



FIGHTING THE FLAMES!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

Gussy, the fireman, falls an easy victim to a jape of the rival New House juniors. But when a fire breaks out in the New House, it's Gussy who comes out strong in fighting the flames!

THE FIRST CHAPTER

THE ONLY WAY!

"I SHALL have to get some ovelwalls!"

"Some what?"

"Ovelwalls, deah boy!"

"And what the thump," demanded Tom Merry, "are ovelwalls?"

"Something you get over a wall with, I should think!" remarked Monty Lowther thoughtfully.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Well, what are they, anyhow?" asked Manners.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth turned his eyeglass severely upon the Terrible Three. He seemed to be under the impression that the Shell fellows were deliberately misunderstanding him.

"When I say ovelwalls," he said, "I mean ovelwalls, natuwally!"

Tom Merry burst into a chuckle.

"Oh, the ass means overalls!" he said.

"Yaas, wathah! I said ovelwalls," said Arthur Augustus innocently. "Undah the circs, I wegard them as vevy necessary. I wathah appvove of old Wailton's ideah with wegard to wegulah fire-dwill, you know. But a chap must think of his clobbah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke with great seriousness, evidently having given the matter considerable thought.



Crammed at the window of the box-room, six haggard, grimed faces glared out into the open air, and six terrified voices shrieked for help.

But Tom Merry & Co. did not look at all serious.

"I see," said Lowther thoughtfully. "If there's an alarm of fire in the middle of the night, you're going to stop to put your overalls over your clobber, in case they get a bit smoky. If you're burned to death while you're doing it, that doesn't count as a goal, I suppose?"

"Wats! I am alludin' to the fire-dwill in the daytime," said Arthur Augustus. "It's a nobbay ideah, as fah as it goes! F'winstance, suppose some anarchist or someone came along settin' fire to St. Jim's! Nothin' like bein' weady. But buzzin' up and down fire-escapes, and jumpin' into blankets, and squirtin' with a hose would play ducks and dwakes with a fellow's clobbah! We've got to go stwaight fwom lessons to fire-dwill. No time to wush up and change clothes."

Arthur Augustus polished his eyeglass thoughtfully.

"It's wathah a pwoblem," he continued. "I have been givin' it some deep thinkin', I can tell you. Of course, a fellow could go in to lessons in his old clothes——"

"He could!" assented Tom Merry.

"That's all vevy well for you chaps," said D'Arcy, with a nod. "You chaps are wathah slovenly, anyway, if you don't mind my mentionin' it. But I've always made it a point to be wathah well-dwessed, and set an example to the Lowah School, you know. Goin' into class in old clothes would be wathah infwa dig. On the othah hand——"

"On the other hand——" grinned Lowther.

"Yaas, on the othah hand, a fellow can't wush off to fire-dwill in decent clobbah, and get his sleeves wubbed and his knees baggay, and all that.

So I have thought of havin' a set of ovelwalls in the lobby always weady. I shall nip into them in a twinklin', you know, and there you are!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any weason for cacklin', you fellows," said Arthur Augustus, raising his eyebrows. "I have been thinkin' it out, and it flashed into my bwain, you know."

"Yours is exactly the brain it would flash into!" assented Manners.

"Yaas, wathah! I think of things, you know," said Arthur Augustus unsuspectingly. "I can get them at Mr. Wiggs', in Wylcombe. He has a lot of stock to sell off cheap—ovewalls among othah things. I think I will buzz off on my bike now, as dwill begins aftah lessons this aftahnoon. If you fellows see Blake, tell him I'm sowwy I can't turn up to cwicket——"

"Can't you?" demanded a voice behind the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Blake and Herries and Digby of the Fourth had come out of the School House while Arthur Augustus was making his sage remarks. Blake gave the swell of St. Jim's a playful tap on the back of the head, tilting his topper over his nose, just to announce his arrival.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus retrieved his topper, and turned a wrathful eye upon the chums of the Fourth.

"You uttah ass, Blake——"

"Come on!" said Blake. "Half an hour at cricket—lots of time! We've got to beat the Shell on Saturday, you know."

"Not in your lifetime!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Rats! Come on, Gussy!"

"I was just wemarkin', Blake——"

"Your remarks can be continued in our next, old chap. Come along to the cricket!"

"I'm goin' down to Wylcombe——"

"Not to-day! Come on!"

"I wequiah some ovelalls——"

"Cricket! Come on!"

"Cwicket can come latah, Blake——"

"Ass! It's fire-drill after lessons—Mr. Railton's new stunt!" said Blake. "Blessed if I can see why we should have it, when the New House don't! But it's no good arguing with a House-master!"

"It's because we have fire-dwill aftah lessons that I wequiah my ovelalls, Blake——"

"Fathead! This way!"

"I-am sowwy——"

"Keep your sorrow for another occasion, old top," said Blake. "Take his right arm, Herries——"

"Let go, Hewwies, you ass!"

"Take his left, Dig——"

"Weally, Digby——"

"I'll prod him behind!" said Blake, taking a business-like grip on his bat. "Now then——"

"Yawwooh!" roared Arthur Augustus frantically, as Blake prodded.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Terrible Three.

"Welease me, you uttah asses——"

"March!" said Blake.

Herries and Digby marched, and Arthur Augustus had to march between them. It was, as Monty Lowther remarked, like a wild elephant being led between two tame ones.

The Terrible Three followed, chortling.

Arthur Augustus turned round a crimson face towards Blake.

"You shwiekin' ass——" he gasped.

Prod!

"Yow-woop! You uttah chump, I——"

Prod!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am goin' in to Wylcombe to get my ovelalls!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"You're going to Little Side to do cricket practice!" answered Blake.

"I wequiah them immediately aftah lessons——"

Prod!

"You feahful wottah——"

"Hold on, old chap!" said Monty Lowther, as if struck by a bright thought. "I'll cut down to Rylcombe and get your overalls, if you like, Gussy. Leave it to me!"

"Bai Jove, that's vewy decent of you, Lowthah!"

"Not at all, old chap! Happy to oblige!" said Lowther affably. "Rely on me to get a first-class fit!"

"Tell Mr. Wiggs to put it on my bill, deah boy. Keep that bat away, Blake, you wottah! I will come down to the cwicket, since Lowthah is so obligin'. You'll be suah to get back befoah lessons, Lowthah!"

"Yes, rather, as Mr. Linton will scalp me if I don't!" grinned Lowther. "If I don't see you, I'll hang 'em on your peg in the lobby."

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy! Yawwooh! Keep that bat away, Blake, you wuffian!"

Arthur Augustus disappeared with his chums in the direction of Little Side.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

MONTY LOWTHER OBLIGES!

"Ass!"

"Duffer!"

Those polite remarks were made by Tom Merry and Manners, as the Fourth-Formers departed. The remarks were addressed, of course, to Monty Lowther, who smiled benignantly at his chums.

"What's the row now?" he inquired.

"Fathead!" said Tom Merry. "What the merry thump are you pulling Gussy's leg for? He can't show up at fire-drill in overalls!"

"Mr. Railton will drop on him like a ton of coke, if he does!" remarked Manners.

"My dear infants, isn't it a fellow's duty to oblige a loved schoolmate?" asked Monty Lowther. "Am I not always doing these kind things?"

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

Monty Lowther looked pained.

"Instead of upbraiding your chum for performing a kind action, come along and help me select the overalls," he said.

"Catch me," said Tom. "I'm going to do some batting before lessons. We're going to beat the Fourth on Saturday."

"I've got some films to develop," said Manners.

"Then I shall have to go alone," said Lowther. "Well, I dare say I can manage. I've seen that lot of goods at Mr. Wiggs, and I think I can pick out something suitable for Gussy. Ta, ta, old toplets!"

Monty Lowther walked away to the bicycle shed, leaving his chums rather perplexed.

"I suppose it's a stunt," said Tom Merry, after some thought. "He can't be ass enough to bring in a suit of overalls for that howling ass. Let's get along to the cricket, Manners."

"Come and help me in the dark-room," suggested Manners.

"Rats!"

"Bow-wow, then!"

And the chums parted, each to follow his own inclination. Tom Merry was batting to Talbot's bowling, and Manners was enjoying himself in the

red light of the dark-room, when Monty Lowther wheeled out his bicycle, and cycled away cheerfully to Rylcombe. On the Fourth Form pitch, Arthur Augustus had nobly consented to throw himself into the cricket, satisfied now on the important subject of the overalls. It was not till the bell rang for lessons that the cricketers came off.

Monty Lowther had not reappeared when the juniors crowded into the School House for afternoon lessons. Tom Merry looked out of the big doorway, with a knitted brow. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was very keen on punctuality, and the chums did not want to be late. They generally received lines enough, without asking for more.

"Lowthah come in, you fellows?" asked Arthur Augustus, coming along with Blake & Co. on his way to the Form-room.

"Not yet."

"Bai Jove! I twust he will not be late, as he went down to Wylcombe to oblige me," said Arthur Augustus, with friendly concern.

"Come on, Gussy!" bawled Blake.

"Comin', deah boy!"

The Fourth-Formers went into their Form-room. Most of the Shell had gone into their room, too, where Mr. Linton was ready for them; but Tom Merry and Manners still lingered. They did not want to go in without their chum.

"The ass!" grunted Manners. "We shall get lines for this."

"Hallo, there he is!"

Monty Lowther came speeding up to the School House, with a big bundle under his arm. He came in rather breathlessly.

"Fourth gone in?" he asked.

"Yes; and we're late——"

"Never mind that," said Lowther



Arthur Augustus turned round a crimson face towards Blake as the latter prodded him with the cricket bat. "You shwiekin' ass——" he gasped. Prod! "Yow-woop, I——" Prod! "I am goin' to Wylcombe to get my overalls!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

cheerfully. "I've got the goods, but I didn't want Gussy to see them before lessons."

"Ass! I tell you——"

Monty Lowther cut into the lobby. There he jerked the string off the parcel, and unrolled the brown paper. A blue bundle rolled out. Tom Merry and Manners stared at it.

"What on earth——" began Tom.

Monty Lowther shook out the overalls. He held them up for inspection before his astonished chums.

"I fancy this lot was worn by a fellow about six-feet-six," he remarked. "A bit long for Gussy, perhaps——"

"Ha, ha! You funny ass!" gasped

Tom Merry. "So that's why——"

"The trousers are about four feet long—the jacket about the same," said Lowther, thoughtfully. "None of Gussy's clobber will show when he's got this lot on, I'm sure. Think so?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'd have got them a bit bigger, but this was the largest size going." Lowther hung his precious purchase on the peg sacred to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth. "Now let's cut, or Linton will be getting his hair off."

"He's got it off already, most likely, you awful ass!"

The Terrible Three cut off hurriedly to the Shell-room.

Lessons had started there, and Mr. Linton turned a freezing eye upon the three juniors as they came in, several minutes late.

" Fifty lines ! " he snapped.

Tom Merry and Manners each bestowed a ferocious look on their too-humorous chum. But Monty Lowther only smiled as he went to his place. He considered that his little joke on Gussy was worth fifty lines.

The thought of Gussy turning up to fire-drill in those overalls was joyful to Lowther, and it enabled him to bear the frowns of his Form-master with great equanimity.

Most of the School House fellows were looking forward to fire-drill after lessons. It was to be taken under the personal supervision of Mr. Railton, who had instituted it in his House. Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, had pooh-poohed the suggestion. He did not approve of any suggestion that came from the School House master. So the New House fellows were not taking part in the drill.

Figgins & Co. of the New House were consequently disposed to make fun of it—while the School House took it with awful seriousness. Already noses had been punched on the subject.

But it was not in Monty Lowther's nature to take anything with very much seriousness. And certainly the first parade of the St. Jim's firemen was not likely to be very serious if Arthur Augustus turned up in the extensive overalls Monty had provided for him.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS CAUSES A SENSATION

" CRICKET for me ! " remarked George Figgins of the New House, when the Fourth Form, dis-

missed by Mr. Lathom, came out into the corridor. Figgins made that observation loud enough for Blake & Co. to hear. He wanted it to be fully understood that any stunt in which the New House did not share wasn't much of a stunt, anyway.

Jack Blake looked round.

" Well, you fellows need some practice," he said. " The way you play cricket is enough to make the angels weep."

" Yaas, wathah ! "

Figgins waved his hand airily.

" Run away, little boys, and play at firemen," he answered. " After all, the School House may catch fire some day, if Racke or Crooke or Mellish drops a cigarette about——"

" Ha, ha, ha ! " roared Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

" That's not likely to happen in the New House, you know ! " grinned Redfern.

Blake gave a snort.

" What about Clampe and Chowle ! " he demanded. " They're smoky beasts, if you like. They'll set fire to a box-room some day with their smokes, and then you fellows will be jolly glad for us to come along and save your lives."

" Yaas, wathah ! " said Arthur Augustus. " And we will woll up like anythin', Figgins, and save your life, deah boy, although you are a wathah cheeky ass ! "

" I'll reward you out of my old-age pension," said Figgins. " I shall be getting it by the time you firemen learn how to handle a fire ! "

" You uttah ass——"

" Oh, come on ! " said Blake. " Railton's out in the quad already ; no time to waste on New House asses ! "

The Shell were coming out now, and they joined the crowd of the

Fourth. All the School House fellows made for the quadrangle, under a fire of chipping from the New House crowd. Most of the juniors stayed only to snatch their caps ; but Arthur Augustus had more to do than that. Arthur Augustus was clad in his usual nobby elegance, and he had his clobber to think of. Fortunately, his elegant clobber was in no danger, owing to the wonderful idea that had flashed into his noble brain. With amateur hands handling a fire-hose, there really was no telling what might happen to a chap's clobber, and Arthur Augustus was running no risks. The overalls settled the question for him.

But a rather thoughtful shade came over his noble brow as he took down the big blue overalls from the peg.

In such garments as overalls even Arthur Augustus did not expect a fashionable cut or fit. But there was a limit. Monty Lowther had been kind and obliging—Gussy admitted that—but— He held up the overalls, and blinked at them through his eyeglass.

"Blake, my deah boy——"

But Blake was gone.

"Hewwies——"

"Come on!" answered Herries, jamming his cap on his head, and bolting.

"I say, Dig——"

"Get a move on, Gussy!" said Dig, as he disappeared.

"Wildwake——"

"I guess I can't stop, old scout!" answered Kit Wildrake. "You'd better hustle. Railton won't like anybody late." And the Canadian junior vanished.

"Bai Jove! I say, Tom Mewwy——"

"Good-bye!"

"Mannahs——"

"Fare thee well!" grinned Manners.

"Lowthah — pway wemain a moment, Lowthah——"

Everybody seemed in a pressing hurry with the exception of Monty Lowther. That kind and obliging youth lingered with Arthur Augustus.

"Don't you know how to get into them?" he asked cheerfully. "I'll help you, old top!"

"Aren't they wathah big, old fellow?" asked D'Arcy dubiously.

"Well, you're such an athletic chap for your age, you know," said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, but——"

"Overalls always fit a bit loosely," said Lowther. "You take in a tuck here and there, you know. I've got some pins."

"Yaas, but—but——"

"Jump into them," said Lowther. "There's Kildare bawling for us already. No time to waste, Gussy."

"I—I suppose it would not do to wisk my clobber——"

"Suppose some ass turns the hose right on you?" asked Lowther.

"Bai Jove!"

"Here you are! Get in——"

Monty Lowther held the vast trousers ready, and Arthur Augustus stepped into them, and nearly vanished.

"Gweat Scott! I——"

"They fasten like this, and the jacket part comes down over them——"

"But they are floatin' all wound my feet——"

"I'll pin 'em up——"

"But——"

"There you are——"

"Yawooooh!" yelled Arthur Augustus suddenly.

"What on earth's the matter?"

"Yow-ow! You wan that pin into my calf, you feahful ass!" spluttered Arthur Augustus.

"Never mind——"

"That's all vewy well for you, you uttah ass, but it was my calf!" shrieked the swell of the Fourth.

"My dear chap, there's no time to waste, and you shouldn't have such a fatted calf. There——"

"Yooooop!"

"What's the matter now?"

"You've wun it into my othah leg!"

"My hat! You're always grouching at something, Gussy!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "The bags are fixed now, anyhow. Now for the rest."

"The rest" of the overalls enveloped Arthur Augustus like a tidal wave. They descended to the floor around him, and mingled gracefully with the bagginess of the trousers.

"Bai Jove! I weally think——"

"Now you're fixed. Come on!"

"But weally——"

Monty Lowther grasped the swell of St. Jim's by the arm, and ran him out of the lobby.

"Your clobber can't get touched now, Gussy——"

"Yaas, but——"

"Come on!"

Lowther cut out of the House. Arthur Augustus hesitated. Undoubtedly, his elegant clobber was remarkably well protected, but——

Cutts of the Fifth came hurrying along. He had been sent by the Housemaster to round up stray juniors.

He almost fell down at the sight of Gussy in his overalls.

"What the—what—what—— Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Cutts.

"Weally, Cutts——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Fifth-Former. "What a game! Get along with you, D'Arcy; Mr. Railton's waiting."

And Cutts of the Fifth pushed Arthur Augustus out of the House, and followed him, still chortling. There was doubt and dismay in Gussy's noble mind now; but it was too late—the die was cast.

He hurried towards the crowd of School House juniors gathered round Mr. Railton in the quadrangle. Kildare of the Sixth already had the hose in position. Darrell and Langton and Rushden were in charge of the fire-escape, and a number of other Sixth-Formers had life-saving sheets in hand. At a respectful distance stood a crowd of New House fellows, venturing on the exact amount of chipping that could possibly be ventured upon in the presence of a Housemaster and a bunch of prefects.

Mr. Railton had his back to the House just then, and did not see Arthur Augustus hurrying up. But the others saw him; and from the New House crowd there went up a wild yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy——" shrieked Blake blankly.

"Gussy——" babbled Herries and Dig.

"Oh, you benighted jay!" gasped Wildrake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm weady, deah boys," panted Arthur Augustus, "quite weady. Sowwy I'm a minute or two late——"

He hurried to join his chums. And then the pins in the extensive trousers—perhaps not put in very securely—jerked out, and the enormous trousers flopped down round Gussy's ankles, and tripped him up.

The roar of laughter caused Mr. Railton to turn round, with a frowning brow, to ascertain the cause.

He was treated to a startling sight. Arthur Augustus, tripping and

stumbling in his floating trousers, took a "header" and landed on his hands and knees fairly at the House-master's feet!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

VERY WET!

MR. RAILTON stared at the extraordinary figure sprawling at his feet. He did not seem to know what it was for the moment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" thundered the House-master.

But it was useless for even the Housemaster to command silence at that moment. The sight of Arthur Augustus sprawling, enveloped in overalls, was too much for the juniors, and the seniors, too. The quadrangle of

St. Jim's rang with shouts of laughter.

"Oh dear!" gasped Tom Merry. "Gussy will be the death of me some day!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Boy!" thundered Mr. Railton.

"Gwoogh! Help a chap up, somebody!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get up at once!"

"I—I—I'm twyin'!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He scrambled up, caught his foot again, and rolled on the ground, with a splutter. Mr. Railton stooped, took a grip on the back of his neck, and lifted him bodily to his feet.

"Gwoogh!"

"You utterly absurd boy!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "What do you



Monty Lowther shook out the overalls and held them up for inspection before his astonished chums. "I fancy this lot was worn by a fellow about six-feet-six," he remarked. "A bit long for Gussy perhaps—"

mean by coming into the quadrangle in this extraordinary garb ? ”

“ They—they’re my ovelwalls, sir ! ”

“ Your what ? ”

“ Ovelwalls—to save my clobbah, sir. ”

“ Ha, ha, ha ! ”

“ Silence ! D’Arcy, go back into the House at once, and remove those ridiculous things. And take a hundred lines ! ”

“ Oh deah ! Weally, sir—— ”

“ Go ! ” thundered Mr. Railton.

Arthur Augustus started. He gathered up his vast trousers in both hands, and stumbled away.

A yell of laughter followed him.

The sight of Arthur Augustus tripping away, holding up his skirts, was irresistible.

“ Oh dear ! ” gasped Blake. “ Of all the asses—— ”

“ I guess he does annex the prize bun ! ” grinned Wildrake.

“ Silence ! ”

Mr. Railton’s frowning brow restored silence at last. The House-master apparently failed to see the joke.

But though the School House fellows were reduced to something like gravity, the New House crowd, at a little distance, persisted in grinning. They were determined that, for their part, the fire-drill was not going to be taken seriously.

Mr. Ratcliff came along from his House, and lifted his scanty eyebrows at the sight of the School House array.

The amateur firemen were at hose-work by this time, and the old elms were receiving a shower-bath, which probably did them good.

Mr. Ratcliff curved his thin lips in a sour smile.

It did not please him to approve of the proceedings ; and in those

circumstances it would have been in better taste for Mr. Ratcliff to keep off the scene. But he preferred to appear. The New House master never neglected an opportunity of making a remark that might cause discomfort.

“ Ah ! Busy, my dear Railton, I see ! ” he remarked, with a manner that indicated that he regarded the whole affair as child’s play.

Mr. Railton, determined not to observe his colleague’s unpleasant smile, nodded cheerfully.

“ As you see, Ratcliff ! ” he replied.

“ What are—er—these—these objects ? ” asked Mr. Ratcliff, glancing at the life-saving sheets.

“ They are for jumping into from a window, in case of fire, ” explained Railton.

“ You really seem to anticipate a fire, my dear fellow ! ”

“ Surely it is not impossible, Ratcliff ! Why not be prepared ? ”

“ Oh, quite so, quite so ! ” said Mr. Ratcliff, with the same disagreeable smile. “ I dare say you are quite right. ”

His tone indicated that he was perfectly convinced that Mr. Railton was quite wrong.

“ Why not let your boys join in the drill ? ” suggested Mr. Railton good-humouredly. “ It would at least do them no harm. ”

“ Waste of time, Mr. Railton—waste of time, in my opinion. ”

“ Hem ! ”

After that remark, even Mr. Railton’s politeness was not equal to any further conversation with Mr. Ratcliff. But the New House master was not finished yet. Everybody present would have been obliged by Mr. Ratcliff’s walking off ; but he had no intention of walking off so long as anything disagreeable remained to be said.

"And this is the hose," he remarked. "What are you going to do with the hose, Lowther?"

Monty Lowther had just taken charge of the nozzle. Every fellow was going to do hose-drill in turn.

Lowther looked up innocently.

"I'm learning, sir," he answered meekly.

"I should suppose that any boy, however stupid, knew how to handle a fire-hose!" said Mr. Ratcliff, his lip curling.

"Well, sir, you have to learn to keep a good aim, and all that," said Monty Lowther. "It's not so jolly easy— Oh dear!"

Swish! Swoooooosh!

Whether it was because Monty Lowther had not yet learned to take a good aim, or because he had, the nozzle suddenly swung round right on the New House master.

The jet of water smote Mr. Ratcliff fairly on the chest.

The tall, thin gentleman gave a mighty jump and a mightier roar.

"Oh! Ah! What— Help! Stoppim! Yoooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the amateur firemen.

"Lowther!" thundered Mr. Railton.

Lowther seemed petrified by what he had done—so petrified that he stood motionless, with the hose still playing on Mr. Ratcliff.

That astounded and enraged gentleman danced in the whizzing flood of water, like an insect in a beam of sunlight.

"Yourrrrrgggh! Stoppim! Yooooop!"

"Lowther——" shrieked Mr. Railton.

Knox of the Sixth was nearest, and he rushed at Lowther. He seized him by the ear—with unnecessary force.

"You young fool, shut it off!"

yelled Knox. "Oh! Ah! Yooooop— gooooooch!"

The nozzle swung round on Knox, and caught him fairly under the chin.

Knox spun backwards.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lowther, stop——"

"Put it down——"

"Yorrrrrgggh!"—from Knox.

"Groooooooh!"—from Mr. Ratcliff.

Kildare jumped at the Shell fellow. The hose did not turn on him. Monty Lowther was wise in his generation; he did not venture upon such "accidents" with the captain of the school.

The water was shut off at last; the hose dropped from Kildare's hand. Knox, drenched and dripping, and crimson with fury, streaked for the School House, for a much-needed change. Mr. Ratcliff stood, streaming with water and shaking with fury.

"Mr. Ratcliff," gasped the School House master, "I—I regret this exceedingly! That clumsy boy shall be severely punished! I cannot sufficiently apologise for——"

"This is a plot, sir!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff furiously.

"Mr. Ratcliff!"

"I am well aware, sir, that this outrage was planned!" yelled the New House master. "The boy, sir, was meeting your wishes, as I am very well aware. I despise such artifices, sir!"

And Mr. Ratcliff, in a towering rage, stamped away, squelching out water with every stamp.

Mr. Railton drew a deep breath. There was a dead silence.

"Dismiss!" said Mr. Railton quietly. "The drill is ended for today! Lowther, I shall see you in my study!"

"Yes, sir!" said Lowther meekly.

Mr. Railton strode away, and the amateur firemen proceeded to stack up their paraphernalia. Among the juniors, at least, there was incessant chuckling, and most of the seniors were grinning. Mr. Ratcliff's remarks had not won him favour among the School House fellows, and there was nobody present who regretted Lowther's accident with the hose.

Only Lowther—who generally had the keenest possible appreciation of his own little jokes—looked a little grave.

"You funny ass!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Why don't you laugh? It was the funniest thing going!"

"Yes, rather!" gurgled Manners. "I'd never seen Ratty doing the fox-trot before!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lowther grinned.

"It was funny— Ha, ha, ha! But I'm rather afraid that it won't be funny in Mr. Railton's study!" he said. And he started for the School House looking rather dismal.

And the humorist of the Shell was right—it wasn't!

As Tom Merry & Co. came back to the House, a shabby looking figure emerged. Only by the eyeglass gleaming in the eye could it be recognised as that of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The juniors stared at him.

"What on earth are you doing in those trousers?" demanded Blake.

Arthur Augustus glanced down at his trousers.

"They're wathah seeday, aren't they?" he remarked.

"Rather isn't the word—they're the limit, I guess!" said Wildrake. "Where on earth did you dig them up?"

"And that old jacket——" said Tom Merry.

"And that waistcoat——"

"You see, deah boys," explained Arthur Augustus, "as Wailton was down on my ovelwalls, I have changed my clobbah. I got these fwom Toby, the page, you know. I asked him to lend me his oldest clobbah. Now I'm weady for the fire-dwill."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to cackle at, deah boys. I am quite weady now, and eagah for the fway!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Only it's all over, you see!"

"Bai Jove!"

"So you can go and change your clobber again!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Weally, you know——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Arthur Augustus, realising that he had changed his clothes a little too late, drifted disconsolately into the School House to change them once more.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

TRIBULATIONS OF A HUMORIST!

"THAT boundah was pullin' my leg!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been very silent at tea in Study No. 6 after the fire-drill. Blake and Herries and Digby were chatting away cheerily, nineteen to the dozen, if not a round score. But there was a deep shade of thoughtfulness on the aristocratic brow of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as if he were dealing with a mental problem of some severity. He came out of a brown study with a sudden remark, and his chums looked at him.

"Hallo! Woke up?" asked Blake.

"I have not been asleep, Blake. I have been thinkin'——"

"Draw it mild, old chap!" remonstrated Digby.

"Pway be sewious, Dig. I have



Cutts almost fell down at the sight of Gussy in his overalls. "What the—what—what— Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Cutts. "Weally, Cutts—" said Arthur Augustus.

been thinkin' it ovah, and I have come to the conclusion that Monty Lowthah was pullin' my leg in landin' me with that feahful set of ovelwalls."

"You really think so?" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

"You've thought that out, on your own?"

"Yaas."

"Without the aid of a net?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What born idiot was it that said the age of miracles was past?" asked Blake. "It isn't. It can't be! Here's Gussy thought it out in less

than an hour; thought out something that was clear from the start—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Herries and Dig.

The swell of St. Jim's adjusted his monocle in his eye with great care, and surveyed his hilarious chums with severity.

"You uttah asses! Did you wealise fwom the beginnin' that Lowthah was pullin' my leg?"

"I had just a faint suspicion!" gurgled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard it as anythin' but a laughin' mattah. I twusted Lowthah

to get me those ovelalls, and in landin' me with those widiculous things, big enough for some beastlay giant, he was weally guilty of a bweach of twust," said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I cannot let this pass without the vewy sevewest wepwehension."

"Fan me, somebody!" murmured Blake.

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet.

"Will you be my second, Blake?" he asked, with dignity.

"Eh?"

"I am goin' to give Lowthah a feahful thwashin'."

"Oh, spare his life!" said Blake.

"Remember he's young. These are the faults of giddy and unthinking youth, Gussy."

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake! He has made me widiculous——"

"Only helped," said Blake. "Nature started it."

"You uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus, in great wrath. "I wegard you as a wibald jestah, Blake. Hewwies, will you be my second?"

"Catch me!" said Herries. "Don't play the goat, old chap!"

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Besides, it was funny," said Blake. "If you could have seen yourself in those trousers, Gussy——"

"Will you be my second, Dig?"

"I don't think!" said Dig.

"If you fellows wefuse to back me up I shall be obliged to look for backin' outside this studay!" said Arthur Augustus.

It was a crushing remark. But somehow Blake & Co. did not look crushed. They smiled.

Arthur Augustus eyed them for a moment, and then he turned and stalked out of Study No. 6, very much on his dignity. He closed the door after him with emphasis.

"Hallo! Wherefore the frown upon that noble brow?" asked a cool, cheery voice in the passage. Cardew of the Fourth stopped to ask the question.

"Cardew, deah boy, will you be my second?"

"That depends," answered Cardew thoughtfully. "Are you going to fight my pal Levison?"

"No."

"My other pal, Clive?"

"No."

"Or my merry cousin, Durrance?"

"No, that's all wight."

"Sorry I can't be your second, then," said Cardew politely. "If you were goin' to fight a friend of mine, I'd oblige you with pleasure. Ta-ta!"

"I wegard you as an uttah ass, Cardew! Hallo, Julian! Stop a minute, deah boy!" Dick Julian stopped, as Ralph Reckness Cardew strolled away. "Julian, old scout, will you be my second? I am goin' to thwash Lowthah!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Julian. "I'll tell you what, Gussy, I'll bring the doctor you'll need afterwards."

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus walked off to the Shell passage. He did not trouble about any further quest for a second.

He reached Study No. 10 in the Shell, tapped at the door, and opened it. The Terrible Three were all there—Tom Merry and Manners seated, and Monty Lowther standing up. For once, there was absolutely no trace of humour in the features of Montague Lowther.

"Pway excuse my buttin' in, deah boys——" began Arthur Augustus.

"All right, so long as you butt out again!" grunted Lowther.

Arthur Augustus fixed an accusing eyeglass upon him.

"I have come heah to thwash you, Lowthah!"

" Ass ! "

" You planted that wotten, widi- culous set of ovelwalls upon me for the expwess purpose of makin' me look an ass ! " said Arthur Augustus sternly.

" Fathead ! "

" Do you deny it, Lowthah ? "

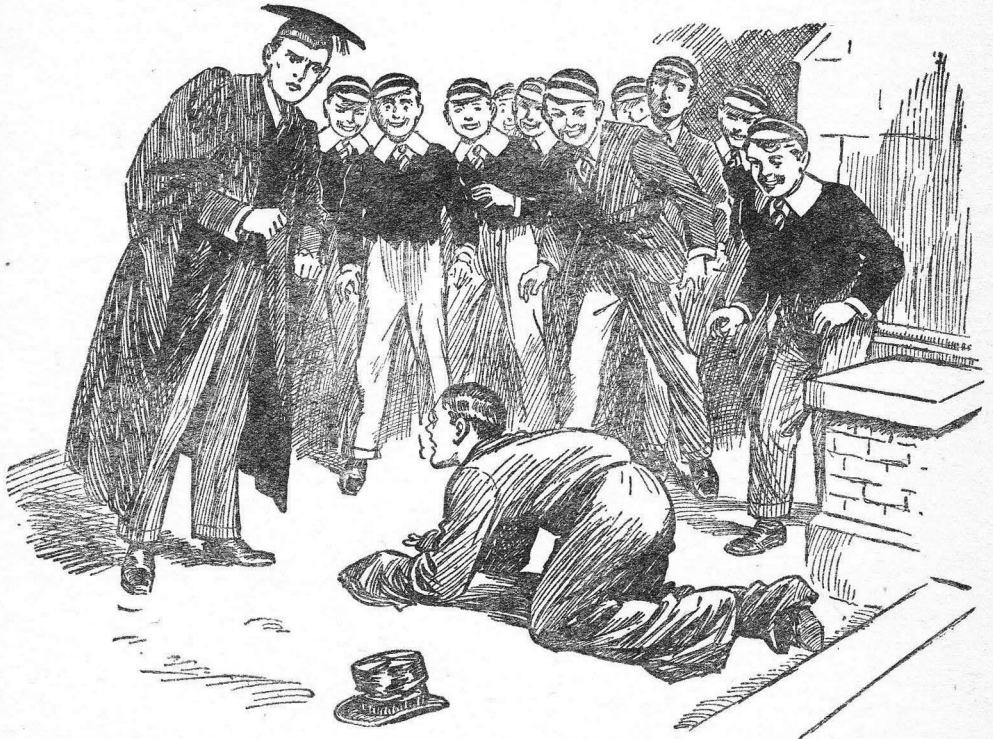
" Come over here, and let me smash you ! " was Lowther's reply. " I want

" A chap can't knock the stuffing out of a Housemaster ! " groaned Lowther. " I like old Railton, but I'd have loved to dot him one right in the eye when he was handling the cane ! Ow ! "

" It'll wear off ! " said Manners.

" Ow ! I know that, ass ! The trouble is that it hasn't worn off yet ! "

" Bai Jove ! Undah the circs, Low-



A roar of laughter caused Mr. Railton to turn round to ascertain the cause. He was treated to the sight of Arthur Augustus, tripping and stumbling in the floating trousers, taking a header and landing at his feet !

to smash somebody, and you'll do."

" Bai Jove ! I——"

" Shut up, Gussy ! " said Tom Merry. " Can't you see Lowther's been through it. He's been walloped for drenching old Ratty ! "

" Oh, let him come on ! " said Lowther. " It will do me good to knock the stuffing out of him ! "

" Weally, Lowthah——"

thah, I will let you off the thwashin' I was goin' to give you," said Arthur Augustus, with great consideration. " But you will pway undahstand, Lowthah, that you are to wegard yourself as havin' been thwashed."

" Why don't they put him in the Zoo ? " said Monty Lowther. " Extra-ordinary that they should let him wander about like this."

" Bai Jove ! You cheeky ass——"
" Order ! " said Tom Merry. " Run away, Gussy, there's a good little boy."
" If you allude to me as a good little boy, Tom Mewwy——"

" Run away and play, old top ! "

Tom Merry gently pushed Arthur Augustus out of the study, and closed the door on him. Lowther was wriggling from his recent infliction in Mr. Railton's study. The Housemaster had not spared the rod. He had laid it on, as Lowther considered, not wisely, but too well.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

FIGGINS & CO. ASSIST !

GEORGE FIGGINS drummed on the table, in his study in the New House, with his knuckles. Figgy was looking very thoughtful and a little morose. Kerr and Wynn bore the drumming on the table with exemplary patience, though Kerr was deep in a mathematical problem, and Fatty Wynn was copying a recipe from a cookery book borrowed from the house-dame.

" You fellows are awfully busy, I suppose ? " Figgins remarked, with a touch of sarcasm, still drumming.

" Not specially," said Kerr, looking up with a smile. " What's the game, Figgy ? Are you going in for table-rapping, and are you trying to call spirits from the vasty deep ? "

" What I don't catch on to," said Fatty Wynn, " is this ! It says here that you take four new-laid eggs——"

" Give us a rest ! " said Figgins.

" And two fresh tomatoes——"

" Bother your tomatoes ! " roared Figgins.

" Eh ? What's the row, Figgy ? " asked Fatty, looking up in surprise. " Ain't you getting ready for supper ? "

" Bless supper ! "

Figgins drummed on the table again.

" It's not a bad idea in itself ! " he said.

" Just what I was thinking," said Fatty Wynn brightly.

" Oh, you've been thinking about it, have you ? "

" Yes, rather—and I think that tomato omelettes will go down a treat. But it says here——"

" Who's talking about tomato omelettes ? " shrieked Figgins.

" Weren't you ? "

" I was talking about the School House stunt," growled Figgins—" their dashed fire-drill ! "

" Oh, that rot ! " said Fatty Wynn. " I was talking about tomato omelettes. If you take four new-laid eggs——"

" I'll take a Welsh rabbit, and knock his silly head on the table, if you don't dry up ! " said Figgins ferociously.

" Order ! " said Kerr. " Get it off your chest, Figgy ! What's worrying your serene highness ? "

" About that School House stunt," said Figgins. " As I said, when Fatty bumped in with his rot, it's not a bad idea in itself. To be quite candid, old Ratty made a mistake in keeping the New House out of it."

" Old Ratty's always making mistakes."

" Railton's idea is a jolly good one, to be perfectly truthful," continued Figgins, " and if old Ratty had joined in, we'd have House drill, and beat the School House hollow. We could do it on our heads."

" Hear, hear ! "

" Now, we're really left out in the cold," said Figgins; " that's what it amounts to. All we can do is to pooh-pooh the whole scheme, and chip those School House duffers."

" Well, we'll do that."

" We've got to do that to save our

face," remarked Fatty Wynn. "I'd rather go in for fire-drill. But we can't admit that to the enemy."

"That's it," assented Figgins. "I'm glad to see you can think of something beside tomato omelettes, Fatty."

"Look here, Figgy——"

"We can't let those cheeky asses get ahead of us with their blessed stunt," said George Figgins. "Ergo—we've got to dish them somehow, and make them look asses; and the question arises, how are we going to do it? That's what I've been trying to think out, instead of looking into cookery-books for tomato

omelettes!" said Figgins crushingly.

"Well, tomato omelettes are jolly good!" said Fatty Wynn defensively.

"If you take four new-laid eggs——"

"Shush, Fatty!" said Kerr, laughing. "You're asking for a big order, Figgy. All the School House is in the stunt, Housemaster and prefects and all, and we can't pull the leg of a Housemaster or the Sixth."

"Bother the Housemaster and the Sixth!" said Figgins. "They can rip, for all I care! But we've got to dish Tom Merry and Blake and that crowd somehow, or else hide our diminished heads. That ass Gussy



Monty Lowther suddenly swung the nozzle of the hose right round at the New Housemaster. The jet of water smote Mr. Ratcliff fairly on the chest. "Oh! Ah! What— Help!" he spluttered. "Stoppim! Yoooooop!"

was saying the other day that his House is going to save the school, if a gang of anarchists should ever come along and set fire to it!" Figgins snorted. "As if any beastly anarchists would be asses enough to come along here playing the giddy goat!"

"Gussy is an ass!" said Kerr. "But"—a glimmer came into the keen eyes of the Scottish junior—"but if Gussy is on the look-out for anarchists they might happen along——"

Snort from Figgins.

"They might!" persisted Kerr. "Three of them, f'rinstance, might turn up at St. Jim's, on purpose to pull Gussy's leg."

"How could they?" roared Figgins. "Have you got their telephone number? And can you call 'em for a jape?"

"Ha, ha! No! But there's little us——"

"Us?" said Figgins dazedly.

"Us!" said Kerr.

"I say, we ain't anarchists!" said Fatty Wynn, with a stare. "I don't know what anarchism is exactly. I've asked Reilly and Mulvaney minor, and they don't seem to agree. They were fighting about it yesterday."

Kerr sighed.

"I'll try to put it into words of one syllable, so that it will penetrate into your feeble intellects," he said. "Gussy's never seen any anarchists, and is never likely to see the genuine article. That's all the more reason why he should be spoofed."

"Oh, it's a jape!" said Figgins.

"Dear man," said Kerr affectionately, "has that just dawned upon your powerful brain?"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Figgins. "If you've got an idea for pulling the leg of those cheeky School House duffers——"

"Listen, and I will a tale unfold," said Kerr. "I've been thinking it out already. What price a plot to burn St. Jim's to the ground, and Gussy getting on the track of it, and the School House Fire Brigade turning out to the rescue——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"Let's talk it over, then," said Kerr.

"After supper," said Fatty Wynn anxiously.

"Bother supper!"

"There's nothing like laying a solid foundation, whatever you're going to do," said Fatty, shaking his head. "I'll buzz off and get four new-laid eggs and three tomatoes——"

"If you do," said Figgins, in concentrated tones, "I'll squeeze 'em down your back, Fatty!"

"Look here, Figgy——"

"Shut up! Go ahead, Kerr!"

Kerr went ahead, and Figgins listened with great attention. Fatty Wynn gave all the attention he could spare from the enthralling thought of tomato omelettes.

The discussion in Figgins' study was punctuated by many chuckles. When it ended, George Francis Kerr was busy for some minutes with pen and paper. Then he quitted the study with Figgins, and David Llewellyn Wynn was free at last to devote his enthusiastic attention to tomato omelettes for supper.

Figgins and Kerr strolled towards the School House, chatting carelessly. Fire-drill had been going on that afternoon; it was a regular institution in the School House now, and Tom Merry & Co. were growing exceedingly pleased with the knowledge and skill they were acquiring. Jumping into blankets was looked upon as a very entertaining game by the fags, and was taken up with

enthusiasm by the Third Form especially. Figgins and Kerr came on several groups of School House juniors discussing the afternoon's performances as they strolled around. They were looking for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and they wanted to come on him by chance. They found the noble youth at last, and hailed him.

"How's the fire brigade bizney going on, Gussy?" asked Kerr affably.

"Vewy well, considewin', deah boys," answered D'Arcy.

"Only considering?" said Figgins. "Considering that the New House are not backing it up, do you mean?"

"Nothin' of the sort, Figgins! But Mr. Wailton is wathah an obstinate and unweflectin' gentleman in some wespects. He does not seem to want to weceive suggestions."

The New House juniors grinned.

"There was a haywick burned on Giles' farm the othah day," continued Arthur Augustus. "There was no evidence that it was done by any anarchists, but that looks vewy suspicious to me—they covah up their twacks so carefully, you know."

"Nothing could be more suspicious than a total absence of evidence!" said Kerr gravely.

"Exactly, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus unsuspectingly. "But when I ventured to suggest to Mr. Wailton that a watch should be kept for these wuffians, he said 'Pooh! Non-sense!' He did, weally."

"He doesn't realise the fearful peril!" remarked Figgins.

"Wathah not! But I'm goin' to keep my eyes open," said Arthur Augustus, with a sage shake of the head. "If they waid St. Jim's, I am not goin' to be taken by surprise, I can tell you!"

"Hallo, what's this?" exclaimed

Kerr, stooping and picking up a fragment of paper at his feet.

"Only a scawp of papah," said D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass on it.

"There's something written on it——"

"My hat!" exclaimed Figgins, staring at the scrap of paper.

"Bai Jove! What is it, deah boys?"

"Look!"

Arthur Augustus glanced at the scrap of paper.

Then his startled eye almost burst through his eyeglass.

There was writing on the paper, in a rough, crabbed hand. It ran—apparently a fragment of a letter of instructions:

"Lenovitch will take the petrol School House first, and

one box dynamite

Sarovitch

and Marsovitch

burn

destroy

the woodshed at St. Jim's at nine

o'clock Tuesday

start the fire——"

That was all. The fragment of paper was torn irregularly, and the rest of the startling letter was only to be guessed at.

"Gweat Scott!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "Some awful incendiawy wottah has been here, deah boys, and he has dwopped this."

"Somebody must have dropped it in the quad!" remarked Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! Some wottah spyin' out the place last night, you know," said Arthur Augustus excitedly. "You see that the lettah has been torn acwoss—the wottah meant to destwoy it, you see!"

"Clear enough, the way you put

it!" said Figgins. "But, I say, this letter belongs to us, Gussy. Kerr found it——"

"Yes, rather!" said Kerr.

"Wats!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "It's up to the School House to baffle their knavish twicks. There isn't any fire bwigade in the New House. Leave it to us."

"But——"

"Weally, Figgins, I insist upon takin' charge of this affaih!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus firmly. "I insist upon your leavin' it in my hands."

"But——"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus; and he walked away, with the telltale scrap of paper in his hand.

"I say, give me my paper!" bawled Kerr.

"Wats!"

"Look here, Gussy——"

"Wats!"

Figgins and Kerr exchanged a glance, and then walked away towards the New House, smiling. And Arthur Augustus, bursting with suppressed excitement, rushed into the School House with the precious paper. There was no time to be lost. For it was Tuesday, and it was eight o'clock, and the fire was to be started by the plotters at nine—according to the mysterious document.

And in such a thrilling hour of danger, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not the fellow to let the grass grow under his feet.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

NO BACKERS.

"NONSENSE!"

"But, sir——"

"It is some absurd practical joke, D'Arcy——"

"Weally, sir——"

"Throw it away, my boy!"

"But——"

"You may go, D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy quitted the Housemaster's study, in the School House, with feelings too deep for words.

Generally, he had a great respect for Mr. Railton. But his respect for that gentleman very nearly failed him now.

Being in possession of information relating to a terrible incendiary plot, Arthur Augustus had gone to his Housemaster, as a matter of course. He expected instant measures to be taken, and the School House Fire Brigade to be called out as a precaution for emergencies.

Instead of which, Mr. Railton, with incredible rashness and recklessness, looked on the thing as a practical joke.

It was amazing to Arthur Augustus. Evidently, if St. Jim's was not to be burned to the ground that night, it depended on Arthur Augustus to save the old school. He hurried away to Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage.

"You fellows——"

"You're late for prep!" said Blake. "Do you want a row with Lathom in the morning, Gussy?"

"Wats! There is no time for pwep this evenin'!"

"Eh?"

"Do you fellows want to save St. Jim's fwom bein' burned to the gwound?" demanded Arthur Augustus.

Blake jumped.

"Hallo! Is there a fire?" he asked.

"Good!" said Herries. "Chance for us to wedge in with the fire brigade. If I can get hold of the hose, I'm going to try to catch Knox of the Sixth——"

"This is a sewious mattah, Hewwies. Look at that!"



"This is a sewious mattah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Look at that!" He threw a scrap of paper on the study table. Blake, Herries and Digby looked at it. "Hallo! Who's pulling your leg this time?" asked Digby.

Arthur Augustus threw a scrap of paper on the study table. Blake and Herries and Digby looked at it.

"Hallo! Who's pulling your leg this time?" asked Digby.

"This is an anarchist document, Dig——"

"Anarchist rats!" said Dig.

"You uttah ass! You're as big an ass as Mr. Wailton!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Cannot you wealise the feahful dangah?"

Blake chuckled.

"I'll get on with my prep. and chance the danger," he said. "I'd

rather chance these jokers than chance Lathom in the morning."

"Bai Jove!"

"You shouldn't play these tricks, Gussy!" said Herries, shaking his head. "What are you trying to pull our leg for?"

"Weally, Hewwies, if you think I manufactured that papah——"

"Didn't you?" asked Herries.

"You uttah ass! It was dwopped in the quad yestahday—or last night—by an anarchist spy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you goin' to back me up in

stoppin' this feahful outwage?" demanded Arthur Augustus hotly.

"Try next door!" said Blake.

"I am surprisid at you. I am——"

"Where's that dashed dictionary?" said Blake, looking round. "Gussy, old bean, you're interrupting the prep."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus would have poured forth the vials of his wrath upon his incredulous chums, but there was no time to waste. It was already turned half-past eight, and the danger was getting close. He rushed out of the study, and sped away to No. 10 in the Shell. He burst into Tom Merry's study like a cyclone.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What the thump——"

"Wally wound, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Dangah! Fiah!"

"What?" yelled the Terrible Three.

"The anarchists are here——"

"Here?" howled Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! They are goin' to start the fiah in the woodshed at nine o'clock, and burn St. Jim's to the ground——"

"Oh, let 'em!" said Manners. "Call me when they begin, and I'll bring out my camera."

"Look at that papah—dwopped by a spy in the quad last night——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cannot you wead, you duffahs? Look at it——"

"Gussy's getting quite bright," said Monty Lowther. "But he can't expect to pull the leg of this study. It isn't the first of April, either. Go and look for greenhorns in the Fourth, Gussy; none in the Shell!"

"Bai Jove!"

There was no help to be had in No. 10. Minutes were precious now, and

Arthur Augustus quitted the study again with a rush, leaving the Terrible Three chuckling.

Three-quarters chimed out from the clock-tower.

"Bai Jove! A quarter to nine, and nothing' done!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Talbot—I say, Talbot——"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Talbot.

"The madmen are just goin' to set fiah to the school——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Pway come along and help me——"

"But what about prep?" asked Talbot.

"You awful ass!"

Arthur Augustus sprinted down the stairs. There were no backers for him in the School House, and either he had to baffle the plotters on his own, or else allow St. Jim's to be burned to the ground. He stayed only to annex a golf-club, and started for the woodshed. He prepared to face the foe on his "lonely own."

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

ONLY A FALSE ALARM!

THERE was a sound of muffled voices.

Arthur Augustus thrilled. It was dark by the woodshed, and the muttering voices came to Gussy's ears from the deep shadows.

Evidently he had come upon the rascals mentioned in the torn letter!

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Pour out the petrol, Lenovitch!"

"Got the matches, Sarovitch?"

Probably only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would have taken those ejaculations for the remarks of the plotters.

His heart beat fast as he gripped his golf-club.

"Ah! The foe!" exclaimed a deep

voice. "The automatic pistol—quick! Slay him—shed his gore—Aha—"

Three dark figures rushed on Arthur Augustus from the shadow of the shed. Before he could use his golf-club it was jerked away, and three masked faces were round him, three pairs of eyes glistening through the holes in the masks.

"Slay him!"

"Shoot him!"

"You howwid wuffians!" gasped Arthur Augustus, struggling as the masked figures seized him. "I—Gwoogh— Leggo! Help! Fire! Help!"

He tore himself away from the gang with surprising ease, and dashed away towards the School House for help.

"Thunder! He's escaped!"

"Set fire to the woodshed!"

"Pour out the petrol!"

Arthur Augustus ran for his life.

Crack, crack, crack! rang out behind him. To Gussy's startled ears it was a succession of pistol-shots. He was far too excited to recognise the Fifth-of-November cracker.

Crack, crack!

"Help! Fire!" roared Arthur Augustus, as he pelted into the School House.

"What—"

"Where—"

"Fire, fire, fire!"

Arthur Augustus roared out the alarm with all the power of his lungs.

"Fire, fire!"

The alarm was taken up on all sides.

Excited fellows shouted inquiries from the studies, the stairs, and the passages. Wildly-excited fags came streaming out of the Third Form room, shouting and yelling.

"Fire, fire!"

Clang, clang, clang!

The alarm-bell crashed out into the night.

Footsteps rang on the staircases, seniors and juniors poured out into the quadrangle.

The alarm was general now.

Mr. Railton's deep voice was heard giving commands. Kildare and Darrell had rushed for the hose. In the distance across the quadrangle, three youths stared at the excited scene outside the School House. They crammed their masks into their pockets, and gasped.

"My only hat!" stuttered Figgins. "There'll be a row! They're really turning out their merry fire brigade!"

"Oh, great pip!" gasped Kerr.

"Get indoors!" breathed Fatty Wynn. "We shall have to prove a jolly strong alibi for this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three young rascals disappeared into the New House. A minute more, and they were deep in prep in their study.

Meanwhile, the alarm was spreading fast. Windows in the School House were thrown wide open, lights blazed into the quad. Tom Merry & Co. were all out of doors, shouting questions. Everybody knew there was a fire, but nobody seemed to know where it was. Mr. Railton's deep voice dominated the uproar and confusion.

"Where is the fire? I can see nothing! Who gave the alarm?"

"D'Arcy!" said a dozen voices.

"Where is D'Arcy?"

"He's ringing the alarm-bell, I think," said Blake.

"Calm yourselves, my boys! It appears to be a false alarm," said Mr. Railton. "Bring D'Arcy here at once, Darrell!"

Darrell rushed into the House, now almost empty. He reappeared, with his hand on Arthur Augustus' collar.

Arthur Augustus was protesting.

" Welease me, Dawwell! I insist
"

" D'Arcy!" thundered Mr. Railton.

" Bai Jove! Yaas, sir?"

" You gave the alarm of fire?"

" Yaas, wathah!"

" Where is there any fire, you stupid boy?"

" In the woodshed, sir! The anarchists——"

" What!" gasped Mr. Railton.

" They wushed on me, sir——"

" What—how—who—who rushed on you?" exclaimed the astonished Housemaster.

" The spies, sir!"

" Is the boy out of his senses?" exclaimed Mr. Railton, in bewilderment.

" I—I showed you the scwap of papah, sir——"

" You incredibly foolish boy, I told you that that was only a foolish practical joke of some person——"

" But they are here, sir!" shouted Arthur Augustus. " They've got automatic pistols and petwol, sir, in the woodshed! They wushed on me—thwee masked wuffians, sir——"

" Three!" murmured Tom Merry. " I think I could guess the names of those giddy raiders, and I fancy they're back in the New House by this time!"

" The boy seems to be suffering from some delusion," said Mr. Railton, greatly perplexed. " Boys, you may return into the House; there is no fire. Kildare, come with me to the woodshed, and we will see if there is anything amiss there."

" Look out for their automatic pistols, Mr. Wailton——"

" Nonsense!"

" They were fiwin' at me, sir——"

" Absurd!"

" I wepeat, sir, they were fiwin——"

" Silence, D'Arcy!"

A crowd of fellows followed the Housemaster to the woodshed. Five or six bike-lamps shed light on the scene. There were no anarchists to be found, no trace of fire, not a drop of petrol, and not the ghost of an automatic pistol.

Kildare picked up something from the ground. It was the exploded shell of a repeating-cracker.

D'Arcy's eyeglass fell from his eye as he looked at it. His eye almost fell after it!

" Bai Jove!" he stuttered.

" This is what you mistook for firing, I suppose, D'Arcy!" snapped Mr. Railton.

" Oh deah! Then——"

" Some foolish prank has been played on this boy," said the Housemaster. " You have given an alarm of fire for no reason, D'Arcy!"

" But—but—but those thwee masked wuffians, sir——"

" Nonsense! You are the victim of a practical joke!" said Mr. Railton crossly. " You have caused great trouble and confusion by your folly, D'Arcy, and I shall consider your punishment——"

" Bai Jove! I—I was twyin' to save the school fwom bein' burned to the gwound, sir——"

" Tish!"

Mr. Railton strode away with a frowning brow. Some of the juniors were laughing, but some of the seniors, who had dragged out hose, and fire-escape, and life-saving sheets from their places, looked exceedingly sheepish and exceedingly wrathful. Knox of the Sixth bestowed a cuff on Gussy's noble ear, which made him stagger, and Rushden righted him again with a cuff on the other ear.

" You young ass!"

" You silly idiot!"

" Kick him!"



Clang, clang, clang! The alarm-bell crashed out into the night, and seniors and juniors were soon pouring out of the School House. Three youths across the quadrangle stared at the scene. "My only hat!" exclaimed Figgins. "There'll be a row!"

"Oh cwumbs!"

"Won't the New House chortle over this!" growled Blake. "Of course, it's a New House jape——"

"Figgins & Co., of course!" said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I wemembah those boundahs were with me when I found the scwap of papah——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Leggo my yah, Kildare!"

Arthur Augustus jerked away his suffering ear, and fled. Even Arthur Augustus did not believe in anarchism any longer. The School House crowd returned to their House, most of them chuckling. But they ceased to chuckle over the incident the next

day, when they found the New House chuckling over it. The laugh was on the side of Figgins & Co.—and the School House Fire Brigade ceased to see anything funny in the matter, and waxed exceeding wrath.

And that day Arthur Augustus D'Arcy led a life in the School House which could only be described as a dog's life!

Everybody seemed to have something unpleasant to say—and said it!

The next time the School House Fire Brigade turned out to drill, Figgins & Co. turned up in great force to watch, and they yelled to the firemen to look out for bombs. And they did not cease troubling till the hose was turned on them accidentally, and then they departed in a great hurry.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

A LITTLE SMOKING-PARTY, AND WHAT
IT LED TO!

"SAFE here!" said Racke of the Shell.

"Safe as houses!" said Clampe.

"No dashed prefect likely to come nosing up here in the box-room, I suppose?" remarked Crooke.

"No fear!"

It was quite a party in the box-room in the New House. Leslie Clampe and Chowle of the New House were there, and Racke, Crooke, Scrope and Mellish of the School House. It was a little smoking-party, and smoking-parties at St. Jim's had to be kept very secret. If Mr. Ratcliff had known of the use the box-room in his House was being put to, Mr. Ratcliff would have descended upon the merry little party with a cane, and the sportsmen of St. Jim's would have felt anything but sporting by the time he had finished with them.

But there was, as Clampe had said, no risk. The box-room was rather secluded, and was not likely to be visited by interfering prefects. Clampe had locked the door and put the key in his pocket, and lighted a tin-backed lamp that hung on the wall.

Racke produced cigarettes galore—the wealthy Aubrey had cigarettes to hand round with great liberality. He also had a pack of cards—the meeting was not only for the joys of smoking.

An upturned box served as a card-table. On other boxes and chairs the merry party sat round it, and six cigarettes were soon going strong. Racke lighted his "smoke" and threw the match over his shoulder.

"I say, be a bit careful!" said Mellish. "There's a lot of straw about here. Somebody's been unpacking a packing-case——"

"Oh, rot!" said Racke carelessly.

"We don't want to give the School House Fire Brigade a job here," grinned Crooke. "Awful rot, that fire brigade, ain't it?"

"Bosh!" said Scrope.

"Tosh!" agreed Clampe. "Jolly glad the New House is out of it. How do you fellows like turning up to fire-drill?"

"Rotten!" growled Racke. "I cut it all I can!"

"Who's going to deal?"

"Cut!"

"There you are."

Racke & Co. were soon busy at poker. Prep was likely to suffer that evening, but prep often did suffer with the black sheep of St. Jim's. Racke had the best of the game, and he raked in the stakes with an unpleasant grin of triumph.

"Your deal, Crooke."

Crooke shuffled the cards.

Aubrey Racke selected a fourth cigarette from his case, and struck a match.

"Careful with that match!" said Mellish, as Racke lighted his cigarette.

The loose straw was behind Racke, and Mellish was nervous.

With a contemptuous laugh, Racke tossed the match over his shoulder. It circled in the air, and dropped on the straw. Racke had expected it to become extinguished as it fell.

But it did not.

It was still alight when it dropped into the straw, and the next moment there was a flare.

"You silly ass!" howled Mellish. "What did I tell you?"

"Oh, gad!"

The juniors jumped up in haste.

The flare of flame ran through the straw, and there was a leaping blaze and a rush of smoke, and they crowded back from it in affright.

"Stamp it out!" exclaimed Crooke. But he did not offer to begin the stamping-out.

"Great Scott!"

"Any water here?" gasped Racke.

"Of course there isn't!"

"Oh, gad!"

"It—it'll die out!" panted Clampe. "Good heavens, if it's seen from the window there'll be a crowd here——"

"Let's get out!" muttered Racke.

"Open the door—quick!"

"But the fire——"

"Hang the fire! Let's get out before we're spotted!"

"It's spreading!" panted Mellish.

"Some silly ass has been spilling oil here!"

"Some was spilt when I fixed up the lamp," said Chowle. "But, dash it all, let's buzz. There'll be a fearful row over this!"

Racke was already at the door, dragging at it.

"Where's the key?" he cried shrilly. "What silly fool's taken the key out? Do you want us all to be burned to death? The key—quick!"

"I—I've got the thing somewhere!" gasped Clampe, fumbling in his pockets. "Oh dear! I—I—— Here it is!"

Racke snatched savagely at the key, and dropped it. He plunged after it, but a rush of flame along the floor drove him back. There was a huge blaze by this time, and the crackling of wood could be heard. The packing-case was blazing up as well as the straw, and boxes were catching, and the flames were leaping up the walls, licking the ceiling, and creeping over the floor. The six terrified juniors crammed the door.

"The key!" muttered Crooke hoarsely.

"The key—quick! Unlock the door!"

"It—it's there! The fire's over it! We can't get it now!"

"Oh, you idiot!"

"Help!" yelled Mellish, quite losing his nerve. "Help!"

"Quiet, you fool!" bawled Racke. "Do you want us all to be caught here?"

"You dummy! Better be caught than suffocated!" howled Mellish.

"Help! Help! Help!"

Mellish hammered frantically on the locked door. There were shouts and footsteps outside, and shouts from the quadrangle. The flames had been seen flaring at the window of the box-room.

"Help!"

Racke tore at the door. But it was stout and strong, and it was locked fast. Nothing short of an axe would have hewed a way through. It hardly shook under Aubrey Racke's frantic efforts.

Racke himself was yellow now. He shrieked and raved for help. A flogging from the Head was a trifle to think of in that extremity, for all the occupants of the box-room were in fearful danger now. The flames were roaring in the room, and the heat was terrible. The perspiration streamed down their smoke-blackened faces. They beat and hammered and kicked on the door, screaming for help.

"Help!"

"Fire! Fire!"

A rush of flames drove the hapless juniors from the door. They crowded to the box-room window, and Racke helplessly smashed out the glass with a chair. The rush of fresh air was reviving to the parched and suffocating juniors, but it fed the flames, and the fire roared now with a deep and sullen boom.

"Fire! Fire!" The alarm rang

through the New House from end to end, startling the juniors from the Common-room, and Mr. Ratcliff from his study.

Crammed at the window of the box-room, six haggard, grimed faces glared out into the open air, and six terrified voices shrieked for help. From within the house there was now no help for Clampe & Co. The locked door was licked by devouring flames, cutting them off from the house. Only from the quad could help come; and in the quadrangle crowds were gathered, and swarming round the angle of the building to stare up at the box-room window, from which smoke was billowing.

“ Help! Help! Fire! ”

THE TENTH CHAPTER

GOOD OLD GUSSY!

“ FIRE! ”

The alarm rang over St. Jim's from end to end, and from the School House Tom Merry & Co. came swarming. It was nearly bed-time for the juniors. Fortunately not quite. As Tom Merry came speeding out he caught the flare of flame against the sky, and the thick column of smoke that dimmed the stars.

“ Fire! Fire! ”

“ It's in the New House! ” shouted Tom Merry.

“ Bai Jove! Wescue, deah boys! ”

“ Boys! ” It was the deep voice of Mr. Railton. “ Order! To your places! ”

The fire-drill of the School House fellows, at which Mr. Ratcliff had smiled so sourly, stood Mr. Ratcliff's House in good stead now.

With perfect order, though with excited faces, the School House crowd obeyed the orders of their House-master.

In a wonderfully short space of time the School House Fire Brigade

was at work. The exact location of the fire was quickly ascertained, and the fire-hose, in Mr. Railton's hand, sent a stream of water into the box-room window in the New House.

Flame as well as smoke licked from the window, over the terrified heads of Racke & Co.

“ Help! Help! ”

“ Bless my soul! ” Mr. Ratcliff hurried up, wildly excited and twittering. “ My dear Railton! Bless my soul, the—the house is on fire—actually on fire! Good heavens! ”

Mr. Railton did not heed his twittering colleague. Mr. Ratcliff wrung his hands and babbled, as useless in that emergency as the smallest fag in the Third Form. Fortunately, the School House master was made of sterner stuff. Plying the hose with a steady hand, he rapped out orders. A group of School House juniors gathered under the window, the life-saving sheet extended and gripped firmly in their hands.

“ Jump! ”

Racke clambered out desperately and dropped into the sheet. He was taken aside, and Clampe followed him, and then Crooke. They were helped away, babbling and gasping. Scrope was the next, and he landed safely. Mellish hung on the window-sill, palpitating from sheer funk, and dropped, half by accident, in the sheet.

Only Chowle remained, and as he stared in terror from the window, equally terrified by the fire behind him and the leap before him, there came a rush of flame and smoke from within, and Chowle disappeared.

There was a gasp from the crowd below.

Mr. Ratcliff gave a shriek.

“ He is lost! He will be killed, burned to death! Oh, heavens— ”

“ Silence, sir! ” said Mr. Railton

gruffly. "The ladder, boys—the ladder! For the love of heaven, quick!"

Kildare and Darrell were rushing the ladder to the window. It crashed on the sill. A hundred pairs of eyes watched for Chowle to reappear. But the window remained blank. It was pretty clear that the wretched junior had been overcome by the smoke, and that he lay within the room, a helpless prey to the devouring flames.

Mr. Railton handed the hose to Kildare, and rushed up the ladder. A cheer followed him. His head went in at the smashed window, but a heavy volume of smoke drove him back, and he reeled on the ladder.

Darrell rushed up and grasped him. Smoke poured out above them in a black volume. The Housemaster, almost insensible, was helped down the ladder by the Sixth-Former.

The next moment there was a yell.

"D'Arcy!"

"Gussy!"

"Stand back!" roared Kildare.

The captain of St. Jim's made a spring forward. But he was too late!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, was skimming up the ladder with lightning speed.

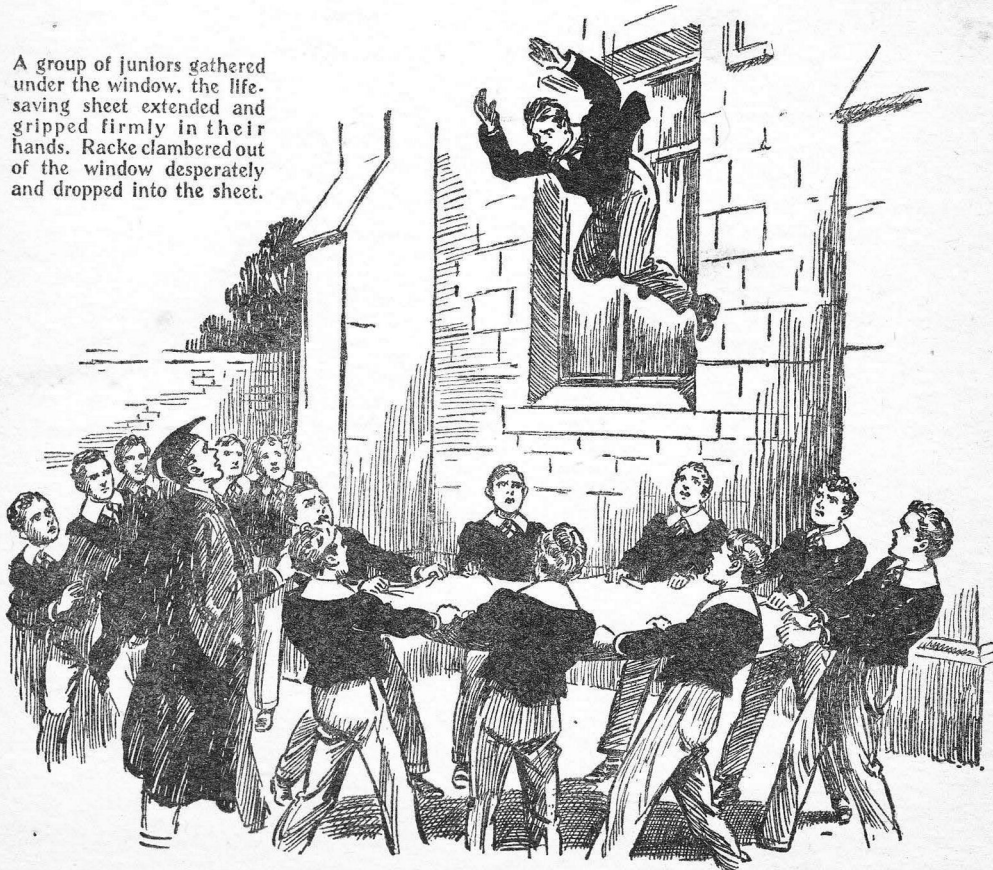
"Gussy!" groaned Blake.

"Come back——"

"Bravo!"

Heedless of the clamour below,

A group of juniors gathered under the window, the life-saving sheet extended and gripped firmly in their hands. Racke clambered out of the window desperately and dropped into the sheet.



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy paused a moment at the top of the ladder to tie his handkerchief over his mouth and nose. Then he plunged headlong into the sea of smoke, and vanished. Mr. Railton struggled to his feet, panting for breath.

"D'Arcy!" he shouted.

But D'Arcy was lost to sight.

Three or four of the Sixth struggled up the ladder. Tom Merry & Co. made a rush, but Mr. Railton waved them back. Kildare was the first at the window.

A smoke-grimed figure rose to view within. From the blackened face an eyeglass gleamed.

There was a roar from the crowd below.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy staggered to the window with Chowle's insensible form grasped in his arms.

"Gussy! Good old Gussy!" shrieked Blake. "Bravo!"

"Good old Gussy!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Give him to me!" panted Kildare, and he took the insensible junior from D'Arcy's hands, and passed him down to the Sixth-Formers lower on the ladder. And Chowle was carried into safety.

"D'Arcy——" Kildare turned back to the window. "Quick!"

Arthur Augustus panted.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! I'm comin'."

The swell of St. Jim's clambered out of the window. He was black as a sweep, his hair was sizzling, there were fierce burns on his face and hands. But he was still cool and calm. Smoke and flame rushed out of the window above him, hardly held in check by the steady stream from the hose.

Arthur Augustus lowered himself on the ladder steadily, and then he

reeled. Kildare's strong arm caught him.

"It's all wight!" murmured Arthur Augustus faintly. "I can manage all wight."

"Hold on to me!"

"Vewy well. Sowwy to twouble you, deah boy." Even at that moment Arthur Augustus' exquisite politeness did not fail him.

Kildare bore him down the ladder.

Arthur Augustus landed on the ground, and stood unsteadily, supported by the St. Jim's captain's strong arm.

He blinked dizzily at the juniors as they crowded round.

"Gussy——"

"Oh, Gussy——"

"Bai Jove! Be careful, you fellows. Stand back, for goodness' sake!"

"What the——"

"I've dwopped my eyeglass. Mind you don't twead on it." And then Arthur Augustus fainted.

The School House Fire Brigade were still fighting the flames when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was laid in bed in the sanatorium, the next bed to Chowle's, and the school doctor, hastily summoned by telephone, was hurrying to attend the two sufferers.

The fire had obtained a good grip on the New House, and inside and outside the House the schoolboy firemen were fighting long and hard before it was got under.

It was at a late hour that night that the last of the flames were conquered, the last spark drowned out.

Mr. Ratcliff wrung his hands when he surveyed the scene of devastation at close quarters—when the danger was over.

The box-room was burnt right out, two or three adjoining rooms were

guttled, passages and walls and ceilings had suffered. It was only too evident, even to Mr. Ratcliff, that the whole House would have been burned but for the prompt aid rendered by the School House Fire Brigade.

But that had been averted, and no lives had been lost. But George Figgins remarked to his chums, when the New House Fourth went to bed that night at a very late hour :

“ It’s Ratty’s fault ! If we’d had fire-drill along with the School House chaps we——”

“ We’d have got it under sooner, before much damage was done,” said Kerr.

“ Yes, rather ! ” agreed Fatty Wynn. “ It’s all Ratty’s fault, and I hope the old scout is satisfied now ! ”

“ And Gussy,” said Figgins, with a catch in his voice—“ Gussy, whose jolly old leg we pulled ! He’s a merry old ass, but what a splendid chap ! ”

“ Hear, hear ! ”

In which opinion both Houses at St. Jim’s heartily concurred.

The next day there was an inquiry into the cause of the outbreak, and it was very fortunate for Racke & Co. that the facts did not come to light.

Chowle was out of the sanatorium that day ; his damages were not serious. He had been overcome by the smoke, and his clothing had been scorched, that was all.

But Arthur Augustus had suffered more seriously.

He had had to search and grope for Chowle in smoke and darkness, and he had received a good many severe burns, and it was many days before his schoolfellows saw him again.

But his chums were admitted to the sanatorium at last, to see the hero of the hour, and they found him sitting

(Continued on next page.)

SOLUTION OF THE MYSTERY OF THE BROKEN FISHING-ROD

See page 147.

KERR : Looking through my notes it struck me as peculiar that although Reilly was in his study at the time Crooke should have been getting his dictionary, and the door was open, he didn’t apparently see or hear the other junior. This suggests that Crooke didn’t go up to the study at all ; and if he was lying, then it was most probably he who took the fishing-rod. (D’Arcy minor must be eliminated for lack of motive.)

Now, why should Crooke take it ?

Obviously to revenge himself for the ragging he had received from Reilly. Reilly had expressed his intention of going into Rylcombe, and practically all the other fellows would be watching the match between School House and New House juniors. Moreover, Reilly was known to be a keen fisherman.

Therefore, if a way could be found of getting Reilly to leave the Form-room, the crime could be planted on him. A way was found—an ink pellet flicked by Racke, who had also suffered at Reilly’s hands and might be expected to take just as keen an interest in revenge.

Which explains how the rod came to be on the banks of the Rhyl. Obviously the person who took it from Lathom’s room didn’t have to take it to the Rhyl also. In fact, Crooke established an alibi for himself by watching the footer, while Racke surreptitiously left the school and finished the dirty work. Only Reilly’s later decision to watch the match upset their little scheme.

Faced with the prospect of a Form ragging, Racke and Crooke accepted the alternative of owning up—thus clearing Wally D’Arcy.

up in bed, looking as if he consisted chiefly of bandages, but with his famous eyeglass gleaming in a cheerful eye.

"Glad to see you, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, with a nod. "Wathah wotten to be stuck here, though Miss Mawie is vewy good. Did they find out what caused the fiah?"

"The Head didn't," said Tom Merry. "But we've got an idea——"

"I guess we can name the culprits, if we wanted to," said Wildrake.

"Was it—was it——"

D'Arcy hesitated.

"Was it what, old chap?"

"Was it—was it anarchists, deah boy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows——"

"It was Chowle and Racke and that gang smoking cigarettes, I believe," said Tom Merry, laughing. "They were all there, anyhow, and the fire must have started while they were there——"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus was a little disappointed.

"Sorry we couldn't find any anarchists, Gussy!" grinned Figgins.

"Only some smoky fags—merely that and nothing more. No anarchists have been seen at St Jim's since the lot you ran down at the woodshed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Figgins——"

"And those three were named Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn," said Figgy repentantly, "and we're sorry we pulled your leg, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus smiled genially.

"All sewene, deah boy! The laugh is on our side now, I wathah considah! The New House would have been in Queeah Stweet but for the School House Fiah Bwigade—what!"

And Figgins cheerfully admitted that it would have been.

And there was another triumph in store for the School House; for, after the fire, the Head made it a point to speak very decidedly to Mr. Ratcliff on the subject, and Ratty was constrained to abandon his opposition, and the New House enrolled for fire-drill with the School House. So that, as Figgins said, the next time there was a fire at St. Jim's, the two Houses would be shoulder to shoulder in Fighting the Flames.

