in but our fat sheriff, namely, and to wit, One-Ton Willy Wood, and he's sure looking plumb important.

"What's all this shenanigan about robbing?" he bleats in his squeaky voice.

"A hundred dollars in gold nuggets," says Alkali Alf, nearly cryin' his old eyes out, "and I done bin robbed of it!"

"What?" howls One-Ton. "Who's the on-natural skunk as 'ud rob an old man like you?"

"It wasn't a skunk," said Alkali, trembling and going ghastly round the gills. "But it sure was on-natural!"

"What was it, old timer?" asks Hank Smith. "Was it a polecat?"

"No," snaps Alkali. "It was a ghosht!"

"A which?" asks Long Lane suspiciously.

"A ghosht," says Alkali. "A spook, will-o'-the-wisp, and

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Gulch Ghost Gives Gold to Sheriff!

spectra, what groans something awful and rattles his riding after something I don't believe in? I never was bones!" good at chasing shadows."

"There ain't one," says Hank, glancing over his shoulder nervously.

"And I don't believe in 'em, either," I says.

One-Ton is getting fidgety, and doesn't quite know what to do, though it's plain he'll have to do something.

"W-what w-was it like?" he asks.

"It was all black," says Alkali, sitting down quick, as if his pore old legs won't hold him up no longer. "It was all black—black face and hands, black clothes, and settin' on a black horse, with a black six-shooter in his black hand."

One-Ton says nothing, but he shivers a lot.

"And did he shoot black bullets, Alkali?" asks Red Ryan.

"Mebbe, yea," says Alkali, trembling a lot more. "He stood up there wid the moon shining behind him, he did, and he groans, and I hears his bones rattle. Then he hollers at me. 'Hey, Alkali,' he says, 'you'll done drop them nuggets, or I'll make you into a ghosht!' says he.

"And you done dropped 'em and ran?" says Long Lane.

"No, I never," said Alkali. "I may be old, but I ain't yellin'. You see, gents, at first I never guessed he was a ghosht. I done thought he was a hold-up with a black mask over his features. So I pulls out me six-shooter and lets fly at him, and I'm a fair good shoot, too. I empties me gun at him, and I'll swear every bullet went plumb through him and out at the back!"

"Apple sass!" sneers Hank Smith.

"It's the truth, gents," says Alkali. "See f'r yore-selves."

He puts his gun down on the table, and we examines the same and smells the barrel. Sure enough that gun had been fired and there wasn't a shell in the magazine, and I tell you we sort o' felt funny about it.

"It's the truth I'm tellin', gents," says Alkali. "I pumped lead into that guy, and he only laffed at me—'orrible laffs, too, they was, what made me blood run cold. In fact, me blood is still cold."

"Buy your own drinks, old-timer," sneers Hank Smith.

Alkali spins round and glares at him.

"I ain't worritin' none about drinks, Hank Smith," says he. "I'd had enough o' the desert, and I was aiming at going way back to Texas City to live w' me married daughter. I got me mule to carry me to Mesa City, but it'll cost me ten dollars for railroad fare to Texas, but that ghosht sure has left me without a cent."

"Did he fire at you?" asks Long Lane.

"He done jest that," says Alkali, shivering. "After I'd emptied me gun, he lifts his, he does, and the bullet took the hat off'n me head. The second bullet hummed past me cheek, gents, but I never heard no report. That gun shot without any noise, gents, and if you stack Bibles higher than the Alleghanias I'll swear it's the truth I'm tellin'!"

"And then, what?" sneers Hank.

"He laffs at me some more, and says if I don't drop them nuggets and run away he'll turn me into a ghosht what'll have to carry his head under his arm. And I was plumb scared, gents. I dropped them nuggets, and I run all the way here. I done left me mule out on the mesa, but she'll come along in the morning of her own accord."

"Oh, yeah!" drawls Hank. "Chewing ghoshtses as she comes."

But Alkali don't take a bit o' notice of him. He goes up to One-Ton and hangs on his fat arm.

"You get that ghosht, sheriff," he says. "You nail him. Never mind my nuggets. I'll sure have to go back in the desert and toil and sweat," he says, "till I done got enough to pay me railroad fare to Texas. Only ten dollars, that is, gents—only ten dollars!"

One-Ton is trembling like a jelly on a dish held by a cook with the ague. And he looks around us and tries to grin.

"Say, Alkali," says he. "D-don't think I'm g-going after n-no ghosht! M-my job is to c-c-orrall bad men, n-not ghoshtses. That's a j-job for a p-p-parson," says he.

Hank begins to see daylight, and is plumb enjoying himself.

"Yeller!" he sneers. "I done said you was no good for sheriff, and now the first guy what asks you f'r help you tries to shift the job on a parson."

"And we haven't got a parson nearer than Mesa City," I puts in.

One-Ton is still shivering till you can almost hear his fat cheeks flop and wobble, but his eyes is glaring something fierce.

"All right," he says. "I done got to do something. You air my deputy, Hank Smith, and I sends you out on the mesa right now to have a look-see for that ghosht."

Hank swallows hard, and don't like the prospect none.

"Guess again, big boy," says he. "D'you think I'm going

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"Because you ain't got the nerve to go yourself!" sneers Hank.

"Yes, I have!" says One-Ton. "We'll go together."

"In which case," I ups and says, scenting something interesting, as you may say, "we'll all go. May as well make a posse of it, boys, because even a ghosht can't shoot half a dozen of us all at once. Who's game?"

Well, the boys gits up, and we troop outside to our hosses. We is all looking plumb determined to see the thing through; but if they all felt like I did way down inside me, then they wasn't happy. And I'm here to tell you, gents, them boys wasn't happy about it. They wasn't showing yellin', and they wasn't quitting. There wasn't a bad man in all Texas County who could scare 'em, but a ghosht is a ghosht, and a ghosht what shoots bullets without making a noise ain't a nice sort o' gent to get to know.

But we wanted to be close handy to see what One-Ton would do, and we was plumb determined that One-Ton should ride out on the mesa that night, which he wouldn't do if we hadn't gone along. Being deputy, Hank couldn't refuse to go after One-Ton had ordered him to go, but Hank had bluffed One-Ton into going, and we was there to see that One-Ton didn't bluff out of the job. That's how it was with us.

But don't think we was happy. We wasn't. We didn't believe in ghoshtses, and we wasn't trusting old Alkali Alf a lot. Yet we could not see why old Alkali should spin such a yarn if so be it wasn't true. After all, there might be sich things as ghoshtses, and if there was one out on the mesa, we was sitting all wrong.

CHAPTER 2.

Scared Stiff!

THE night was dark—pitch dark. I did begin to wonder, like, what had become of that moon which, old Alkali said, was a-shining behind the black ghosht. But I didn't think long. That old moon might have sunk purty low, or the clouds might be hiding it. Anyway, the night was dark, and you can't argue darkness away. And there was just enough wind out on the mesa to make the shrubs and the grasses go swish, swish, swoosh, swish—all of which was plumb uncanny.

It wasn't long afore we was all holding our breaths and looking this way and that through the darkness. Hank Smith got so jagged in the nerves he rolled hisself a cigarette. I saw him a-doing of it, too, but when he scraped the match on the box and the flame shot up—Jeeroosalem!

One-Ton shrieks like a maniac.

"Ow! It wasn't me, mister!" he bawls. "Ow, you berute, you—"

Then the match went out, and we was all gasping. One-Ton looked round, and his face was ghastly in the darkness.

"Did you see that?" he says, in hollow tones. "Ghoshtly lights, that's what it is!"

"You fat idjit!" I says, though I wasn't telling him how Hank's match had scared me for the second. "Cain't a guy light a cigarette without you getting the jumps? Ride on, you fat spook-hunter!"

One-Ton growled and fingered his gun.

"I'll allow I am jumpy," he said, in his squeaky voice. "But jest remember this, boys. The next shock I gets I aim to shoot at it! So put that in yore pipes and smoke it!"

But there wasn't a hombre there that I knew of who was in the mood for playing jokes, because we was getting mighty close to the spot where old Alkali Alf had lost his nuggets. Maybe I never told you, but we gathered Alkali had met the ghosht down by the gully, what is plumb full of water, except in the hottest season of the year, which was at that moment, when it was merely a lot of mud soft enough to swallow up a steer.

Having arrived, we called a halt, and dismounted from our hosses. We looked to One-Ton to say what was to be done, but he sort o' came down flop off his staggering cayuse and stood there with his teeth chattering, making a noise like a baby droppin' split peas on a tin tray. And if he hadn't been so fat that his legs was a yard apart, his knees would ha' knocked together. I'll allow they was trying hard to do that same only they wouldn't reach!

Though I'll allow, also, I was sort o' queer under me shirtfront. It was dark, and the grasses went swish, swoosh, swish, all round us. Then Long Lane sort o' takes a deep breath and puts his head well back. We is all gazing round—and round—all pent-up and studying shadows till we was ready to swear we could see spooks and goblins all

round us. Then Long Lane does something. I'll tell the world he did!

"Ooh!" he blares. "Ooh, ah—ah—tschoo!"
 Jumping snakes, I never heard sich a row afore. I jumped out o' my skin, and One-Ton leaps a foot in the air. "Help!" he bawls, and sets off running down towards the gully, till he catches his spurs in the brush and falls—plomp!—on his fat face. He don't attempt to git up. He stops where he is, howling like a puppy under a horse's foot. "Yaroo!" he yells. "He done shot me! Call him off!"

But Hank Smith is sure shaky and in a plumb bad temper. He goes up to One-Ton and the toe of his boot digs in the sheriff's ribs, though it can't hurt him on account of the fat.

"Git up, you fatty streak of yellor!" he snaps. "Don't you know yit that Long Lane has hay fever, and can't a gent sneeze his head off without you losing yours, you miserable, overweight in fatty degeneration!"

One-Ton is not sure whether to believe all he hears. If

all-fired row was only the braying of Alkali's mule and he was so plumb lonely out on the mesa he let us rope him, and we forked our cayuses and led him into Hammertoe Gulch because we couldn't see what was the use of staying where we were.

Hank Smith was plumb disgusted with the whole affair. "What a sheriff!" he keeps grumbling. "What a sheriff! Fancy a sheriff high-tailing for home when a dog-goned mule brays at him!"

Of course, we knows that One-Ton wouldn't have been scared of a mule in broad daylight, or when his nerves wasn't ragged along of Alkali Alf and the black ghosht. All the same for that, we was more or less hipped, ourselves, yit we hadn't lost our heads till we'd seen what it was.

Then I gets an idea and I talks to them boys. The more I talks, the more they grins, and Long Lane being willing, we don't go straight up to the saloon. We halts by the store and gets the storekeeper out of his bed and makes



When One-Ton sees what we're carrying, he reels back against the counter!

he does he's in a temper, and if he doesn't he's sure got the willies plumb bad. All his fat limbs is shaking like spruce twigs in a high wind, yet he does manage to look mad.

"Any m-more t-tricks," he stammers, "and I'll sh-sh-shoot the f-funny m-man, I w-will," says he. "And further—"

"Blaw—eeblaw—aw—are—awee—blaw!" Gee, boys, I jest can't put that racket down on paper. But the din sure interrupted One-Ton's speech, and he goes as white as snow. He trembles and shivers and chatters.

"Oh, lor'!" he blubbers. "I d-don't—what I m-mean—it ain't m-my j-j-j-job!"

"Blaw—eeblaw—blare!" That racket lets up again, and it's like forty thousand donkeys with the croup trying to tell the world there's rain coming. And then the moon starts to slide out from behind a bank of cloud. She don't give a lot of light, but she gives enough for us to see a horse on the ridge about ten yards away. Leastways, gents, she was an animile with a body, four legs, a head, two ears and a tail. I can testify to that because I looked.

One-Ton looked too, and he saw that animile's head go up and he heard the row she done make.

"Blaw—aw—eeblaw!"

"Ghoshts!" yells One-Ton, falling back on me so hard I jest natcherally sat down on a thorn bush, and what I said I'm not telling you now. But One-Ton yanks out his gun and he starts filling the atmosphere with lead. Up I jumps and tries to grab his arm.

"You fat idjit!" I yells. "If you don't quit—"
 And he misunderstood me. He thought I meant him to quit ghosht hunting, for he spun round and jumps for his hoss. He climbs into the saddle and, still pumping lead into the ozone, he gallops off back towards Hammertoe Gulch like all the spooks in the world was hanging on his hoss' tail.

Lucky for old Alkali's mule One-Ton was sure a bad shot in the day-time with no danger about, but out ghosht hunting he couldn't have hit a barn door at six inches range and with me holding his hand. For you kin guess, gents, that

it worth his while to serve us. We gets a bag of flour and some red ink, and we gets busy.

Meanwhile, One-Ton is in the saloon and we're listening at the door. He is talking to Alkali Alf.

"Yeah," he says. "We heard the ghosht and we seen him. My men is chasing what I done left of him. On-fortchinately," says he, "ordinary bullets ain't much use against them ghoshts."

"And what 'bout my gold nuggets?" wails Alkali.

"Never saw a sight of 'em," said One-Ton.

"Not as I'm worriting 'bout all of 'em," said Alkali. "It would not be so bad if I done had ten dollars to pay me railroad fare to Texas City."

One-Ton thinks that out, cocking his head on one side. "Well," says he. "Tell you what. I'll give you ten dollars, old timer. And if I gets them gold nuggets I'll send 'em on to you if you'll let me know where I'm to send 'em."

Alkali likes that talk.

"Gimme the ten dollars," he says. "And you can keep them gold nuggets if you kin find 'em, which I doubt."

"Very well," says One-Ton. "It's a bargain, old timer!" And he hands over ten good dollars, which Alkali pockets in double quick time. "And mind this," continues One-Ton, in his squeaky voice, and sticking out his fat chest. "If mortal man can cotch that ghosht and get them nuggets I'm the man to do it, so mind that."

Then, in the middle of his big talk, we fling open the door and we come in like a procession. It was like a procession, I'll tell the cock-eyed world, and a funeral procession, at that, because we carries Long Lane on a shutter, and he's lying flat on his back, with his face ghastly white and an awful, ugly red stain on his forehead. When One-Ton sees what we're carrying in, he reels back against the counter and drinks Alkali's rat poison before Alkali can stop him.

"Who done this thing?" he axes, in hollow tones.
 Hank Smith glowers at him and fingers his six-shooter. "You done it, you yellor rat," says he.

"Me?" bawls One-Ton. "How come?"
 "You gets scared stiff when Alkali's mule brayed—the mule we done brought in with us—and you went loco and high-tailed for home, pumping lead into the ozone, one of which come down and punctured my pore pardner's brain pan," says he.

"And you calls yourself a sheriff!" sneers Red Ryan. "Aw, go chase yerself, arrest yerself, lynch yerself, and lock up what's left, you bloated terror, you!"

One-Ton is more scared than he was of the ghosht.

"What can I do?" he moans. "It was an accident, boys!"

"There's two things got to be did," says Hank sternly. "We done got to git a parson for pore Long Lane, and we done got to lay that ghosht for Alkali Alf. Now, which do you do?"

"I ain't g-going after n-no ghosht," stammers One-Ton. "I d-d-don't believe in n-no ghoshts."

"Then maybe you believes in parsons," says Red Ryan. "You go for the parson while we chase the ghosht."

"But—"
 "Butt yoreself, sheriff," snarls Hank. "And maybe you'll move quicker. Git a move on, fatness!"

One-Ton looks at Long Lane and Long Lane gives out an awful groan, stirs, and groans again.

"I wants a parson," he moans.

"Air you going?" snarls Red Ryan. "Or do we hang you on the nearest tree?"

"I'll g-go," says One-Ton.

And he goes, while Alkali Alf looks on and cain't make head or tail of what's happening. When Long Lane sits up and calls for a drink he nearly falls through the floor. But I'll give the old rat his due, he wasn't long getting the hang of things and he laughed till his old sides cracked.

CHAPTER 3.

Luck!

ONE-TON was hitting the trail for Mesa City to fetch a parson, and we had to be plumb quick about what we meant to do, and we could not worry about Alkali. We goes off and very quietly we rides on to the dark, dark mesa. The moon has gone and hidden herself again behind the clouds and we has to go careful. We is all a bit jumpy, but we don't say nothing about it for a long time until we get close to the waterless gully, which is now all soft, oozy mud, and close to the trail down which One-Ton will have to come from Mesa City.

Then Long Lane ups and says his bit.

"Buddies," says he. "Whilst I was being bumped on the shutter I did a whole heap of powerful thinking."

(Continued on next page.)

The Schoolboy Airmen!

(Continued from page 20.)

From the room where the Head lay came the faint clink of instruments as they turned away along the passage.

There was a yell of laughter in Study No. 6. It was a few days later, and Blake & Co. were standing a little "spread" in honour of Tom Merry. It had been a wonderful feast, and most of the fellows present felt sure that the guest of honour would not want the cheery atmosphere spoilt with any long-winded speeches.

But Arthur Augustus, apparently, thought otherwise. He had prepared quite an oration in honour of Tom Merry's great heroism on the night he had flown to France to fetch Dr. Rivoli, and so saved the Head's life. It was full of well-chosen and flowery phrases, and it had taken Gussy quite a long time to prepare it. He did not mean to be done out of delivering it!

He sniffed, and turned to Tom Merry. "Ahem! In pvoposin' the toast of Tom Mewwy I should like to say a few words about his wippin' bwavewy on that night of which we all know—"

Tom Merry broke in hastily. "Jolly kind of you, Gussy," he said, "but if you don't mind, I'll be glad to be allowed to forget that particular night. I didn't do anything much, anyway—"

"Rats!" chorused Monty Lowther and Manners, Talbot and Kangaroo, and several others.

"Exactly—wats!" nodded Arthur Augustus firmly. He sighed. "Howevah, if you weally pwefer to have no speeches on the mattah, deah boy, there is no more to be said! As the guest of honah, what you say is law, don't you know?"

And Arthur Augustus sat down gracefully—to the relief of everybody.

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"Sure, you did," says Red Ryan. "You had to keep yore big mouth shut, and it gave your brain the first chance it's had for years."

"You're anxious for trouble, big boy," says Long Lane. "Listen to me first and we'll have the apple sass later on. I was thinking, and I'm still thinking, as how that there yarn of Alkali's about the ghosht is all my eye, bluff and blarney, to git his dirty hands on that ten dollars."

"What a brain!" says Hank. "I spotted that when I heard him get the money out o' One-Ton and tells him he can keep the nuggets if he can find 'em!"

"And there ain't no ghosht at all, cowboys," says Red Ryan.

"Which same is the first good news I've heard to-day," I butts in. "Only there's going to be a ghosht mighty soon, so we'd better start things."

Along of Long Lane being long and nigh on six feet high we picks him for the star turn, and as he knows One-Ton is a bad shot he's game enough. But like the rest of us, he done forgot one thing, which came near being plumb important, and I won't tell you what that something was.

We had the things with us, and they was nothing else but a lot of sacks all wetted and rubbed in coal dust behind the store, so that, in the darkness on the mesa they'd look black enough. These here doctored sacks we wrapped on Long Lane's horse, and every bit of metal work and all his buttons likely to shine on Long Lane's long person we blacked over with boot blacking, likewise got from the store. We had black gloves for Long Lane's hands and we had a big black mask for his face. We blacked one of his six-shooters, and we set him on his horse and got all ready.

We had to wait some time. Red Ryan goes for a look-see down the trail and it's gone midnight when he comes back in a hurry to say he can hear horses coming—two, he reckons.

"Well," I says, "you go back and lay low in the sage brush by the big rock. If it's One-Ton and the parson the owl hoots twice. Savvy?"

"Yeah," says Red, and off he goes.

We hides in the dip behind the ridge, and after about a quarter of an hour an owl hoots twice and we know it's Red Ryan's signal. One-Ton and the parson is coming. I peers over the ridge, and as the moon begins to peep again from behind the clouds I sees the pair of 'em cantering along the trail, and One-Ton looks like he's got the willies and is plumb glad of such good company.

"Git on," I says, and Long Lane rides up to the ridge. Up he goes, and he sure looks ghashly with the moon behind him.

There was a tap on the door. The grinning face of Toby, the page, appeared.

"Letter for Master Merry!"

"Thanks, Toby!"

Tom took the letter, and gave an exclamation as he saw it was in the handwriting of the headmaster of St. Jim's.

Dr. Holmes was at present away from the school, convalescent. But the fact that he could write a letter showed that he was already on the road to recovery, and Tom's face had lit up as he ripped open the envelope.

His face went crimson as he read the contents. Then he thrust the letter hastily into his pocket.

"What's the Head say, old chap?" asked Blake eagerly.

Tom smiled.

"Oh, he—he just writes to thank me for what I did," he confessed a trifle sheepishly. "Someone's been exaggerating a lot—he seemed to think what I did was something great, although, of course, any chap could have done it—"

"Oh, rats!" grinned Manners.

"I say, deah boy!" Arthur Augustus' voice was eager with excitement. "I wondah if, atfah this, the Head will agwee to cawwyin' on flyin' instwuction at St. Jim's?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I don't think he will, Gussy."

"You never know!" said Blake hopefully.

But Tom Merry was right.

Despite the fact that his life had been saved, thanks to the instruction Tom Merry, at any rate, had received in the art of piloting a plane, the Head was still of the opinion, when he returned to the school, that flying was altogether too exciting a pastime for a peaceful school!

But one thing was certain—Dr. Holmes would be the last person at St. Jim's to regret the brief existence at St. Jim's of the Schoolboy Airmen!

THE END.

(A ripping yarn, what? Yes, and you'll say the same when you read: "A KNOCK-OUT FOR KNOX!" next week's rousing yarn of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. Make sure of your copy by ORDERING IT EARLY!)

"Earth worms!" he bawls. "Halt, afore I attacks ye wid spooks!"

And as he lifts his arm the whole doggone party of us howls like dogs.

"Yar-oo!" we bawls. "Ya-roo!" One-Ton jest falls off'n his hoss with fright.

"Bogies!" he yells. "Spooks, bogies—armies of 'em! Yow!"

But the parson is a tough customer, which was what we'd done forgot. As quick as a flash he outs with a gun and lets fly. Long Lane glimpses the action and turns his head aside. Even then, the bullet took the lobe of one ear, and scared of what would happen next Long Lane slips out of the saddle. In so doing he onlooses some of the sacks on the hoss.

The parson lets fly again, and the bullet hums close to the hoss, which kicks up and runs for it, the sacks flying out like he's got wings. One-Ton sees that and he's had enough.

"Bogies!" he bawls, and away he runs. Gee, gents, the way that chap ran was something to see. In fact, you had to be plumb quick in the eyesight to see him at all. He lit out for anywhere but there, and didn't give a hoot where he finished up so long as them bogies was miles behind. And along of it being quicker it came natcherel to him to run down hill, helter skelter, and—slosh, flop, he went, up to his fat waist in the oozy, sticky mud of the gully.

"I'll give 'em bogies!" cried the parson, taking Long Lane's hat off with a bullet.

Of course, I can't see my pardner come to harm that way, so I pops my head over the ridge and yells for mercy.

"Nix on the shooter, parson," I says. "We done plumb forgot you was full o' grit. It's only a game with One-Ton."

"And a silly game, too!" he snaps, a bit raw in the temper. "Might scare the sheriff out of his wits, and if he's got a weak heart—"

"Weak head!" sneers Long Lane, try to stop his ear bleeding.

"Anyway," says the parson, "hark at him! Better go and haul him out of the gully."

"Hi-yi! Help!" One-Ton was bawling. "I'm stuck fast." So we went down, wanting to laugh, but not sure whether to laugh or not. One-Ton had heard our voices and he knew what we done on him.

"You pack of idjits!" he snarled. "Haul me out! I'd clap the hull lot of you in the coop only I'm too plumb good-tempered."

Red Ryan grabs him by one arm and I grabs him by the other and we hauls him out from the mud. He comes out with a lovely squelch, and he's dripping with mud that don't smell like roses, neether. But he's grinning all over his fat face.

"How come?" I axes.

"I done found the nuggets," he says. "And they're mine!"

Then we sees he's got hold of a rope, and he hauls a bag out of the mud, and in that bag is gold nuggets like Alkali had said.

And while we is gaping at him, someone else joins the party, and the said person is none other than Alkali Alf, the desert rat, astride his long eared mule.

"Hey!" he bawls. "What you doing?"

"Don't you worrit none, old timer," says One-Ton, squeaking with triumph. "The ghosht is scared and I done found them nuggets what you said in public I could have if I found 'em!"

Jecroosalem, old Alkali didn't worry about the parson being there. The language that man used made the mule blush pink, and, of course, everybody knew where they stood. Old Alkali had manufactured the yarn about the ghosht. His idee was to get the ten dollars, then set out for Mesa City at night, collecting the nuggets which he had hidden as he passed by. He'd sunk 'em in the mud with a rope tied to the bag, and carried up to a tree stump. Maybe the old rat had worked that trip at other places, but he sure slipped up this time.

One-Ton was as perky as a cockerel and didn't give a hoot for the mud that clung to his legs.



One-Ton gallops off towards Hammertoe Gulch, still pumping lead into the ozone.

"Much obleeged to you boys," says he. "But you try them funny tricks again and I'll sure clap you in chokey. So mind that!"

And we hadn't the heart to sass him back, because what had we got out of it? Long Lane had lost the lobe of one ear and the parson made us contribute some of our hard-earned savings towards the expenses of his church in Mesa City as some sort o' compensation for the night ride.

I tell you, gents, it's fair sickening the way One-Ton always gets the luck. It ain't a matter o' grit or quickness on the draw. He's fat and he's soft, and somehow, it don't matter how he falls, he always falls just right and sitting pretty. Luck? Maybe it's luck as makes fat, or fat as makes luck. After all, did you ever see a fat guy as was always onlucky? I never did!

And it would have gone hard with any guys who tried meddling with us that night as we rode home, because we was plumb rattled, sore, and raw about the tempers.

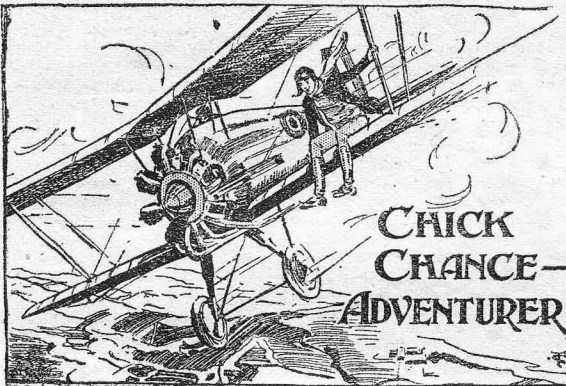
"But it can't last!" growled Hank Smith. "And we've got to do something 'bout that fat sheriff!"

"Mebbe so," snarled Long Lane, fingering the bandages on his off-side ear. "But next time you wants a ghosht, count me out. Some other fool guy can be star turn in the next outfit, and afore I play ghoshtesses again I'll sure wait till I'm a real, dyed-in-the-wool spook from the back o' beyond! This night's shenanigan has been more'n enough for yours truly."

No one answered him. We just went home and left it at that for the time being, although there was no doubt about it in our minds that things were coming to a head in Hammertoe Gulch, and it wouldn't be long before something drastic did happen to One-Ton Willy, and I hopes I'll be there to see it!

(There will be another amusing yarn of One-Ton Willy in next week's GEM. Be sure and read it, chums!)

CONTINUATION OF ROBERT MURRAY'S BRILLIANT SERIAL STORY!



THE STORY SO FAR.

Chick Chance and his two chums, Horace and Herbert, and Lobula, a native guide, are searching for Eustace Latimer, who has come into a fortune. He is believed to be a prisoner, together with his daughter, in Black City, in the heart of Central Africa. If Latimer does not return to England within a given time, the money will go to Burk Roscoe, a scoundrel, who is at present a captive aboard Chick's fast plane. Chick and his pals eventually arrive over Black City, which is easily identified by a prominent rocky edifice shaped like a lion's head.

The Valley of the Amazeli!

CHICK reached for his field-glasses. He was not certain, but he fancied that he could see a human figure standing far back in the dark recesses of the lion's mouth.

"Smoke!" jerked Horace. "Looks like a signal of some kind!"

"A signal from Eustace Latimer, perhaps," suggested Herbert eagerly. "Look, it's stopped already!"

The puffs of smoke had ceased as suddenly as they had started. If Eustace Latimer was still alive it was not unlikely that he would attempt to attract attention at sight of the plane and its occupants. But what would he be doing in the cave that formed the mouth of the stone lion, and how had he got there? Was it possible that the whole of the gigantic rock was honeycombed with passages and caves that formed a natural stronghold for the King of the Amazeli and his black warriors?

Chick's face was grim with intent as he kicked the rudder-bar and sent the plane swooping towards the far end of the rugged, walled crater. Here, a thousand feet or more in the air, was a flat-topped mountain peak that formed a level plateau of smooth ground, where it was quite possible for the monoplane to land, and from which it would have no difficulty in rising again. It overlooked the circular valley, and offered no other way of approach, save from the air.

Chick's plans were formed. It only remained for him to communicate them to his companions and put them into operation. He put the plane's nose down in a long glide. The plateau covered an area of quite a square mile, and was as level as the palm of his hand. It was strewn with big boulders in places, but he cleverly avoided these as he swung the machine's nose into the wind and brought her gently to rest.

"Well, what's the next move?" asked Horace puzzledly. "I can see you've got something up your sleeve, old son."

Chick jerked a thumb towards the valley below and the towering pinnacle of rock that formed the plinth of the lion's head.

"I'm going down there to pay a visit," he said calmly. "I am going to seek an interview with the boss of the Amazeli, and find out if he is holding Latimer and his daughter prisoners."

Horace and Herbert stared uneasily at one another.

"But how are you going to get down there? You can't climb down!" protested Herbert.

"I'm going to make a parachute landing," explained the young airman, as he seized one of the Irving chute packs

and commenced to strap it in position. "Now, just listen carefully to what I say. I want you to fly the old bus out over those fields on the other side of the river. Circle at three thousand feet, and I'll drop off. After that, you come straight back here, land, and wait for further instructions."

"Further instructions?" echoed Horace. "What d'you mean? That you'll send up a telegram, or drop us a post-card some day next week?"

"I'll give you a signal," promised Chick, as he seized a Very light pistol and tucked it into the pocket of his tunic. "I'm going to try to convince the king of the Amazeli that he's in for a heap of trouble if he refuses to release Latimer and his daughter. If he consents, I'll fire one light in the air. That'll mean it'll be safe for you to fly down and land to take us aboard."

"And supposing the black swab refuses?" exclaimed Herbert uneasily. "He might grab you, and make you a prisoner as well."

"I'm hoping he won't," grinned Chick confidently. "But if he should, perhaps you could make him alter his mind by diving down and cutting loose with the machine-gun. You might drop a few Mills' bombs as well."

Horace shook his head.

"Yours is a rotten idea," he said bluntly. "Why, you silly, chump-headed coon, you can't speak the lingo! How are you going to make the beggars understand what you mean?"

Chick's jaw dropped. Here was a point he had overlooked. Lobula, who had been listening intently to every word, drew himself up and patted his great chest.

"I will come with you," he said simply. "No doubt I shall be able to speak to the Amazeli in something of their own language. I do not know how the white man intends to reach the Black City, but where he goes surely I can follow!"

"I believe you've got the pluck to try it," declared Chick admiringly.

He endeavoured to explain something of the principle of the parachute that would wait them to land, and the faithful black was still unshaken in his purpose.

"It is quite simple," said Chick, with quiet dignity. "One just steps into the air, counts the number of fingers on one hand, and pulls the little ring on the end of the string."

"Yes, and don't forget to pull the ring," warned Herbert gravely. "Else the blessed chute won't open, and you'll get a nasty headache when you hit the ground!"

"Remember my instructions," said Chick, as he strapped his pistol in its holster, and slipped some spare clips of cartridges in his pockets. "Once I've landed, fly back here, and look out for my signal. If it doesn't come before night-fall you'll know something's gone wrong. Keep an eye on that skunk Roscoe, and don't give him a chance to pull any more of his dirty tricks!"

A strained silence fell over the occupants of the plane as Herbert prepared to spin the prop. Chick knew only too well that once he left the machine in mid-air he might never set eyes on his two chums again. They had reached

the crisis in their daring undertaking that could only result in success or utter failure.

A moment later the monoplane had left the ground and was swooping out over the sun-baked valley of the Amazeli. Twice Horace circled the big, rock-walled basin, gradually gliding to an altitude of three thousand feet. Below they could see the forests and fields, the tumbling waters of the Tambaze River, and the black men swarming like flies at the base of the Lion Rock.

Then the crucial moment came. Chick patted Horace reassuringly on the shoulder, gripped Herbert silently by the hand, and, nodding to Lobula, clambered up on to the top of the fuselage. From there he worked his way out on the left wing, the wind howling and screaming in his ears as he crept towards the edge of the taut, drumming fabric.

Again he signalled to Lobula, who was clinging precariously to the opposite wing.

"Here goes!" muttered Chick Chance, as he clutched his knees and somersaulted headlong into space. He heard the plane go roaring on through the air as he plunged downwards, turning over and over like a trick diver.

WHITE MAN REACHES HIDDEN BLACK CITY!

Deliberately he counted six before he tugged the ring that was hooked over his thumb.

There was a sharp report, and a sudden strain on shoulders and thighs as the harness took the strain, and the big parachute billowed out above him like a puff of yellow smoke.

Chick rode easy, and glanced coolly in all directions. Far away over one shoulder he could see the monoplane gliding down towards its landing-place on the distant plateau. A minute later he sighted Lobula, floating twenty yards distant, a queer expression of interest and surprise on his black face as he watched the ground coming up towards him.

It was only a matter of moments before Chick made his landing in a clump of coarse grass. He bent his knees to ease the shock, and unhooked himself from the parachute as soon as he felt his feet touch the ground. Absolutely unharmed, he stood erect, and immediately realised that Lobula had not been so fortunate.

The big black had come in contact with a lofty tree. The chute had caught in the branches, and Lobula hung dangling within a few feet of the ground. Chick ran quickly to his side, and reached up to unfasten the safety-catch.

"Wow! That is indeed a strange way of flying!" grunted the native, as he dropped down and rubbed the scratches on his muscular arm. "What does one do when one wishes to rise up into the air again?"

"That is just what you can't do," informed the young airman grimly. "We're down here for good, unless the plane lands to pick us up again. Come on, old son; let's go and find the reception committee. Surely someone must have seen us come to earth!"

Side by side they forced their way through a belt of trees, and glimpsed the Lion Rock towering up into the air some four or five hundred yards away. They struck a wide, hard beaten track that evidently led to the river, and which had been levelled as firm as asphalt by the tread of countless naked feet.

They had scarcely taken a dozen paces when a sound of deep voices fell on their ears, and around a bend in the path came a score of the giant warriors of the Amazeli—huge, black fellows, none of them standing an inch under seven feet in height.

They stopped dead in sudden silence at sight of the two strangers, staring boldly, with nodding plumes, and poised spears gleaming bright in the sunlight. Each wore a kaross of leopard skin, and the big shields they carried were comprised of complete lion-skins, stretched taut on a wooden framework.

"The Amazeli, warriors of the Lion King!" muttered Lobula.

He raised one hand above his head, held palm outward

in token of friendship, and spoke a few words of greeting. He spoke again in a different tongue, as no one appeared to understand his first attempt, and this time one of the Amazeli answered him, curtly and haughtily.

"Tell them that we come in peace," instructed Chick. "Tell them that we mean them no harm, and that we wish to speak with their king, or chief, or whatever the old bozo calls himself. Lay it on thick, Lobula. Warn them that if any harm comes to us, other white men armed with guns will swoop down out of the sky and blow them clean off the face of the earth."

Lobula evidently did his best to impress the natives. He spoke volubly, gesticulating, topping the pistol at his waist, and pointing meaningfully towards the sky. The Amazeli glanced up, and stared uneasily at one another. It was evident that they had never before seen an aeroplane, and were even more at a loss to understand how these two strangers had dropped down from the sky without coming to any apparent harm.

Finally one, who was evidently their leader, uttered a sharp command. The others reversed their spears, and lined up in a double row along the path, leaving the way open for Chick to proceed.

"It is well. They are going to conduct us to their king," informed Lobula. "But it may be that we will be walking into the lion's mouth."

"We've got to risk that," rejoined Chick carelessly.

With an air of the utmost indifference, he lit a cigarette and sauntered forward between the rows of giant, coal-black warriors. He had an unpleasant feeling that at any minute he might feel a dozen spear-heads tickling him painfully in the ribs; but no treacherous move was made as they advanced along the wide path and emerged on the brink of the river, facing the Lion Rock.

Seeing it for the first time at close quarters, Chick was astounded. What freak of nature had produced this colossal pinnacle of rugged, black rock, he could not guess. At its base it was far bigger than any of the Egyptian pyramids, and tapered up to a tremendous height, to terminate in the rough semblance of a lion's head that was visible for miles around.

Chick could now see that steps were hewn in the sides of the rock, that wound round and round like a spiral staircase, and apparently ascended to the very peak of the gigantic monolith. Here and there the face of the rock was broken by jutting platforms and yawning openings that seemed to penetrate into the heart of its interior.

(Chick and Lobula are in the heart of the Black City now. Will they find the professor and his daughter? Will they ever succeed in winning a way back to England and civilisation? See next week's instalment of this sparkling story, boys.)

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