



The MERRY PRISONER.



*A short complete story of
St. Jim's School, in which
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy
proves he has a kind heart!*



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TRIMBLE was in trouble. He always is. But on this occasion the matter was more serious than most.

Let me plunge into the sordid details.

A rabbit-pie had disappeared from the school kitchen. The cook explained to the Head that it had "walked." But the Head knew that a rabbit-pie is no pedestrian, and that it could not have disappeared without some human agency.

Dr. Holmes summoned a general assembly in Big Hall, and he probed very deeply into the matter.

Baggy Trimble was found to have left his dormitory at dead of night. At first, Baggy strenuously denied all knowledge of the affair, but under the Head's searching cross-examination he broke down. At last he had to admit that he had taken the pie.

"But there is every excuse for me, sir," he said to the Head.

Dr. Holmes frowned.

"Theft is inexcusable, Trimble," he said.

"Oh, really, sir—! The fact is, I was nearly starving. I didn't have a meal all day yesterday. I came down late for breakfast, and there wasn't a crumb left. After morning school I had to go on an errand for my Form-master, and so I missed my dinner. When

tea-time came, I was carrying Mr. Selby's golf-clubs for him on the links. So I missed tea. And in the evening I had an imposition to get finished for Mr. Railton. He said if it wasn't handed in by bed-time he'd cane me. So I hadn't time to think about supper. Consequently, sir, I was wasting away to a shadow, and I was so ravenous during the night that I even felt like eating my—my bootlaces, sir!"

At this, there was a titter from the assembly in Big Hall.

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "I cannot accept your statements, Trimble. You are a proven fabricator. Your word cannot be relied upon in any particular. For this outrageous theft from the school kitchen, you will be severely flogged!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

The Head beckoned to the school porter.

"Taggles!" he said. "I will trouble you to take this boy on your shoulders."

"Werry good, sir."

It looked as if Baggy Trimble was in for a terrible flogging. But he was saved on the scaffold, so to speak.

"Pardon me, sir," interposed Mr. Railton, "but Trimble's statement that he had an imposition to write for me last night is

perfectly true. I was not aware that he missed his supper in consequence."

"Did he complete the imposition, Mr. Railton?" asked the Head.

"No, sir. He brought me less than half of it. And as I had been having a great deal of trouble with him of late, I gave him a very severe caning. In view of this, might I suggest that his punishment takes some other form?"

The Head, who had been about to wield the birch-rod, laid aside that instrument of torture.

"Very well, Mr. Railton," he said. "I will inflict a different, though not less drastic punishment. Trimble must learn to keep his hands from picking and stealing. He will be confined to the punishment-room for twenty-four hours. During that period, his diet will consist of bread and water."

Trimble's face fell. He would almost have preferred a birching.

Food was the be-all and the end-all of Baggy's existence, and to be placed on a diet of bread and water would be gall and worm-wood to him.

The fat junior threw out his arms appealingly.

"Have pity, sir!" he pleaded. "Don't let me go to the punishment-room! Don't put me on bread-and-water, sir! I'll be as good as gold in future — honour bright, sir!"

But the Head was adamant. He signalled to Kildare of the Sixth.

"Take this wretched boy to the punishment-room, and see that he is securely locked in," he said.

Kildare marched Baggy out of the crowded hall, and the school was then dismissed.

Only one fellow felt sorry for the delinquent. This was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Gussy has a heart of gold, and he is for ever thinking and planning for those who are less fortunate than himself.

"I feel dreadfully sorrowful for poor Twimble," remarked the swell of St. Jim's.

Jack Blake gave a snort.

"I haven't any patience with the fat burglar!" he growled. "A fellow who raids the school kitchen deserves all he gets."

"Hear, hear!" said Digby and Herries, in chorus.

"Don't be hard on Twimble, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "He has a sort of kink. When he grows up, I expect he'll be a kleptomaniac. He simply can't keep his hands from pickin' an' stealin'."

"Then the sooner he learns, the better," was Blake's comment. "This term of imprisonment in the punishment-room will give

him a chance of brooding over his shady past, and making good resolutions for the future."

"But think of his tewwible punishment!" said Arthur Augustus. "A whole day an' night in the punishment-woom, without a soul to speak to, without a book to wead, an' without anythin' to eat except bwead an' water. It will be a heart-bweakin' expewience."

"Let Trimble get on with it!" growled Blake. "I've got no sympathy for him."

Neither had Herries and Digby. But Arthur Augustus had plenty of sympathy. He was fairly bubbling over with it.

"I'm goin' up to the punishment-woom, deah boys," he announced.



A clutching hand appeared through the opening in the ceiling. "Heah we are, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "Theah's a cuwwant cake!" (See Page 207.)

What on earth for?" asked Digby.

"To talk to Twimble through the key-hole, an' cheer him up," was the reply.

Despite the protestations of his chums, Arthur Augustus proceeded to the old tower, and climbed the spiral staircase which led to the punishment-room.

On reaching the stout oak door, Gussy heard sounds of groaning from the interior of the dreaded apartment.

"Are you there, Twimble?" he called through the keyhole.

The groaning ceased as if by magic.

"That you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, deah boy."

"Have you come to torment me, or to help me?"

"To help you, of course!"

"Then I'll tell you what you can do," said Baggy Trimble. "I've just made a discovery. There's a loose plank in the floor of this room. It lifts right up. So if you'd like to help me, Gussy, you can take some tuck into the lumber-room that's underneath this and smuggle it up to me. I can't exist on a bread-and-water diet, you know."

Arthur Augustus jumped at the idea.

"I shall be vewy pleased to fetch you some gwub, Twimble," he said. "I am suah you must be dweadfully hungwy."

"Hungry? Why, I could eat a donkey's hind leg off!"

"All sewene, deah boy I'll buzz along to the tuckshop befoah the bell goes for mornin' lessons, an' bring you some supplies."

The generous Gussy, eager to help the prisoner, sped off to the tuckshop. He made numerous and varied purchases, and conveyed them to the school tower.

He had to exercise great caution, for if his intentions were divined by the authorities, he would find himself in serious trouble.

It was just like Gussy to run grave risks for the sake of another—even for such a worthless fellow as Baggy Trimble.

The supplies of tuck were conveyed to the lumber-room. By placing a number of packing-cases on top of each other, Gussy was able to reach the aperture in the floor of the punishment-room.

A clutching hand appeared through the opening.

"Heah we are, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "I'll pass the things up to you one at a time. This is a cuwwant cake——"

The clutching hand closed upon the cake, and it was promptly transferred to the regions above.

"This is an apple turnovah——"

The apple turnover promptly followed the cake. And so it went on, until Baggy Trimble found himself in possession of sufficient provisions to last him for the twenty-four hours of his captivity.

He didn't mind his solitary confinement a bit, especially when his benefactor brought him a number of thrilling adventure stories to read.

"This is top-hole!" murmured the fat junior. "I'm dodging lessons, and I've got plenty to eat and plenty to read. What could be nicer?"

Baggy had, of course, restored the floor-board to its proper place. He also smuggled the food and books under the bed whenever he heard footsteps.

Taggles brought him his bread-and-water at intervals. And the school porter could not understand why the prisoner looked so cheerful and contented.

Baggy seemed to be enjoying his captivity as much as the imprisoned Cavalier of old, who wrote the famous lines:—

"Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage."

Arthur Augustus paid him several surreptitious visits during the day, and ministered to his comfort in every possible way.

Baggy Trimble had such a good time that when the twenty-four hours had expired, and the Head gave the order for his release, he actually pleaded to be allowed to remain in the punishment-room!

Fortunately for Baggy, the fact that he had been supplied with food and reading matter never came to light. And perhaps it was equally fortunate for Gussy the Good Samaritan!

THE END