

A lost football leads to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy becoming involved in a strange mystery. Who holds the key to "the secret of the study?"!

The SECRET of the STUDY

by MARTIN CLIFFORD



TOM
MERRY'S
OWN

MANDEVILLE PUBLICATIONS

THE SECRET OF THE STUDY

MARTIN CLIFFORD

This is the second volume in the new series of "Tom Merry" full-length novels.

A lost football leads to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy becoming involved in a strange mystery which, for a time, causes a considerable spot of bother in the School House at St. Jim's... Arthur Augustus being the only fellow in the House who does not know that he has fallen under suspicion. It is Figgins & Co. of the New House who find the clue to the mystery, finally elucidating the strange secret of D'Arcy's study.

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THE SECRET OF THE STUDY

By the same Author

TOM MERRY & CO. OF ST. JIM'S



Face to face with the School House master, the wretched man staggered, catching at the doorpost for support.

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MARTIN CLIFFORD

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CHAPTER I

GUSSY'S GOAL!

"ON the ball!" roared Tom Merry.

"Back up, New House!" shouted George Figgins.

There was quite a spot of liveliness in the old quad at St. Jim's.

The welcome bell had jangled, and the school were out after third hour. It was fine weather, with just a nip of frost in the air. A crowd of juniors of both Houses seemed to be enjoying life.

Figgins and Co., of the New House, had trundled out a footer to punt about before dinner. School-House men, spotting the same, had rushed into the punt-about, with the fell intention of bagging that ball, and getting it away to their House as a trophy of victory.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, of the Shell, were the first into the fray. They pounced on the football and rushed it towards the School-House. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn charged them off the ball, and barged it back into their own territory. But then Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, all School-House men, rushed in, hurling Figgins and Co. right and left, and raced off with the footer. New House men tore in pursuit, and Blake and Herries and Digby sprawled under their charge. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had the ball, and he rushed it on towards his House. With his cap gone he knew not where, his carefully-brushed hair ruffled in the wind, his eyeglass flying at the end of its cord, Arthur Augustus careered on, right up to the study windows of the School-House.

But Figgins, his long legs going like lightning, reached

him, almost under the study window of Mr. Railton, house-master of the School-House. Arthur Augustus was shouldered off the ball, and went spinning. But before Figgins could clear, a School-House man charged him over: and for a moment it was nobody's ball. The next moment, Kerr of the New House was on the spot, and he kicked the footer high into the air towards his own House.

But it met a head—Tom Merry's head—and was headed back. Once more it dropped under the house-master's window. School-House and New House rushed for it together, and there was a wild mix-up: with a couple of dozen excited fellows pushing, scrambling, shoving, shouting, panting, yelling.

Which caused Mr. Railton, in the study, to sit up and take notice.

St. Jim's men were not supposed to kick up a shindy under a master's study window. If they kicked up a shindy, as often they did, they were expected to keep at a respectful distance from such sacred precincts. In the excitement of the fray, the rival parties had forgotten all about that. The uproar under the window woke every echo in the house-master's study, and drowned his voice as he was speaking to Orris, the house-porter. Railton was a good-tempered house-master: but there was a limit.

He was seated at his desk. He had unlocked a little drawer in the desk, and taken therefrom a bundle of currency notes. Orris stood waiting, with a tradesman's bill in his hand. Mr. Railton was giving him instructions with regard to the payment of that bill, when his voice was drowned by the din under his window.

He rose from the desk, frowning, and stepped to the window. The window was wide open on the quad. He looked out, and rapped:

“Boys!”

Not a fellow heard him.

Five or six of them were rolling on the earth, the rest barging wildly about the ball. From the midst of the *melée*,

the football suddenly shot, like a pip from an orange. Figgins had got it clear, off towards his own House.

But had he?

It dropped fairly at the foot of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus had one second, before the crowd rushed him down. Arthur Augustus was not always quick on the uptake. But in football matters, his aristocratic brain worked swiftly and efficiently. He kicked the ball back to the School-House. At such a moment, a fellow could hardly be expected to notice how near he was to the windows, or to remember that it was a rather dangerous game to kick a Soccer ball in the proximity of the same. The ball shot from D'Arcy's foot like a bullet, straight at the window where the School-House master stood.

The next second, D'Arcy of the Fourth was charged over. But he had done the deed!

He had done it, perhaps, not wisely but too well. Even to capture a New House footer, and demonstrate thereby that School-House was cock-house at St. Jim's, Arthur Augustus would hardly have used his house-master's study window as a goal, had he had time to reflect.

Mr. Railton, luckily, had a quick eye. He dodged that footer just in time, as it shot in at the open window. It grazed his ear as it whizzed by.

It missed Railton. But every bullet has its billet: and the same law applies to Soccer balls.

Missing Railton at the window, the whizzing footer shot across the study, and crashed on Orris's ear as he stood by the desk.

Orris, the house-porter, was a rather slight young fellow. And he was taken entirely by surprise. That crash completely up-ended him.

"Oh!" roared Orris, as the ball landed. He went over headlong, sprawling on the desk, scattering papers far and wide, and rolled from the desk to the floor. He sprawled on the study carpet, in a dizzy state, hardly knowing what had happened to him, but with a startled and confused impression

that the ancient pile of St. Jim's was collapsing on his head.

Mr. Railton gave him a look.

"Upon my word!" he ejaculated.

Then, with dire wrath in his brow, he leaned from the window.

"Boys!" he roared.

They heard him this time.

Sudden silence fell upon the excited mob of juniors. Only one voice was heard: that of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he scrambled to his feet.

"Bai Jove! Where's that ball, you fellows?"

"Oh, you ass!" breathed Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"You fathead!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——!"

"Gussy's done it now!" murmured Figgins.

Only Arthur Augustus was unaware of what had become of the disputed footer. He had been charged over too suddenly to watch it in transit. He jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and stared round, quite surprised by the mysterious disappearance of the Soccer ball.

"Where is that ball, you fellows?" he exclaimed.

"In Railton's study!" hissed Blake.

"Oh cwumbs!"

Then D'Arcy's startled eyes became aware of a knitted brow at the open window. He blinked at Mr. Railton. Railton, generally, looked genial. But at the present moment he seemed to be reproducing the frightful, fearful, frantic frown of the Lord High Executioner.

"Merry!" he rapped.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" stammered Tom.

"Who kicked that football into my study?"

"Oh! I—I—I——it was an accident, sir," stammered the captain of the Shell.

"No doubt," said Mr. Railton, grimly, "But such accidents

must not happen.. I did not see who kicked the football—who was it? ”

“ It was I, sir! ” said Arthur Augustus, “ I did not mean to kick it in at your window, sir—I was only gettin’ it away from the New House wottahs—I—I mean the New House men, sir.”

“ The ball struck Orris, and knocked him over,” said Mr. Railton, sternly, “ He seems to be hurt.”

“ Oh, cwikey! ”

Orris certainly did seem to be hurt. He was sitting up on the carpet now, with both hands clasped to a suffering ear, and uttering a series of gasping ejaculations, without ceasing for a moment.

“ Ow! ow! ow! Ow! ow! ow! ” It went on like the unending melody in Wagnerian music, though considerably less melodiously.

“ Bai Jove! I’m aw’fly sowwy, sir,” exclaimed Arthur Augustus. “ I’m vewy sowwy indeed if Owwis is hurt, sir. I had no ideah——”

“ You will take two hundred lines, D’Arcy.”

“ Weally, sir, it was quite an accident——”

“ And the football will be confiscated.”

“ But as it was quite an accident, sir——! ” persisted Arthur Augustus.

“ That will do, D’Arcy.”

“ Yaas, sir! But pewwaps you will allow me to point out——Bai Jove! Leave go my arm, Blake——leave go my othah arm, Tom Mewwy——you are intewwuptin’ me while I am speakin’ to Mr. Wailton——will you let go? ”

Tom Merry and Jack Blake did not let go. They realised, if Gussy did not, that their house-master did not look in a mood for further argument from the Honourable Arthur Augustus D’Arcy. With an arm each, heedless of expostulations, they walked Arthur Augustus away from the spot.

CHAPTER II

LOYAL CHUMS!

“It’s wathah wuff!”

Arthur Augustus D’Arcy made that remark, in Study No. 6 in the School-House, at tea-time.

The swell of St. Jim’s was seated in the study armchair, with one elegant leg crossed over the other—with a due regard to the crease in his beautiful trousers. There was a wrinkle of thought on his brow: and he seemed too deeply occupied in his reflections, to think of lending a hand in getting tea.

Three other fellows were busy.

Jack Blake was striving to open a tin of sardines with a pocket-knife. Herries was making toast at the fire. Digby was scanning the interior of the study cupboard, in the delusive hope of spotting some spot of butter or marger that might have been overlooked. All three being busy, they passed by Arthur Augustus’s remark like the idle wind which they regarded not.

Arthur Augustus sat up, and glanced round at his chums, with a frown.

“I was speakin’, you fellows!” he said.

“You generally are!” agreed Blake.

“Weally, Blake——.”

“Look in the biscuit-box, and see if there’s any tea left,” suggested Blake.

“I was goin’ to say——.”

“Blow!” ejaculated Blake, as the pocket-knife slipped on the sardine-tin, and he narrowly escaped an amputation. “Oh! Blow!”

"I was wemarkin'——."

"No butter and no marger!" sighed Dig, turning from the study cupboard.

"Nevah mind that," said Arthur Augustus, "I was wemarkin' that it is wathah wuff on old Figgins to lose his football."

"Bother old Figgins," said Blake, crossly, "And bother his football. I've a jolly good mind to jump on this beastly tin."

"Bai Jove! You couldn't open it by jumpin' on it, could you?" asked Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"Fathead!"

Blake made a ferocious jab at the tin with the pocket-knife. By great good fortune, the blade penetrated the metal instead of snapping shut on his fingers. He proceeded to saw at the tin. At long last the sardines began to emerge, in a fragmentary state.

"That's done it," said Blake. Success in a difficult operation restored his good-humour. "Were you saying something, Gussy?"

"I was sayin'," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "that it is wathah wuff on old Figgins to lose his football. We were goin' to bag that footah, just to show the New House wottahs that our House is cock-house. But we should have handed it back aftahwards to the ownah. Now that Wailton has confiscated it, we cannot hand it back."

"They shell out confiscated things at the end of the term," said Blake. "Figgins will have to wait till then."

"That is all vewy well, Blake, but sportin' geah is vewy hard to come by in these days. Figgins will want his footah."

"Go and tell Railton to think again!" suggested Blake, sarcastically.

"I am vewy glad you think that a good ideah, Blake, as it is just what I was thinkin' of."

"What!" roared Blake.

"Pway do not wear at me, Blake. I have told you vewy often that I dislike bein' woared at. I feel wesponsible in

the mattah," explained Arthur Augustus, "It was I kicked the footah in at Wailton's window, you see."

"Just the sort of thing you would do!" remarked Herries.

"Oh, just!" agreed Dig.

"Gussy all over," said Blake, "Might have knocked Railton spinning. Lucky it was only Orris that got it."

"I don't suppose that Owwis thinks it was vewy lucky," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head, "He was yelpin' like anythin'. I am goin' to look in on Owwis pwe-sently and expwess my wegwet for the accident."

"Which of course will make it all right!" said Blake, sarcastic again.

"Yaas, wathah," assented Arthur Augustus, innocently, "Owwis must have felt vewy upset, and a fellow is bound to expwess his wegwet. I shall certainly offah an apology. Pewwaps I had bettah tip him a ten-shillin' note too—what do you think, Blake?"

Blake chuckled.

"I think he would probably rather have the ten-bobber than the apology," he answered.

"I wegard some wecompense as bein' due, after knockin' a chap ovah with a footah," said Arthur Augustus, "But at the pwe-sent moment, I am thinkin' about gettin' that football back to old Figgins."

"You can't get it back, fathead. Didn't you hear Railton say that it was confiscated? Or are you deaf as well as silly?"

"Wailton was wathah shirty at the time, Blake. I considah that he acted vewy hastily in confiscatin' the football."

"Oh, my hat! Are you thinking of telling him so?"

"I shall put it tactfully, Blake. You are awah that I am a fellow of some tact and judgment. I am goin' to Wailton's study aftah tea to speak to him about it, and I twust that he will take a weasonable view."

Blake, distributing fragmentary sardines on four plates, paused in that occupation to gaze at his noble chum. Dig and Herries gazed at him.

"You're going to speak to Railton about it?" ejaculated Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

"You think that a house-master will let a Fourth-form man tell him to change his mind!" yelled Dig.

"I do not see why not, Dig, when he acted hastily, and has pwobably wealised it by this time."

"Mad!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Now look here, you image——!" said Blake.

"I wefuse to be called an image, Blake. I wegard the expwession as oppwobwious. I am certainly goin' to Wailton aftah tea. He is a vevy good-tempered man—wemarkably so for a beak, weally. I have no doubt that he will hand ovah the footah at once, when I point out how vevy unweasonable it would be to keep it till the end of the term."

"Oh, suffering crocodiles!" said Dig.

"You footling fathead," said Blake, "We all got off cheap after kicking up a shindy under a beak's window. If it had been Ratcliff, we should have got six on the bags all round, and very likely Extra School as well. Railton let us off lightly, as he always does. But if you go to his study and check him, he will give you six of the best."

"I twust, Blake, that I am uttahly incapable of the bad form of cheekin' a house-mastah?"

"What do you call it, then?" hooted Blake, "Of course the footer was confiscated, after banging in at a beak's window. Any other beak would have whopped us all round. You're not going to Railton."

"I certainly am, Blake."

"You're not!" roared Blake.

"I have alweady wequested you, Blake, not to woar at a chap," said Arthur Augustus, "It weally thwows me into quite a fluttah. You will find that it will be all wight. Wailton is bound to see weason, as a weasonable man. I wegard this mattah as bein' my wesponsibility, and I shall assuwedly weturn that footah to Figgins."

"You won't get the footer," said Dig, "You'll get six on the bags for cheek."

"Wats! "

"Better pack some exercise books in your pants before you go," said Herries.

"Wubbish! "

"That's all right," said Blake, "He's not going. We'll take jolly good care that he doesn't go anywhere near Railton's study."

"I shall certainly not allow you to intahfeah, Blake."

"Ain't I your keeper?" demanded Blake.

"You cheeky ass," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly, "I wefuse to discuss the mattah furthah. Pway dwop the subject, and let us have tea."

Arthur Augustus's aspect was extremely dignified, as he sat at the study table and disposed of sardines and dry toast. Arthur Augustus had made up his aristocratic mind, and was quite impervious to argument on the subject. During tea in Study No. 6, Blake and Herries and Digby took it in turns to point out to Gussy that he couldn't go and argue with Railton, that he shouldn't go and argue with Railton, and that they would jolly well see that he didn't go and argue with Railton. To all of which Arthur Augustus turned a dignified deaf ear—and when tea was over, he rose to leave the study.

"Going?" asked Blake, breathing hard.

"I have already told you that I am goin', Blake. Pway say nothin' more," answered Arthur Augustus, frigidly.

"That does it," said Blake, "Collar him! "

"Bai Jove! "

"Arthur Augustus made a rapid step towards the door, as his three chums jumped up and converged upon him.

But he was not rapid enough. Three pairs of hands grasped him, and he was swung back from the door.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus struggled in the grasp of his loyal chums, "You wuffians, welease me at once."

"You're not going to ask Railton for a whopping, old

bean," said Blake, "You're going to give us your word, honour bright, not to speak to Railton about that footer."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort!" roared Arthur Augustus, "and if you do not welease me at once, I will give you a feahful thwashin' all wound."

"Bump him!" said Blake.

"Oh, cwumbs! I tell you—I wepeat—yawoooooh!"

Bump!

Arthur Augustus sat on the study carpet. He sat on it hard. There was a creak of a loose board under the carpet as Gussy sat on it.

"There!" said Blake, "Mind, this is for your own good, Gussy!"

"You uttah wuffian——!"

"Will you promise not to go to Railton——!"

"Nevah!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Give him another!"

Bump!

"Oh, cwiskey! Will you welease me!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "You are wuinin' my twousahs, you wuffians."

"Will you give us your word——?"

"No!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Go it, you men," said Blake, "We'll keep this up as long as you do, Gussy! You're not goin' to cheek Railton, old tulip. Give him another."

Bump!

"Oh, cwiskey!"

"This hurts us more than it does you, Gussy!" said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottahs! I wefuse to wegard you as fwiends any longah! I wegard you as wuffianly wottahs! Welease me!"

"Are you going to Railton?"

"Yaas, wathah."

Bump!

"Oh, cwumbs! Oh, cwiskey! You are uttahly wuinin' my

twousahs! You—you—you uttah wottahs, welease me, and I will not go to Wailton!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Honour bright?" demanded Blake.

"Honah bwight, you wottah!"

"Good man," said Blake: and Arthur Augustus was released. He tottered to his feet, gasping for breath, and glared at his devoted chums with a glare that might have cracked his eyeglass, "You—you—you—you wottahs—you wuffians—you smears—you smudges—"

"That's how Gussy thanks his pals for saving him from a whopping!" sighed Blake, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless Gussy."

"You fwightful wottah!" Arthur Augustus tottered to the door, and opened it. Then he turned, to bestow another devastating glare on three grinning faces, "I shall not go to Wailton, as I have pwomised not to do so. But I shall certainly weturn that footah to Figgins, and if there is a wow about it, it will be your fault. So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, you cheekay asses."

"He hasn't had enough," exclaimed Blake, "Collar him again—"

Arthur Augustus departed in haste.

CHAPTER III

A SPOT OF TROUBLE IN TOM MERRY'S STUDY

"Buzz off!"

Three fellows were busy in No. 10 Study in the Shell.

Tom Merry, sitting on a corner of the study table, was wrinkling his youthful brow over a paper containing a list of names, and he thoughtfully chewed the end of a pencil. There were fifteen names in the list over which the junior football captain was pondering, which looked as if he were

mapping out a Rugby side: whereas the St. Jim's game was Soccer. But four of those names had to go, leaving the eleven who were to play Rookwood when they came over: and that was a matter for deep consideration.

Monty Lowther, seated at the table, had a pen in his hand, several spots of ink on his fingers, and a sheet of paper before him which looked rather like a jigsaw puzzle with alterations and scratchings out. His look was even more concentrated than Tom Merry's. Nobody, looking at Monty's corrugated brow, would have guessed that he was evolving light and genial badinage for the Comic Column in "Tom Merry's Weekly." Judging by appearances, he might have been composing an elegy, if not a funeral oration. Humour was a matter that Monty took seriously!

Manners, at another corner of the table, was cutting films. Films for the camera were expensive and hard to get, and Manners was awfully careful with his films, as every good amateur photographer ought to be. He did not even look round as the study door opened, and remained happily unconscious that his young brother Reggie was looking in at the doorway.

It was not really a propitious moment for Manners minor of the Third Form to butt in.

Monty Lowther ejaculated "Buzz off!" The other two did not even speak. Reggie stared at them all.

"I say——!" he began.

"Don't!" said Monty Lowther.

"Eh! Don't what?"

"Don't say! Just scud!"

"Oh, don't be a goat!" said Reggie, and he came into the study.

For a Third Form fag to tell a man in the Shell not to be a goat, was to invite kicking. But Manners minor was rather a privileged young person in that study. Kicking Manners minor meant a row with Manners major, who was an affectionate and dutiful elder brother, almost as much attached to Reggie as he was to his camera.

"Oh! You!" said Manners, becoming aware of Reggie's existence. "Wait a minute, Reggie, till I've finished with these films."

"Wait half an hour, till I've finished this column!" said Monty Lowther, "Sit down and be quiet."

"Can it," said Manners minor. "I say, Harry, I haven't a lot of time to waste. D'Arcy minor and young Levison are expecting me."

Harry Manners did not answer that. He concentrated on his films. Monty Lowther gave the fag a glare, which did not disturb his equanimity in the very least. Reggie looked impatient: but he had to wait, and he filled in the time by strolling about the study and whistling shrilly. Tom Merry put the football list into his pocket, and Lowther laid down his pen. Concentrated thought was not a practical proposition with Reggie in the study.

"There!" said Manners. The films had been cut with meticulous neatness, and he laid down the scissors. He glanced at a folded paper in his minor's hand. "What is it—an exercise for Selby?" It was quite a usual occurrence for Reggie, when he was "bottled," to come to his major for assistance.

"Tain't that," said Reggie.

"Well, what is it?"

Reggie hesitated. He glanced at Tom Merry, and he glanced at Monty Lowther, and seemed uncertain. Tom Merry smiled: and Monty Lowther breathed hard.

"Like us to clear out of our own study?" asked Lowther, with almost ferocious politeness.

"Well, you might clear, while I speak to my major," said Reggie.

"Don't be a young ass," said Manners, gruffly, "If you've got anything to say, cough it up. What's that paper?"

"Well, I don't want it jawed about," said Reggie, sulkily, "It might get me into a row. It's football coupons."

"Football coupons!" repeated Manners, blankly.

Tom Merry and Lowther stared. There was no doubt

that Manners minor might get into a "row" if discovered as a participant in football pools. There was no doubt whatever about that—not a possible, probable shadow of doubt.

Manners of the Shell seemed quite petrified for a moment. Then, without speaking, he took the paper from his minor's hand, and looked at it. Tom and Monty looked at it. It bore the style and title "SNOOPER'S POOLS," with spaces marked off for competitors to back their fancy with a 1 or a 2 for a win, or an X for a draw.

Reggie Manners had cheek enough for a dozen fags: but he looked a little uneasy as Manners of the Shell scanned that precious paper. The expression on his major's face was not reassuring.

"You young sweep!" said Manners, at last, "Where did you get this? You can't have written to these people for their coupons. They wouldn't send them to a schoolboy, or a school at all. Where did you get it?"

"We picked it up," snapped Reggie, "Somebody dropped it about the quad, and we found it."

"Whoever dropped it about, would get his hair combed, if the beaks saw it," said Tom Merry.

"Well, the beaks ain't going to see it," said Reggie, "There's nothing to pull a long face about—lots of people go in for football pools, don't they?"

"Not at thirteen," said Tom.

"I don't see that that makes any difference. I know a lot about League teams," said Reggie, "I'm going in for it. D'Arcy minor said it was all rot, and young Levison said it was piffle. I fancy they'll sing to a different tune if I pull off a win of a thousand pounds in the Nimble Nineteen."

"A—a—a thousand what?" gasped Manners.

"Pounds," said Reggie. "If you name nineteen winning teams, or draws, in the Nimble Nineteen, you're a winner. Sometimes it's more than a thousand pounds, I believe."

The three Shell fellows gazed at Manners minor. Reggie Manners of the Third was rather a young sweep, in some

ways. His form-master, Selby, had caned him for smoking, which Reggie considered very doggish. But this was rather the limit, even for the scamp of the Third. There was silence in No. 10 Study: which was broken by Reggie.

"I want you to lend me a pound," he said.

"You want me to lend you a pound!" repeated Manners mechanically.

"It's not much good filling in only one coupon," explained Reggie, "I want to take twenty chances, at a bob each. See? But—but I've only got twopence."

"You young ass!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"And there's the address, too, went on Reggie, "It says on the paper that they won't deal with anybody at a school. I don't see why not——."

"You don't see why not?" said Lowther.

"No, I don't—but there it is! I suppose I could fix up the address with the newsagent's at Rylcombe!" said Reggie, "They take in letters for people, I've heard. What do you think, Harry?"

Harry Manners seemed at a loss for speech.

"Look here, kid," said Tom Merry, gently, "You can't do this kind of thing. It's gambling."

"'Tain't!" said Reggie. "It's sport."

"It's against the rules," said Lowther.

"You never do anything against the rules?" jeered Reggie, "Is there a rule allowing fellows to put ink in Ratcliff's top hat? You jolly well did!"

Manners, with a grim face, stepped towards the study fireplace, with the precious paper extended in his hand. Reggie, with a yell of alarm, rushed to stop him.

"Gimme my coupons!" he roared, "If you're too jolly mean to lend me a quid, I'll manage somehow without you, but gimme my coupons! I'll hack your shins if you don't gimme my coupons."

Reggie grabbed frantically at the coupon sheet. Manners, with his left hand, gripped his collar, and held him wriggling at arm's length. With his right, he dropped the coupon

sheet into the study fire, where it blazed up and disappeared from existence.

"Oh, you rotter!" gasped Reggie. "You—you rotten bully!"

"That was the best thing to do with it, kid," said Tom Merry, mildly, "You can't go in for football pools, as you ought to know. You'd get into a fearful row if you were found doing it."

"Mind your own business!" yelled Reggie. "I didn't come to this study for a sermon—though I suppose it's what I might have expected here. Ow! Leave go my collar, you rotter—if you shake me again, I'll—ooooooooh!"

Shake! shake! shake! shake!

Manners shook and shook again. Generally he was very patient with his minor: a circumstance of which Reggie took the fullest advantage. But his patience seemed to be exhausted on this occasion.

"Oh! ow! ooogh! woogh!" spluttered Reggie, "Leggo! I'll jolly well hack your shins if you don't leggo!"

"There!" gasped Manners, at last. He released Reggie's collar, and the spluttering fag tottered towards the door. "There, you young rascal! If I catch you with football coupons again, I'll give you the fives bat. Get out."

"Oh! ow! Ooooh!" gasped Reggie. He gave his major a most unbrotherly glare. "If you think you can stop me you're jolly well mistaken, see! I know where I can get some more coupons if I look for them, so rats!"

"Where?" roared Manners.

"Find out!" retorted Reggie.

"By gum! I'll——."

"You're not going to stop me. I'm going to get some more coupons, and I jolly well know where, and I'll jolly well get a pound from somewhere, and——."

Reggie did not finish. Manners was striding at him: and the scamp of the Third bolted, and there was an echoing slam, as the door of No. 10 Study banged after Manners minor.

CHAPTER IV

GOOD ADVICE NOT WANTED!

TAP!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, having tapped at the door of Orris's room, opened the same, and his eyeglass gleamed in.

"Owwis——!" he began.

Orris jumped and looked round. He was seated at his table, apparently busy with papers. He did not seem pleased by the interruption. But he rose respectfully to his feet as he beheld the elegant figure of D'Arcy of the Fourth in the doorway.

Orris was not a prepossessing young man to look at. He had a shifty eye, a pimply complexion, and a half-smoked cigarette hanging from a loose lip. He had not been long in his present post, and Arthur Augustus had seen little of him. He did not much like what he had seen, as a matter of fact. But Arthur Augustus felt that he owed Orris an apology, and he had come along to render it.

"May I come in, Owwis?" asked D'Arcy, politely.

Orris gave him a sidelong look, standing between D'Arcy and the table. It did not occur to Arthur Augustus that he was screening from view the papers that lay on the table, on which he had been busily engaged when Gussy's tap came at the door.

"Excuse me, sir—but you're not allowed to come here," said Orris.

Arthur Augustus raised his eyebrows.

"I have spoken to the House-dame, Owwis, and asked permission to come heah and speak to you," he answered.

"Oh!" Orris shifted uneasily, "Well, what is it, sir?"



Orris jumped and looked round. He did not seem pleased by the interrupton.

He had not asked D'Arcy to enter. But never dreaming that Orris could have any objection to his doing so, Arthur Augustus walked elegantly in.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated, as his glance fell on the papers on the table. They were sheets of football pool coupons. "I am sowwy I have intewwupted you, Owwis, if you are busy."

"Not at all, sir," mumbled Orris, biting his lip. "Perhaps you will tell me what you have come for, sir."

"Yaas, wathah! But I am wathah sowwy, Owwis, to see this," said Arthur Augustus, with a gesture towards the football coupons. His aristocratic face was very serious. Orris was about ten years older than Arthur Augustus, but a trifling circumstance like that did not prevent Gussy from weighing in with fatherly advice.

"Indeed, sir!" murmured Orris.

"Of course, you are fwee to do as you like," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Thank you, sir," said Orris, with sarcasm.

"Not at all, Owwis," said Arthur Augustus, deaf and blind to sarcasm, "Ewevy man to his taste, and you are fwee to play the goat if you want to. But this sort of thing is wathah like gamblin', isn't it?"

"Is it?" said Orris.

"That is my opinion, Owwis."

"It is very kind of you, sir, to come here and tell a house-porter your opinion," said Orris.

Not for a moment did it occur to Arthur Augustus that Orris was being impertinent. He nodded benevolently.

"I twust, Owwis, that I shall always be weady to give any fellow a tip when he is on the w'ong twack," he said, "You see, apart fwom the wathah shady element, it is a mug's game. You are thwowin' away your money. These get-wich-quick ideahs are all wot. For ewevy pound won there must be twenty shillin's lost, or there wouldn't be any pound, would there?"

"I suppose not," admitted Orris.

“Now,” said Arthur Augustus, sagely, “Suppose somebody wins a thousand pounds in a penny pool——!”

Orris’s eyes glistened.

“That sounds all wight, what?” said Arthur Augustus, “But just considah for a moment. The pwize comes out of the pool. That means that enough pennies must be lost, to make up a thousand pounds for the winnah. Now, how many pennies are there in a thousand pounds?”

“I’m sure I don’t know, sir.”

“Pwecisely!” said Arthur Augustus, “You’ve nevah thought it out, Owwis. Pool puntahs nevah do. Now a hundwed pence is eight and fourpence——.”

“How good you are at arithmetic, sir,” said Orris: completely wasting his impertinence on the unseeing Gussy.

“Well, Lathom doesn’t think me vevy good at it in class,” said Arthur Augustus, innocently, “But I think I have got that wight. Now, if a hundwed pence is eight and fourpence, it takes about two hundwed and fifty pence, more or less, to make up a pound, Owwis. That means about two hundwed and fifty thousand pence to make up a thousand pounds. Can you work that out, Owwis?”

“I think I could, sir, if I tried very, very hard!” said Orris.

“And where does that get you?” asked Arthur Augustus, triumphantly, “Why, it means that two hundwed and fifty thousand penny puntahs must lose, to make one winnah of a thousand pound pwize. And that means that you have one chance in two hundwed and fifty thousand. Which is pwactically nothin’ at all.”

“Indeed, sir.”

“Yaas, indeed, Owwis. I thought I would point it out to you, so that you will not waste your money on such wubbish.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Not at all, Owwis. You are vevy welcome. Much bettah to save your money than to chuck it away in that weckless and wegardless mannah. If you like I will take

these silly coupons away and put them in the fiah in my study."

"What?" ejaculated Orris.

"I shall be vewy pleased to do so, Owwis," said Arthur Augustus, and he picked up a coupon sheet from the table. The next moment Orris snatched it from his hand.

"Leave that alone," snapped Orris.

Arthur Augustus gave quite a jump. He had had no doubt that his irrefragable reasoning on the subject of pools had convinced Orris. Arthur Augustus had yet a great deal to learn about people who hoped to "get rich quick."

"Bai Jove! Owwis, you are forgettin' your mannahs!" said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "I shall certainly not touch your wubbish if you do not desiah me to do so. I was merely advisin' you for your own good."

"When I want advice from a schoolboy, sir, I will ask for it!" said Orris. "Until then, sir, perhaps you will be kind enough to keep it for your friends."

Arthur Augustus gave him a look. Even the unsuspecting Gussy could see that this was cheek.

"Vewy well, Owwis, I will say no more about the mattah," he said, with stately dignity, "Let it dwop! I came heah to offah you an apology, Owwis."

"Eh?"

"I twust," said Arthur Augustus, "that you feel no ill effects from bein' knocked ovah by that footah in Mr. Wailton's study?"

"Oh! No! I'd forgotten about it," said Orris, staring at the swell of St. Jim's, "It's of no consequence."

"It was quite an accident, of course," said Arthur Augustus, "I am vewy sowwy that it happened, and I felt bound to expwess my wegwet. I was goin' to ask you, Owwis, to accept a ten-shillin' note as some slight wecompence for that vewy unfortunate accident."

Orris's eyes glistened again. Possibly the pursuit of quick riches had run away with his spare cash, and he was glad to hear of a ten-shilling note.

"You are very kind, sir," he said.

"Not at all, Owwis. The footah must have given you a wathah hard knock, and it was vevy wuff on you. I should have gweat pleasuah in offahin' you a ten-shillin' note if you would accept it, Owwis."

"I shall be very pleased, sir."

"Wight-ho," said Arthur Augustus. He took out his little Russia-leather wallet, and opened it. Then he gave a slight start.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated. The wallet was empty.

Orris looked at him.

"How vevy awkward," said Arthur Augustus, "I wemembah now that I changed my last note this mornin' in bweak at the tuck-shop. I had quite forgotten it, Owwis."

Orris breathed rather hard through a pimply nose. It did not occur to Arthur Augustus that Orris would have given a great deal, at that moment, to box his noble ears.

"So I shall not be able to offah you a ten-shillin' note aftah all, Owwis," said Arthur Augustus, regretfully, "Howevah, I am vevy glad that you accept my apology for the accident in Wailton's study. Good-night, Owwis."

Orris made no reply to that valediction. Perhaps his feelings were too deep for words. He shut his door after the departing figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and shut it hard.

Then he sat down again to his football coupons, and forgot the existence of Arthur Augustus, and everybody else, in the absorbing and delusive task of spotting winners, and getting rich quick!

CHAPTER V

LOST BALL!

"Who's that?" mumbled Jack Blake, sleepily.

He lifted his head from the pillow, and glanced round, in the gloom of the Fourth-form dormitory.

Something had awakened him. He had an impression that someone was up, and moving about in the dark. Another voice came from another bed.

“What’s that?” It was Digby’s voice.

“Who’s that barging about?” Herries was awake, too.

“Some silly ass up!” grunted Blake, “What the thump is anybody turning out for in the middle of the night?”

He sat up in bed and stared round.

There was a faint glimmer of starlight at the high windows of the dormitory. But the long lofty room was in deep shadow, and he could see nothing but the dim outlines of beds.

He did not see, and had no suspicion of, a half-dressed figure that stood motionless and silent in the dark. And Arthur Augustus D’Arcy standing beside the bed from which he had turned out, was very careful not to draw attention. Inadvertently, he had banged against the bedside chair in the gloom, with the result that several fellows had awakened. Silently, he waited for them to fall asleep again.

“Anybody up?” called out Herries.

“Hallo, what’s the row?” Levison of the Fourth woke up. Two or three more voices joined in—Cardew’s, Clive’s, Wildrake’s. Then there was a squeak from Baggy Trimble.

“Ooooh! Is it a burglar?”

“Fathead!” grunted Blake, “It’s some fellow larking, I suppose. Or that goat Cardew going out of bounds.”

There was a sleepy chuckle from Cardew’s bed.

“Not guilty!” he yawned.

Arthur Augustus D’Arcy, the fellow who was up, maintained a masterly silence. D’Arcy had laid his plans for that night—they were cut and dried. But only too well he knew that if his loyal chums discovered that he had nocturnal designs on the confiscated Soccer ball in Railton’s study, they would turn out of bed and collar him, and if necessary sit on his head till rising-bell to keep him safe in the dormitory.

Arthur Augustus had given his word not to tackle Railton on the subject of that Soccer ball; and his word was his bond.

But his intention to recapture it was quite unchanged. Opposition did not have the effect of causing Gussy to change his mind.. It only made him more determined. But he realised that he had to be very cautious.

Still and silent as a stone image, he waited, invisible in the dark.

For several minutes, sleepy voices came from several beds. But Jack Blake laid his head on his pillow again at last, and the voices died away. Slumber reigned once more in the Fourth-form dormitory in the School House.

Arthur Augustus waited a few minutes longer, to make assurance doubly sure. Then, silent in his socks, he crept away towards the door.

There was hardly a sound as the door opened, and shut again after him. He grinned cheerily, as he trod away on tiptoe down the dark passage.

His loyal chums had dropped off to sleep again: and if they were dreaming, they certainly did not dream that Arthur Augustus was out of the dormitory, and threading his way by dark passages and staircases in the direction of Masters' Studies.

The great staircase was a well of blackness, as Arthur Augustus crept quietly down. It was close upon midnight, and at that hour, the last door had closed, the last light was out, and all St. Jim's was sleeping. Arthur Augustus had no fear of imaginary burglars in shadowy corners: and no doubt that he was the only fellow up in the School House.

But, as he stepped into the corridor on which Mr. Railton's study door opened, he suddenly caught his breath, stopped, and listened. Some sound had come to his ears: he hardly knew what, but he had a vague and eerie impression that some unseen tiptoeing figure had passed him in the darkness. He stood quite still, his heart beating, his ear bent to listen.

But if there had been a sound, it was not repeated. Deep silence reigned, unbroken by the faintest sound.

Arthur Augustus drew a deep breath. For the moment, he had been startled: but he pulled himself together at once.

“Bai Jove! Are you gettin’ to be a nervy ass like Twimble, afraid of the dark?” he murmured to himself. “Wats!”

And he trod on towards the house-master’s door.

It was black as a hat in the corridor. But Arthur Augustus knew every inch of the way, and hardly needed to grope to the door he wanted. He felt for the door-handle and turned it, and silently opened the door.

The study within was not quite so dark as the passage. The blinds were drawn back, and a glimmer of starlight came in at the window. To D’Arcy’s surprise, a cold draught of air struck him as he stood in the doorway. It was as if the study window stood open, with the cold wind blowing in from the quadrangle. But it was scarcely possible to suppose that Mr. Railton had gone to bed leaving his window open, on the ground floor.

Arthur Augustus stepped into the study, and closed the door after him without a sound. Then, with a start of surprise, he became aware that, scarcely possible as it seemed, the window was wide open.

“Bai Jove!” breathed Arthur Augustus, as he stared at it, “How fwightfully careless of Wailton! If a burglah came along, he would only have to step in! I am quite surprisid at Wailton bein’ so vevy careless.”

He crossed to the window. It stood wide to the night, and the wind from the quad rustled papers that lay on the house-master’s desk. Entrance into the sleeping House was quite easy at that open window, and Arthur Augustus was quite astonished at his house-master’s carelessness in leaving it so. Certainly D’Arcy had no intention of leaving it as he found it. Very carefully indeed, he closed the window, and secured the catch.

Then he groped in his trousers pocket for a flash-lamp he had placed there in readiness, and turned on a tiny beam of light. He expected to spot the Soccer ball at once, and depart from the study without delay.

So far, all had gone well and easily. But at this stage,

there came a hitch in the proceedings. Contrary to his expectation, he did not spot the Soccer ball at once. He did not spot it at all.

He moved round the study, flashing the light into every possible and impossible place, but nothing like leather met his eyes.

He had intended to be only a minute or so in the study. Five minutes passed, and he was still there, peering about into corners, in a state of growing and intensifying exasperation.

The confiscated Soccer ball had been in the study. D'Arcy had had no doubt that it would be still there. It had not occurred to his powerful brain that Railton might have disposed of it elsewhere. But slowly and surely it dawned upon him that Railton must have done so. A Soccer ball, after all, was not the kind of thing that a house-master would be likely to keep about his study—if Gussy had only thought of that. But he had not thought of that till now——now that he was rooting all over the room in vain search for it.

“Oh, cwumbs!” murmured Arthur Augustus, at last, “The beastly thing isn’t heah—I wondah what Wailton has done with it. How fwightfully annoyin’.”

He flashed the light round, giving the study a last look over. But it was clear that Figgy’s ball was not in the room at all, and the exasperated swell of St. Jim’s had to give it up.

His feelings were deep, as he shut off the light. Gussy was a sticker: but even Gussy realised that he could not root all over the House at midnight hunting for that lost ball. He had turned out at midnight for nothing: and now, like the weary ploughman in the poem, he had to plod his homeward way—empty-handed. He breathed hard through his noble nose.

“Blow!” he murmured.

Then he departed. There was nothing doing: and any further effort to retrieve that ball obviously had to be postponed. With a knitted brow, he left the study, closing the

door softly behind him, and trod away through the darkness to the stairs.

A few minutes later, the door of the Fourth-form dormitory opened, and Arthur Augustus glided in. And a few minutes after that, Gussy's aristocratic head was on the pillow, and he was dreaming that he was kicking innumerable goals against Jimmy Silver and Co. of Rookwood School.

CHAPTER VI

KEEPING IT DARK!

"WHAT'S up?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Eh! Is anything?" asked Tom Merry.

"Nothing that I know of," said Manners.

The 'Terrible Three' were in the quad after breakfast in the morning. Tom Merry and Manners were both in a thoughtful mood, and if anything was "up," they had not observed it. Monty Lowther, who was not thinking about the St. Jim's junior side like Tom Merry, or about the wilfulness of a troublesome minor like Manners, was rather more observant.

"Didn't you notice Railton's face, at prayers?" asked Monty.

"Not specially."

"Well, he looked jolly grim."

"Did he?"

"Yes," said Lowther, "He did. Have you noticed Kildare, and Darrell, and Knox, and Langton, and the other pre's?"

"I think they were at the high table at brekker," said Tom, "Can't say I noticed them specially. What about them?"

"They all looked grim."

"Did they?"

"Something's up," said Monty Lowther, "There's a row on, I fancy. Some fellow spotted breaking out, I shouldn't wonder. Anyhow, there's something up, and the pre's know what it is." Monty Lowther nodded his head, sagely. "Hallo, here comes old Kildare. Does he look bonny?"

Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, came out of the School House, and glanced about him. Tom Merry and Manners looked at him: and they had to admit that Monty was right. There was an extremely serious expression on Kildare's usually cheery face, and his brows were knitted. Obviously he was not in his usual cheerful mood.

He came across to the three Shell fellows.

"Anything up, Kildare?" asked Tom.

"Yes! Do you know, Merry, whether any fellow in your form went down from the Shell dormitory after lights out last night?"

Tom Merry looked astonished, as he felt.

"Not that I know of, Kildare," he answered, "I'm pretty certain not. Can't imagine why any fellow should."

"That's not the point. I want to know whether any fellow did," grunted Kildare, "But I suppose you were fast asleep, anyhow."

"Well, I usually sleep pretty soundly," answered Tom, with a smile, "Nobody went out of the dormitory so far as I know."

"Or you?" asked Kildare, glancing at Manners and Lowther.

Both of them shook their heads. Kildare gave them a nod, and left them. The three exchanged glances. Monty Lowther smiled.

"Did I say something was up?" he murmured.

"Well, what the dickens can it be?" asked Tom, puzzled, "Can't be some goat like Cutts of the Fifth, or Racke of our form, breaking out. They want some fellow who was out of his dorm, but they don't know who."

"Something must have happened last night, after lights

out," said Manners, "Some jape on a beak, perhaps. If some beak's study has been shipped, I'll bet it was that ass Cardew of the Fourth."

"Here comes Blake! I wonder if he knows."

Study No. 6 joined the Terrible Three. Blake and Herries and Dig were looking a little excited: while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had a very thoughtful look on his noble visage.

"You fellows know anything?" asked Blake, at once.

"Only that the prefects are looking for some fellow who was out of his dorm last night," answered Tom, "Any of the Fourth been on the war-path?"

"Not that I know of," said Blake, "Darrell's been asking me. The pre's seem to be asking questions all over the shop. Something's happened."

"I wondah what!" remarked Arthur Augustus, very thoughtfully.

"Somebody went down and did something, that's jolly plain," said Herries, "Goodness knows what."

"Looks as if it was something serious," said Dig, "I saw Railton speaking to the Head, and they both looked like boiled owls."

"I told Darrell that nobody in the Fourth went down, so far as I knew," went on Blake, "I don't think anybody did. But—it's rather queer!"

"What's queer?" asked Tom.

"Well, somebody did turn out of bed," said Blake, "I woke up and heard somebody moving in the dorm. I called out, but he never answered. Some other fellows woke up, too. Whoever it was went back to bed—at least, I supposed that he did. What are you grinning at, D'Arcy, you image?"

"Was I gwinnin', deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, mildly.

"Nothing to grin at, that I can see," said Blake, crossly, "I know that I heard somebody moving in the middle of the night. You didn't wake up—and if you grin at everything I say, I'll bang your head on a tree."

"Weally, Blake——."

"I say, though," said Manners, "If you heard somebody up in the Fourth, he may have gone down, for all you know."

"The man they want," said Lowther, with a nod.

"Wubbish!" said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head.

"Oh, rubbish, is it?" exclaimed Lowther, nettled, "Well, I can jolly well tell you that if the pre's hear that a man was up, in your dorm, last night, they'll jolly well nail him as the fellow they're looking for."

"That's what I've been thinking about," said Blake, with a worried look, "I told Darrell, when he asked me, that so far as I knew nobody had gone down. That was the truth, of course. I didn't mention that I'd heard a fellow turn out of bed in the night—but——"

"Quite wight," said Arthur Augustus, "Least said, soonest mended, deah boy. Somethin' appears to have happened in the night, and you don't want to put the pwefects on the twack of the w'ong man."

"May be the right man," said Tom Merry.

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus, "Nothin' of the kind."

"Well, what do you know about it, anyhow?" demanded Monty Lowther, warmly, "How do you know that the fellow who turned out of bed didn't go down?"

"I did not say that he did not go down, Lowthah. I should hardly make a statement that was not twue," said Arthur Augustus, stiffly.

"What?"

Six fellows ejaculated all at once, staring at Arthur Augustus. It was clear that he knew something about the matter.

"Were you awake after all, Gussy?" demanded Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

"And you know that the fellow who turned out of bed did go down from the dormitory?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus did not reply immediately. He seemed to be pondering. Finally he said, very thoughtfully:

"I wathah think that I had bettah say nothin' about it,

Tom Mewwy. I do not want it to get about that I went down last night."

"You!" yelled Blake.

"There is no need to shout at a fellow, Blake. I can heah you quite distinctly if you speak in a modewate tone of voice."

"Was it you?" howled Blake.

"I have already wemarked, Blake, that the least said the soonest mended. I am, I twust, a fellow of tact and judgment: and I wegard it as more judicious to keep the whole thing dark."

"So it was Gussy!" said Tom Merry, staring blankly at the swell of St. Jim's, "In the name of all that's idiotic, Gussy, why did you go down in the middle of the night? It was you who went down?"

"I pwefer not to answah that question, Tom Mewwy. Of course I twust you old chap," said Arthur August, reassuringly, "I know vewy well that you would not give a man away. But you might let it out carelessly—and it is much safah, in the circs, to say nothin' about it."

"Ain't he a prize-packet?" said Blake, "Ain't he a cough-drop! Why did they send him to St. Jim's instead of to a home for idiots?"

"Weally, Blake, you cheeky ass——!"

"Why did you go down?" hooted Herries.

"I have already wemarked twice, Hewwies, that the least said the soonest mended. Somethin' seems to have happened duwin' the night—goodness knows what. I don't want it put down to me, whatevah it was. So I am goin' to say nothing at all—not a word! I am goin' to keep it dark."

"You burbling chump——!" began Digby.

"I wefuse to be called a burblin' chump, Dig. You fellows are wathah unthinkin'," said Arthur Augustus, "It is much bettah for you to know nothin' about it. Then, if you are asked you can say so——see? It would place you in a vewy awkward posish if I told you that I went down fwom the dorm

last night. So I wegard it as absolutely essential to keep it dark.”

“Look here, you ass——”

“Look here, you chump——”

“Look here, you fathead——”

“Wats!” said Arthur Augustus, “I wepeat that I am keepin’ it dark: and if you are goin’ to slang a fellow for actin’ with tact and judgment, I will wetire.”

And Arthur Augustus turned on his heel, and walked away, with his noble nose in the air. Six fellows stared after him, as he went: and then looked at one another, expressively.

“What on earth has that mad ass been up to?” asked Tom Merry.

But nobody could answer that question. That it was Arthur Augustus D’Arcy who had gone down in the night, they knew: although Arthur Augustus was keeping it dark, in his own inimitable way. They could only wonder into what spot of trouble the ineffable Gussy had landed himself this time!

CHAPTER VII

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NIGHT!

NOBODY quite knew how it got out. But it did get out. Even in class that morning the rumour was spreading, and fellows whispered excitedly to one another. In break, everybody knew: and St. Jim’s thrilled from end to end with excitement. Somebody had heard Orris tell Taggles, the school porter; or else Taggles tell Orris, the house-porter. It really did not matter which. Somebody else had heard Railton drop a word to Mr. Lathom, master of the Fourth— or else Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, drop a word to

the French master, Monsieur Morny: or else Monsieur Morny dropping a word to Mr. Selby, master of the Third. Mrs. Mimms, the house-dame, had been heard speaking to a maid—a maid had been heard speaking to Toby the page—Kildare of the Sixth had been heard speaking to Darrell, or Langton, or Jones major. Some fellow, looking out of the window, had actually seen Inspector Skeat, of Wayland, coming in at the gates. Some fellows knew, or surmised, or imagined, that it was a serious case of burglary—indeed Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth, knew as an absolute fact that the Head's safe had been blown open with dynamite, and his study practically wrecked. On the other hand, D'Arcy minor of the Third, who, greatly daring, had climbed on Dr. Holmes's window-sill and peeped in, had noted nothing out of the common within. Figgins and Co. of the New House, had heard from somebody that their house-master, Ratcliff, had said something about "pound notes" to somebody or other. All sorts of rumours, in fact, spread like wildfire about the school: and in morning break, everyone was discussing the thrilling news.

One thing, at all events, appeared certain: something had happened in Mr. Railton's study in the night. Something was missing—whether "pound notes" or not!

Inspector Skeat of Wayland certainly had come to the school: there was no doubt about that, because he was still there. It was said that all the House servants had been collected, while the school were in class, to be questioned by Mr. Skeat.

It was clear now why the prefects had been asking questions that morning, to ascertain whether any fellow had gone down in the night. In a case of pilfering, investigation could not be kept below stairs. No inhabitant of the School House was exempt.

When the bell called the school in for third hour, the form-rooms were in a buzz of excitement. It was not easy for Mr. Linton to keep the attention of the Shell upon the lesson: still less easy for little Mr. Lathom to suppress excited whis-

pering in the Fourth: and Mr. Selby certainly had his hands full with the Third Form. Even in the Fifth and Sixth, Mr. Ratcliff and Mr. Railton did not get the accustomed calm of senior forms. Fellows watched the clock, anxious to get out and hear more news.

Among the innumerable excited fellows, there were six who were not only excited, but deeply perturbed and worried. Six fellows knew——what nobody else so far knew——that D'Arcy of the Fourth had gone down from his dormitory during the night. That he had gone to Railton's study, or could possibly be mixed up in what had happened there, was of course unthinkable——but why had he gone down, and what would the beaks, and the police-inspector, think, when it came out?

In third school, Blake, Herries and Digby glanced many times at Arthur Augustus. He was not looking in the least uneasy. He was rather unusually thoughtful, that was all.

What had happened in the night was known now——something, probably pound notes, had been pilfered in Railton's study. That was more than enough to give Arthur Augustus food for thought—in view of the fact that he, his own noble self, had entered that study surreptitiously during the hours of darkness.

That suspicion could fall upon him personally did not occur to Gussy's noble mind—that was too unthinkable to be thought of. But there were other aspects of the case that he had to consider.

When the junior forms were dismissed, Blake and Herries and Dig gathered round Arthur Augustus in the corridor. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, coming out of the Shell form-room, joined them, while the rest went into the quad. The "Terrible Three" were as much concerned about Gussy as Study No. 6.

"Now, you image!" breathed Blake.

"Weally, Blake——."

"Now you've got to explain——!" hissed Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——."

"Better not jaw here, you fellows," said Tom Merry, hastily, "Come up to my study."

"The fact is," said Arthur Augustus, calmly, "I've been thinkin' it out, and I wathah think that I had bettah speak to Wailton. I think that pewwaps I can let in some light on the mattah."

"Not about what's missing from Railton's study!" gasped Dig.

"Yaas, wathah."

"You can't know anythihng about that!" groaned Blake.

"I wathah think I do, Blake."

"Come up to the study!" repeated Tom Merry. "We must go into this before anything is said. Come on, Gussy."

"Pewwaps I had bettah go diwectly to Wailton——."

"Hook him along!" said Blake: and half-a-dozen fellows gathered round Arthur Augustus, and walked him off to the staircase.

"Weally, you fellows——!" objected Arthur Augustus.

"You blithering owl," hissed Blake, "We've got to know what's happened, before you start burbling to the House beak."

"I don't mind consultin' you fellows," said Arthur Augustus, graciously, "But I must, of course, act accordin' to my own tact and judgment."

"Idiot!"

"Bai Jove! If you call me an idiot, Blake——."

"Blithering idiot, if you like that better," hissed Blake. "Get on, you dangerous lunatic, or we'll pull you along by your ears."

"I should uttably wefuse to be pulled along by my yahs, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, indignantly, "Howevah, I will come up to the study if you like."

Tom Merry and Co. walked him into No. 10 in the Shell, and the door was closed. Then six pairs of eyes were fixed on the calm countenance of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Now, you chump——!" said Herries.

"Now, you footling fathead——!" said Dig.

"Now, you benighted ditherer——!" said Blake.

"I wegard all those expwessions as oppwobwious, and quite uncalled for," said Arthur Augustus, calmly, "and I wefuse to wemain heah and listen to them."

"Gussy, old chap, can't you see we're worried," said Tom Merry.

"Eh! What are you wowwied about, Tom Mewwy?" asked Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass on the captain of the Shell.

"Oh, my only hat!" said Tom, "Look here, Gussy, you let out this morning that you did go down in the night——."

"That is wathah an ewwah on your part, Tom Mewwy. I told you distinctly that I was keepin' that dark."

"Fan me!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——!"

"You didn't go to Railton's study by any chance?" asked Manners.

"Yaas, wathah."

"You went to Railton's study!" gasped Blake. He gazed at D'Arcy with almost horror in his face.

"Weally, Blake, I fail to see why you should look stwuck all of a heap," said Arthur Augustus, "What is the mattah?"

"Something's been pinched in Railton's study last night!" hissed Blake.

"Yaas: I am now awah of that," assented Arthur Augustus, with a nod, "and in the circs, I think I had bettah not keep it dark that I went there, as I know somethin' that may be vewy useful for Inspectah Skeat to know."

"In the name of all that's unlucky, why did you go down to Railton's study last night?" asked Tom Merry.

"It was weally Blake's fault——."

"My fault!" stuttered Blake.

"Yaas, wathah," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, warmly, "You pwevented me fwom tacklin' Wailton about that footah. You tweated me in a mannah I can only descwibe as wuffianly, till I pwomised not to speak to Wailton. That was why I went down last night to get Figgy's Soccer ball."

"Oh, ye gods and little fishes!" said Monty Lowther, "You went down to Railton's study to bag a confiscated footer?"

"Pwecisely," said Arthur Augustus, "and if it had been there, I should have bagged it. Unfortunately, Wailton must have put it somewhah else, and I couldn't find it in his study. So I had to come back without it."

"Lucky for you!" said Manners.

"I do not wegard it as lucky, Mannahs. I had all my twouble for nothin'."

"You'd have had a spot of trouble with Railton, if you'd bagged a footer he said was confiscated," said Manners, drily.

"I was not goin' to tell Wailton that I had bagged it," said Arthur Augustus, sarcastically, "I had no intention whatevah of mentionin' it."

"Well, never mind that," said Blake, "If you only played the giddy ox last night, that doesn't matter—we're used to that."

"I do not wegard it as playin' the giddy ox, Blake, to westore Figgy's Soccah ball, for which I am wesponsible."

"Fathead! Now listen to me," said Blake, "You don't know anything about what has happened in Railton's study—you only went there after that silly footer. So there's no need to say anything about your going down at all. Goodness knows what some of the fellows would think!"

"I do not quite follow that wemark, Blake. I suppose ewevybody would know why I went there, if I told them?"

"Ain't he the limit?" said Blake, "Look here, Gussy, you're to keep mum, see? You're not to yowl out all over St. Jim's that you were rooting about Railton's study, just about the time that somebody was pinching his pound notes."

"I have alweady decided that I am bound to speak to Wailton, Blake. You see, when I went into the study, the window was wide open."

"What?" exclaimed all the juniors together.

"I supposed, at the time, that Wailton had forgotten to

shut it, befoah he went to bed. So I closed it and fastened it."

"Oh!" breathed Blake.

"But of course, now we know that there has been a wobbewy in Wailton's study, that lets in a vevy diffewent light on the mattah."

"It does!" said Tom Merry.

"Fwom what we have heard," continued Arthur Augustus, "Inspectah Skeat has been questionin' the servants, and we know that the pwefects have been wootin' about aftah some fellow who may have gone down. Pewwaps you fellows don't wealise what that means. It looks to me vevy much as if they suspect that the wobbewy was done by somebody inside the House."

"What a brain!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Well, I am wathah a bwainy chap, Lowthah, and I think of things," said Arthur Augustus, innocently, "Now, of course, we cannot have them suspectin' innocent people, when it is plain that the pilferah got in by the window, and is pwobably some twamp or othah. I shall have to tell Wailton about that open window, at the wisk of gettin' licked for going down last night. It is my dutay."

"It doesn't matter if you're licked," muttered Blake, "But——."

"Weally, Blake, I considah that it mattahs a gweat deal. But in the circs, I am bound to take the wisk."

"But——!" said Blake.

"But what, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus. "What are you all lookin' like boiled owls about. If it's a lickin', I can stand it."

Tom Merry and Co. gazed at him. Obviously it had not occurred for one moment to Arthur Augustus that there was any risk, beyond a "licking," if it came out that he had entered that study in the night, where a theft had taken place. They were silent and worried.

"Besides," went on Arthur Augustus, thoughtfully,

"pprobably it will not be a lickin'. Wailton is bound to appweciate my goin' to him of my own accord——."

"Oh, you dithering dummy!" groaned Blake, "If I'd only known you were going down last night, I'd have turned out and tied you up with your own pyjamas."

"I should have uttably wefused to be tied up in my own pyjamas, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, "and we are wastin' time. I am goin' to Wailton now."

Arthur Augustus walked out of the study. Blake raised a hand to stop him—but dropped it again. All the juniors realised that the police-inspector had to know about that open window in the night, which Gussy had so dutifully and so unfortunately closed and fastened. But they looked at one another in dismal dismay as Arthur Augustus departed to interview his house-master.

"After all, it will be all right, when they get the right man!" muttered Blake, "Gussy's going to ask them to believe that he burgled Railton's study—but when they get the man——."

"Suppose they don't!" said Herries.

"They couldn't suspect Gussy," said Tom Merry, slowly.

"Not when he sits up on his hind legs and begs to be suspected!" muttered Blake, "Everybody doesn't know him as we do. What's anybody to think, when they hear that a chap went down in the middle of the night to a master's study, and that pound notes are missed in the morning? By gum, if Gussy gets himself suspected, I'll boot him all over the House and back again."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had left six very worried fellows behind him. But he was not worried at all, himself, as he walked to Mr. Railton's study. He saw nothing in particular to be worried about.

CHAPTER VIII

IN CONFIDENCE!

"MR. SKEAT! You feel sure——?"

"Quite!" said Inspector Skeat. His tone was crisp and decisive.

Mr. Railton was silent, his face sombre.

He was in his study with the Wayland inspector. Mr. Skeat had had rather a busy morning at St. Jim's, since he had come over in response to a telephone-call. He had investigated: questioned: examined: and the outcome of his investigating, questioning, and examining, was that there was a pilferer in the School House at St. Jim's—an inevitable conclusion, but one extremely repugnant to the School-House master.

"The facts speak for themselves, sir," said Mr. Skeat, "Twenty pound notes have been taken from the drawer in your desk. The lock was snapped open—quite an easy thing. Any boy with a pocket-knife could have done it easily——"

"Or any person from outside who gained admittance——"

"Oh, quite!" said Mr. Skeat, "But I need not point out that this is not professional work. Any professional could have picked that simple little lock with a few inches of wire—and would hardly have been likely to content himself with a handful of currency notes, and leave the head-master's safe untouched."

"Yes, yes, yes! I do not mean that! But some wandering, pilfering tramp——"

"——would hardly be likely to find his way to this par-

ticular room, sir, and to the particular drawer in which you keep petty cash," said Mr. Skeat, drily.

"Oh! No! But if he entered by the window——."

"The window was fastened on the inside, sir. No doubt a tramp could have opened such a simple catch from outside—and entered. But he could not possibly have fastened it again after leaving."

Mr. Railton was silent again.

"I am afraid that we must conclude, sir, that the pilferer is within the building," said Mr. Skeat, "I have carefully examined all the servants: but if the thief is among them, he is well on his guard: the result has been simply nil. But you cannot, of course, exclude the other occupants of the building. If it should transpire that any boy was out of bed during the night——."

"There has been some investigation, by the prefects, but so far, nothing is known of any boy having left his dormitory," said Mr. Railton, "And I cannot believe——."

"There are black sheep in every flock, sir!" said Mr. Skeat, "But if there is any servant in the house whom you do not wholly trust, and whose quarters should be searched——."

"I cannot say so."

"Or any person, whether a servant or a schoolboy, in money difficulties——."

"I know of none."

"You have told me, sir, that you have the numbers of the notes," said Mr. Skeat. "People do not always take the numbers of pound notes, as they do of banknotes—and the pilferer would hardly guess that you did so. I have no doubt whatever that the——the person will pass the stolen notes without any misgiving. That is a line we may follow, sir."

Mr. Railton sighed.

"I certainly have the numbers, Mr. Skeat," he said, "It is my invariable practice to take down the numbers of the notes, as soon as I receive them from the bank. But once they are in circulation——."

"The circulation, in this case, will be in a very limited sphere," said Mr. Skeat, "A dishonest servant would be most likely to spend the money in the locality, while a schoolboy would be quite certain to do so."

"That is so, certainly," assented the house-master.

"I suggest, sir, that cognisance should be taken of all pound notes expended at the school shop during the next few days——."

"I will certainly see Mrs. Taggles about that," said Mr. Railton, "But—but I cannot bring myself to believe——."

Tap!

Mr. Railton broke off, as the tap came at his study door.

"Come in!" he rapped.

The door opened, and the most elegant figure at St. Jim's appeared in the doorway. Arthur Augustus walked in: to be received with a frown by his house-master.

"D'Arcy! You should not come here now—I am occupied! Leave my study at once."

"Pway excuse me, sir——."

"I have told you to leave my study, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, sir, I heard you. But I think I am bound to tell you what I know about what happened last night, sir," explained Arthur Augustus.

Mr. Railton started. Inspector Skeat fixed a pair of very penetrating eyes on the swell of St. Jim's.

"If you know anything about that matter, D'Arcy, certainly you may speak," said Mr. Railton.

"I undahstand, sir, fwom what I have heard fellows sayin', that there was a wobbewy in this study duwin' the night."

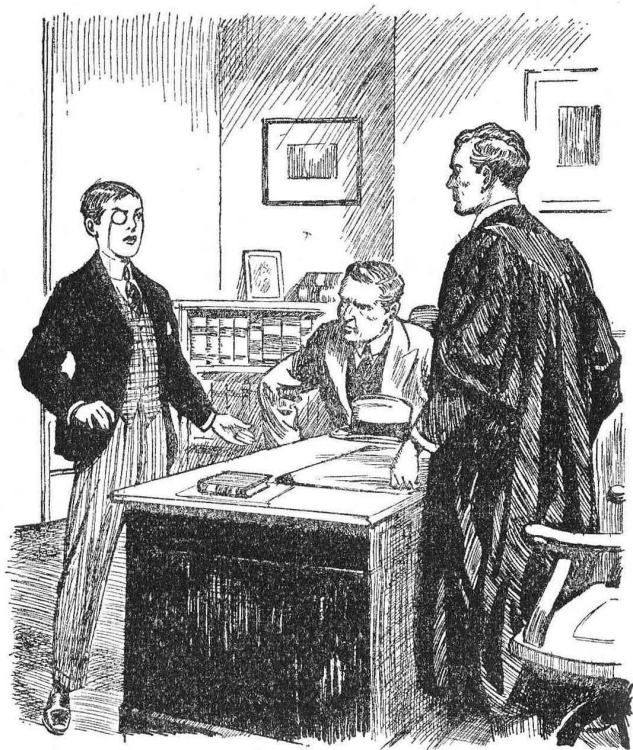
"That is correct, D'Arcy."

"And that it is not known, sir, that the wobbah came fwom outside the school," went on Arthur Augustus.

"That is certainly not known, D'Arcy. "If you have any knowledge whatever——."

"Yaas, wathah, sir! I know that the wobbah came fwom outside the House, and I thought I ought to tell you, sir."

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Railton, blankly, "I fail to



"I think I am bound to tell you what I know about what happened last night, sir," explained Arthur Augustus.

see how you can possibly know anything of the kind, D'Arcy. But proceed."

Inspector Skeat did not speak: but his keen eyes almost bored into Arthur Augustus. Mr. Skeat was certain, absolutely and completely certain, that the theft in the study had been the work of someone inside the House. His fixed belief on that point was not likely to be easily shaken. There was a glimmer of suspicion in his keen scanning of Arthur Augustus's innocent face.

Arthur Augustus paused for a moment. What was coming next, he realised, required all the tact and judgment which he had no doubt that he possessed.

"Your window was wide open at midnight, sir," he said, at last.

Mr. Railton gave another start.

"D'Arcy! What do you mean? I closed and fastened my window last night when I left the study, and it was found closed and fastened this morning. In any case, how could you possibly know whether the window was open or shut, when you were in bed in your dormitory?" Then he caught his breath, "D'Arcy! Do you mean to say that you were out of your dormitory after lights out?"

"Yaas, sir,"

"You came downstairs in the night!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, his eyes almost bulging at the swell of St. Jim's: while Inspector Skeat's narrowed almost to pin-points in his keen scrutiny of the junior.

"Yaas, sir."

"Did you come to this study?"

"Yaas, sir!" answered Arthur Augustus for the third time, "That is how I know about it, sir."

"And for what reason, D'Arcy," said Mr. Railton, in a deep, stern voice, "did you break the rules of the House by leaving your dormitory after lights out, and come down to my study?"

"I twust, sir, that you will wegard what I am goin' to say as spoken in confidencé," said Arthur Augustus.

“What?”

“In confidence, sir,” said Arthur Augustus, cheerfully.

“In confidence—between a house-master and a junior boy!” exclaimed Mr. Railton.

“No, sir,” said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, “Between one gentleman and another, sir.”

Mr. Railton gazed at him. He seemed at a loss for words. His eye strayed to the cane on his study table. Inspector Skeat stared at Arthur Augustus harder than ever.

There was quite a long silence. The house-master broke it at last.

“I presume, D’Arcy, that you do not intend to be impertinent!” he said.

“Weally, sir, I twust that I am incapable of bein’ impertinent to my house-mastah,” exclaimed Arthur Augustus, warmly, “I should wegard it as vewy bad form.”

“Tell me at once what you have come here to say!” rapped Mr. Railton.

“Vewy well, sir! I shall wely upon you tweatin’ it as confidential, as I am tellin’ you of my own accord, at the wisk of a whoppin’. I came down to get the Soccah ball, sir.”

“The Soccer ball!” repeated Mr. Railton, blankly. “Oh! Ah! Oh! Are you alluding to the football confiscated yesterday after the accident in my study?”

“Yaas, sir. I wegarded myself as wesponsible for that ball, sir, as it did not belong to me,” explained Arthur Augustus. “I was goin’ to bag it and weturn it to the ownah, sir.”

“Upon my word! You venture to tell me——” Mr. Railton gasped for a moment, “But let that pass! It appears, then, that you came down to this study last night, D’Arcy. At what time was this?”

“Just on midnight, sir. I heard twelve fwom the clock-towah as I was goin’ back to the dormitoway.”

“You say that you found the window open?”

“Wide open, sir. Of course I supposed that you had forgotten to shut it befoah going to bed, sir, and I shut it and

fastened it. But since I heard about the wobbewy, I knew that that was the way the wobbah got in: and I considahed it my dutay to come heah and tell you about it, sir."

There was another long silence in the study. This time it was broken by Inspector Skeat.

"Have you anything else to tell, Master D'Arcy?" he asked.

"Nothin' else, sir."

"No one was here when you entered the study? You saw and heard nothing of any other person?"

"No, sir."

"Did you observe that a drawer in your house-master's desk had been forced open?"

Arthur Augustus shook his head, with a slight smile.

"I did not look at the desk, sir. You see, I was lookin' for Figgins's football, and I did not suppose that Mr. Wailton had put a football into his desk."

"Did you touch the desk at all?"

"Not at all, sir."

"You had no other reason for visiting the study, other than to look for a—a football?"

"What othah weason could I have?" asked Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"Please answer my question."

"Vewy well. I had no othah weason."

"You are quite sure that you found the window open?"

"Quite, sir! You see, I shut it and fastened it because it was open." It seemed to Arthur Augustus that Inspector Skeat was a little dense, and he made it quite clear, "I couldn't have shut it and fastened it if it hadn't been open, could I?"

"You have no knowledge of the pound notes that were taken from your house-master's desk?"

"Sowwy, no, sir—only that they must have been taken by the wottah who got in at the window, and left it open when he cleahed off."

Another long silence—during which Mr. Railton and

Inspector Skeat both scanned the cheerful Gussy with intense keenness, as if striving to read his thoughts. Arthur Augustus underwent the inspection without turning a hair. Inspector Skeat coughed, at last, and Mr. Railton spoke:

“If you have nothing more to tell me, D’Arcy——”

“That is all, sir.”

“Then you may leave my study. I will deal with you later on the subject of coming down from your dormitory——”

“I twust, sir, that in the circs you will wegard that as confidential——”

“Leave my study.”

“Yaas, sir, but——”

“If you do not leave my study immediately, D’Arcy, I shall cane you,” said Mr. Railton, in a deep voice.

“Oh, bai Jove!”

Arthur Augustus left the study immediately!

When the door closed on him, house-master and police-inspector exchanged a long look. Then they discussed the unexpected information imparted by the swell of St. Jim’s: and Arthur Augustus, as he walked away, little dreamed of the awful possibility they were discussing.

CHAPTER IX

CARDEW KNOWS!

“Who went down?” asked Cardew.

Ralph Reckness Cardew, of the Fourth Form, propounded that query in Study No. 9, after tea that day.

His study-mates, Levison and Clive, did not answer. Levison frowned, and Clive gave a grunt, and that was all. Cardew smiled. The subject seemed distasteful to his friends—which was a reason for Cardew to pursue it. The dandy of the Fourth had many irritating ways. And he was inter-

ented in the mystery which had excited the whole House, if his pals were not.

"A Fourth-form man went down last night, and helped himself to Railton's pound notes," he said, deliberately, "Now, who was the happy man?"

"That's a rotten thing to say, Cardew!" growled Clive.

"Rotten but true!" sighed Cardew, "like so many things in this wicked world. You don't fancy that the man who went down was just roaming the corridors for fun, do you?"

"Nobody went down!" snapped Levison.

"You don't really believe that, Ernest, old bean," drawled Cardew. "Somebody woke a lot of us up last night, getting out. He kept quiet till we were all asleep again, and then went down from the dorm—and you know it as well as I do."

Levison was silent.

"That man, whoever he was, went down from the dorm—and the man who went down, was the man who snaffled the pound notes," said Cardew, coolly, "Doesn't it stick out a mile?"

"Rot!" said Clive: but he spoke without conviction.

"All rot," said Levison, uneasily, "Even if a man in the Fourth went down, that doesn't connect him up with what happened in Railton's study."

"Might be just a coincidence," said Clive.

"The sort of coincidence that Inspector Skeat would be glad to hear of, I fancy!" grinned Cardew. "Now, who's frightfully hard up in the Fourth——"

"Oh, chuck it!"

"Man must have been frightfully hard up, to help himself from a beak's desk. Let's see—Trimble's always hard up—but we heard his dulcet tones in the dorm when Blake was asking who was up. D'Arcy was hard up yesterday——"

"You babbling idiot, if you mention D'Arcy's name in connection with anything of the kind, you ought to be kicked!" exclaimed Clive, angrily.

"I'm merely mentionin' that he was hard up——" drawled Cardew.

“Well, how do you know he was?” snapped Levison.

“Easy—because I wanted to borrow a quid from him, and he hadn’t one——”

“That means that you were hard up yourself!” said Clive, “Are you going to accuse yourself on your own evidence?”

“Oh, my hat! Dashed if I thought of that one!” said Cardew. He burst into a laugh, “Not so jolly easy to do detective work, when you come to think of it. I don’t think I’ll follow that particular line of investigation any further.”

“I shouldn’t!” said Clive, drily.

“All the same, it was a man in the Fourth,” went on Cardew, “Fellows don’t go down in the middle of the night for nothing. And——hello, here’s the one and only! Let’s put it to him.”

“Weally, Cardew——!” Arthur Augustus D’Arcy looked in at the doorway of Study No. 9, “I came along to speak to you——”

“Just the man we want to see,” said Cardew, “Trickle in, old bean. We’re discussing a knotty problem, and a brainy man like you is just the fellow to help.”

“Bai Jove! You are vewy flattewin’, deah boy,” said Arthur Augustus, unsuspectingly, “I shall be vewy pleased to help. What is the pwoblem?”

“Who went down from the dorm last night?” said Cardew. “I think that the fellow who turned out of bed went down to Railton’s study. These fellows don’t, or make out they don’t.”

Arthur Augustus smiled.

“That is a vewy easy one, Cardew.”

“You don’t mean to say you know!” exclaimed Levison, staring.

“Yaas, wathah.”

“Oh, my aunt Sempronia!” ejaculated Cardew, “You know who it was, and you know that he went down to Railton’s study?”

“Quite!” grinned Arthur Augustus, “You see, it was I.”
Three fellows in Study No. 9 fairly bounded.

“ You! ” yelled Cardew.

“ You! ” stuttered Levison.

“ You! ” breathed Clive.

“ Yaas, wathah! I was goin’ to keep it dark, because I did not want to get into a wow,” explained Arthur Augustus, “ But there is no secwet about it now, since I have told Wailton.”

“ You’ve told Railton? ” Cardew fairly gasped, “ You—you—you’ve told Railton you went down to his study in the middle of the night? ”

“ I considahed it my dutay to do so, Cardew, because I found the window open, and closed it, and I thought In-spectah Skeat ought to know.”

The three juniors in Study No. 9 stared at Arthur Augustus, blankly.

“ Are you pulling our leg? ” asked Cardew, at last.

“ Certainly not.”

“ Did you tell Railton why you went down to his study? ”

“ Natuwally.”

“ Oh, ye gods and little fishes! ”

“ You see, I had to explain to him,” said Arthur Augustus, “ I am afwaid he was wathah watty about my goin’ there for Figgy’s footah——.”

“ You—you—you told Railton that you—you—you went there for F—F—Figgy’s footer!” Cardew seemed afflicted with a stutter.

“ Yaas, wathah.”

“ Did he believe you? ”

Arthur Augustus raised his eyebrows.

“ I twust, Cardew, that my house-mastah would not think of doubtin’ my word,” he said, stiffly. “ Pway don’t be widiculous.”

“ Fan me!” murmured Cardew.

“ Weally, Cardew——!”

“ You’ve told Railton! Don’t you know that Railton will pass it on to old Skeat? ” asked Cardew.

“Inspectah Skeat was pwesent when I told Wailton, Cardew.”

“Great pip!”

Cardew gazed at Arthur Augustus D’Arcy in a sort of fascinated way. Levison and Clive regarded him very curiously. Arthur Augustus went on cheerfully:

“If that was your problem, Cardew, you know all about it now. But what I dwopped in for was about the pound note you wanted to bowwow fwom me yestahday. I was sowwy, as I told you, that I could not oblige——.”

“Oh, don’t mench,” said Cardew.

“But it is all wight now,” explained Arthur Augustus, “I was stonay yestahday, but I have some pound notes to-day.”

“You—you’ve got some pound notes to-day!” gasped Cardew, while Levison and Clive gave the swell of St. Jim’s startled looks.

“Yaas, wathah! It was vewy awkward yestahday—I was goin’ to tip Owwis a ten-bob note, for knockin’ him ovah with that footah, you know, and I found that I had wun out of cuwwency notes. Howevah, it is all wight now—I am wathah in funds to-day.”

“Pound notes!” breathed Cardew.

“Yaas.” Arthur Augustus drew out his little Russia-leather wallet, “So if you still want that pound, Cardew, heah you are.”

“Oh! No! No fear—I—I mean, no, thanks! I don’t want it now!” stammered Cardew. It—it’s all right!”

“Vewy well, deah boy: just as you like.” Arthur Augustus slipped the wallet back into his pocket, “I will twot along and tip Owwis. Cheewio!”

Arthur Augustus walked gracefully out of Study No. 9. Levison and Clive watched him go, in silence. When the elegant figure had disappeared, Cardew gave his study-mates a mocking glance.

“What do you fellows think now?” he asked.

There was silence.

“Gussy—of all men!” said Cardew, “By gad, you never

know a man till you find him out! If I'd been asked to name the man, I'd have put D'Arcy last on the list! And—he's the man! Who'd have thought it?"

"Nobody!" said Levison, quietly, "and nobody will ever think it unless some silly-clever ass like you, Cardew."

"Nobody!" growled Clive.

Cardew laughed.

"If D'Arcy didn't do it, he's puttin' in some pretty hard work to make everybody think he did!" he remarked, "What's the good of humbuggin'?" You know as well as I do where he got those pound notes in his wallet. By gad, he was goin' to lend me one of Railton's pound notes—pshaw!"

"You think that?" demanded Levison.

"Don't you?" grinned Cardew.

"No!" said Ernest Levison, "I don't! And Clivey doesn't! And we're jolly well going to scrag you for thinking so. Come on, Clivey."

"What-ho!" said Sidney Clive, jumping up.

"Here—look here—hands off, you fatheads—oh, gad! Stoppit, will you?" yelled Cardew, as his friends fell on him, grasped him, and whirled him off his chair, "I say—will you stoppit—by gad, I'll—oh, crumbs—Yoo-hoop!"

Cardew yelled frantically, as he was bumped on the study carpet. He continued to yell, as his friends bumped him again, and yet again. Then Levison and Clive walked out of Study No. 9, leaving him sprawling and spluttering on the floor, gurgling for breath—dishevelled and winded, but with his opinion quite unchanged.

CHAPTER X

TOM MERRY LOSES HIS TEMPER!

TOM MERRY frowned.

He was coming along the Shell passage to the study landing, when the squeaky voice of Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth, fell on his ears.

There were a group of fellows on the landing, of whom Trimble was one. They were not fellows with whom Tom ever had much to do—Racke and Crooke of the Shell, and Mellish and Trimble of the Fourth. Tom would have passed them by without a glance, but for what he heard as he came along. But what he heard caused him to knit his brows and give them attention.

“D’Arcy, of course,” Trimble was saying, “What beats me is that they haven’t nailed him for it. Think it’s because his pater is a governor of the school?”

“Shouldn’t wonder,” remarked Mellish.

“Looks pretty plain, anyhow,” said Racke, “Everyone knows that D’Arcy went down to Railton’s study on Monday night.”

“And everybody knows why, I fancy,” sneered Crooke.

“The queer thing is, that he doesn’t seem to know that everybody jolly well knows,” grinned Trimble, “He goes on just the same as ever, looking as if butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth—with Railton’s pound notes in his wallet. But why hasn’t Railton done anything—that’s what beats me.”

Tom Merry, instead of crossing to the stairs, came directly towards the group on the landing. His eyes were glinting under his knitted brows. Another day had passed, since the mysterious happening in Mr. Railton’s study. Nothing, so

far as the St. Jim's fellows knew, had been done about it, beyond the visit of Inspector Skeat. What conclusions the inspector had come to, were unknown to the school: and Mr. Railton and the head-master were keeping their own counsel. Many fellows had almost forgotten about it—to others, it was a matter of deep and abiding interest.

Often and often, groups of fellows would be discussing the affair, and would suddenly fall silent if Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came along. It was quite common for an excited conversation to be going on, in the day-room or the quad or the passages, and for it to cease abruptly at the sight of the most elegant figure at St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus, the most unobservant of mortals, never noticed it—but his friends certainly did, and they wondered sometimes how long it would be before it dawned on Gussy.

“Railton jolly well knows who's got those pound notes—,” Trimble was going on, when Tom Merry came on the scene.

“Trimble, you dingy worm——!” began Tom.

Baggy stared round at him.

“Eh! Wharrer you calling a fellow names for?” he demanded.

“I heard what you said about D'Arcy.”

“Well, I'm not the only fellow saying it, am I?” grinned Trimble, “Everybody knows it was D'Arcy. I say, though, fancy him going to Railton and spinning a yarn about finding the window open that night! Making out it was some tramp got into the House. He, he!” Baggy Trimble chuckled—but the next moment his chuckle changed into a yell, as Tom Merry grasped him by the collar, and banged his head on the oak banisters. “Oh! Ow! Leggo! Wooooh!”

Bang bang!

“Ow! wow!” roared Trimble, struggling wildly, “Leggo! Wow! Will you leggo?”

“Not yet,” said Tom, “You can think what you like, you dingy little rotter, but you can't say what you like, see? Take that as a tip!”

Bang!

“Whoooooop!” roared Trimble. “Leggo! I say, Mellish, make him leggo! Racke——Crooke——make him leggo, will you?”

Mellish and Racke and Crooke did not seem to be thinking of making Tom Merry let go. They would as soon have faced a lion in its wrath, as the captain of the Shell, with that grim look on his face. They backed away, looking on, while Trimble sagged like a sack in Tom’s muscular grip.

Bang!

Trimble’s fat head smote the oak again. A fiendish yell awoke all the echoes of the study landing and most of the studies. Several fellows looked out of studies—among them Arthur Augustus D’Arcy from the doorway of Study No. 6.

Bang!

“Yaroooooop!”

Tom Merry, his face grim with wrath, was about to administer yet another bang, when his arm was suddenly grasped, just in time to save a fat head from establishing contact once more with hard oak.

He stared, or rather glared, round, quite prepared to knock the interrupter spinning with his disengaged hand. But that interrupter proved to be an elegant youth whom he certainly had no desire to knock spinning.

“Weally, Tom Mewwy. I am surprised at you!” said Arthur Augustus, holding on to his arm, and speaking in tones of disapproving reproof, “Pway welease Twimble at once.”

“Let go, you ass!” snapped Tom.

“I wefuse to let go,” answered Arthur Augustus, calmly, “I wepeat that I am surprised at you. I am well awah that Twimble is an iwwitatin’ little beast, but you have no wight whatevah to bang his nappah like that. I shall certainly not allow you to bang it again.”

Tom Merry, breathing hard, released Trimble’s collar. The fat Baggy tottered against the banisters, gasping for breath, and blinking at Arthur Augustus very uneasily. He rubbed his fat head and yelped.



"Weally, Tom Mewwy. I am surprised at you!" said Arthur Augustus, holding on to his arm, and speaking in terms of disapproving reprovall.

“Ow! ow! wow! ow!”

“You have hurt Twimble, Tom Mewwy,” said Arthur Augustus, severely.

“I meant to,” snapped Tom, “I’ll hurt him some more, if you’ll walk off and stop playing the goat.”

“I shall certainly not walk off, and leave you to bang Twimble’s nappah,” said Arthur Augustus, “I am surprised at you, bweakin’ out in this way. It is vewy bad form for a fellow to lose his tempah.”

“Fathead!”

“You must wemembah, Tom Mewwy,” said Arthur Augustus, in his most fatherly manner, “that you are vewy much stwongah than Twimble, who is a lazy little wottah and nevah keeps himself fit. Shakespeare says——.”

“Bother Shakespeare.”

“Shakespeare says that it is toppin’ to have a giant’s stwength, but bad form to use it like a giant, or somethin’ to that effect! You should beah that in mind, Tom Mewwy.”

“You dithering ass——.”

“I am vewy sowwy to see a fwiend of mine actin’ in such a mannah. I don’t want a wow with you, deah boy, but I shall certainly not allow you to touch Twimble again!” said Arthur Augustus, firmly.

“Oh, crikey!” murmured Trimble. Racke and Crooke and Mellish grinned at one another. Obviously, Arthur Augustus had not the faintest idea why Tom had been banging Trimble’s head.

“Oh, you ass!” said Tom.

“Pway contwol your tempah, deah boy,” advised Arthur Augustus, “What has Twimble done, anyhow?”

“Nothing, fathead!” growled Tom.

“Bai Jove! If you were banging Twimble’s head for nothin’, Tom Mewwy——”

“It was what he said, you howling ass.”

“Well, what did he say, then?”

“Fathead!”

“If that was all he said, you had no wight to bang his

head on the banistahs," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, warmly.

"That wasn't what he said, ass! That's what I'm saying, chump! Fathead! Ass! Dithering dunderhead!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Oh, rats," snapped Tom, crossly.

"I fail to undahstand this," said Arthur Augustus, perplexed, "Twimble, you must have said somethin' vewy unpleasant to make Tom Mewwy lose his tempah like that. What did you say?"

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Trimble. Not for his fat life would he have dared to repeat his words for the ears of Arthur Augustus.

Racke and Crooke and Mellish were almost doubled up with merriment. Arthur Augustus coming to Trimble's rescue, in the circumstances, had its comic side. Even Baggy was grinning a little, as he rubbed his head.

"Oh, chuck it," growled Tom, "Cut off, you fat sweep, before I kick you."

Baggy Trimble was glad enough to cut off. He sidled along the banisters, and doged down the staircase. Racke and Co. strolled away, laughing. Arthur Augustus gazed at Tom Merry, with a mixture of disapproval and perplexity in his noble countenance.

"What the dooce was it Twimble said, to get your wag out like that, Tom Mewwy?" he asked.

"Find out!" grunted Tom.

"I wegard that as a wude weply, Tom Mewwy."

"Idiot!"

"Weally, you cheekay ass——"

"Ditherer!"

"You are askin' for a punch in the eye, Tom Mewwy."

"Chump!"

Arthur Augustus breathed hard through his noble nose.

"I shall not punch you in the eye, Tom Mewwy, as you are a fwiend of mine," he said, with dignity, "But I shall certainly not wemain heah to listen to such a stwing of oppwobwious expwessions. Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus turned loftily on his heel, and walked back to Study No. 6. Tom Merry, manfully resisting the temptation to plant his foot on Gussy's trousers as he departed, went down the staircase. Luckily, he came on Baggy Trimble on the lower landing, and found comfort in planting his foot on Baggy's trousers—though Baggy found no comfort in it whatever.

CHAPTER XI

NO ADMITTANCE!

“OH, cwikey!” ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He was startled.

Really, it was enough—more than enough—to startle any fellow.

Morning school was going on at St. Jim's. Every fellow—excepting Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—was in his form-room. Arthur Augustus was not—for the simple reason that he had forgotten to take in a map required in second lesson.

Mr. Lathom had given him leave to fetch that map from his study. He had told him, severely, to lose no time. So Arthur Augustus was in a hurry.

It was but seldom that D'Arcy of the Fourth was in a hurry. His manners and customs were leisurely, generally exhibiting the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. But it was possible—indeed probable—that if he delayed his return with that map, his form-master might reward him with lines or a detention. So for once the swell of St. Jim's did not let the grass grow under his aristocratic feet.

He ran up the stairs. He crossed the study landing like an arrow. He did the Fourth Form passage, as far as No. 6, as if it were a cinder-path.

Arriving at his study door, he did not pause. He turned

the handle, pushed the door, and barged on, to enter the study with the opening door, as any fellow pressed for time would naturally do.

And the door did not open!

That was utterly unlooked-for!

For some unimaginable reason, that door, which should have opened to his touch, did not budge the fraction of an inch.

The result was disastrous. Had it opened, Arthur Augustus would have sped in along with it, unimpeded. As it did not open, Arthur Augustus sped into the door itself, and his noble nose banged on hard oak with a quite terrific bang.

“Oh, cwikey! Oh, cwumbs! Oh, scissahs!” yelled Arthur Augustus.

He staggered back from the door of Study No. 6. His hand quitted the door-handle and flew to his nose.

There was a pain in his nose. It felt as if it had been pushed right back through his head. It hadn't—but that was what it felt like. A spot of red oozed from it.

“Oh! Ow! My nose! Oh, cwikey!” gasped Arthur Augustus. “What is the mattah with that beastly door! Oh, cwumbs!”

He jerked out a spotless handkerchief, and pressed it to his suffering nose. The handkerchief ceased to be spotless on the spot. It was sprinkled with crimson.

For some moments Arthur Augustus stood, handkerchief pressed to nose, the pangs in which absorbed his whole attention. But when the agony abated, as the youthful Macaulay expressed it, he gave his attention to the study door again.

He grasped the handle, turned it, shook it, rattled it. His first impression was that the door must have jammed somehow. But he quickly discovered that it was not jammed. It was locked on the inside.

“Bai Jove!” breathed Arthur Augustus.

His wrath was rising. He had damaged his nose, he was

losing time at the risk of detention, because somebody—he could not begin to guess who—had gone into his study and locked the door after him! It was perplexing as well as exasperating. For who could it be? Toby, the page, or Orris, the house-porter, or one of the maids, might have gone into the study for some domestic reason. But why should he, or she, lock himself, or herself, in the study? It was really quite mysterious.

Arthur Augustus thumped on the door.

“Let me in at once, whoevah you are!” he exclaimed, “Do you heah me? Open this door immediately.”

There was no reply from within the study: but he caught the sound of a movement, and of a quick panting breath.

Someone was there. That was certain. But whoever was there did not choose to reply.

Thump! thump! thump!

Arthur Augustus was getting excited.

He thumped on the door, and thumped and thumped. Then, bending his aristocratic head to the level of the key-hole, he shouted through that orifice:

“Who’s in there? Answah me at once.”

But answer there came none! Whoever was in Study No. 6, passed Arthur Augustus’s excited shout by, like the idle wind which he regarded not.

“Will you open this door, you wottah?” shrieked Arthur Augustus.

No reply.

Arthur Augustus breathed wrath.

Who was in his study, he could not begin to guess. He could not suppose that it was one of the House servants, Toby or Orris or one of maids, locked in and refusing to answer him. He could only conclude that it was some fellow “larking” in Study No. 6.

Not a fellow of his own form, for all the Fourth Form of St. Jim’s were in the form-room with Mr. Lathom, acquiring geographical knowledge. Some fellow of another form must have got out in class, to pay a surreptitious visit to the study

—no doubt some practical joker. That, at all events, was the only conclusion to which Arthur Augustus could come. Lowther of the Shell, as likely as not: for had not Monty Lowther once introduced soot into D'Arcy's Sunday hat, in that very study?

Thump! thump! thump!

"You uttah wottah! Will you let me in! Bai Jove, if you do not open this door at once, I will give you a feahful thwashin'."

Even that dire threat elicited no response. Perhaps the intruder was not much alarmed: for it was by no means clear how Arthur Augustus was to administer a thrashing through a locked door!

"Will you weply, you wat?" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Are you afwaid that I shall know who you are, you wap-scillion, if I heah you?"

Whether that was or was not his reason, the unknown occupant of the study preserved a masterly silence.

Thump! thump! thump!

Not often did the swell of St. Jim's lose his temper. But he had a pain in his noble nose, he was in a hurry, and he was locked out of his own study by some interloper, who disdained even to answer a word. Arthur Augustus was almost at boiling point. His wrath equalled, if it did not exceed, the celebrated wrath of Achilles, to Greece the direful spring of woes unnumbered.

Thump! thump! bang! Bang!

"Ow! oh! wow!" yelled Arthur Augustus, suddenly. He had banged on the door not wisely but too well! "Ow! Oh! Bai Jove! Woooooh!"

He ceased his attack on the door, and sucked painful knuckles.

"Ooooh! Oh! Oh, cwikey! Bai Jove!"

For a full minute Arthur Augustus suspended operations on the door. He rubbed aching knuckles, and he dabbed a nose that persisted in oozing red. He breathed fury. Had the door opened then, the intruder in Study No. 6 would

undoubtedly have been booked for a very lively time. But the door did not open.

Thump! thump! thump! Arthur Augustus re-started after the interval: using his left hand this time, and with a little more circumspection. Thump! thump! thump!

The thumping woke all the echoes of the Fourth-form passage. But it did not draw a sound from the locked study. D'Arcy had heard the intruder once—but he did not hear him again. Whoever he was, he evidently intended to follow the sage example of Brer Fox, to “lie low and say nuffin’.”

“Oh, cwumbs!” Arthur Augustus ceased thumping at last. He realised that thumping was not getting him anywhere. “You uttah wascal, will you let me into my study? Do you heah me?”

Silence.

“I have come up to fetch somethin’, you wat! I shall get into a wow with Lathom if I do not weturn to the form. Do you undahstand, you wotten smudge?”

Still silence.

“Will you tell me who you are, you weptile, so that I can look for you aftah class and thwash you?”

Even that tempting offer did not draw a reply.

“Bai Jove!” Arthur Augustus gasped with wrath, “I shall have to go back without my map! I will jollay well find out who you are, you wottah, and thwash you like anythin’ aftah class. You’ve got it comin’, you wascal!”

There was no reply from Study No. 6, and Arthur Augustus departed. It went sorely against the grain to depart without dealing with the fellow who had locked him out of his own study. But there was evidently nothing to be done with a locked door: and as Arthur Augustus had been absent for a good ten minutes by this time, he realised that it behoved him to return to the form-room—mapless. With his handkerchief pressed to his noble nose, and feelings too deep for words, Arthur Augustus departed, leaving the mysterious intruder in Study No. 6 in possession of that celebrated apartment.

CHAPTER XII

MYSTERIOUS!

“D’ARCY!”

Mr. Lathom’s eyes fixed upon Arthur Augustus, as he came back into the Fourth Form room. So did all other eyes.

Arthur Augustus had restored his spotted handkerchief to his pocket. The claret had ceased to ooze. But his nose, like Marian’s in the ballad, was red and raw. It leaped to the eye.

His chums, Blake and Herries and Digby, stared at him. Figgins and Co. stared at him. Everybody stared at him. Many fellows grinned. Baggy Trimble chuckled. Mr. Lathom frowned.

“D’Arcy! You have been absent from the form-room more than ten minutes!” rapped Mr. Lathom.

“Yaas, sir! I——”

“Two minutes would have been ample to fetch a map from your study.”

“Yaas, sir! But——”

“You have been wasting time, D’Arcy.”

“Oh, no, sir! I——”

“I gave you leave to fetch your map, which you should not have forgotten in the first place!” exclaimed Mr. Lathom, sternly, “You have stayed out of the form-room unnecessarily, and apparently occupied the time in fighting ——”

“Weally, sir——”

“Your appearance is shocking, D’Arcy!” rapped Mr. Lathom.

“Oh cwumbs! Is it weally, sir?” Arthur Augustus passed his hand tenderly over his nose, “I am sowwy, sir, but——”

“And you have not brought your map!” exclaimed the master of the Fourth, “You have been fighting, and have forgotten your map!”

Arthur Augustus breathed hard through his damaged nose.

“I assuah you, sir, that I have not been fightin’,” he exclaimed, “Nothin’ of the kind. I banged my nose on a door, sir.”

“On a door!” repeated Mr. Lathom, blankly.

“Yaas, sir. I was in a huwwy, sir, and I was wushin’ into the study, and the door was locked, so my nose banged on it——”

“Ha, ha, ha!” came from the Fourth Form. It had not occurred to Arthur Augustus that there was anything of a comic nature in the collision between his noble nose and the door of Study 6. But the other fellows seemed to think that there was. A howl of laughter interrupted him.

Arthur Augustus stared round at grinning faces.

“Weally, you fellows, there is nothin’ to laugh at!” he exclaimed, “I gave my nose a feahful bang on that beastly door——”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Silence, please!” rapped Mr. Lathom. “Why have you not brought your map, D’Arcy?”

“I couldn’t get into the study, sir,” explained Arthur Augustus, “I have alweady wemarked that the door was locked, sir.”

“Study doors should not be locked,” said Mr. Lathom, “But if it was locked, why did you not unlock it?”

“It was locked on the inside, sir.”

“What?” ejaculated Mr. Lathom.

“There was somebody in the study, sir, and he had locked the door, and wefused to open it.”

“Oh, my hat!” murmured Jack Blake, staring blankly at his noble chum. Herries and Digby blinked at him. Arthur

Augustus was stating the fact. But it did not sound like a fact. That any fellow could have locked himself in a junior study, during class, seemed quite improbable, and indeed impossible, to everyone in the Fourth-form room.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, "If there was some boy in your study, D'Arcy, who was it?"

"I don't know, sir! The wottah—I mean the fellow—wefused to speak, or to open the door, and I had to come back without my map."

Mr. Lathom looked very long, and very hard, at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It was quite plain that he was not convinced.

"I shall ascertain whether your statement is correct, D'Arcy," he said, at last, very drily, "Kerr!"

"Yes, sir!" said Kerr.

"I shall leave you in charge of the form for a few minutes. D'Arcy, you may go to your place."

"Yaas, sir."

Mr. Lathom, with a frowning brow, left the form-room. Kerr of the New House, who was Head Boy in the Fourth, was left to keep order in his absence. But the moment the door had closed behind Mr. Lathom, there was a buzz of voices. Any interest the St. Jim's Fourth might possibly have had in geography completely evaporated. All interest was centred in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and the remarkable story he had told.

"What on earth's happened, you image?" exclaimed Blake.

"Weally, Blake——."

"Whom have you been scrapping with?" asked Cardew.

"Weally, Cardew——."

"Who gave you that prize nose?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Weally, Wynn——!"

"He, he, he!" chuckled Baggy Trimble, "Fancy spinning Lathom a yarn like that. I say, D'Arcy, who punched your nose?"

"Weally, Twimble——."

"Did you really bang your nose on the study door?" demanded Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! You see, I was wushin' into the study in a huwwy, and the door bein' locked——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not a mattah for mewwiment," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly, "Look at my nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors. Looking at Arthur Augustus's noble nose only seemed to add to their merriment.

"But the study door can't have been locked!" said Herries, "Who would want to lock our study door?"

"Nobody," said Digby, "Must have been jammed, somehow. Did you try turning the handle, Gussy?"

"You uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus, "Of course I twied turnin' the handle! Do you think I am a silly ass?"

"Yes, rather," answered Dig, at once.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But who was in the study, if anybody was?" demanded Blake.

"I haven't the foggiest, deah boy. I am goin' to find out, aftah class, and give him a feahful thwashin'."

"Can't have been anybody," said George Figgins, shaking his head, "Might be some fellow out of form, but he wouldn't want to lock himself in Gussy's study. You fancied it, old bean."

"I wegard you as an ass, Figgins. There was somebody in the study, and he wefused to open the door, or to say a word. I expect it was somebody playin' twicks—vewy likely that fathead Lowthah."

"Well, if there's anybody, Lathom will nail him," said Blake, "Sure you didn't go to sleep and dream it?"

"Wats!"

"Well, you know what a howling ass you are!" argued Blake. "If you didn't see him, and didn't hear him, how do you know he was there?"

"I heard him bweathin'," answered Arthur Augustus, "Besides, as the door was locked, there must have been some-

body inside. I say, does my nose look vewy bad? ”

“ Like a danger-signal,” said Blake, cheerfully.

“ Bai Jove! Is it weally as bad as that, Hewwies? ”

“ Worse! ” answered Herries.

“ Does it look vewy wed, Dig? ”

“ Red isn’t the word,” said Digby, “ Scarlet! Crimson! Flaming! ”

Arthur Augustus breathed hard, as he sat down in his place. Arthur Augustus was very particular about his personal appearance. He was, indeed, the glass of fashion and the mould of form in the Lower School at St. Jim’s. To be the possessor of a nose that shone like a danger-signal was irksome and exasperating. Arthur Augustus was simply yearning to discover who was responsible for that nose, and to give him some of the same.

“ Quiet, you fellows,” called out Kerr, “ Here comes Lathom.”

The form-room door opened, and Mr. Lathom came in. There was a frown on his brow, and a map in his hand. He laid that map on D’Arcy’s desk, and the swell of St. Jim’s blinked at it. It was the map he had left on his study table.

“ D’Arcy! ” said Mr. Lathom, in a deep voice, “ There is your map! ”

“ Thank you, sir,” said Arthur Augustus.

“ Your study door was not locked, D’Arcy.”

“ Eh? ”

“ I entered the study without difficulty,” said Mr. Lathom, sternly, “ No one was there, D’Arcy.”

“ Oh, cwumbs! ”

The Fourth-form fellows looked at one another. Cardew winked at Levison and Clive. Figgins and Co. exchanged a grin. Baggy Trimble indulged in a squeaky chuckle. Nobody in the Fourth, as a matter of fact, believed that there had been anybody in Study No. 6. Fellows who knew Gussy well supposed as a matter of course that he had made some idiotic mistake. Other fellows supposed that he had been

“telling the tale.” But nobody supposed that some mystery-man had been locked in Study No. 6. And the fact that Mr. Lathom had found the study door unlocked, and nobody there, was proof positive—in the eyes of the Fourth Form, at least.

Mr. Lathom was regarding the elegant ornament of his form very severely. He had taken the trouble to ascertain whether there might possibly be any foundation for Arthur Augustus’s extraordinary story. And he had found none. His voice was very deep as he went on:

“Do you still adhere to the absurd story you told me, D’Arcy, when you returned to the form-room?”

Arthur Augustus gazed at him.

“I twust, sir, that you do not think of doubtin’ my word?” he said, with a great deal of dignity.

Mr. Lathom coughed.

“No,” he said, after a pause, “I do not doubt your word, D’Arcy.”

“Thank you, sir!” said Arthur Augustus, still extremely dignified.

“I conclude,” said Mr. Lathom, “that you made some absurd mistake, D’Arcy. There certainly was no one in your study, and the door was not locked. You are a very foolish boy, D’Arcy.”

“Weally, sir——”

“You will write a hundred lines from the second book of the Æneid, and bring them to my study at six o’clock, D’Arcy.”

“But, sir——!”

“That will do, D’Arcy.”

“Yaas, sir! But it was not my fault that some fellow locked himself in my study——” expostulated Arthur Augustus.

“There was no one in your study, D’Arcy.”

“But I heard him, sir——”

“Nonsense.”

“I wepeat, sir——”

“Upon my word,” exclaimed Mr. Lathom, “If you say another word, D’Arcy, I shall cane you.”

Arthur Augustus D’Arcy opened his lips—but closed them again. His indignation was deep: but it was evidently judicious not to utter another word.

Mr. Lathom, frowning, went back to his desk. Geography was resumed in the Fourth-form room. Arthur Augustus suppressed his feelings, and sat in indignant silence—giving absolutely no attention to geography, his noble mind concentrated on the mysterious intruder in Study No. 6, and the urgent need of discovering him and giving him a nose redder than Gussy’s own!

CHAPTER XIII

DOUBTING THOMASES!

TOM MERRY stared. Harry Manners stared. Monty Lowther stared, and grinned. Three stares, and one grin, were concentrated on the aristocratic countenance of Arthur Augustus D’Arcy of the Fourth Form.

It was sunny in the old quadrangle of St. Jim’s, when the school came out in break. In the sunshine, Arthur Augustus’s reddened nose showed up to great advantage. It caught the eyes of Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, as they came out of the School-House. They gazed at it.

Arthur Augustus was in the quad with his pals, Blake and Herries and Digby, when the Terrible Three came along. He seemed to be engaged in a rather excited argument with them. Herries and Dig were grinning. Blake was making soothing gestures.

The three Shell fellows joined the group: gazing at that glowing nose, Monty Lowther, who never could help being

funny, shaded his eyes with his hand, as if dazzled by the glow.

Arthur Augustus gave him a look. He screwed his eye-glass into his eye, and gave him another look. Both looks were devastating. Arthur Augustus had a suspicion that the unknown joker in Study No. 6 might have been Lowther of the Shell, and he was in no mood for Monty's playful little ways.

"What on earth's happened to your nose, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Caught it in a door?" inquired Manners.

"I like the colour scheme!" remarked Monty Lowther, "Quite a Turner effect."

"Weally, Lowthah——."

"Just a spot dazzling!" said Lowther.

"I am goin' to look for the wottah who gave me this nose, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard, "I am goin' to make his nose weddah than mine, when I spot him. I am goin' to give him a feahful thwashin'."

"Who's the happy man?" asked Tom Merry.

"I do not know at pwesent, Tom Mewwy.

"You don't know who punched your nose?" exclaimed the captain of the Shell, in astonishment.

"Nobody punched my nose, Tom Mewwy. I was wushin' into my study in a huwwy, and the door was locked, and I banged my nose——."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Shell fellows.

"Pewwaps it may seem funnay to you, but it will not seem funnay to the wottah who locked himself in my study this mornin'," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "I am goin' to give him a twemendous thwashin'."

"Gussy thinks that some chap locked himself in No. 6," explained Blake, in a tone of resigned patience, "I daresay the door jammed, and Gussy thought it was locked, when he went up for his map, and he came back and told Lathom so."

"And Lathom went up at once, and the door wasn't locked," grinned Herries.

"I expect he forgot to turn the handle," remarked Dig, "Lathom gave him a hundred lines."

"And that was getting off cheap," said Blake, "Some beaks would have thought he was just spinning a yarn, after staying out of the form-room. But of course Lathom knows what an ass Gussy is."

"I wepeat, Blake, that there was somebody in the study!" roared Arthur Augustus, "And I wepeat that I am goin' to thwash him."

"But there can't have been anybody in the study during class, Gussy!" Tom Merry pointed out.

"Some chap must have got out of class, Tom Mewwy. There was certainly somebody in the study. The door was locked."

"Jammed!" said Blake.

"Locked!" hooted Arthur Augustus.

"Or you forgot to turn the handle," urged Dig. This seemed to be Dig's favourite theory.

"I wefuse to ansawah such an asinine wemark, Dig. I twust that I am not an uttah idiot!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, hotly.

"What a trusting nature!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But if the door was shut, you couldn't see into the study," said Tom Merry, "Did the fellow speak?"

"Not a word. Of course he was afwaid that I should wecognize his voice if he did. He did not uttah a syllable."

"Then how do you know there was anybody in the study at all?" asked Manners.

"Because I heard him. Othahwise, I might have supposed that some japin' ass had locked the door and walked off with the key. But I heard a sort of panting bweath when I banged on the door. He was fwightened."

"He couldn't see you through the door, could he?" asked Lowther.

"Of course not, Lowthah."

"Then it can't have been your features that did it!" said Lowther, thoughtfully, "So what was he frightened about?"

"You uttah ass!" hooted Arthur Augustus, while the other fellows chuckled.

"You say you heard him pant?" continued Lowther, "How many times did he pant?"

"Only once—he kept vewy quiet aftah that."

"So there was only one pant?"

"Yaas."

"Well, that's jolly odd," said Monty Lowther, shaking his head, "If there was any fellow in the study at all, he would have a pair of pants——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You widiculous duffah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "I do not mean that kind of pants, as you know very well. As a matter of fact, I wathah think I can guess who was in the study. It must have been a Shell man, as all the Fourth were in form. I have a vewy stwong suspicion who it was."

"There was nobody in the study!" roared Blake.

"Pway dwy up, Blake."

"Just fancy, old chap," urged Herries, "You fancied the door was locked——."

"I wegard you as an ass, Hewwies."

"You see, if you forgot to turn the handle——!" began Dig.

"Bai Jove! If you suggest again that I forgot to turn the handle, Dig, I will punch you in the eye!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, excitedly, "I tell you that I turned the handle, and wattled it, and the door was locked——."

"Lathom found it unlocked——!" urged Blake.

"The bwute must have dodged out when I came down, befoah Lathom went up. He had several minutes. I tell you I heard him in the study. I am pwetty certain that it was a Shell man. Have you been in my study, Tom Mewwy?"

"Not guilty, my lord!" said Tom, laughing.

"Have you been in my study, Mannahs?"

"Innocent as a babe!" grinned Manners.

"Have you been in my study, Lowthah?"

"Certainly," answered Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! I wathah thought that it was you, you funny ass! Now you've got it comin'!" roared Arthur Augustus, and he rushed at Monty Lowther.

Lowther promptly dodged behind Tom Merry.

"Hold on!" he gasped, "Let a fellow speak——."

"You have said enough, you wottah! Pway get out of the way, Tom Mewwy. I am goin' to thwash Lowthah——."

"But it wasn't Lowther," gasped Tom Merry, "Lowther never went out of the form-room in class."

"Wats! He has just owned up that he has been in my study——."

"So I have——lots of times," howled Lowther, "Why, I came to tea yesterday——don't you remember?"

"I was not alludin' to yestahday, Lowthah——."

"I was!" said Monty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You unuttewable ass!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, "Was it you in my study this mornin' when I banged my nose on the door?"

"Not at all! Sorry I wasn't there——I should have enjoyed the performance. But I was in form with Linton."

Arthur Augustus breathed hard and deep.

"I have a gweat mind to punch your sillay nose for makin' idiotic jokes, Lowthah. If you cannot be sewious on a sewious subject, dwy up. Pewwaps you do not wealise that the mattah is sewious!" added Arthur Augustus, with crushing sarcasm.

"Well, it hadn't occurred to me, so far," admitted Lowther.

"I wegard you as an ass, Lowthah."

"My dear chap, you can regard me in any character you choose to assume for the purpose," said Monty, blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

“ Oh, wats! I wefuse to listen to your wotten jokes, Lowthah.” Arthur Augustus turned to his chums, “ I am goin’ up to the study to see what that wottah was doin’ there. Are you fellows comin’? ”

Arthur Augustus D’Arcy marched into the House, with a frowning brow, and his noble nose high in the air. Jack Blake sighed, George Herries grunted, and Robert Arthur Digby grinned. Then they followed their noble chum. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther exchanged a grin, and followed on. Seven fellows arrived at Study No. 6 in the Fourth—only one of whom expected to find traces of the unknown and mysterious intruder.

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE TRAIL!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D’ARCY stood in Study No. 6, and looked round him.

He looked round him quite blankly.

The study presented its customary aspect. There was no sign, not the ghost of a sign, that any “ rag ” had been perpetrated there.

No. 6 in the Fourth was not exactly tidy. There was a football boot on the table, a Latin exercise on the floor, a huddle of firewood in the fender, an empty jam-jar on the mantelpiece, books scattered on the chairs and the window-seat. But that was all quite normal. There was nothing unusual to be seen.

That some unknown person had visited the study during class, Arthur Augustus knew, if no one else did. He had taken it for granted that the visit had been for the purpose of a “ rag.” Why else should anyone go to the study at all, and lock the door against interruption?

But there was absolutely no trace of a visitor. Arthur Augustus stared round him, as if he could not believe the evidence of his eyes or his eyeglass. He was amazed.

"Bai Jove!" he said at last.

Six fellows, crowded at the study doorway, watched him with grinning faces.

Tom Merry and Co. were not surprised, for they had not had the slightest expectation of discovering that anyone had been in the study during class. Had there been a "rag," Mr. Lathom could scarcely have failed to notice it when he came up.

It was a much simpler explanation that the study door had jammed somehow, and that Arthur Augustus had fancied the rest.

There were fellows in the Fourth, like Trimble and Melish, who had no doubt that D'Arcy had stayed out of form on his own account, and spun Lathom a most unlikely yarn on his return. But his friends knew him better than that. Arthur Augustus was incapable of untruth. But he was, in the opinion of all his pals, just the fellow to make an idiotic mistake.

"Bai Jove!" repeated Arthur Augustus, blankly, "Nobody seems to have been waggin' heah, you fellows."

"Nobody's been here at all," said Blake, "You can see that for yourself now, Gussy."

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake. Of course I supposed that it was a wag. But if it wasn't a wag, why did the fellow come heah at all?"

"He didn't!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——!"

"Must have been a mistake, old chap," said Tom Merry, soothingly, "Study doors do jam sometimes——."

"The door was locked on the inside, Tom Mewwy."

"Hem!"

"I wepeat that I heard him in the study. He was startled, or fwightened, when I banged on the door, and I heard him pant——."

“Not even a pair of pants!” murmured Monty Lowther.

“Pway don’t wepeat your asinine jokes, Lowthah. They are bad enough once. The fellow was heah. But if he did not come heah for a wag, what did he come heah for at all?”

Arthur Augustus wrinkled his noble brow in perplexity. As there was no sign or trace of a rag in the study, the visit of the unknown intruder was quite unaccountable—to Gussy. To the other fellows it was simply proof that Arthur Augustus had made one more of his many mistakes.

“You see,” said Manners, “Nobody could have been here. You know yourself that nobody was out of class in the Fourth. We know that nobody was out in the Shell. Think some fag of the Third came up here to lock himself in your study for nothing?”

“Or a senior man?” grinned Lowther.

“Orris or Toby might have come up for something, but he wouldn’t lock himself in your study, old bean,” said Tom.

“Nobody would!” said Digby.

“Why the dickens should anybody?” demanded Herries.

“Look here, Gussy,” said Blake, “You can see that nobody’s been here. You never heard anything of him but just a pant—well, I expect you were panting a bit yourself, after cutting upstairs, and banging on the door. You fancied you heard it from the study, see?”

“That’s it,” said Manners, with a nod.

“That clears it up, Gussy,” said Tom Merry, “See?”

“And now let’s get out and punt a footer, before the bell goes for third school,” said Blake, “Come on, Gussy.”

Arthur Augustus had listened to all these remarks in disdainful silence. His friends having explained the whole matter away, to their own satisfaction at least, expected him to let it drop. Arthur Augustus was not thinking in the least of letting it drop.

“Coming, Gussy?” asked Tom.

“I have no time to punt a footah now, Tom Mewwy, as I have not yet found out who was in this study this mornin’.”

"Haven't we made you understand that nobody was here?" hooted Blake.

"Not at all, deah boy. I know that somebody was, and I am goin' to find him out and punch his nose, and make it weddah than mine." Arthur Augustus breathed indignation, "Bai Jove! Do you think I'm goin' to let the wottah give me a wed nose, and get away with it?"

"But he hasn't got away with it," said Monty Lowther, "There it still is——sticking in the middle of your chivvy, Gussy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats! You fellows wun away and play," said Arthur Augustus, "I am goin' to look for my minah, and ask him whethah any Third-Form man was out in class."

Arthur Augustus walked out of Study No. 6, frowning. Tom Merry and Co. followed on. As it was clear that no member of the Fourth or the Shell had been larking in the study that morning, Arthur Augustus was driven to the conclusion that it must have been some fag of the Third. So he marched off in search of his young brother, Wally, of the Third: with six fellows grinning at his heels.

D'Arcy minor was discovered in the quad, in company with Manners minor and Levison minor. The three minors were engaged in some argument, under the elms: Reggie Manners standing with a sullen face, while Walter Adolphus D'Arcy and Frank Levison talked to him together, apparently in expostulation. The conference was interrupted by the arrival of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his grinning followers.

"Wally," began Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, don't bother," said D'Arcy minor, over his shoulder. Wally of the Third had manners and customs quite unlike those of his major, and he could not have been more off-hand. "I'm talking to young Manners. Now look here, Reggie——"

"Weally, Wally——."

"Oh, can it, Gussy, old man," urged Wally.

"You diswepctful young wapsallion, I wefuse to can

it," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, wrathfully, "I want to ask you somethin', Wally."

"Nothing doing," answered Wally, "I'm down to my last threepenny-bit."

"Bai Jove! You uttah young ass. Do you think I want to bowwow anythin' fwom you!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, "You are askin' me to thwash you, Wally. Howevah," went on Arthur Augustus, more mildly, "If you are weally down on your uppahs, Wally, I can let you have a few half-cwowns if you like. I had some pound notes wathaah unexpectedly last Tuesday."

"Tuesday!" repeated Wally, staring at him. D'Arcy minor had heard something of the rumours that were spreading in the Lower School, if D'Arcy major had not, "Did you say Tuesday, Gussy? Do you mean after what happened in Railton's study—the day after?"

"Yaas, last Tuesday," assented Arthur Augustus, "Nothin' extwaordinawy in the governah sendin' me a couple of pound notes, is there?"

"Oh! They came from the pater!" said Wally. "O.K. Look here, you can let me have five bob, if you like."

"Yaas, wathah." Two half-crowns were dropped from the whitest hand in the School House into a rather grubby palm. "Now, Wally, I want you to tell me somethin'. Some ass was larkin' in my study duwin' class in second lesson, and I am lookin' for him. Was anybody out in the Third?"

"Nobody," answered Wally, "Selby was keeping us all on the grind all through second school. Nobody went out."

"Are you quite suah of that, Wally?"

"Of course I am, fathead."

"It is extwemely lackin' in pwopah wespsect, Wally, to address your eldah bwothah as a fathead," said Arthur Augustus, severely. "I wegard you as a diswespsectful young wagamuffin."

And Arthur Augustus departed, still with his faithful followers at his heels: leaving the three fags to resume their argument, whatever it was: which they did immediately.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus glanced at six grinning faces, "This is weally gettin' vewy mystewious. It was nobody in the Third, the Fourth, or the Shell, it appeahs. It must have been a seniah man."

Blake winked at his comrades.

"Let's go and question the Fifth and Sixth," he said, "There's Kildare and Darrell over there, Gussy—let's go and ask them if they were larking in a junior study in second school."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake——."

"What about the Head?" asked Monty Lowther, gravely.

"The Head?" repeated Arthur Augustus.

"Yes! The Sixth were up to Railton in second school and the Head had nothing to do. Think he might have been larking in your study?"

"You uttah ass!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry and Co.

"Appawently you cannot be sewious on a sewious subject," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, wrathfully, "But I am goin' to spot that wottah, all the same, and punch his nose for lockin' me out of my study——."

"Nobody did!" roared Blake.

"Wubbish!"

"Look here, Gussy, old man——!" urged Tom Merry.

"Wats!"

"Hallo, there's the bell!" exclaimed Blake, "Third school—and we've wasted break playing the goat with Gussy! D'Arcy, you ass——."

"I wepeat, wats!" snapped Arthur Augustus.

The juniors headed for their form-rooms at the summons of the bell: and for the present, at least, Arthur Augustus had to give up the trail. But he did not give up his intention of tracking down the mysterious visitant in Study No. 6. His belief that some unknown person had been locked in Study No. 6 that morning remained fixed in his mind, and his friends had to leave it there. It was clear that, though

they spoke with the tongue of men and angels, they would never convince Arthur Augustus otherwise——though even Arthur Augustus realised that the chance of discovering the offender was somewhat remote.

CHAPTER XV

UNEXPECTED!

“He’s your major!” said Reggie Manners.

“Think I’m going to stick my major?” demanded D’Arcy minor, “Not that he’d lend me money for a thing like that.”

“You needn’t tell him what it’s for,” argued Reggie.

Wally of the Third sniffed.

“He’d ask me! What do you fancy he would think a man in the Third wanted a whole pound note for? I never have a whole pound note, except on my birthday.”

“Wally would have to tell his major what it was for, if he asked him for it, Reggie!” said Levison minor, quietly, “and ten to one D’Arcy major would just smack his head, if he heard about the football pools. He jolly well wouldn’t cough up the quid, I know that.”

“Try your own major!” snorted Wally, “You’ve got a major in the Shell.”

“I’ve tried him,” growled Reggie, “and he took my coupons away and jammed them in the fire. I had to get new ones.”

“Leave it alone for goodness sake——.”

“It’s all rot,” said Wally.

“I expect you’d say whacks fast enough, if I walked off with a big prize!” sneered Reggie. “I tell you I believe I’ve got the winning teams in the Nimble Nineteen. If I had a pound——.”

“Well, you haven’t,” said Wally, “and that’s that.”

"Your major has," said Reggie, "He said so this morning, when he was speaking to you in the quad. You could ask him——."

"Forget it," said Wally.

Reggie scowled. Evidently he was very keen on the Nimble Nineteen: and his brother's drastic action, in jamming his sheet of coupons into the fire in No. 10 Study, had not lessened his keenness. Reggie was persuaded that he knew a tremendous lot about League football teams, and that he could name winners—and he was quite dazzled by the prospect of huge prizes if fortune favoured him,—to the extent of picking out nineteen successful shots on one coupon. Both his friends in the Third Form were quite bored with it.

The three fags were arguing in a corner of the locker room in the School House, the spot where fags most did congregate, out of form. D'Arcy minor and Levison minor were both fed up, and looked it: but Reggie was persistent. He was going to "get rich quick" if he could!

"If you asked your major——!" resumed Reggie.

"Br-r-r-r-r!" grunted Wally.

"He's soft, as you jolly well know," said Reggie, "Anybody can get round D'Arcy of the Fourth. I jolly well know that that fat tick Trimble borrows off him, and of course he never pays. He's soft as putty, and you could manage him——."

"If you say my major's soft as putty, young Manners, I'll jam your head into a locker!" exclaimed Wally, indignantly.

"You've said so yourself," barked Reggie.

"Well, I can say what I like about my major, but you can't," retorted Wally, "What about your own major——moony ass, with his silly nose always stuck in his photography and rubbish. I'd rather have my major any day."

"Look here——!"

"Don't you slang my major, young Manners. I won't have it."

"I ain't slanging him—what I mean is, he's soft, and he would let you have one of his pound notes if you asked him, and you could lend it to me——"

“Well, I won’t!” rapped Wally, “See?—I jolly well won’t! If you want one of my major’s pound notes, you can ask him yourself! And if he’s as soft as you make out, perhaps he’ll give you one—so yah!”

And Wally of the Third stalked out of the locker-room, to put an end to the discussion.

“Come on, Frank,” he called over his shoulder.

Frank Levison was about to follow, but Reggie caught him by the sleeve.

“Look here, what about your major?” he asked.

“I should have to tell Ernest what it was for, and he wouldn’t,” answered Levison minor. “Besides, I don’t suppose he’s got a pound. Let’s get out.”

And Levison minor followed Wally, leaving Reggie Manners scowling and discontented.

Reggie, with knitted brows, sat on one of the lockers, and drew a coupon sheet from his pocket. He scanned the entries he had made thereon, with an expression of greedy excitement that was not pleasant to see on so young and boyish a face. There was no doubt that Snooper’s Pools were not doing Reggie Manners any good—as indeed his friends had told him a good many times.

But the lure of sudden riches had taken possession of his mind: and it was in vain that Wally and Frank pointed out that he hadn’t a dog’s chance of winning, that he would be chucking his money away if he had it, that he wasn’t eligible to enter the competition in any case, as Snooper’s did not deal with schoolboys: that ten to one the newsagents in Rylcombe wouldn’t agree to receive letters for him, and that even if they did, he would get a tremendous whipping if it came out. All this sage counsel rolled off Reggie like water off a duck. The commonest of common-sense had no chance against the dazzling possibility of a big prize—and in that Reggie was not much more foolish than many of his elders.

He shoved the coupons back into his pocket, and rose from the locker. Hobbs of the Third called to him as he went

out, but he did not need Hobbs. He made his way to the Fourth-form studies.

Wally's suggestion that he should himself ask Arthur Augustus for one of his pound notes, if he wanted it, had been made in sarcasm. But Reggie was thinking of doing that very thing.

D'Arcy of the Fourth was "soft," in Reggie's valuable opinion. It was highly improbable that he was "soft" enough to hand over a pound note to a fag in the Third, merely for the asking. But if there was the remotest chance, Reggie was not going to lose it. Slim and remote as that chance might be, it was the only one he had: and after all, if D'Arcy of the Fourth said no, he would be no worse off than before.

Not very hopefully, Reggie arrived at Study No. 6 in the Fourth. He gave an angry grunt as he looked into the study, and found that it was empty.

It was after class, but not yet tea-time: and Arthur Augustus and his friends were out of the House somewhere. Reggie went into the study to wait for Arthur Augustus to come in.

He sat down in the study armchair: but he was too restless to remain still, and he soon jumped up again and walked about the study, staring occasionally from the window. Ten minutes or so later, he had a distant view of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming back from games-practice with a crowd of other fellows, and watched him disappear into the changing-room. That meant that he would not be long in coming up to the study. Reggie hoped: and he roved restlessly about the room waiting.

Then it happened—the utterly unexpected!

There was a square of carpet in Study No. 6, extremely well worn, and in fact adorned with more than one hole. Reggie, wandering about the room, caught his foot in a rent, and kicked irritably at the carpet to clear it. That irritable kick pushed back the edge of the carpet, and a slip of paper lying on the floor, hitherto hidden from sight, was revealed.

Reggie stared at it, and picked it up, and whistled.

It was a pound note.

"Silly ass!" snorted Reggie.

He had no doubt that it was one of D'Arcy's pound notes, dropped in the study—Arthur Augustus was careless in such matters. No doubt he had dropped it in taking something else from his wallet, without noticing it. It would be like him! It had slipped somehow under the carpet's edge—no doubt kicked there by a passing foot. The silly ass couldn't have missed it yet, or he would be looking for it. And Reggie had found it.

He scowled at it! It seemed unfair to Reggie. Here was he, Reggie Manners, with a winning list in his pocket, which he couldn't despatch to win a prize because he hadn't a pound note! And that soft ass D'Arcy of the Fourth had pound notes to drop about his study, forgetting all about them! It was very irritating and exasperating to the young sportsman of the Third Form.

But his brow cleared.

He had found that note for D'Arcy. Quite likely D'Arcy might never have found it at all—it might have been left there for days, or weeks, and very likely swept up when one of the maids "hoovered" the room. D'Arcy might lend him that pound note, now that he had found it!

Reggie's face became quite bright at that idea. Why shouldn't D'Arcy lend him that pound note, which very likely he would never have seen again if Reggie hadn't found it by the sheerest chance?

It almost seemed to Reggie that his problem was solved, as he walked out of the study and went down to the changing-room to interview Arthur Augustus on the subject without delay.

CHAPTER XVI

HIS BROTHER'S KEEPER!

"TOM MEWWY!"

Tom Merry lifted a glowing face from a steaming basin, and towelled the same. He blinked over the towel at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who sat with one leg in his elegant trousers, and the other leg not yet in, and a thoughtful expression on his aristocratic face.

"Heave ahead, Gussy," said the captain of the Shell, cheerily, as he towelled.

There was a cheery crowd in the changing-room after games-practice, and a buzz of voices, in a steamy atmosphere. Tom Merry's face was very bright. He had been putting his men through their paces, and was satisfied with the prospects for the Rookwood match—which, at the moment, was among the most important matters within the wide limits of the universe, from the point of view of the St. Jim's juniors.

"I am goin' to give you a word of advice, old chap," said Arthur Augustus, benevolently.

"Do!" said Tom, laughing.

"Listen to the oracle!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——!"

"Oyez! oyez!" called out Cardew, "Listen-in, you fellows! A Daniel come to judgment! Oyez! oyez!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Cardew——"

"Are you going to advise Tommy to put in a few more New House men, Gussy?" asked George Figgins.

"Bai Jove! Hardly, Figgins. There are wathah too many New House men in the side already, as I undahstand

that you and Kerr and Wynn will be playin'——”

“You understand that?” ejaculated Kerr.

“Yaas. Isn't it so?”

“Quite! But fancy you understanding it—or anything else!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Weally, Kerr——”

“The team needs a few more from our House,” said Fatty Wynn, “Three New House men give it a backbone, I know—but a few more——”

“Hear, hear!” said Figgins.

“Bow-wow!” said Jack Blake.

“Three are three too many,” remarked Manners, “Plenty of good men in the School House!”

“Fathead!” said Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, all together.

“Well, I wouldn't quite agwee to that, Mannahs,” said Arthur Augustus, thoughtfully, “Both Houses must be wepwesented in a School match. But thwee is wathah a lot fwom ovah the way. Howevah, I won't say anythin' about that, Tom Mewwy, if you have decided on those thwee chaps. Have your own way, deah boy.”

“Thanks!” said Tom, “I breathe again!”

“Weally, Tom Mewwy——”

“But what's the jolly old advice?” asked Cardew, “Can't you see we're all yearning to hear from the man who knows?”

“I wegard you as an ass, Cardew,” said Arthur Augustus, “I believe I know a little about Soccah.”

“That's an under-statement,” said Cardew, shaking his head.

“I am glad you can see it, Cardew.”

“I mean, you should have said that you know a very little about Soccer,” explained Cardew, blandly.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, wats. If you are willin' to heah my opinion, Tom Mewwy——”

“Shoot!” said Tom.

“Well, probably you have noticed how well Cardew has

played up in games-pwactice lately. He was wemarkably good to-day. My advice to you is to put Cardew in to play Wookwood."

And having thus delivered his opinion, Arthur Augustus proceeded to insert his second leg into his trousers.

A dozen fellows stared at Arthur Augustus, and grinned. Tom Merry laughed. Ralph Cardew gave the swell of St. Jim's a very curious look. Certainly he had not guessed what was coming.

"Good advice, Tom Merry," remarked Levison.

"Cardew doesn't think so," said Blake, "Hasn't he just said that Gussy knows very little about Soccer?"

"I withdraw that erroneous remark," said Cardew, "Gussy knows a lot! He is a gold-mine of wisdom on the subject. I bow to his judgment."

"I shouldn't wonder if you're right, Gussy," said Tom Merry, "But it means leaving out another man——"

"My deah chap," said Arthur Augustus, "No sportsman would object to bein' left out to make way for a bettah man."

"Sure of that?" asked Tom.

"Yaas, wathah," answered Arthur Augustus, emphatically.

"You see, I should have to put Cardew in at outside left ——"

"That would scarcely be possible, Tom Mewwy, as I shall be playin' outside left," said Arthur Augustus, staring at him.

"You'll simply go into reverse," said Monty Lowther, "Instead of being outside left, you'll be left outside."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats! Of course I did not mean anythin' of that kind, Tom Mewwy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"O.K., Gussy," said Tom Merry, laughing, "We wouldn't leave you out of the front line for love or money. Thanks for your advice, all the same."

The Terrible Three left the changing-room together, and glanced at a fag who was loitering outside the doorway. Manners stopped, and Tom Merry and Lowther stopped also.

"What do you want, Reggie?" asked Manners.

Reggie gave him a rather sidelong look.

"Oh! Nothing!" he answered, "Only waiting to speak to a chap."

Manners nodded, and walked on with his friends. His face was thoughtful and a little troubled. Since the coupon sheet had been burned in No. 10 Study, Reggie had not said a word further on the subject—he had not, in fact, spoken to his brother again at all, until now. But Manners, who was a thoughtful and dutiful major, was troubled by the doubt that the idea might still be working in his young brother's mind.

"Oh! These minors!" sighed Monty Lowther.

"My people at home expect me to keep an eye on Reggie," said Manners, shortly, "And he's rather a young ass."

"Passed unanimously," agreed Monty, "But he's all right, old chap—you did his coupons in, and he wouldn't be likely to find another lot."

"He said he knew where to get them."

"Bunkum," said Lowther, "Where could he get them?"

"He wouldn't be likely to get a pound note, anyway," said Tom Merry, smiling.

"Money isn't sent with football coupons," answered Manners, "That's not legal. The little idiot wanted the money to pay up the following week if he lost."

"Oh!" said Tom. His face became very grave, and he forgot even Soccer for the moment, "Manners, old man—you don't think it possible that Reggie might push in with his coupons, without having the money to pay a loss—my dear chap, that would be swindling the pools people—"

"No, I don't think he would—I'm sure he wouldn't. But—he's a silly kid," muttered Manners, "I'd like to know where he thinks he can get pool coupons from—some chap may have them—"

"Hardly likely."

"Well, hold on a minute," said Manners, "He's waiting to speak to somebody in the changing-room—let's see who it is."

There are some bad eggs in the House—Cardew's fool enough to go in for that kind of thing, and he might be fool enough to——"

"Rot!" said Tom.

"Well, hang on and let's see who it is he's waiting for, anyway," grunted Manners.

"Oh, all right."

They had not long to wait. Levison, Clive, and Cardew came out together, but Reggie did not even look at them, and they passed on. A minute or two later, four fellows emerged—Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy. Then Reggie Manners made a move to intercept them.

"Oh!" said Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"O.K., old chap," he said.

"Pass on, friend, and all's well!" grinned Monty Lowther.

Manners' face cleared as he went on with his chums. Reggie, evidently, was waiting there to speak to some member of Study No. 6—and Study No. 6 were, like Cæsar's wife, above suspicion. Harry Manners dismissed his misgivings from his mind—though he would not, perhaps, have dismissed them so easily, had he known just why his minor was waiting there for Study No. 6.

CHAPTER XVII

WHOSE POUND NOTE?

"D'ARCY!"

"Yaas, deah boy."

"I—I want to speak to you."

"Fiah away!" said Arthur Augustus, encouragingly.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's manners were always polished and irreproachable. He was as polite to a fag in the Third as

to a prefect in the Sixth Form. Blake and Herries and Dig, who had no particular use for fags, walked on, and left him to it. That was rather a relief to Reggie, who wanted to speak to D'Arcy alone. He was happily persuaded that Arthur Augustus was "soft": but he did not labour under the delusion that Blake and Herries and Dig were.

"What is it, Weggie?" asked Arthur Augustus, as the fag hesitated to speak, "Anythin' I can do for you? Your bwothah is wathah a fwiend of mine, you know, and I should be vewy pleased."

"I'm—I'm in a bit of a fix, D'Arcy."

"Old Selby?" asked Arthur Augustus, sympathetically, "I know he is a bit of a Tartah! But if you've got bottled ovah an exahcise, Weggie, your major is the man—he can play my head off at Latin."

"It isn't that!" muttered Reggie, "I—I happen to want a pound very badly, and—and I went to your study to speak to you, and—and found a pound note on the floor—and here it is."

"Bai Jove!"

Reggie half-revealed the pound note, crumpled in his hand. He did not pass it to D'Arcy—perhaps he felt that Arthur Augustus would be more likely to let him keep it, if he retained possession of it. D'Arcy gazed at it in great surprise.

"You picked that up in my study?" he ejaculated.

"Yes! It was just under the edge of the carpet, and I happened to kick it—and there it was!"

"That is vewy wemarkable," said Arthur Augustus, "I don't see how I can have dwopped it about the study—I am vewy careful in such things, you know."

Reggie made no rejoinder to that. Arthur Augustus had been known to forget to pick up his change in the tuck-shop. He had been known to use a ten-shilling note as a book-mark in his Latin dictionary. He was known to be surprised every time he came to the end of his available cash, not quite knowing where it could have gone. That did not prevent Arthur Augustus from believing himself to be a very careful

fellow with money! Indeed he had no doubt that he was a shining example to his study-mates in that respect.

"Of course, a fellow might dwop a cuwwency note," admitted Arthur Augustus, upon reflection, "I keep stamps in my wallet, and I might have taken out a stamp and dwopped somethin', especially if those young asses Blake and Hewwies and Dig were larkin' in the study. Howevah, I will soon see."

"It must be yours, D'Arcy," urged Reggie, "Blake and Herries and Digby never have pound notes—hardly any fellows do."

"They have not had any lately, at any wate," said Arthur Augustus, "We have all been fwightfully hard up, until my governah sent me a couple of pound notes on Tuesday, and Blake got a ten-bobbah fwom his aunt. I will look in my wallet, Weggie."

The little Russian-leather wallet came out, and Arthur Augustus investigated it. It contained one pound note.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"That note you found cannot be mine, Weggie," he said, "I had only one, and heah it is, you see."

"But you had two," said Reggie.

"Yaas, wathah! But I changed one, because I wanted a ten-bobbah to tip Owwis for knockin' him ovah with a footah," explained Arthur Augustus, "I was goin' to lend the othah to a man in my form, but it turned out that he didn't want it aftah all. So I have that one left, and that note in your hand can't be mine."

"Well, it must be yours, as I picked it up in your study," urged Reggie, "Look here, will you lend it to me, as I found it for you? I—I'll let you have it back later—honour bright."

Arthur Augustus looked puzzled.

"I—I suppose I might have dwopped it some time ago, and nevah noticed," he said, slowly, "But I think I had bettah ask my fwiends about it—it must certainly belong to one of

us, as you found it in our study—but if it was dwopped some time back, it might belong to any man in the study.”

Reggie breathed hard with impatience. Arthur Augustus D’Arcy, in his opinion, was ass enough to lose a pound note without noticing the loss: but certainly Blake and Herries and Digby were not. If that note belonged to any man in Study No. 6 it belonged to Arthur Augustus.

“Look here——!” he muttered.

“Come along, and I will speak to them about it,” said Arthur Augustus, “If it is mine, I will certainly lend it to you, kid, as you found it. I am vewy much obliged to you for findin’ it. But I must make suah!”

Reggie, controlling his angry impatience, followed the swell of St. Jim’s, and he rejoined Blake and Co. in the quad. Three heads were shaken at once when he inquired whether any one of them had lost a pound note that term. And Herries remarked “Fathead!” to express his opinion of such a question.

“Weally, Hewwies, a chap might dwop a pound note without noticin’ it,” said Arthur Augustus.

“He might, if he was crackers!” agreed Herries.

“Weally, you ass——”

“You see, our paters ain’t noble lords, loaded up to the neck with oof!” said Blake, “I’ve had only one pound note this term, and you can bank on it that I didn’t jolly well scatter it about the floor of the study.”

“And I haven’t had even one,” remarked Dig, “and if I had, I shouldn’t strew it about to slip under the study carpet.”

“Look here, if you’ve got an extra pound note, we can stand a spread in the study,” said Herries.

“I am lendin’ it to Weggie, Hewwies, as he found it, if it is mine,” said Arthur Augustus, “If you are suah it is not yours, you fellows——”

“Ass!” replied Blake, Herries, and Digby in chorus: which apparently meant that they were quite sure.

“I wegard that expwession as quite uncalled-for,” said Arthur Augustus, “A chap is bound to be vewy careful in

money mattahs. It would be vewy awkward to lend a chap a pound note and discovah aftahwards that it belonged to somebody else. Howevah, if it does not belong to you fellows, it must belong to me, so that is all wight."

"You'll lend it to me?" breathed Reggie, his voice trembling with eagerness.

"Yaas, wathah—didn't I say I would?"

"Thanks, D'Arcy!" muttered Reggie: and he thrust his hand, with the crumpled note in it, into his pocket, and hurried away.

"Well," said Blake, "Of all the howling idiots, lending a quid at a time to an inky little beast in a fag form——."

"He found it, Blake——."

"What does the kid want a whole pound for?" demanded Blake.

"I nevah asked him, deah boy. Pwobably he has wun up an account at the shop, and Mrs. Taggles may be dunnin' him for it. He seemed wathah wowwied, I thought. It is vewy odd that I cannot wemembah bein' a pound short—but of course, it may have been dwopped two or three weeks ago, and a fellow wouldn't wemembah. I might nevah have found it, so why shouldn't I lend it to Weggie? You fellows comin' up to tea?"

"Might as well look round the study, and see whether Gussy has been chucking any more currency notes about!" suggested Herries, sarcastically, as the chums of the Fourth went into the House.

"I did not chuck it about, Hewwies," said Arthur Augustus, mildly, "It must have dwopped when I was takin' somethin' fwom my wallet——."

"Gussy all over," said Blake, "We'll jolly well look—— he may have been dropping currency notes regularly every day since the term started——."

"Weally, Blake, you ass——."

"Regular gold-mine, perhaps, in our study," chuckled Dig.

"Wubbish!"

"We'll jolly well look!" said Blake, "If you dropped one,

you might have dropped another—you know what a fathead you are! I've told you often enough."

"Wats!"

In Study No. 6 Blake shifted the study table, and threw the square of carpet aside. It was not, perhaps, probable that there was treasure-trove in the study: still, as one currency note had been found under the carpet, it seemed worth while to look.

Nothing, however, was revealed, excepting a somewhat dusty floor. If D'Arcy had dropped one note, evidently he had not dropped another. Blake put his foot on a short length of floor-board that creaked as he trod on it.

"I've been going to put a nail in that board for dog's ages," he remarked, "May as well, now that the carpet's up." And Blake pulled his tool-box out of the study cupboard, and sorted out hammer and nails.

For the next few minutes there was hammering and banging in Study No. 6. Five or six nails were well and truly driven home, through the board to the joist underneath.

Blake trod on it again to test it. There was not the ghost of a creak. That short section of board was now as firm and solid as the rest of the floor in Study No. 6.

"That's that!" remarked Blake.

And the carpet was restored to its place, and the food-stuffs sorted out, and Study No. 6 sat down to tea.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RIGHT THING!

"CALL yourself a pal!" said Wally D'Arcy of the Third, in tones of the deepest scorn.

Reggie Manners flushed.

"Not pally, I must say!" remarked Frank Levison.

"Well, look here——!" muttered Reggie.

"Oh, walk off with your pound note, if you like," said D'Arcy minor, "Be a stingy little swob. Who cares?"

"I ain't a stingy swob!" protested Reggie, indignantly, "But you know jolly well what I got this pound note from your major for."

"Yes——to chuck away!" jeered Wally.

"Might as well chuck it in the fire!" suggested Levison minor, "You'll get nineteen winners on a pool coupon by the time you're nineteen centuries old—not before."

"I believe I've got them right——."

"Rot!" said the other two fags together.

Reggie Manners looked worried. He had his coupon sheet spread out on a locker, in the locker-room, and he was satisfied with his selection of teams for the Nimble Nineteen in Snooper's Pools. His two friends had not the slightest faith in Reggie's selections. Neither did they think it quite the thing for Reggie to "go in" for football pools at all. They had been quite astounded when they learned that Reggie had, after all, secured the required pound from D'Arcy major. But their immediate idea was a practical one—that that wind-fall should be expended on something much more tangible and enjoyable than Snooper's Pools. That depended upon whether Reggie did what they thought the right thing!

"You got it from my major," said Wally, in an aggrieved tone, "If I'd known that he was idiot enough to drop currency notes about his study, I'd have found it for him——."

"I didn't know," snapped Reggie, "I just saw it when I kicked the carpet——."

"And so you stuck him for it, and he was soft enough to let you have it," said Wally, "and now you've got it, you're too jolly mean and stingy to spend it on a spread, though I've told you that Dame Taggles has got in lovely fresh pies, and meringues, too——."

"I want it——."

"I had five bob this morning," said Wally, "You saw my major hand it over. Did I sew it up in my trousers pocket?"

"I ain't sewing it up in my trousers pocket. I want it for the pools——."

"Did I stand you and Frank, and young Hobbs, and Joe Frayne jam-tarts at the shop, or didn't I?" demanded Wally.

"I know you did! But——."

"And when young Levison had half-a-crown yesterday, did we have tea on it in this very room, or didn't we?"

"I know we did. But——"

"And now you've got a whole pound!" said Wally, "You got it for nothing, from my own major. And you're hoarding it."

"I ain't hoarding it," howled Reggie. "I tell you, with this pound, I may be getting pounds and pounds——"

"Rats and rats and rats!" jeered Wally. "Why, if they found out that you are a schoolboy, they wouldn't pay the prize even if you did win—it's against their rules, and they tell you so plainly on that very paper you've got."

"They won't find it out."

"And how do you know the newsagent will take in letters for you, even if you have the nerve to ask?"

"I know they do for Orris. I saw him there once, and ——"

"And that put it into your head, I suppose," said Wally, "Well, Orris is a house-porter, not a schoolboy—he can do as he likes. You can't! Why, if Selby spotted this, he'd take your skin off."

"I ain't going to let Selby spot it."

"Not when you're rolling about St. Jim's with your pockets stuffed with oof?" said Wally, sarcastically, "Why, you'll be dropping currency notes about the passages, just like my major does about his study."

"Oh, don't be a goat!"

"Well, don't you be a stingy swob!" retorted Wally.

Reggie Manners almost wriggled with discomfort. He was by no means insensible to the reproaches of his comrades. Levison minor's half-crown, and Wally's two half-crowns, had been expended royally, and all three had shared in the

good things. Gladly would Reggie have played up, in his turn, as his friends justly expected him to do, now that he was in such ample and unexpected funds. But Snooper's Pools stood like a lion in the path.

"Look here," he said, at last, "I ain't stingy——."

"What do you call it, then?" jeered Wally.

"I——I want to take twenty chances at a bob each. I've told you. Well, if I lose, I——I must have the money to pay up, see?"

"No 'if' about that!" said Wally, "You'll lose."

"Dead cert!" agreed Levison minor, with a nod, "Bank on that, Reggie! You'll lose all right!"

"Well, if I do, I shall have to pay," urged Reggie, "I'd be scared to death if I lost and hadn't the money to pay."

"Leave the rotten thing alone!" suggested Wally, "It's gambling, just like your major told you. Leave it alone."

"Look here, I——I——I'll take the twenty chances at a tanner each, instead of a bob!" said Manners minor, "That will make ten shillings. And you'll come down to Rylcombe with me to-morrow, and see if they will fix up the address."

"Better keep clear of the whole thing," said Wally.

"Well, I won't!" snapped Reggie, "I'm going in for it. Why shouldn't I? But I'll make it ten bob, and we'll blow the other ten bob on a spread. What about that?"

Perhaps Reggie himself was not insensible to the attractions of the "lovely pies" and the meringues at Dame Taggles' shop. Anyhow, he made his offer, upon which Wally of the Third condescended to close.

"Well, you're a mug to chuck away ten bob," he said, "But if you do the decent thing with the other ten, O.K. Come on, you men."

Reggie Manners folded up his new coupon sheet and put it in his pocket, and the three "men" left the locker-room. They walked across to the school shop, several other fags joining them en route: and the pound note passed across Mrs. Taggles' counter. Wally of the Third, expert in such

matters, planned purchases to the exact value of ten shillings, and Reggie received a ten-shilling note in change.

After which, the three minors, in company with Hobbs and Frayne and Pigott and one or two more "men" of the Third Form, sat down round a little table, and forgetting all about tea in hall, proceeded to enjoy life. They did not think of noticing that Mrs. Taggles put the pound note aside, after scribbling on the back, in pencil, the name "Manners mi." Nobody at St. Jim's knew that all pound notes passed at the school shop were treated in a similar manner, to be examined later by Mr. Railton.

It was quite a glorious spread. Even in times of dearth, quite a lot of edibles could be obtained for the sum of ten shillings, chiefly of a sticky nature. Reggie Manners was quite popular in the somewhat sticky circle round the table, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that D'Arcy minor, whose opinion carried great weight in the Third Form at St. Jim's, no longer regarded him as a stingy swob! Quite a happy party finished that spread in the tuck-shop, to the last crumb and the last plum: and when it was over, Reggie Manners walked between his two comrades, arm-in-arm, back to the House, on the friendliest footing imaginable. A rift in the lute had threatened: but that handsome spread in the tuck-shop had healed the breach: and all was calm and bright!

CHAPTER XIX

FIGGINS DARES TO BE A DANIEL!

"THAT ass——!" said George Figgins, morosely.

"Gussy all over!" sighed Kerr.

"We'll get it back at the end of the term;" said Fatty Wynn.

“The end of the term isn’t now!” grunted Figgins.

Which was undeniable.

Figgins and Co. at tea in their study in the New House, were discussing that little matter of the lost ball. That footer had gone from their gaze like a beautiful dream, as it were, on Monday—now it was Thursday, but the lapse of days had not caused them to forget it. It was, so to speak, lost to sight but to memory dear!

As Arthur Augustus D’Arcy had sapiently remarked to his friends, sports gear was both expensive and hard to come by. Figgins wanted his footer. It was rather an old footer, but if not quite up to the mark for matches, it served its purpose excellently in a punt-about or a pick-up. And that football was confiscated by a house-master, because that ass, D’Arcy, had inadvertently kicked it through the house-master’s window.

Figgins and Co. did not blame Mr. Railton for confiscating it. They could have expected no less, in the circumstances: and they were well aware that their own house-master, Ratcliff, would have handed out whoppings as well. The blame lay on the ineffable Gussy.

“You see, we want our footer,” went on Figgins, “That ass—that chump—that footling fathead—D’Arcy, had to kick it in at a beak’s window. The sort of thing he would do!”

Kerr grinned.

“He tried to get it back for us, from what we hear,” he remarked, “The howling ass raided his House beak’s study for it in the middle of the night—only it wasn’t there!”

“It wouldn’t be where he expected to find it, of course,” said Figgins, “If there was a wrong place to look into, he would look into it. Still, though we want that footer, I’m rather glad that chump never bagged it back from Railton’s study—his beak would have taken his skin off.”

“Some fellows say he never went down to Railton’s study after that footer,” said Fatty Wynn, “That was the night Railton’s pound notes went, you know.”

Snort, from Figgins.

"Let me hear any fellow saying that D'Arcy went after Railton's pound notes," he exclaimed, "I'll alter his features for him."

"Dear old Gussy!" said Kerr, "He does ask for it! Nobody would know he went down that night, if he hadn't gone and told Railton about the open window."

"He had to tell him that, of course," said Figgins, "Old Skeat might have fancied it was a man in the House did it, if he hadn't been told about that open window. That shows that some tramp got in."

"Does it?" murmured Kerr.

"Eh?" Figgins stared at him, "Of course it does! A man inside a house goes into a room by the door, not by the window."

"He might open the window, and leave it open, to make it look as if somebody came in from outside," said Kerr, quietly, "That would be the first thing he would think of, Figgy."

"Oh!" ejaculated Figgins. He whistled, "I never thought of it, Kerr."

"Sneak-thieves think of things you wouldn't think of, old chap. Of course, it may have been a tramp. But—" Kerr shook his head, "That open window isn't really evidence one way or the other. It may have been opened by a man from outside to get in, or left open by a man inside to look like it."

George Figgins wrinkled his brows in thought. Figgy was much better at football than at thinking. But he nodded at last.

"By gum!" he said, "I—I suppose you're right, Kerr. Somebody inside the School House all the time, very likely. I say, that would be pretty rotten. I say, old Skeat hasn't been here again, so far as I know. I wonder what he thinks."

"I wonder!" said Kerr.

"But about the footer——." Figgins came back to the matter uppermost in his mind, "We want that footer, Kerr."

"It's gone, old scout."

"I know that! But one good turn deserves another," said Figgins, "We've lost our footer, through a School House

fathead kicking it into a beak's study. Well, they've got an old footer in Study No. 6. It belongs to D'Arcy, I believe—anyhow it belongs to his study. We bag that ball and keep it till the end of the term, in exchange for ours—that's fair."

"Fair enough," said Kerr, laughing, "But I can't quite see Blake and his pals letting us do it."

"I'm not thinking of asking Study No. 6 to hand it over to us on a plate," answered Figgins, "I'm thinking of bagging it. D'Arcy bagged ours, and it's gone—well, we bag his, and we'll let him have it back when Railton lets us have ours back. That's fair play. So all we've got to do is to bag it."

"That's all!" assented Kerr, with faint sarcasm, "But it won't be easy."

"Not so easy as rushing fellows in the quad—but we're going to do it, and I know how!" declared Figgins. "I'm going over after tea to speak to Tom Merry about the football. You know jolly well that Redfern, of our House, ought to be in the team to meet Rookwood——"

"We all know that," said Kerr, laughing, "But Tom Merry's junior skipper, and he doesn't."

"Well, I'm going to put it to him. But the point is this," said Figgins, with deep astuteness. "After speaking to that Shell fathead about the Rookwood game, I shall be on the spot, see? Well, I find a chance of dodging into Study No. 6—with luck, you know—when nobody's there——"

"You'll need some luck!" agreed Kerr.

"But I say." David Llewellyn Wynn stared at Figgins, "I say, fifty fellows will see you walking off with a footer under your arm. They'll scrag you."

"You don't get me, old man. I haven't finished yet. I don't walk off with the footer under my arm. I chuck it out of the study window."

"Oh!" said Fatty Wynn.

"You fellows are hanging about under that study window," went on Figgins, "and the minute the ball drops, you dribble it off to this House. See?"

"And what happens to you afterwards—stuck in a School

House study, chucking School House footers out of the window?" asked Kerr.

"Well, if I'm not spotted at it, I just walk out. If I'm spotted, I shall get the time of my life, I expect. But the footer will be ours, and that's what matters. What?" said Figgins, triumphantly.

"Your name isn't Daniel, is it?" said Kerr.

"Eh! What! My name's George, as you jolly well know. What do you mean?"

"It was Daniel who walked into the lion's den, not George."

"Oh, don't be a funny ass," said Figgins, "I don't care if I get ragged, so long as we bag a School House footer in exchange for ours. That's what matters. Looks a sound scheme, to me!"

"But——!" said Kerr, uneasily.

"Oh, never mind buts," said Figgins, "Look here, Kerr, I know you're a Scotchman, but you haven't got all the brains in this study. I've thought this out."

"O.K." said Kerr. Kerr of the Fourth had about twenty times Figgy's intellectual powers: but he was too loyal a chum to let Figgy know. "If you've thought it out, old chap, let's try it on."

"Come on, then," said Figgins, briskly.

And tea being finished, the chums of the New House left their study, and walked out of the House. Figgins had an expression of cheery confidence on his rugged face—which was hardly shared by his comrades. Kerr and Wynn were ready to back him up, but they were feeling considerably dubious about the soundness of the scheme. Figgins dared to be a Daniel—but they hardly expected him to have Daniel's good fortune.

George Figgins walked into the School House as bold as brass. Kerr and Wynn strolled with a very casual air under the study windows.

There they waited and watched for the raided footer to drop from the window of Study No. 6—ready to scud off to

the New House with it—if it dropped. That depended on Figgy's luck within.

Figgins rather felt that he was in luck when, on the staircase, he met Blake and Co. coming down after tea. That, of course, indicated that Study No. 6 was tenantless.

"Hallo! New House tick!" exclaimed Blake, "What are you doing on the respectable side of the quad, Figgins?"

"Yaas, wathah! Woll him down!" suggested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Hear, hear!" said Herries and Dig.

"Tom Merry in his study?" asked Figgins, diplomatically.

"Oh, if you've come over about the footer—!" said Blake.

"Certainly I've come over about the footer," said Figgins, with an inward chuckle. Blake was alluding to the game—Figgins was alluding to the ball—but he did not feel called upon to elucidate that detail.

"You can cut on, then," said Blake, graciously. And Figgins went on and up cheerily to the study landing, and crossed it.

"By gum!" breathed Figgins, looking about him on the landing.

He was in luck, there was no doubt about that. Not a single fellow was on the landing, or in sight in the Fourth-form passage. The coast was absolutely clear.

Figgins did not head for Tom Merry's study in the Shell. This was a chance not to be lost. Breathlessly, he cut into the Fourth-form passage, and dashed into Study No. 6. In great glee, he rooted about that celebrated study in search of the footer which was to replace his own—and for which his comrades were waiting under the study window.

CHAPTER XX

CAUGHT IN THE ACT!

MONTY LOWTHER looked in at the doorway of No. 10 Study in the Shell, and grinned at Tom Merry and Manners.

"They've gone down," he said.

"All four of them?" asked Manners.

"All the giddy quartette! Come on."

"Well, I was going to speak to Talbot about the football——!" began Tom Merry.

"Never mind the football for once, you image! You can speak to Talbot any time!" yapped Monty, "We can't barge into Study No. 6 any time——now's the chance. I watched them go across the study landing. Come on, I tell you."

"Oh, all right!" said Tom Merry.

And Manners and Tom Merry followed Lowther down the passage. Monty Lowther was grinning, and his friends were mildly interested. Monty was as keen on japing, as Manners on photography, and Tom on Soccer: and the three bore with one another's dissimilar tastes with friendly tolerance. Tom would rather have talked football with Talbot, and Manners would rather have gone down to the dark room: but they played up like good chums, and followed Monty, to lend a hand in his contemplated jest on Study No. 6. The coast was clear, as Monty had watched for Blake and Co. to go down after tea: and he was not aware that Figgins of the New House had happened while he was cutting back to No. 10 to call his friends.

"No end of a lark on dear old Gussy!" chirruped Monty, "He still believes that somebody was in his study this morn-

ing, locking him out. He will think it's the same chap again, when he finds all his hats piled up on the study table, and marked "All One Price, Ninepence!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Gussy will go off at the deep end, if his precious hats are messed about," he said, "He's very particular about his hats."

"That's all right—he will put it down to the jolly old mystery-man who locks him out of his study," chuckled Monty, "We'll drop in again to-morrow and sort out his neckties. He can put it all down to the mystery man."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The "Terrible Three" turned into the Fourth-form passage. Monty Lowther had planned a whole series of japes on the unsuspecting Gussy, all of which he was to put down to the mysterious intruder who had locked him out of his study. He was merely going to begin with the hats.

The three arrived at the door of Study No. 6, and Monty Lowther threw it open.

As he had watched Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, go down after tea, he naturally expected to find the study vacant.

But it was not, as it happened, vacant.

A rather lean and lengthy figure was bending at the open study cupboard, in the very act of extracting an old football from the lower division thereof. The Shell fellows had, for the moment, only a back view of him: but they knew that it was Figgins of the New House, and they stared at him, blankly.

"What the thump——!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

Figgins bounded.

"Oh!" he gasped, as he stared round at the unexpected arrivals. He clutched the footer under his arm.

Another minute, and all would have been well. Figgins had had to root about for a few minutes to find that ball. He had found it, in the bottom of the study cupboard. In another minute he would have tossed it out of the window



Figgins bounded. "Oh," he gasped, as he stared round at the unexpected arrivals. He clutched the footer under his arm.

to Kerr and Wynn waiting below, and scudded. But—owing to Montague Lowther's japing proclivities—that minute was not granted him.

"New House tick!" exclaimed Lowther.

"A House raid, by gum!" exclaimed Tom Merry, "Collar him!"

Figgins made a desperate bound to the window.

Had it been open, the footer, at least, would have been captured, whatever had happened to Figgins afterwards—Figgy would have tossed it out, and then taken what was coming to him. But the window was not open.

Figgins grabbed at it in haste. But he had no time—the School-House trio were on him in a twinkling. Japing Gussy was quite forgotten at the sight of a New House man raiding a School House study! Tom Merry and Lowther and Manners collared George Figgins, all at once, and swung him back from the window. The footer rolled on the study floor, as Figgins struggled in the grasp of the Terrible Three.

"Got him!" chuckled Lowther.

"You School House swobs!" roared Figgins, "I—I—I'll yaroooh!"

Bump!

Figgins sat on the floor of Study No. 6, and roared.

"Bagging a footer, by gum!" said Manners, "He was going to chuck it out of the window——"

"Bet you his pals are waiting for it," grinned Lowther, "Keep him safe while I look."

"We've got him," chuckled Tom.

Figgins heaved and rocked. But they had him. Figgy was a sinewy fellow—but two pairs of hands were one pair too many for Figgy. Tom Merry had hold of one arm, Manners of the other, and they had the New House junior, hard and fast. Leaving him in their hands, Monty Lowther picked up the inkpot from the study table, stepped to the window, opened it, and looked out. He grinned down at the upturned faces of Kerr and Wynn of the New House.

They stared up at him in dismay.

They were expecting George Figgins at that window—but it was Monty Lowther who happened! Evidently, something had gone wrong with Figgy's sound scheme. He had dared to be a Daniel: but only too clearly Daniel's luck had not come his way.

"Waiting for Figgy to chuck something out?" called out Lowther.

Kerr and Wynn did not reply in words: but they gave him expressive looks.

"Figgy's engaged at the moment," continued Lowther, "But I'm going to chuck something out instead! Catch!

His hand swept out over the window-sill, with the inkpot in it—inverted. There was a sudden splutter from the two New House juniors below, as a shower of ink splattered over their upturned faces.

"Oh!" gasped Kerr.

"Oooooogh!" spluttered Fatty Wynn.

They jumped away hurriedly, dabbing inky faces.

"Don't go!" called out Lowther, "Hold on a minute, old pippins, while I get some more ink!"

Kerr and Wynn did not hold on while Lowther got some more ink! They appeared to have had all they wanted. Like the guests in Macbeth, they stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once.

Lowther turned back into the study, chuckling.

"Your pals will want a wash, Figgy," he said, as he replaced the inkpot on the table, "Hard luck—I believe you never wash in the New House. Isn't that so?"

"You School-House fathead, I'll mop up the study with you, if these swobs will let go!" roared Figgins.

"We're not letting go just yet," said Tom Merry, cheerfully, "You're a prisoner of war, Figgy. You can't raid the School House—."

"I jolly well can, and I jolly well will, and I'll jolly well have that footer," hooted Figgins, "and I'll jolly well—oooooch!" Figgins spluttered, "Keep that gum away, Lowther, you funny idiot—groooooogh!"

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Figgins struggled frantically. Kerr and Wynn had had Study No. 6's supply of ink, and now George Figgins was getting the gum. So mighty were Figgy's struggles, that he rocked across the study in the grasp of Manners and Tom Merry, and Monty put down the gum bottle and came to the aid of his comrades. But Figgy gave even the three of them plenty to do for some minutes. They crashed into the study table and sent it sliding—two or three chairs went over—books were scattered far and wide: and the uproar echoed far beyond the study. A crowd of fellows gathered at the door to stare in. Baggy Trimble was the first to arrive, then Cardew and Clive and Levison, then Wildrake and Tompkins, and then a dozen more fellows, among them Blake and Co.

“Bai Jove! What's this feahful wow, you fellows?” exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, “Is that Figgins in our study?”

“New House raid!” gasped Tom Merry, “Chuck it, Figgy—we've got you.”

“Urrrrrrgh!” gurgled Figgins, quite winded. He sagged in the grasp of the Terrible Three, dishevelled and breathless. “Urrrrrrgh.”

“Why, you New House smudge,” exclaimed Jack Blake, indignantly, “You told us you'd come over about the footer.”

“So I did!” gasped Figgins, “There's the footer! I'd have had it, if these mouldy Shell-fish hadn't butted in.”

“Aftah our old footah!” exclaimed Arthur Augustus, “Bai Jove! Wag him, deah boys—wag him bald-headed.”

“Frog's march!” said Blake.

“Look here——!” gasped Figgins.

“That's wight—give him the fwog's march, as a warnin' to New House wottahs not to barge into a wespectable House!”

“Hear, hear!”

The hapless Figgins was almost at his last gasp. But he

essayed to struggle again, as he was seized by many hands and swept off his feet. It booted not—he went out of Study No. 6 with his arms and legs flying in the midst of a laughing crowd, and was frog's-marched along the passage to the landing and across the landing to the stairs.

“Woll him down!” yelled Arthur Augustus.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

George Figgins went rolling. He hardly knew how he got out of the School House, and limped away to the safer side of the quad. There two juniors with ink-sprinkled faces met him: and the three looked at one another, in expressive silence.

“Sound scheme!” remarked Kerr, at last.

“I don't think!” said Fatty Wynn.

“Urrrrrrrh!” said Figgins. He had no breath at present to say more.

CHAPTER XXI

NUMBER 7 60 A 777989001

ORRIS, the house-porter, tapped at the door of the Third-Form room, and opened it. Mr. Selby, master of the Third, glanced round, with a frown. Selby did not like interruptions of lessons: in which his taste differed very considerably from that of his Form. It was first school on Friday morning, and the Third had only just started. They were quite willing to leave off, however, even if only for a few minutes. All the inhabitants of the Third form-room, with the solitary exception of Mr. Selby, welcomed the appearance of Orris, while wondering what he wanted.

“If you please, sir,” said Orris, as he inserted his pimply countenance into the form-room.”

“Well?” rapped Mr. Selby.

“Mr. Railton, sir, would like to see Master Manners in his study.”

Grunt, from Mr. Selby. It was very unusual for a boy to be called away from class, and Mr. Selby did not like it. However, a summons from the house-master settled that point, whether Mr. Selby liked it or not, and he glanced at Manners minor.

“You——,” he began. Then he stopped, staring at Reggie.

Reggie’s face had gone white.

Every fag in the form wondered why Railton wanted to see Reggie Manners. But Reggie did not wonder—he dreaded that he knew. It was all very well for Manners, mi, to regard himself as rather a sportsman for dabbling in football pools. He was only too well aware that the eye of authority looked on such matters in a very different light. His instant fear was that the School House master had somehow got wind of Snooper’s Pools, and Reggie’s intended participation therein.

Mr. Selby’s frown deepened. The fag’s scared face told only too plainly that he had something on his conscience.

“You will go to Mr. Railton’s study at once, Manners mi!” snapped Mr. Selby.

“Yes, sir!” gasped Reggie.

His knees knocked together as he rose to leave his form. Wally D’Arcy gave Levison minor a look. Both of them guessed, like Reggie, that it was a matter of Snooper’s Pools. It had come out—and they were glad to remember that they had given Reggie good advice on that subject, though he had disregarded it. It was no comfort to Reggie to remember that disregarded advice, as he almost tottered to the door and went out.

The door closed on him:

In the corridor, Orris looked at the wretched fag, curiously. Reggie caught him by the sleeve.

“Look here, Orris, do you know why Railton wants to see me?” he muttered.

"No, sir," answered Orris.

"Didn't he say anything?"

"Only to fetch you to his study, sir."

"Nothing about—about—about football pools!" faltered Reggie.

Orris stared at him.

"Not a word, sir. You don't go in for that, sir, surely, a little boy like you."

Reggie was feeling too scared and worried to resent being called a little boy. It was quite an insult for a Third-Form "man" to be called a little boy. But he hardly noticed it, in his present agitation.

"I—I haven't yet," he stammered, "I was going to—but I haven't fixed up an address yet, see?"

"All the better for you, sir," said Orris, drily. "I don't see how you could get the coupons, either. If you know anyone who has football coupons, you'd better leave him alone, sir."

Then, as he read something in the fag's scared face, Orris started, and a very unpleasant look came over his own.

"You don't mean——!" he began.

Reggie mumbled.

"You had a lot of spare coupons—I thought you wouldn't mind if I had one sheet of them—you had lots——"

Orris set his lips.

"If you'd asked me, I should have told you no, at once," he snapped.

"I—I know! But——"

"If that's what your house-master wants to see you about, don't let him think I gave it to you," snarled Orris.

"I—I wouldn't, of course. But—but do you think it's that?" mumbled Reggie. "He didn't say anything——?"

"No." Orris shook his head, "I don't think it's that. He had a pound note on his table, and I know that Mrs. Taggles has been speaking to him. I think it must be something to do with spending money at the tuck-shop, sir."

"Oh!" Reggie brightened up at once, "Oh! That's all

right! We don't often have pound notes, of course. But that's all right—D'Arcy of the Fourth lent me that pound note—if it's only that."

Reggie, greatly relieved in his mind, trotted away to his house-master's study—leaving Orris somewhat relieved, too. He was not to blame, perhaps, for the young rascal having taken a sheet of football coupons from his table: but he certainly did not want his speculations in getting-rich-quick to come to Mr. Railton's knowledge.

Manners minor had almost recovered his usual aplomb, by the time he tapped at the door of Mr. Railton's study.

"Come in!"

Reggie entered.

Mr. Railton was seated at his desk. A pound note lay on the desk before him, and in his hand was a list of numbers.

One of those numbers, T 60 A 777989001, was ticked with a pencil. It was the same number that was printed on the pound note.

The house-master's face was grave, very grave, as Reggie noted with a new qualm. He turned towards the fag, and scanned him keenly.

"I have sent for you, Manners minor, to ask you about a pound note you changed at the school shop yesterday," said Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir," mumbled Reggie. It was not football pools after all—that was clear now. His sporting proclivities had not come to light. It was only that pound note which D'Arcy had lent him. Railton was going to make a fuss about a small boy in the Third spending so much money. That was the sort of thing a fussy beak might make a fuss about, Reggie thought scornfully. And that was all, so far as Reggie could see.

"You went to the school shop with some friends, after class yesterday, and changed a pound note with Mrs. Taggles," said the house-master.

"Yes, sir! I—I don't often have a pound note, sir," said

Reggie, defensively. "And—and I spent only half of it, sir. I had ten shillings change."

"Quite so," said Mr. Railton, "What I desire to know is, where you obtained the pound note."

Reggie stared at him. So it wasn't a fuss about a fag spending too much money, after all. Railton wanted to know the source of his unusual wealth—why, Reggie could not fathom.

He shifted uneasily. Railton ought to have taken it for granted that it was a tip from some affectionate relative.

His hesitation did not escape Mr. Railton. The house-master's face became sterner.

"Answer my question at once, Manners minor!" he rapped, "Tell me immediately how and where you obtained the pound note."

"A man in the Fourth lent it to me, sir," faltered Reggie.

Mr. Railton raised his eyebrows.

"That is a very strange statement, Manners minor. It must be unusual—very unusual indeed—for one boy to lend another so much as a pound at a time—and especially a boy in another form.

"Oh, yes, sir! But—but——," stammered Reggie. He was in a difficulty. Certainly he could not explain to Mr. Railton that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, was "soft," and that almost anybody could stick him for almost anything. That was Reggie's own valuable opinion: but it was not the sort of thing to be passed on to a "beak."

"But what?"

"I—I—I mean——."

"Manners minor, if your statement is true, give me at once the name of the boy in the Fourth Form who lent you a pound note."

"It's true, sir," gasped Reggie, "He—he really lent it to me, sir. I—I know it was unusual—but—but as I found it——."

"You found it?"

"I—I mean, he'd dropped it about his study, sir, and I

found it, and very likely he never would have, so that was why he lent it to me, sir."

"His name!" rapped Mr. Railton.

"D'Arcy, sir."

"D'Arcy!" Mr. Railton started, almost as if he had received a blow, "D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form! Manners minor, are you telling me that D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, lent you this pound note, which you changed in the school shop yesterday?"

"Yes, sir," gasped Reggie, quite scared. He could see that there was something awfully serious in connection with that pound note, though he could not begin to imagine what it was. "I—I asked him, and—and he lent it to me."

"You say you had picked it up in his study—No. 6 in the Fourth Form?"

"Yes, sir—he had dropped it and didn't remember——."

"D'Arcy will bear out your statement, I presume?"

"Of course, sir, if you ask him. I—I don't want to get D'Arcy into a row, sir," gasped Reggie, "It was decent of him to lend it to me, as I was—was hard up, sir. I—I never thought there was any harm——."

"Very well," said Mr. Railton, "You may now return to your form-room, Manners minor."

Reggie Manners went out of the study in a bewildered state. There was nothing about football pools—that was all right. Nothing about spending too much at the tuck-shop—that was all right too. Only something about that pound note that D'Arcy had lent him, which was quite bewildering. What on earth was the matter with the pound note? Reggie went back to his form-room in quite a maze.

Mr. Railton, left alone in his study, sat for some minutes in deep and painful thought. He picked up the pound note, turned it over, and glanced at the back. It bore the pencilled name "Manners mi." There was no mistake about that. Dame Taggles had instructions to mark the name of every customer at her shop who passed in a pound note, on the back of the note. This was the first time there had been

a "catch,"—the first time one of the purloined currency notes had been traced to the school shop. Twenty had been taken from Mr. Railton's study on Monday night: and on Thursday afternoon, one of them had been paid over Mrs. Taggles' counter—by Manners minor, of the Third Form. It was proof positive that the pilferer was an inmate of the school, as Inspector Skeat had never doubted. But that the pilferer could be a little fag seemed almost impossible—and questioning the fag had brought to light the name of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—the junior had admitted that he had gone down secretly to his house-master's study on the night of the robbery.

What it looked like—what it assuredly would have looked like to Inspector Skeat—Mr. Railton realised only too clearly. His face was dark and troubled as he thought it over.

At length, he touched the bell for Orris; and despatched the house-porter to the Fourth-form room, to summon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to the study.

CHAPTER XXII

A SURPRISE FOR ARTHUR AUGUSTUS

"O Lux Dardanae, spes O fidissima Teucwum——."

"Teucrum!" said Mr. Lathom.

"Yaas, sir—I said Teucwum!" said Arthur Augustus, innocently.

Whereat the Fourth Form smiled. Arthur Augustus's delightful accent sometimes detracted from the majestic gravity of Virgil's deathless verse, in the Fourth Form room.

"Construe!" said Mr. Lathom, patiently.

Arthur Augustus paused. He had not, perhaps, given so much attention to prep, the evening before, in Study No. 6,

as he ought to have done. Anyhow the translation of that simple word "lux" did not linger in his aristocratic memory.

"O——," he began, and paused again.

"Luck!" whispered Cardew.

Some of the juniors who caught that whisper grinned while others gave Cardew expressive looks. Arthur Augustus's noble leg was easy to pull: and he would never have expected leg-pulling when he was up for con under the eye of his form-master. Glad of the tip, D'Arcy rattled on cheerfully.

"O luck of Dardania——."

He got no further than that. Mr. Lathom's hand went up to stop him. Lathom was a good-tempered and patient little gentleman; but there was a limit.

"D'Arcy! You have not prepared this lesson!" he rapped, severely, "How dare you make a mistake of which a Third-Form boy would be ashamed?"

"Oh, cwumbs!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "I—I—I mean, haven't I got it wight, sir?"

"Ow!" ejaculated Cardew, suddenly, as Jack Blake hacked him under the desk. Blake had no use for leg-pulling in class, where his noble chum was concerned.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, "Cardew! How dare you interrupt the lesson with ridiculous noises? Take fifty lines."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Cardew.

"D'Arcy! If you do not know that 'lux' means 'light'——."

"Bai Jove! So it does! I wemembah now——."

"This will not do, D'Arcy. After class you will write out——."

Tap!

The form-room door opened, and a pimply face looked in.

"If you please, sir——!" said Orris.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Lathom, testily.

"Mr. Railton would like to see Master D'Arcy, in his study, sir."

Arthur Augustus did not feel like Reggie Manners, as he heard that summons. It had come rather luckily for him, for

his form-master had evidently been going to give him an imposition when he was interrupted. Arthur Augustus was quite glad of it.

"Oh! Very well! D'Arcy, you may leave the form-room, and go to your house-master's study."

"Yaas, sir."

And Arthur Augustus left the form-room with alacrity, and smiled as the door closed behind him.

"That was wathah luck, Owwis," he remarked, "You couldn't have butted in at a bettah time. Lathom was just goin' to give me an impot, Owwis. A wottah pulled my leg and I handed out a howlah in con. What does Wailton want, Owwis?"

"He did not tell me, sir," said Orris.

"Pwobably not, Owwis, but pewwaps you have some ideah."

"None at all, sir."

"Did he look shirtay?"

"He looked very grave, sir."

"Not waxy?"

"Not that I noticed, sir."

"Oh, vewy well: I suppose it's all wight. He can't be goin' to dwag up Monday night aftah neahly a week—that wouldn't be cwicket," said Arthur Augustus, "Wailton wouldn't play cat and mouse with a man."

"Monday night, sir?" repeated Orris, with a curious look at Arthur Augustus.

"Pewwaps you haven't heard about it, Owwis. I went down to Wailton's study on Monday night aftah a football—the night of the wobbewy, you know. But Wailton couldn't be goin' to dwag that up on Fwiday, could he?"

"It does not seem likely, sir," said Orris.

Arthur Augustus walked off to his house-master's study quite cheerfully, leaving Orris staring after him with a very peculiar expression on his pimply face.

"Come in!" said Mr. Railton, as Arthur Augustus tapped, and the swell of St. Jim's entered his house-master's presence.

Mr. Railton, as Orris had told him, looked very grave. But Arthur Augustus was not alarmed. He had no sins on his noble conscience, beyond that nocturnal excursion in quest of the confiscated football: and Railton was not the man to drag up old offences after the lapse of days. Arthur Augustus only wondered mildly why his house-master had sent for him, and would not have been surprised to hear that it was some communication, perhaps, from his noble "governor," Lord Eastwood. He waited cheerfully for Mr. Railton to speak.

For some moments, Railton scanned his calm, unsuspecting face, as he had scanned Reggie's. It's calm unsuspectingness seemed to relieve him, for his own brow cleared somewhat. But when he spoke, his tone was very grave.

"D'Arcy! I am told that yesterday afternoon, you lent a pound note to a boy in the Third Form, Manners minor."

Arthur Augustus fairly blinked. That was about the last thing he would have expected to hear from Railton.

"Answer me, D'Arcy! Is that the case?"

"I twust, sir, that there is no harm in lendin' a pound note to the young bwotah of a fwiend of mine," said Arthur Augustus.

"I am asking you to state the fact of the matter, D'Arcy. Kindly give me a direct answer."

"Yaas, I certainly did, sir."

"Where did you obtain the pound note?"

"I weally do not know, sir."

"D'Arcy!"

"Pewwaps you will allow me to explain, sir," said Arthur Augustus, calmly."

"I am waiting for you to do so, D'Arcy," said the School House master, in a very deep voice.

"It was wathah cuwious, sir," D'Arcy proceeded to explain, "Weggie—I mean Mannahs mi,—picked it up in my study. Blake and Hewwies and Dig were suah that it was not theirs, so it must have been mine. But I have not the slightest wecollection of losin' it, so I think I must have dwopped it

some time ago, and for that weason, sir, I cannot say exactly where I had it. It must have been a tip fwom a welative, I pwesume—but whethah it came fwom my governah—I mean Lord Eastwood, sir—or fwom an uncle or an aunt, or pewwaps fwom my bwothah Conway, I weally cannot say.”

Mr. Railton listened to this, with his eyes intently on Gussy’s cheerful face. He had had the impression that Manners minor was telling him the truth. He was almost certain that D’Arcy was telling him the truth. Between the two, he did not know what to believe. For that note as he knew by comparing the number with his list, was one of the currency notes pilfered from his study on Monday night, and only the pilferer could have dropped it in Study No. 6—if indeed Reggie had found it there as he declared.

“You are sure that Manners minor picked the note up in your study, D’Arcy, and did not find it or obtain it elsewhere?” he asked.

“Yaas, sir.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“He told me so, sir.”

Mr. Railton breathed rather hard for a moment.

“Have you any knowledge of the fact, D’Arcy, beside Manners minor’s own statement that he picked up the note in your study?”

“Eh! Oh! No, sir. But Weggie said so—I distinctly wemembah——.”

“Were you in the study when he found it?”

“Oh, no, sir! I was changin’ aftah games-pwactice, and Weggie met me when I came out, and told me.”

“So you did not see Manners minor pick up the note?”

“No, sir, as I was nowhah neah the study.”

“Why was Manners minor in your study at all, in your absence?”

“He went there to speak to me, and came down aftah-wards as I did not come in, I suppose.”

"None of your friends was in or about the study at the time?" asked the house-master.

"No: they were all at games-pwactice with me and Tom Mewwy and the west."

"Then there is no evidence that Manners minor found the pound note in your study at all, excepting his statement to that effect?"

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus gave quite a jump, as it dawned on him at last that somebody's word was being doubted.

Arthur Augustus never doubted anybody's word himself. He even believed things that Baggy Trimble told him. He gazed at his house-master, his noble face becoming quite portentiously grave.

"Answer me, D'Arcy, please," said Mr. Railton, quietly.

"It is only Mannahs minah's word, of course, sir, but I wegard a fellow's word as pwactically the same thing as pwoof!" said Arthur Augustus, "Weggie told me that he picked up that pound note in my study, and I jolly well know he did."

Mr. Railton drew a deep, deep breath.

"D'Arcy! I must now tell you something—something very serious—indeed, terribly serious. That pound note has been identified as one of the notes taken from my desk here last Monday night."

"Mr. Wailton!"

Arthur Augustus almost goggled at him.

"Impossible, sir!" he gasped.

"There is no doubt about the fact, D'Arcy. I have the numbers of the pilfered notes, and that particular note has been identified by the number."

"Gweat Scott!"

His house-master's study seemed to be turning round, to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He could only goggle at Mr. Railton.

"If that note was found in your study, D'Arcy, as Manners

minor states, it can have been dropped there only by the pilferer."

"Oh, cwikey!"

"Can you explain it, D'Arcy?"

"I—I can't undahstand it, sir," babbled Arthur Augustus, quite bewildered, "I can undahstand somebody dwoppin' a note and losin' it—that might happen to any fellow—but I cannot undahstand what the pilfewah was in my study for! Why should he dwop it in my study whoevah he is?"

Mr. Railton gave him a long, long look.

"On Monday night, D'Arcy, you came down to this study secretly. The robbery took place that night. You have told me that you came to look for a confiscated football. Have you anything else to tell me——now?"

"No, sir."

"You have nothing to confess?"

"Only what I have already told you, sir. I cannot wemembah anythin' else," said Arthur Augustus, with an effort of thought, "Only comin' to the study for the footah, and shuttin' the window—nothin' else that I wemembah."

"Nothing?"

"No, sir."

"You have nothing to tell me about what happened that night, D'Arcy, even now that one of the purloined notes has been found in your study?"

"No, sir! That doesn't make any difference, does it?"

Mr. Railton did not reply to that. He sat with his eyes fixed on D'Arcy's face. What was in his mind was a mystery to Arthur Augustus. Not for an instant did it occur to him that he could be suspected of being the pilferer. The finding of the pilfered note in his study was undoubtedly an extraordinary circumstance: but the most extraordinary of circumstances could not put into Gussy's aristocratic head the idea that anybody could possibly suspect him of a dishonest action. He only wondered of what Mr. Railton might be thinking, without even remotely guessing what it was. The

house-master spoke at last.

"Once more, D'Arcy, if you have anything to tell me, tell now, before this miserable matter goes further," he said.

"But I have nothin' more to tell you, sir," said Arthur Augustus, in wonder, "I have already told you all I know about the mattah."

"Very well," said Mr. Railton, with a sigh, "You may return to your form-room, D'Arcy."

Arthur Augustus left the study, and went back to the Fourth Form room. Blake and Herries and Dig gave him inquiring looks as he took his place in form.

"Anything up?" whispered Blake.

"Yaas, wathah. It is weally most wemarkable——."

"Are you talking in class, D'Arcy?" rapped Mr. Lathom. And Arthur Augustus's startling news for his chums had to wait till the juniors were dismissed for break.

CHAPTER XXIII

A SHOCK FOR HARRY MANNERS

CARDEW smiled.

"Does he do it well?" he murmured.

"Shut up!" snapped Levison of the Fourth.

Ralph Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

The Fourth Form were out, and most of them had gathered in a crowd in the quad, of which Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the centre. Blake and Herries and Dig wanted to know why Railton had sent for Gussy during class—and a good many other fellows in the form were curious to know, also. There were some who took it for granted that it was in connection with the missing pound notes—in fact, Baggy Trimble was happily convinced that Arthur Augustus was

about to be "run in" by Inspector Skeat, while Mellish and Chowle confided to one another their opinion that at least he was going up to the Head to be sacked.

Arthur Augustus, however, did not look like a fellow who was going to be either "run in" or sacked. His noble countenance was as cheerful as ever.

Not for a moment did it occur to him to keep to himself what Mr. Railton had told him. The finding of the pilfered note in his study was a very extraordinary happening, utterly astonishing to Gussy, and naturally he wanted to know what his chums thought about it. He had no objection to all the Fourth hearing him—or all the school, for that matter, or all the county of Sussex. He did not even observe the dismay with which his friends heard the news, or the queer glances exchanged among the others, or the cynical grin on the face of Ralph Reckness Cardew. To the pure, it is said, all things are pure: and D'Arcy's own mind being incapable of suspicion, he gave everyone else the credit of being as unsuspecting as himself.

"Isn't it wemarkable?" Arthur Augustus was saying, "Isn't it vevy wemarkable indeed, you fellows? Wailton said that that pound note Weggie found in my study was twaced by the numbah as bein' one of his—I suppose Wailton can't have made a mistake about the numbah, can he?"

"Hardly!" grinned Trimble.

"Of course he hasn't, fathead," said Blake, "But——"

"Well, then, it turns out that that note did not belong to me, as we supposed, and I nevah dwopped it about the study aftah all."

"Didn't you?" asked Cardew blandly.

"Eh! How could I, Cardew? It was a pilfered note, as it turns out, so it must have been dwopped there by the pilfewah," explained Arthur Augustus.

"Dear me!" said Cardew.

"Will you shut up, Cardew?" breathed Sidney Clive.

"Lots of fellows won't, if I do," smiled Cardew, "Don't

be an ass, Clivey—isn't it as plain as your face—which is saying a lot?"

"Eh! What is plain, Cardew?" asked Arthur Augustus, with a lack of comprehension that was almost sublime, "It seems vewy mystewious to me."

"Good old Gussy!" said Figgins, "You're the biggest ass going, old man, but there isn't a decent chap here who doesn't believe every word you say."

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr and Wynn.

"Weally, Figgins——."

"It's remarkable, as D'Arcy says," drawled Cardew, "Fancy one of Railton's notes being picked up in his study, after such a remarkable coincidence as his goin' down to Railton's study at night at the same time as the pilferer! I don't think anything could be more remarkable than that."

Jack Blake looked round, with a fierce gleam in his eyes. Levison and Clive slipped their arms through Cardew's, and walked him away—only in time. Baggy Trimble chuckled—his chuckle changing to a yell of anguish, as Herries hacked a fat leg.

"Bai Jove! What are you kickin' Twimble for, Hewwies?" asked Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"Fathead!" was Herries' reply.

"Weally, Hewwies——."

"Trimble needs kicking occasionally," remarked Dig, and he kicked him in his turn—after which the fat Baggy did not feel like chuckling any more. He howled and faded out of the picture.

"It is, as Cardew said, vewy wemarkable," said Arthur Augustus, "You see, when I went down to Wailton's study that night, the pilfewah must have been there befoah me—I might have wun into him, you know."

"Might have been there at exaactly the same time!" said Mellish, with a wink at Chowle.

"Yaas, that might easily have happened," assented Arthur Augustus, "Bai Jove! What are you smackin' Mellish's head for, Figgins?"

“Keep off, you New House rotter!” yelled Mellish, dodging. He backed out of the crowd, catching a hack from Blake as he went.

“Pway don’t kick up a wow, you fellows,” said Arthur Augustus, “This is not a time for wowin’. It is a vewy sewious mattah. You wemembah that my findin’ Wailton’s window open that night made us think that the pilfewah came fwom outside the House. But now it looks as if the howwid wat is in the House——.”

“Does it?” gasped Blake.

“Yaas, wathah, now that one of the notes has been found in a School House study. An outsidersh couldn’t have got into the House, dwoppin’ stolen notes about. That seems quite cleah to me.”

“Oh, Gussy!” murmured Dig.

“I know it’s howwid to think of, Dig, but I am afwaid that there is no doubt now that the pilfewah is in the School House,” said Arthur Augustus, shaking his noble head sadly, “Findin’ that note in my study pwoves that.”

The juniors gazed at Arthur Augustus D’Arcy. Some of them, perhaps, thought, like Cardew, that he was “doing it well.” But his friends, at least, knew the length, depth and breadth of Gussy’s impenetrable unsuspectingness. It had not, and could not, occur to him, that anyone could possibly regard him as an object of suspicion.

“Hello, what’s the jolly old conference about?” The Shell were out now, and Tom Merry came up, with Manners and Lowther, and Talbot and Kangaroo, and several other fellows.

“Anything up?” asked Manners.

“Gussy been trying to open a door with his nose again?” asked Monty Lowther.

“Weally, Lowthah——.”

“They’ve found one of the pinched pound notes,” growled Blake.

“Phew! Where did they find it?” exclaimed Tom.

"In our study," muttered Blake, "Gussy was called out of class this morning, and Railton told him."

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

"I've just been tellin' these fellows, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, cheerfully, "And I was just wemarkin' that findin' that note in my study pwoves unfortunately that the pilfewah is in the House, not outside as we supposed fwom Wailton's window bein' open that night."

"Oh, Gussy!" Tom gazed at him.

"I shouldn't wondah if the wottah opened Wailton's window, you know, just to make it look as if the pilfewin' was done fwom outside," continued Arthur Augustus, "What do you fellows think?"

"Oh, gum!" said Gore of the Shell, staring at D'Arcy, "And I suppose you've no idea who the pilferer was?"

"Not the foggiest, deah boy. Have you?" asked Arthur Augustus innocently.

"Oh, crikey!" was Gores's only reply to that.

"Look here," said Manners, incisively, "Let's have this clear. Railton told you that the note was picked up in your study, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"Well, that will have to be proved," said Manners, "A fellow who had a note in his pocket, and was nailed, could say quite easily that he had picked it up in a study—he will have to prove it."

"Yes, rather," exclaimed Tom Merry, "Manners is right there."

"Right as rain!" said Lowther, "Why, he might have chosen D'Arcy's study, simply because D'Arcy went down that night. I'll bet you Railton will jolly well make him prove that he did pick it up in Study No. 6."

"But he told me he had picked it up there, and I lent it to him thinkin' it was mine, and that was how it came out——" explained Arthur Augustus.

"You're an innocent old duck, Gussy," said Manners, "He might have told you a crammer, see?"

"Nothin' of the kind, Mannahs."

"Well, who was the man who picked it up, or said he did?" asked Manners, "A lot depends on that. Who was it?"

"Young Weggie——."

"What?"

"Your minah, old chap."

"My—my—my minor!" stuttered Manners, utterly taken aback. "You—you mean to say it was Reggie——." Manners' face was a picture.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Oh!" gasped Manners.

His face went quite pale, and then flushed crimson. Without another word, he turned and walked hurriedly away. Tom Merry and Lowther hastily followed him: leaving the crowd of juniors exchanging strange looks—and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy staring after Manners quite blankly.

CHAPTER XXIV

MAJOR AND MINOR

"BETTER chuck it!" said Wally of the Third.

"Much better!" said Frank Levison.

Reggie Manners looked sullen.

"I ain't going to chuck it," he said, stubbornly, "I tell you, that wasn't what Railton wanted me about. He doesn't know a thing. I thought at first it was the pools—but it wasn't."

"It's a mug's game," said Wally.

"We can get out after third school," said Reggie, "Look here, you said you'd come down to Rylcombe with me, and help me fix it up with the newsagent to take in letters for me, if I stood that spread yesterday."

“You said so!” retorted D’Arcy minor, “We didn’t, did we, Frank?”

Levison minor shook his head.

“You’re not going to let me down,” said Reggie, “Look here, if I don’t get the coupons off to-day, I shall be too late for this week’s pools—and I believe I’ve got the winners—.”

“Rot!” said Wally, decisively.

“Tosh!” said Levison minor.

“Well, look here, will you come with me after third school, or not?” snapped Reggie, “You as good as said you would. You can’t let a man down. I tell you I’m practically certain of the teams I’ve picked out—.”

“Chuck it,” said Wally, hastily, “Here comes your major.”

Reggie Manners glanced round, with a very unbrotherly expression on his face. The three fags were talking under one of the old elms in break. Wally caught sight of Manners of the Shell bearing down on them, followed by Tom Merry and Monty Lowther. The look on Harry Manners’ face rather alarmed Wally and Frank, but Reggie only stared at him with a mingling of sullenness and obstinacy. Manners came up almost breathlessly.

“Oh, here you are!” he exclaimed, “I’ve been looking for you, Reggie—.”

“You needn’t have,” said Reggie.

“Clear off, you two,” said Manners, “I’ve got to speak to my minor.”

“Don’t!” said Reggie, as Wally and Frank hesitated, “Look here, Harry, you can leave us alone, see? I don’t want any more pi-jaw from you.”

“Kick those fags out of it, you fellows!” said Manners, savagely: but Wally and Frank did not wait for that drastic measure. Manners’ look was enough to tell them that something serious was the matter, and they walked away, leaving him with his minor.

Reggie made a move to follow: but Manners grasped him by the shoulder, so forcibly that the fag gave a yelp of pain.

"Leave me alone, I tell you," said Reggie, shrilly, "I'll jolly well hack your shins."

"You young blackguard," said Manners, in a low tense voice, "Do you want to be sacked? Do you want to be sent to Borstal? Listen to me."

Reggie gave him a scared look.

"What do you mean? I've done nothing—," he stammered.

"You told D'Arcy you picked up a pound note in his study yesterday, and he lent it to you because you found it."

"No business of yours."

"Did you find it in his study?"

"Yes, I did."

"Is that the truth?" asked Manners, fiercely.

"The kid's telling the truth, Manners," said Tom Merry, quietly.

"How do I know he is?" exclaimed Manners, "I know he wanted a pound note the other day to gamble with, and he couldn't get it from me. Now he's got a pound note—one of the notes stolen from Railton's study on Monday night—."

Reggie jumped almost clear of the ground.

His eyes almost popped from his face in horror.

"Tain't," he gasped, "You're mad! I picked it up in D'Arcy's study—." Then he broke off, the colour draining from his face. Like a flash, he understood now why his house-master had been questioning him about that pound note. "Oh! That's what he meant, then—oh! I never knew—I tell you I found it in D'Arcy's study, and took it to him—why, you saw me, yesterday, waiting for him outside the changing-room—."

"So that was it, was it?" said Manners, "You little rascal, if I'd known, I'd have kicked you across the quad. Now tell me the truth. Did you really find it in D'Arcy's study, or did you only tell D'Arcy so, so that you could make out that you'd borrowed it off him?"

"Where do you think I got it?" panted Reggie, "Think I pinched it?"

"That's what I want to know!" snapped Manners.

"Why, you—you—you rotter—!" gasped Reggie.

"Easy does it, Manners, old man," murmured Lowther.

"Go easy," said Tom.

"Oh, it's easy, isn't it?" said Manners, bitterly, "Somebody in the House pinched Railton's pound notes, and my young brother is found with one of them, and he spins a silly yarn about it. Easy as pie."

"Tain't a yarn," panted Reggie, "I did find it there. . . it was just under the edge of the carpet, and I happened to kick it—Blake and Herries and Digby said it wasn't theirs, so of course I supposed it was D'Arcy's—how was I to know it was pinched?—if it was! How do you know it was?"

"Railton said so—he's got the note back, I suppose—anyhow he told D'Arcy so. If you found it in Study 6, the pincher dropped it there—and why should he?"

"I—I don't know—unless it was D'Arcy——."

"What?"

"Well, a lot of fellows are hinting that it was D'Arcy who bagged Railton's notes that night when he went down—that's what he went down for——."

"Shut up that!" growled Tom Merry.

"I didn't believe it—never thought about it," said Reggie, "But—but if that note was pinched, and I found it in his study——."

"Did you?" hissed Manners.

"I've told you I did—same as I told D'Arcy, and Railton when he asked me this morning——."

"So Railton asked you about it?"

"Yes, I was called out in class—Orris came for me. He never said it was a stolen note—but he asked me a lot about it——."

"What were you doing last Monday night?"

"I was asleep in bed in my dorm."

"You never went down?"

"Of course I didn't!" shrieked Reggie, his face white as chalk, "Are you going to make out that I went down to Railton's study, and—and—I didn't! Oh, I didn't!"

"How can I know that you didn't?" said Manners, "You've got into gambling, with no money to gamble with—and you told me you'd get a pound note from somewhere if I didn't give you one——."

"I didn't mean—I—I—I didn't——." Reggie was almost in tears, "I—I wish I'd never found those coupons—that silly fool Orris ought to keep them locked up—I wish I'd never——."

"So it's Orris who has football coupons about the school, is it?" said Manners, savagely, "Did he give them to you?"

"No! No! I found the first one, and after you put it in the fire, I—I got another from Orris's room—he has lots——."

"You pinched it?" said Manners, "Is that what you mean?"

Yell from Reggie.

"You beast! It was only a sheet of coupons, and he didn't want it—what did it matter if I had it?"

"Or if you had Railton's pound notes?" hissed Manners, major."

"I tell you I never——."

"So you've got more coupons, have you?" said Manners, between his teeth, "and you're going to back your fancy with stolen money. Give me those coupons."

Reggie was past resistance now. He was not feeling like a sportive sportsman—he was feeling like a badly-frightened little boy. Football pools and getting rich quick had lost all their attractions for him. With lamb-like docility he extracted the coupon sheet from his pocket, and handed it to his major. Manners crumpled it savagely in his hand.

"Now look here," he said, "If you've told the truth about finding that pound note in D'Arcy's study, well and good—if you haven't, you'd better go straight to Railton and confess what you've done——."

"I haven't done anything—I tell you—I only wanted to win a prize in the football pools!" wailed Reggie, "I—I believe I had the winning teams——."

"Oh, shut up, you little idiot, and get out."

Reggie, gulping, shut up and got out.

Manners breathed hard.

"What do you fellows think?" he asked, looking at his chums.

"I think it's the truth—he did pick up that note in D'Arcy's study," said Tom, "Goodness knows what Railton thinks—but that's what I think."

"Same here," said Lowther, with a nod.

"But can't you see what that means?" muttered Manners, "If he found the note there, the pilferer dropped it there—the pilferer's in Study 6. That means D'Arcy. And——and that's impossible."

"Quite!" said Tom.

"Well, then, it's between Reggie and D'Arcy——and D'Arcy's impossible!" groaned Manners, "What's a fellow to think?"

Neither Tom Merry nor Monty Lowther could answer that. They did not know what to think, themselves. Manners tore the coupon sheet into small fragments, and tossed them on the wind over the school wall. That was some satisfaction, at least. But it did not solve the problem that weighed on his mind.

CHAPTER XXV

FIGGINS TRIES IT ON!

FIGGINS grinned.

Several fellows noticed it, and wondered why.

There was nothing going on in the Fourth-form room to cause a fellow to grin. In third school, Mr. Lathom was taking his form on a little run in Roman history. And few of the Fourth, if any, found Augustus Cæsar very entertaining, even with Julius Cæsar, Marcus Antonius, Brutus, and Quintus Horatius Flaccus thrown in. Nevertheless, George Figgins did grin—widely.

Figgins was thinking of that footer in Study No. 6. He had failed to bag it once, bagging nothing but a frog's march. This time he had a sounder scheme.

It was a glance at Arthur Augustus's noble nose, when the Fourth were coming in after break, that put the idea into Figgy's head. Gussy's nose had considerably recovered from its contact with the door of Study No. 6 the previous day—it was now only a mild pink. But it reminded Figgy of Gussy going up for his map on Thursday morning. It put into his head the idea of getting out in class and annexing that footer.

Kerr and Wynn did not seem to think that old Figgy was much of a strategist. They agreed that it was good work to bag Gussy's footer, in place of the one Gussy had kicked through his house-master's window. That would be one up against the rival House. But they did not agree that Figgy was likely to pull it off.

Figgins did not claim to be a brainy man like his Scottish

chum. Still, he rather liked the idea of showing Kerr that he could be a bit of a strategist.

For which reason, Figgins had carefully turned on a tap in the junior lobby before going in to class, as a ready-made excuse for getting out again.

If that was not strategy, what was strategy?

No wonder Figgins grinned. During class, the coast was absolutely clear—Study No. 6 was at his mercy. Tom Merry and Co. couldn't butt in this time—they were safe in the Shell form-room. It looked good, to Figgins.

"Please, sir——!" said Figgins.

Mr. Lathom glanced at him.

"What is it, Figgins?"

"May I go and turn off the tap in the lobby, sir? I left it running."

"That was very careless and forgetful, Figgins," said Mr. Lathom, "Go and turn it off at once."

Figgins walked out of the form-room. He winked at Kerr and Wynn as he went, luckily unnoticed by Mr. Lathom: leaving his friends wondering what Figgins was up to.

Once out of the form-room, Figgins repaired to the lobby, and dutifully turned off the tap he had so carefully left running. Then he cut up the staircase, and headed for Study No. 6.

He had it all cut and dried. To bag that School House footer, chuck it out of the study window, and cut back to the form-room, was the work of hardly a couple of minutes. After class it would be easy to collect it in the quad. Grinning, Figgins dashed up the stairs.

Arthur Augustus, the previous day, had put on speed, on the same route. Figgins put on twice the speed, his long legs fairly twinkling. Arthur Augustus had unexpectedly found the study door locked, and banged his nose on it. Figgins did not find it locked. He hurled it open, and rushed in with it as it opened: and was half-way across the study, before he made the discovery that Study No. 6 was not, as he had naturally expected to find it, vacant!

“Oh!” gasped Figgins.

He stopped just in time to save himself from crashing into Mr. Railton.

His eyes popped at the house-master. Indeed, he could hardly believe them, for a moment. What on earth Railton could be doing in a junior study was beyond Figgy’s imagining.

But he was there! Why he was there, was a mystery to Figgins: but there was no doubt about the fact——Railton was there, staring at the New House junior in great astonishment.

“Figgins!” exclaimed the house-master, blankly.

“Oh!” repeated Figgins.

Figgy had been feeling pleased with his strategy—grinning over it, in fact.

Now he wished that he had approached Study No. 6 rather more strategically.

But who could have dreamed of meeting a house-master there? Figgins certainly hadn’t.

“Figgins!” repeated Mr. Railton, “What are you doing here?”

“Oh! I—I—I came——!” stammered Figgins.

“Has Mr. Lathom given you leave from class?”

“I—I—yes—no—I—oh—no—yes——!” Figgins was a little incoherent.

“Answer me, Figgins.”

“He—he—he gave me leave to—to—tut-tut-turn off a tut-tut-tap in lobby, sir!” stuttered Figgins.

“Then why did you come up to this study?”

“I—I—I——.” Figgy’s voice trailed off.

Mr. Railton frowned. He was at no loss to guess why a New House junior had seized an opportunity to pay a surreptitious visit to a School House study. It was, of course, some sort of a House rag. It was rather exasperating to Mr. Railton. He had chosen a time when the juniors were in class, to make a search in Study No. 6: not desiring to let it become the talk of the House that D’Arcy’s study had been

searched. Certainly he had not expected a breathless Fourth-former to hurtle into the study like a thunderbolt.

Figgins made a strategic backward movement towards the door. But his strategy served him no better than before. He was not allowed to fade out of the picture as he fervently wished to do.

"Figgins!" rapped Mr. Railton.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" mumbled Figgins.

"You will return to your form-room at once, and I shall give you a note to take to your form-master."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" groaned Figgins.

A minute later, he quitted Study No. 6, with a note in his hand for Mr. Lathom. Figgy had rushed up the stairs with a grinning face, full of beans. He trailed down again looking as if he were trying to understudy the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance.

It was a dismal Figgins that re-entered the Fourth-form room. All eyes in the form were on him, as he went to Mr. Lathom's desk and presented the note from the house-master.

"What is this, Figgins?" asked Mr. Lathom, puzzled.

"A note from Mr. Railton, sir," mumbled Figgins.

Mr. Lathom read the note. Then he gave Figgins a portentous frown. There was a stir of interest in the Fourth, as he picked up the cane from his desk.

"Bai Jove! Lathom's goin' to whop poor old Figgy!" whispered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "I wondah what's up."

"Figgins." Mr. Lathom's voice was deep, "I gave you leave out of the form-room to turn off a running tap. I learn that you made use of this to go up to a Fourth-form study with the intention of playing some prank there. Tell me at once why you went to Study No. 6, Figgins."

"Study No. 6!" breathed Jack Blake.

"Our study—!" said Herries.

"After that footer—!" hissed Dig.

"Bai Jove!"

"Silence in the form," rapped Mr. Lathom, "Figgins, answer my question immediately."

“I—I—I——.” It had to come out, “I—I was going to—to borrow a—a footer, sir.”

“Upon my word!” exclaimed Mr. Lathom, “This passes all patience. Figgins, bend over that chair at once.”

In the lowest of spirits Figgins bent over the chair.

Whop!

“Ow!”

Whop!

“Wow!”

“You may go to your place, Figgins,” rapped Mr. Lathom, laying down his cane.

Figgins wriggled to his place. He sat down there, still wriggling. Kerr and Wynn gave him sympathetic looks. The looks that Blake and Co. gave him were extremely warlike. But Figgins was unregarding of both—his attention seemed to be concentrated on wriggling.

CHAPTER XXVI

ALL ONE PRICE!

“GWEAT Scott!”

Arthur Augustus D’Arcy fairly jumped.

His eyeglass dropped from his eye, in his startled surprise, as he gazed into Study No. 6.

It was after class that day. Blake and Co. had been chatting in the junior day-room, before they came up to their study. Arthur Augustus opened the study door—and jumped at what he beheld within.

“What——!” began Blake and Herries and Dig together. Then they saw what Arthur Augustus had seen.

Somebody, evidently, had been in that study. Quite an extraordinary variety of goods were displayed on the study table. In the centre stood three top hats, one above another,

forming a sort of pyramid——D'Arcy's best Sunday hat, his second-best hat, and his common-or-garden topper, as it were. Ranged round the pyramid of hats were a number of neckties, of various hues, a couple of fancy waistcoats, an elegant jacket, and a pair of embroidered slippers which were a birthday present from his cousin Ethel. And propped against the pyramid of hats was a placard, bearing the legend:

JUMBLE SALE!

ALL ONE PRICE! NINEPENNY!

“Oh! My hat!” ejaculated Blake.

“Oh! My hats!” gasped Arthur Augustus.

He gazed at the scene almost in horror. Some bold bad hand, evidently, had been sorting out his most precious possessions: recklessly rumpling waistcoats, and ruffling the bright smoothness of toppers.

Horror and wrath mingled in the aristocratic countenance of Arthur Augustus. Blake and Co., sad to relate, only grinned. They seemed to see something funny in a “jumble sale” of Gussy's precious hats and fancy waistcoats.

“Good idea of yours, Gussy,” said Blake, with a wink at Herries and Dig.

“Mine?” ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

“I've said lots of times that you have too much rubbish about the study,” said Blake, “Jolly good idea of yours to hold a jumble sale and get rid of some of it.”

“Topping idea!” agreed Herries.

“Couldn't do better,” declared Dig.

“You uttah asses!” shrieked Arthur Augustus, “Do you think that I have awwanged those things on the table for a jumble sale?”

“Haven't you?” asked Blake, “Well, it's a jolly good idea anyhow. I'll buy one of the hats, if you'll take sixpence. It will do to keep coal in.”

“You fwightful fatthead——.”

“I'll have one of the waistcoats,” said Herries, “I can cut it up into polishing rags for my bike.”

“You uttah chump——.”

"Ninepence each is a lot for those neckties, though," said Dig, "Will you take threepence a time, Gussy?"

Words seemed to fail Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He glared speechlessly at his comrades. His noble face was crimson with wrath.

"Who has done this?" he gasped, at last, finding his voice, "What uttah wuffian has been messin' about with my hats? Bai Jove, I will give him a feahful thwashin' when I spot him. I have no doubt that it was the same wottah who was in this study yestahday, and made me bang my nose on the door. I told you the bwute came heah for a wag, only I intewwupted him, comin' up for my map. Now he has done it."

"Bow-wow!" said Blake.

"I am quite suah of it, Blake! It is the same wottah!" roared Arthur Augustus, "I am goin' to find him, somehow. And if you fellows were weally a fellow's fwends, you would help me to spot him, instead of standin' there gwinnin' like a lot of Cheshire cheeses—I mean Cheshire cats."

There was a step in the passage, and a cheery face looked in—that of Monty Lowther of the Shell.

"Hallo! Anything up in this study?" asked Lowther blandly.

"Yes—Gussy's hats are up for sale," answered Blake, "If you want to buy one for a coal scoop, now's your chance."

"My hats are not for sale!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, "It is a wag! That wottah has been heah again, Lowthah—the wottah who locked me out yestahday—I am suah it is the same wottah——."

"The jolly old mystery man?" ejaculated Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Bosh!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake——."

"Tosh!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——."

"Oyez! oyez! oyez!" shouted Monty Lowther, into the passage, "Roll up, you men! Jumble sale in Study No. 6."

"Lowthah, you uttah ass, I tell you my hats are not for sale," yelled Arthur Augustus, "I wepeat that it is a wag." Lowther did not heed.

"Oyez! oyez!" he roared, "Roll up! Now's your chance to bag a bargain! All one price, ninepence! Toppers, neckties, slippers—all going at ninepence——."

"Will you dwy up, Lowthah, you mad ass?"

"Sale now on!" roared Monty Lowther, "Gussy's toppers at ninepence a time! Roll up and bag your bargains."

There was a rush in the Fourth-form passage. Lowther's shouts echoed along the studies, and brought a crowd of the Fourth to the scene. They stared in at the doorway of Study No. 6, and there was a roar of laughter.

"Gussy's hats——."

"——and neckties——."

"All one price!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah asses, it is not a jumble sale," howled Arthur Augustus, "Some awful wottah has been waggin' heah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What price the lot, Gussy?"

"Too dear at ninepence."

"Tanner a time for the toppers, Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus breathed wrath. All the Fourth-form fellows, even his own bosom pals, seemed to think it funny. It did not seem funny to the swell of St. Jim's. Quite forgetting the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, he glared at his grinning chums, and at the laughing crowd in the doorway.

"Go away!" he hooted, "Cleah off! I wepeat that it is not a jumble sale——nothin' of the kind——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to laugh at——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lowthah, you silly ass, what do you mean by bwingin' "



They stared in at the doorway of Study No. 6, and there was a roar of laughter.

a crowd of cacklin' duffahs wound the study? I have a gweat mind to punch your silly head."

"Only helping on the jumble sale," protested Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wepeat——."

"Perhaps Lowther knows something about it!" grinned Blake, "I shouldn't wonder if he could tell you who put your hats up for sale, Gussy."

"It was that mystewy man who was in the study yestah-day, Blake——."

"There wasn't any mystery man in the study yesterday, fathead: but I fancy there's been a Shell-fish in the study to-day."

"Wats! I am quite suah——."

"Hold on, Lowther," said Blake, as the funny man of the Shell made a movement towards the crowded doorway, "Japing Gussy is all very well: but we don't let Shell bouncers rag in this study. Collar him."

"It was not Lowthah, Blake! It was——."

"Fathead! Bag him."

Monty Lowther made a jump for the doorway. Arthur Augustus had no doubt that it was the "mystery man" who was responsible for that rag—but Jack Blake was rather keener than his aristocratic chum. He did not think it was by chance that Lowther was on the spot to push on the "jumble sale." He grabbed the funny man of the Shell as he retreated, and Herries and Dig grabbed him the next moment, and Monty Lowther whirled in the grasp of three pairs of hands.

"Blake! Hewwies! Dig! Pway leave Lowthah alone! I wepeat that it was the mystewy man——."

Bump!

Monty Lowther sat on the study carpet, hard. He roared as he sat.

"Ow! Leggo! Wow!"

"Know anything about this jumble sale, old bean?" asked Blake.

“Ow! Will you leggo?”

Bump!

“Oh, crumbs! Stop it!” yelled Lowther. He rather wished that he had not come on the scene to enjoy his little joke on Gussy. He was not enjoying it now.

“Bump him till he owns up!” said Blake.

“Yes, rather.”

Bump!

For the third time Monty Lowther landed on the carpet. The yell he gave echoed the length of the Fourth-form passage.

“Did you rag Gussy’s hats?” asked Blake, cheerily.

“Ow! wow!”

Bump!

“Ow! Yes! Leggo!” shrieked Lowther, “I jolly well did! Wow!”

“Bai Jove! Why, Lowthah, you uttah wottah, do you mean to say that you came heah and wagged my toppahs——.”

“Yes, you silly ass!” howled Lowther, “I knew you’d think it was your imaginary mystery man, you howling ass! Ow! Will you leggo now? Wow!”

Blake and Co. released the hapless humorist of the Shell, and he scrambled up spluttering for breath. Arthur Augustus gazed at him, looking like Roderick Dhu when dark lightnings flashed from Roderick’s eye! He hurriedly pushed back his cuffs.

“Don’t let the wottah get away, you fellows! I am goin’ to give him a feahful thwashin’ for waggin’ my toppahs!”

Arthur Augustus rushed at Lowther. Had not Blake’s foot got in the way, damage would have been done. But Blake’s foot, somehow, did get in the way, and Arthur Augustus stumbled over it, and sat down suddenly.

“Better cut, Lowther, old man, before Gussy strews the hungry churchyard with your bones!” remarked Blake. “Help him out, you chaps.”

Monty Lowther did not really need helping out of the study—but he was helped out, all the same, with vigour.

He went, gasping—and the crowd of Fourth-formers helped him along the passage with equal vigour, and left him spluttering on the study landing.

It was a breathless, untidy Lowther that limped away to the Shell quarters, tottered into No. 10 Study, and collapsed into a chair there. Tom Merry and Manners stared at him as he collapsed.

“Been enjoying your jape on Gussy?” asked Tom.

“Ooooooogh!”

“You look as if you’d been enjoying life!” remarked Manners.

“Woooooogh!”

That was all Monty Lowther had to say, at present. For quite a considerable time his remarks were limited to “oogh” and “woogh” and “ow”—and “wow!” The way of the japer, like that of the transgressor, was sometimes hard!

CHAPTER XXVII

CARDEW IS WANTED!

“It’s rot!” said Cardew.

“What is?” asked Levison. And Clive glanced enquiringly at the dandy of the Fourth, who was sitting in the study armchair in No. 9. It was Saturday afternoon, and they were at tea in the study after games-practice. Cardew, regardless of toast and sardines sat in the armchair with a frowning brow.

Clive and Levison had been talking of the Rookwood match, which was due the following week. Cardew listened to them in silence, till he suddenly remarked that it was “rot.”

“It’s rot that I’m not playing Rookwood next week,”

said Cardew, "Tom Merry doesn't mean to give me a show. He never does."

"That's rot, if you like," said Clive.

"You're not the most reliable of men, Cardew," said Ernest Levison, "You don't stick to the game like other men."

"I've been sticking to it now," snapped Cardew, "I haven't missed a pick-up for weeks. I'm at the top of my form. Even that ass D'Arcy has noticed that I play a good game. I ought to have a show."

"D'Arcy isn't an ass at Soccer," said Clive.

"No—though he's better still at midnight stunts," sneered Cardew.

"Oh, shut up that."

Cardew gave an angry grunt. He was not always keen on football, or on anything else—he was volatile by nature, and liable to chop and change. But when he was keen on anything, he was very keen. At the moment, he was keen on Soccer: and when he was at his best, it was undeniable that he was a very good man indeed. But places in the St. Jim's junior eleven were not to be had for the asking: and it was natural that the junior football captain should not think of turning out a trusted man to make room for a fellow who was a careless slacker half the time, though very good when he was any good at all.

But the grandson of Lord Reckness was more important in his own eyes than he was in Tom Merry's. He had played and played hard, in a dozen pick-ups, in the hope of getting into the team that was to meet Jimmy Silver and Co. when they came over from Rookwood. And there was no room for him in the team, and that was that. And he was angry and annoyed and resentful.

"Have a spot of sense, old chap," said Levison, "Tom Merry can't turn out a good man to make room for you."

"He can turn out a man who may be sacked from the school any day, if not run in by old Skeat!" snapped Cardew. "It's rot for D'Arcy to be in the team at all. It beats me

how he's got the nerve to face a crowd in the changing-room, when every fellow knows what he's done."

"Don't talk rot!" growled Clive, "Keep that to yourself."

"Do you think I'm the only man who thinks so?" sneered Cardew, "Half the men in the House agree with me. I hear that they're chipping young Manners about it in the Third—but it wasn't young Manners who went down to Railton's study last Monday night."

"No," said Levison, quietly, "It was D'Arcy—and he went after Figgy's footer, as he said. You're a rotter to think anything else, Cardew."

"Plenty of rotters about, then," said Cardew, "I tell you half the House knows he did it—and the other half know, too, only won't admit it. Railton knows—why do you think that New House fathead, Figgins, ran into him in D'Arcy's study yesterday? What do you think Railton was doing there while fellows were in class?"

"If he was searching the study, he never found anything," said Levison, "Nothing has come of it."

"Oh, the rest of the loot's in a safer place, I daresay," sneered Cardew, "I knew it was D'Arcy from the first—and then a fag picks up one of the pilfered notes in his study, and that puts the lid on. And I'm kept out of the team by a fellow who ought to be run in for pinching."

Tap!

The door of Study No. 9 opened, and an eyeglass gleamed into the study. Levison and Clive reddened, uncomfortably, at the sight of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Cardew gave him an inimical look. Sudden silence fell on the study.

Arthur Augustus gave the three a cheery nod.

"I twust I am not intewwuptin' anythin'," he remarked.

"Oh, not at all," stammered Levison, "Trot in."

Arthur Augustus glanced, in mild surprise, at two flushed faces, and then at a scowling face in the armchair.

"It is wathah odd," he remarked.

"Eh! What's rather odd?" asked Clive, uncomfortably.

"In fact, it is vewy odd indeed," said Arthur Augustus,

"I mean the way fellows seem to shut up all of a sudden when I come along, as if there was some sort of a secret about. I have noticed it several times."

Cardew smiled sarcastically: and Levison and Clive exchanged a look of discomfort. What had been evident to every other man at St. Jim's for several days had, apparently, dawned at last on the powerful intellect of the Honourable Arthur Augustus. And it perplexed him a little.

"Weally, I seem to have dwopped into this study like a cold douche," said Arthur Augustus, in a somewhat dignified manner, "I am sowwy if I have intewwupted some discussion which you did not wish to weach myyahs. I merely dwopped in to speak to Cardew about the football."

"What about that?" asked Levison, in surprise.

"I have just heard that Talbot of the Shell will be away from the school next Saturday," explained Arthur Augustus, "It is wathah a feahful blow to Tom Mewwy, Talbot bein' one of his best men. But his uncle, Colonel Lyndon, wants him to go home for the week-end, and Talbot cannot vewy well wefuse—so he will have to stand out of the Wookwood match."

"Oh!" said Cardew. He sat up in the armchair.

"Oh!" said Levison, "That means that another man will be wanted in the team——."

"A forward!" said Clive.

"Yaas, wathah! So I have been tellin' Tom Mewwy that, as Talbot is out of it, he can't do bettah than play Cardew. I have wathah an eye for a man's form at Soccah, you know, and I have a vewy stwong opinion that Cardew is the man to take Talbot's place on the wight wing."

Levison and Clive glanced at Cardew. That youth coloured—even Cardew had the grace to feel a little ashamed of himself, for the moment, as the unsuspecting Gussy rattled on.

"So the long and short of it is, that Tom Mewwy wants to see Cardew," added Arthur Augustus, "Tom Mewwy is sometimes wathah an obstinate ass, and doesn't always see

things as I do—what are you gwinnin' at? There is nothin' to gwin at. This time Tom Mewwy agwees with me, I am vewy glad to say, and if you walk along to No. 10 in the Shell, Cardew, I wathah think you'll find that your name is goin' up in the list for Wookwood."

With that, and a nod to the whole study, Arthur Augustus faded out of No. 9, and drew the door shut after him.

Levison drew a deep breath.

"Do you feel like kicking yourself, Cardew?" he asked.

"If you don't, you ought to," growled Clive.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Not in the least," he answered, coolly, "Gussy's a good little ass, in many ways—but that doesn't alter facts. He had Railton's pound notes last Monday night, and you know it as well as I do."

Cardew rose from the armchair. He was elated, there was no doubt about it. It was quite probable that D'Arcy's opinion had weighed with Tom Merry, in picking out a man to fill the vacant place in the team: for Arthur Augustus, with all his little ways, had nothing to learn about Soccer and the playing thereof. Cardew preferred not to think about that. The junior football captain had picked him out to play, and that was that: and he walked out of No. 9 Study in the Fourth, in very cheerful spirits, and repaired to No. 10 in the Shell, to strike the iron while it was hot, as it were.

"Cardew's got that idea fixed in his head about D'Arcy," muttered Clive, when Cardew was gone.

"I'm afraid a good many fellows have," said Levison. "We all know what it looks like—though D'Arcy doesn't seem to. I don't think any fellow would dare to put it plain to Gussy, though. But the talk will go on till the pilferer's spotted—"

"Who on earth can it have been?"

"Goodness knows."

"Not young Manners——."

Levison shook his head.

"But it looks as if it's between the two of them——," said Clive.

"I know! But——," Levison wrinkled his brows, "You remember that queer yarn D'Arcy spun in second school on Thursday—about somebody being locked in his study——."

"Only his jolly old fancy," said Clive, laughing, "The door was jammed, and he banged his nose on it, and fancied the rest—his own pals think so."

"Well, yes! But——" Levison spoke slowly and thoughtfully, "Since we've heard about the note being found there, I've wondered. Suppose there was somebody in the study that morning—and suppose it was the pilferer——."

"Oh!" exclaimed Clive.

"It's just possible," said Levison, "He may have gone there for more pilfering, and dropped that pound note somehow——. Of course he would lock the door in case somebody happened to come up—and it happened that D'Arcy did——."

"But, my dear chap, if he went pilfering in a junior study, he wouldn't carry a note in his hand that he'd pilfered three or four days before. How could he have dropped one of Railton's notes there, if it was as you say?"

"Well, that does beat me," confessed Levison, "All the same, I know that D'Arcy never did it, and I don't believe young Manners did. It's a puzzle—and I believe Railton's as much puzzled as we are—he's done nothing, anyway. It's a dashed mystery."

A few minutes later, the study door reopened, and Ralph Reckness Cardew looked in, with a smiling face.

"All serene?" asked Levison and Clive together.

"O.K." said Cardew, "Thomas was quite gracious—He doesn't think I'm as good a man as Talbot——."

"You're not!" pointed out Clive.

"So Thomas said! But he's kind enough to think me the next best thing," drawled Cardew, "So I'm in the eleven to play Rookwood next Saturday. I shouldn't wonder if there may be another change in the team before the Rookwood date though."

"Eh! Why?" asked Levison.

“Our outside left may be run in by that time,” grinned Cardew.

Clive clutched up a loaf from the table with the evident intention of hurling it, and Cardew backed out of the doorway, and walked away laughing.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PLOTTING A PLOT!

GEORGE FIGGINS breathed wrath. Kerr frowned, and Fatty Wynn grunted expressively.

The New House trio were in the quad after school on Monday, and they were staring up at a School-house window—the window of Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

School-House men were also looking up—and grinning. But Figgins and Co. showed no disposition to grin.

The window of Study No. 6 was open. Jack Blake stood there, leaning out. In his hands was a football—which he was displaying to the gaze of the fellows in the quad below.

It was D'Arcy's old footer, which usually reposed in the bottom of the study cupboard when not wanted for punting about. It was the footer which George Figgins had determined to annex in the place of his own lost ball. It was the footer which he had twice attempted to capture by strategy—the first time capturing a frog's march, the second time a whopping from Lathom. And now Blake, with a grinning face, held it out of the window for Figgy's inspection—adding insult to injury, as it were! It was an invitation to Figgins and Co. to capture the ball if they could—it was tantalizing and exasperating. Figgins, indeed, stared up at that footer, as Tantalus of old gazed at the desirable things just beyond his reach.

“Coming after this ball, Figgy?” called out Blake.

Figgins made no reply—except by a very expressive look. An eyeglass gleamed at the window beside Blake. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked out, with a cheery grin.

"Twy again, Figgins," he called out, "I'll tell you what, old scout—I'll make you a pwesent of that ball if you can get it."

"That's a good offer, Figgy," said Tom Merry, laughing. Snort, from Figgins.

"If at first you don't succeed, twy, twy, twy again!" chuckled Arthur Augustus, "Dwop in any time you want a fwog's march, Figgins."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins glared at a crowd of laughing School House juniors.

"You can cackle——!" he snorted.

"Thanks!" said Monty Lowther, "We will! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll bag that ball, all the same!" said Figgins, "You just wait a bit, you School House smudges—you'll see!"

And Figgins stalked away, followed by his chums.

"Don't you want this footer, Figgy?" shouted Blake, from the window, "Here it is, waiting for you—if you like to come after it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins disdained to reply. But as he walked away with his friends, he seemed to be understudying the Alpine young man in the poem—his brow was set, his eye beneath, flashed like a falchion from its sheath!

"By gum!" breathed Figgins, "We're going to have that ball, you two! Hear me? We're going to have it, see?"

Kerr and Wynn did not seem to "see." They were heart and soul with their great chief: but they did not see how they were going to capture a footer safe in a study in the rival House.

"We've got to think of a way," went on Figgins, "I've tried twice, and had no luck. Can't you think of a way, Kerr? You're a dashed Scotchman, ain't you? Well, Scotchmen are supposed to have some brains. Where's yours?"

Kerr smiled.

"It's not so easy," he remarked.

"Who said it was easy?" snorted Figgins, "What's the good of doing easy things, anyhow. Any fool can do easy things. We're going to do it because it ain't easy, see, just to show those School-House smears that our House is cock house."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"Well, what about you, Fatty?" demanded Figgins, "Can't you think of something? Can't a Welshman do anything but sing, and tell a fellow when he's out of tune?"

Fatty Wynn grinned. Figgy was given to singing sometimes, and on such occasions Figgy, like Mr. McClan in the ballad, wandered about into several keys, which was a little excruciating to a Welsh ear. Fatty, certainly, could tell Figgy when he was out of tune: but he couldn't tell him how to bag that footer from Study No. 6 in the School House.

"Oh, grin!" said Figgins, exasperated, "I can see that I shall have to do all the thinking."

At which Kerr grinned, as well as Fatty Wynn. They did not seem to be impressed by the possible results if Figgy did the thinking.

"Precious pair of duds I've got for pals, haven't I," said the aggrieved Figgins, "Not an idea in your heads between you."

"It's not so easy, Figgy, old man," said Kerr, "They know we're after that footer, and they'll watch out that we don't get a chance. There'll be somebody with an eye open for us, from rising-bell till dorm."

"That's so," said Fatty Wynn, with a nod.

Growl from Figgins.

"You fellows make a fellow understand what Job's comforters made him feel like!" he said, "Any more cheerful things to say?"

"Let a fellow speak, old chap. We haven't an earthly of bagging that footer in the day time," said Kerr, "But at night——."

Figgins jumped.

"At night!" he repeated.

"Oh, crikey!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"It's that or nothing," said Kerr, "No good slanging your pals, Figgy—that won't get us Gussy's footer. We're not going to own up that we're beaten——."

"No fear!" said Figgins, emphatically.

"But—breaking dorm bounds—getting out of the House after lights out—my dear chap!" said Fatty.

"It's risky," said Kerr, "Ratty would take our skin off, if we were caught out. But it's the only way, as the chap says in the play. If you're game, we can work it."

"But—," hesitated Figgins. He was game: and he was relentlessly determined to capture that footer. But—there was a "but." The thought of what Mr. Ratcliff—otherwise Ratty—would do, if they were caught out, was not encouraging.

But Figgins was "for it" now. He had put it up to his Scottish chum to think of a plan: and Kerr had thought of one!

"We leave it pretty late, to make sure—as sure as we can," said Kerr, quietly, "Ratcliff will be away one night this week—and we'll pick that night."

"That won't be till Thursday——."

"More haste less speed, old man. Better pull it off on Thursday than be caught out on Tuesday or Wednesday."

"Well, of course it would be safer with Ratty off the scene," admitted Figgy, "Not too jolly safe anyway."

"Thursday night we turn out, after everybody's in bed and fast asleep," said Kerr, "We get out of the House—that's easy."

"Not so easy to get into the School House, though," said Figgins, "Got a set of cracksman's tools in your trousers' pocket?"

"Fathead! That's easy, too," said Kerr, "You know that little window at the back of the House—the servants' box-room, next to Orris's room?"

"Yes—but it would be fastened."

Kerr smiled.

"It's always fastened, of course, being on the ground floor," he said, "But on Thursday, before lock-ups, I make an excuse for going to speak to Orris when he's off duty, in his room. When I come away, I slip into the box-room and unfasten the window catch. It wouldn't take a minute."

"Oh!" said Figgins.

"So we find it unfastened when we drop in later," said Kerr, "Easy as pie—if you're game to break House bounds after lights out." "We're game," said Fatty Wynn.

"It means a row if we're nailed," said Figgins, "But we shan't be nailed. Anyhow it's worth the risk. We'll ship the study while we're about it, and walk off with the footer. By gum! Lowther was larking with Gussy's toppers the other day—we'll jolly well walk off Gussy's Sunday topper, as well as the footer—and wag it at him next day from our study window—same as Blake did the footer. What?"

And Figgins chuckled gleefully.

"What-ho!" chortled Fatty.

And the three heroes of the New House strolled in the quad, discussing their little plot in all its bearings, till every detail was cut and dried.

"Mum's the word, though," said Kerr, "Not a syllable—even in our own House—if it gets out, we're done."

And it was agreed that mum should be the word.

Not a word—not a syllable—did Figgins and Co. breathe of their plot, even to pals in the New House. It was a rather reckless, and extremely risky, enterprise: and it could not be kept too dark. Mr. Ratcliff, their house-master, who was attending a Conference in London on Thursday, and staying in town for the night, certainly never dreamed of what was scheduled to happen during his absence. New House prefects were in the same state of blissful ignorance. To New House juniors who inquired sarcastically when Figgy was going to bag that School House footer, Figgy made only the masterly answer "Wait and see." The plot was plotted—

the scheme was schemed—and Figgins and Co. looked forward eagerly to Thursday—nothing doubting that it would be “all right on the night.”

CHAPTER XXIX

AT LAST!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stopped dead.

He stood at the doorway of the junior day-room, like a stone statue, incapable of movement.

The door was half open. Arthur Augustus had been about to enter, his aristocratic face as cheerful and equable as was its wont. But as a voice from the day-room fell on his ears, he stopped—and stood petrified. It was the voice of Ralph Reckness Cardew that came from within drawling, half-mocking, as usual.

“Oh, chuck it, Levison! D'Arcy's own pals don't believe in that mystery-man in his study last week. What's the good of trying to make out that he was the pilferer, and dropped a pound note about—when he doesn't exist? You know as well as I do who the pilferer was—the one and only Gussy!”

It had happened at last!

For more than a week, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's name had been bandied about the House, and about the other House, in connection with the affair in his House-master's study. Not a suspicion of it had penetrated Gussy's noble brain. For days and days, he had not even noticed that groups of fellows would suddenly leave off talking when he drifted into the offing. That circumstance had, at long last, dawned upon him, and perplexed him, as he had said in Study No. 9. But he never dreamed of guessing why. That any fellow could possibly connect him with an act of dishonesty was too unimaginable for him to imagine it. His

friends hoped that he never would "tumble": and that the pilferer would be spotted, thus washing out the whole thing. But the pilferer had not been spotted—none of the pilfered notes had been traced, with the exception of the single one found by Reggie Manners in D'Arcy's study. And now it had happened!—Arthur Augustus had "tumbled."

Certainly, Cardew would not have spoken as he did, had he known that D'Arcy was walking into hearing. The talk would have ceased suddenly, as usual, at the sight of him. But D'Arcy, coming along the passage to the open doorway, was unseen—and he heard as he came. It had been bound to happen sooner or later—and now it had happened. The surprising thing was that it had not happened sooner.

But to Arthur Augustus it came as a stunning shock.

In fact, he could hardly believe his noble ears. He could almost have believed that he was fast asleep in the Fourth-form dormitory, and only dreaming that he was at the door of the day-room, hearing Cardew's mocking voice accuse him of that meanest of mean actions, petty pilfering. It did not seem real.

He stood rooted to the floor: and Clive's voice came:

"You're a rotter, Cardew! Levison's very likely got it right—and anyway, D'Arcy would cut his hand off before he would pilfer, as you'd know if you weren't a rotten, silly-clever, carping, suspicious rotter."

"Thanks, old man!" drawled Cardew.

"All that, and more!" snapped Levison.

"Thanks again," said Cardew, "So glad to hear the candid opinion of my dearest pals."

Arthur Augustus stirred. He had stood rooted, his aristocratic brain trying to assimilate this. Now, with an expression on his face that had never been seen there before, he walked into the day-room.

Cardew gave a start as he saw him. Levison and Clive crimsoned. One glance at D'Arcy was enough—they knew that he had heard. The fat was in the fire now.

There were only a few fellows in the day-room. Baggy

Trimble, with a fat grin on his face, was listening to the talk. Three or four other fellows were at the other end of the room, and did not hear what Cardew was saying. But they all stared at the sight of D'Arcy's face as he came in.

"Oh, gad!" breathed Cardew. Even the cool, nonchalant dandy of the Fourth was uneasy, at that moment.

"Cardew." Arthur Augustus's voice was very quiet, "I heard what you said."

"Did you?" murmured Cardew.

"Cardew never meant you to hear, D'Arcy——!" said Levison, hastily.

"I am awah of that, Levison. I am vewy well awah that the weptile supposed that he was slanderin' a fellow behind his back."

Cardew's face flushed.

"Listeners never hear any good of themselves," he retorted.

"You are quite awah that I was not listenin', Cardew. Any fellow comin' up the passage must have heard you. That wemark is in keepin' with your wotten lyin', cowardly slanderin'."

"Oh, cut it out!" snapped Cardew, his eyes gleaming, "Are you fool enough not to know that it's the talk of the House?"

"That is quite untrue, Cardew. You are the only fellow in the House wat enough to think anythin' of the kind."

"Better ask some of the fellows," sneered Cardew.

"I would not insult any fellow by askin' him whethah he was a wotten wat like you, Cardew."

"Do you know that you're asking me to punch your head?" asked Cardew.

"You will have evey opportunity of puttin' in all the punchin' you can hand out," said Arthur Augustus, "I'm goin' to thwash you, you wat, till you can't cwawl. Take off your jacket."

Kangaroo of the Shell came across the day-room.

"What on earth's the row?" he asked.

"You had bettah ask Cardew, Hawwy Noble. I will not soil my tongue by wepeatin' that that wat has accused me of pinchin' Wailton's pound notes."

"You rotter, Cardew," breathed the Australian junior.

"Doesn't half the House think the same?" sneered Cardew, "Everyone knows."

"I will knock that back down your wascally neck, Cardew."

"Look here, you can't scrap in the day-room," interposed Levison, "Better get out behind the gym, and we'll get the gloves——."

"I wefuse to wait a single moment befoah thwashin' that wottah, Levison." Arthur Augustus peeled off a well-fitting jacket, and pushed back his cuffs. "Are you weady, Cardew?" Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"If you're keen on a scrap, I'm your man," he answered, "I don't want to scrap with you, and you've no more reason for scrappin' with me than with fifty other fellows who are sayin' the same thing—Oh!"

Smack!

Cardew broke off, with a yell, as an open palm smacked across his face.

"Now will you come on, you wat?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Cardew did not need asking again. He pitched off his jacket, and came on, his eyes flashing over his lashing fists. A moment more, and they were fighting furiously.

There had been only half-a-dozen fellows in the junior day-room when the row started. In about a couple of minutes there were half-a-hundred. The news of a fight in the day-room spread like wildfire. Fellows crowded in from everywhere, and there was a buzz of excited voices. Blake and Co. arrived with a rush, to find their noble chum engaged in deadly combat. In his shirt-sleeves, with his eyeglass flying at the end of its cord, his face set and his eyes gleaming, Arthur Augustus was going strong—heedless of a trickle of red flowing from his noble nose.



As neither heeded him, he strode at them, grasped Arthur Augustus with one hand, and Cardew with the other, and fairly pitched them apart.

"What on earth's the row?" exclaimed Tom Merry, as he came in with Manners and Lowther and a crowd of others, "Gussy, old man——."

"Gussy——!" exclaimed Blake.

"What's the row about, Kangy?"

"That cad Cardew—D'Arcy heard him—you can guess ——," said Kangaroo, "I hope Gussy will knock him into a cocked hat."

"He looks like it," said Monty Lowther, "Punch him, Gussy."

"Go it, Gussy!"

"Knock him out, old tulip."

Arthur Augustus neither heard nor heeded. He was concentrated on the work in hand. And it was not easy work, for Cardew was fit, and a good boxer, and had plenty of pluck. They were fighting hammer and tongs, and both were already showing signs of damage. There was a sudden crash as Cardew went down on his back, landing hard on oak planks.

"Man down!" said Herries.

But Cardew was up in a moment, and rushing on, Arthur Augustus met him with right and left, and hammer and tongs they went again. Tramping, panting, they punched and punched, till a savage jolt caught Arthur Augustus on his noble chin, and he went over. But he leaped up as actively as if, like Antaeus of old, he derived new strength from contact with mother earth, and hurled himself again at his adversary, with slogging fists.

There was a sudden squeak from Trimble.

"Cave! 'Ware pre's."

Neither of the combatants heeded the warning, and the slogging was fast and furious, as Kildare of the Sixth strode into the room. The captain of St. Jim's stared blankly at the fighting juniors.

"Stop that!" roared Kildare.

And as neither heeded, he strode at them, grasped Arthur Augustus with one hand, and Cardew with the other, and

fairly pitched them apart. Arthur Augustus tottered to one side of the room, Cardew to the other. Kildare stood between them, with frowning brow.

"You young rascals!" he hooted, "Scrapping in the day-room—and without even the gloves on——."

Arthur Augustus rallied, panting for breath.

"Pway stand out of the way, Kildare!" he exclaimed.

"What?"

"I am goin' to thwash that wottah——."

Cardew dropped his hands. He realised, if Gussy did not, that the head-prefect's word was law. Arthur Augustus was too wildly excited to heed even the captain of the school.

"You young ass!" roared Kildare, "Stand back."

"I insist upon thwashin' that wottah, Kildare! Pway get out of the way—I uttably wefuse to stand back——and I wepeat——Ow! Leggo, Blake."

Blake and Herries and Dig grasped their noble chum, as one man, and dragged him back. Arthur Augustus resisted hotly.

"Welease me," he panted, "I wepeat that I insist upon thwashin' that wotten wat Cardew——."

"All right, Kildare—we'll keep him quiet," said Blake.

"I wefuse to be kept quiet—I uttably wefuse——."

"Shut up, ass!" breathed Dig.

"I wefuse to shut up——."

"That's enough from you, D'Arcy," rapped Kildare, "Any more cheek, and I'll give you six."

"Weally, Kildare, I twust you do not wegard my wemarks as cheek. I should considah it vevy bad form to cheek the captain of the school," said Arthur Augustus, calming down a little, "But you see——."

"That will do, you yóung ass. What do you mean by kicking up a row here that can be heard all over the House?" exclaimed Kildare, "I've a good mind to whop the pair of you. Any more of it, and I'll send you up to the Head. Mind, I mean that."

And Kildare, frowning, stalked out of the junior day-doom.

Cardew, quietly, put on his jacket. Neither Levison nor Clive offered him a helping hand. Tom Merry picked up D'Arcy's jacket.

"Here you are, Gussy," he said.

"I am goin' to thwash Cardew, Tom Mewwy——."

"After what Kildare said?" hooted Blake, "Put your jacket on, fathead, and come away and bathe your nose—I can tell you it needs it."

"I am goin' to thwash Cardew——."

"Oh let him get on with it," drawled Cardew, "We'll both go up to the Head together."

"You shut up!" roared Blake.

"I'll please myself about that."

"You won't," said Tom Merry, savagely, "You'll hold your cheeky tongue or you'll be booted. You've said too much already, you rat."

"Boot him, anyhow," said Kangaroo.

Cardew gave a glance round at a crowd of hostile faces. Even his own chums were hostile, at that moment. He shrugged his shoulders, and walked out of the day-room. Arthur Augustus uttered an exclamation of wrath, and made an effort to break loose from his chums—but Blake and Herries and Dig held him fast.

"Get your jacket on, old chap," said Tom.

"I wefuse to get my jacket on, Tom Mewwy. I am goin' to thwash that wotten cad Cardew——."

"You've thrashed him enough, old son," said Monty Lowther, "He was on his last legs. Do you want to make a hospital case of him?"

"Oh! Pewwaps I have thwashed him enough," admitted Arthur Augustus, "He is a wank weptile, but——."

"But enough's as good as a feast," said Tom, "Here's your jacket."

Arthur Augustus consented at last to put his jacket on. Then he was led away by his friends, to bathe his noble nose, which, as Blake had pointed out, certainly needed it. The day-room was left in a buzz of excitement. Hitherto, Arthur

Augustus D'Arcy had been the only fellow in the House who did not know that his name was bandied about in connection with the pilfering. Now he knew. And what his reaction would be, was a question of great interest.

CHAPTER XXX

TROUBLE IN THE TEAM!

"TOM MEWWY!"

"What——?"

"That's wubbish!"

"Eh?"

"Wubbish!" repeated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, firmly, "Wank wubbish!"

Tom Merry looked at him. A dozen fellows looked at him. They had been looking at the football notice, posted up by the junior captain: but now they all transferred their attention to Arthur Augustus.

Tom, after long cogitation, had finally decided on his team. Talbot of the Shell was unavoidably absent, a great loss to the side: but Tom was satisfied that his place at outside right was fairly well filled by Cardew of the Fourth—who had been so strongly recommended by that sapient youth, Arthur Augustus. With the exception of Talbot's missing name, the team was as good a one as St. Jim's could put up, with players selected from both Houses. The list ran:

D. L. Wynn.

G. Herries, Harry Noble.

M. Lowther, S. Clive, G. F. Kerr.

R. R. Cardew, G. Figgins, T. Merry, J. Blake, A. A. D'Arcy.

Fellows who found their names in the list were accustomed to feel satisfied. Fellows who didn't, often considered

that the list might be improved. But it was quite unusual for a fellow whose name was up, to tell the football captain that it was rubbish—indeed rank rubbish.

“What’s biting you, Gussy?” asked Tom, good-temperedly, “We’re not leaving you out, old man—though that nose of yours will make the Rookwood men stare. You had to jam it on a door last week, and on a fist this week—and it does really look a bit the worse for wear.”

“Weally, Tom Mewwy——”

“Don’t tell me you want to stand out, and give your boko a rest,” urged Tom, “To-day’s Thursday, and we play on Saturday. Still, if you feel that your proboscis won’t stand the strain——”

“You uttah ass!”

“The list’s up early, and I’ve time to look for another man. Redfern of the New House is a good man, if you’re going to give us the go-by——”

“I am not goin’ to give you the go-by, Tom Mewwy. I am goin’ to play for St. Jim’s. But that list will not do.”

“Cheese it, Gussy, old man,” murmured Jack Blake.

“I wefuse to cheese it, Blake. I wepeat that that list will not do, and I twust that Tom Mewwy will agwee with me.”

Tom Merry laughed.

“Well I’m an agreeable chap!” he remarked, “I’ll do my best! But what’s the matter with the list, Gussy—if you’re satisfied with outside left?”

“Outside wight,” answered Arthur Augustus, “I am quite surprised to find the name of Cardew in a football team in which I am playin’, Tom Mewwy.”

“After ragging me bald-headed until I put him in?” asked Tom.

“I am vewy sowwy that I said a word in his favah. He is a weptile,” said Arthur Augustus, “I was judgin’ him only on his Soccah.”

“It’s Soccer we’re going to play on Saturday,” Tom pointed out.

"I did not think it was marbles, Tom Mewwy. But Soccah is not enough. St. Jim's ought not to play a weptile."

"My dear chap," said Tom, patiently, "Your rows with Cardew have nothing to do with football. Football's a game. Nothing to do with rows."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy breathed hard through his aristocratic and somewhat swollen nose. All the fellows round the notice-board were looking at him curiously. Since the fight in the day-room the day before, rumour had been busier than ever with D'Arcy's name. There were fellows who shared Cardew's belief, and others who wondered whether he had it right. But if anyone expected Arthur Augustus to carry his noble head a little less high, on account of what had been said in the day-room, that expectation proved quite unfounded. The swell of St. Jim's went on the even tenor of his way unperturbed. Apparently his view was that he was above suspicion except so far as "weptiles" were concerned. Cardew was a reptile: he had thrashed Cardew, or at least was satisfied that he had: and that was that! It had failed to penetrate his noble brain that other fellows, as well as Ralph Cardew, looked on him with a doubting eye. Cardew was a reptile and a rank outsider, and that was all there was about it!

There was a pause. Arthur Augustus's eye was gleaming: but he remained calm.

"I twust, Tom Mewwy, that you will weconsidah this," he said, "You have not, I pwesume, forgotten what that weptile said yestahday."

"That's got nothing to do with Soccah, old chap," said Tom, soothingly.

"I am sowwy for the fellow, in a way," said Arthur Augustus, "It must be howwid to have a wotten mind like his. But a wat like that is not fit to wepwesent St. Jim's on the football field, Tom Mewwy. I am surprisid that you should think of such a thing."

"We want to beat Rookwood," said Tom, "Cardew's a

cad—but he can play Soccer, and he plays at outside right now we've lost old Talbot."

"I wepeat——!"

"Tommy's skipper, Gussy," murmured Lowther.

"I am awah of that, Lowthah. But I twust that a skip-pah may wectify a mistake. Mannahs is a vevy good forward, Tom Mewwy. Why not play him?"

"Not a bad idea, Tom," said Manners, with a grin.

"Wouldn't I be jolly glad to, if you played Soccer as well as you take photographs," said Tom, "You know that, Manners. Look here, Gussy, you're a good little ass, and every decent man in the House stands by you in your row with Cardew—but you're not cut out for Adviser-in-Chief. Chuck it, see?"

"Vevy well, Tom Mewwy! I will not give you any more advice——"

"For this relief, much thanks," said Tom.

"I will only say——"

"Bow-wow!"

"I wegard that as a widiculous wemark, Tom Mewwy. I will only say that if you are playin' Cardew, I wequest you to take my name out of the list. I wesign my place in the team."

"Gussy!" exclaimed Blake.

"I am quite wesolved, Blake, that I will not play in the same team with a weptile. The othah fellows may please themselves, of course, if they do not wegard the mattah in the same light. If Tom Mewwy wants the wat, he is welcome to him—but I will have nothin' to do with him, on the football field or off."

"You can't let us down, Gussy," said Tom.

"It is you, Tom Mewwy, who are lettin' me down, and the school too," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "It is an insult to any fellow to ask him to wub shouldahs with a weptile. Pway cwoss my name out."

"Your name stays in!" roared Tom.

"I am standin' out of the game, Tom Mewwy."

“Look here, you fathead——!”

“Wats!” said Arthur Augustus: and he turned on his heel, and walked away, thus putting an end to the discussion.

Tom Merry gave a grunt of angry exasperation. So far as Gussy’s spot of trouble with Cardew was concerned, he was heart and soul with Gussy. But a football captain had to think of football first. Whatever Cardew thought or said about Gussy did not affect his form as a footballer, and he was the best man in the Lower School to fill Talbot’s place: and that was enough for Tom. It was not, evidently, enough for Arthur Augustus D’Arcy.

“The howling ass!” exclaimed Tom, “the blithering idiot——”

“Oh, go easy,” said Blake, “After all, there’s a lot in what Gussy says.”

“Are you going to kick, as well as that footling fathead?” hooted Tom.

“We want to beat Rookwood, Blake,” remarked Levison.

“I know that as well as you do,” snapped Blake, “But I wouldn’t touch your precious pal Cardew with a barge-pole.”

“You’re not wanted to touch him with a barge-pole,” growled Tom Merry, “You’re wanted to play inside left while Cardew plays outside right, and Gussy’s wanted at outside left——. And he’s got to play.”

“Well, he won’t,” said Blake, shaking his head, “When Gussy gets his back up, it stays up. And you can’t wonder at it, either. I don’t feel any too good about playing in the same team with that rat myself.”

“Nor I!” grunted Herries.

“Oh, don’t talk rot!” exclaimed Tom, in great exasperation, “Is Study No. 6 a home for idiots?”

“Rot, is it?” said Blake, “Well, rot or not, you can put it in your pipe and smoke it, Tom Merry. And you can jolly well find a new inside as well as outside on the left

wing. I'm standing out like Gussy if Cardew goes in, so there! ”

“And look for a new right half while you're about it,” exclaimed Herries, “I'm out too! ”

“And I'd say the same if I were in the team! ” said Dig.

“Look here——! ” hooted Tom.

But Study No. 6 did not “look there.” They walked off after Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, leaving Tom Merry red with wrath. A football captain has many responsibilities, and many little spots of bother: but three men walking out of his team on the eve of an important match was rather over the usual limit. Tom Merry, generally as good-tempered a fellow as any at St. Jim's, did not, at that moment, look his usual sunny self.

He took a pencil from his pocket, and stepped towards the football notice. The other fellows exchanged glances.

“Might chuck Cardew, old man! ” murmured Monty Lowther.

“Hasn't Cardew been picked out to play? ” snapped Tom.

“Yes, but——”

“That's that, then! If Gussy goes wandering about in the middle of the night and asks to be suspected of cracking cribs, has that got anything to do with football? ”

“No. But——”

“Cardew's got a rotten suspicious mind. Well, is he going to play Soccer with his mind, or with his feet? ”

“His feet, old chap! But——”

“But rats! ” said Tom Merry, crossly.

And he drew his pencil through three names on the list: D'Arcy, Blake, and Herries. And that was that!

CHAPTER XXXI

ANOTHER MYSTERY?

“ROTTEN!” growled Jack Blake.

“Putrid!” agreed George Herries.

“Yaas, wathah!” sighed Arthur Augustus D’Arcy.

And Dig nodded sympathetically.

They were not happy, in Study No. 6. Blake and Herries were backing up their noble chum, and they did not regret it. But it meant that they were out of the Rookwood match on Saturday: and that they regretted very much indeed. They were keen to play, and they were needed in the coming tough tussle with Jimmy Silver and Co. of Rookwood School—two powerful reasons for regret. They were peevish: they were disgruntled: they were very angry and touchy. They were very much inclined to go along to No. 9, and rag Ralph Cardew bald-headed and ship his study. They were rather disposed to do the same in No. 10 in the Shell. They were not indeed averse from ragging one another. Everything seemed out of joint—especially tempers!

“After all, you can play footer with a chap, even if he’s a rank outsider,” grunted Blake.

“Weally, Blake——”

“First time this study has been left out of a junior School match!” said Herries.

“It’s wotten! But——”

“Oh, we can look on, and cheer somebody else’s goals—if any!” said Blake, sarcastically, “I wonder who Tom Merry will shove in? We’d better make up our minds to cheer Rookwood goals—there mayn’t be any for St. Jim’s.”

"After all, Soccer's Soccer," remarked Dig.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Even Soccah does not come first, deah boys," he said, gently but firmly, "Nothin' would induce me to line up with a wat like Cardew. Tom Mewwy ought to dwop him."

"He's a good man at Soccer—the best, with Talbot gone," growled Blake, "And Tommy's skipper."

"Anyhow he won't drop Cardew," said Herries.

"No—he's dropped us instead," said Blake, savagely.

"We have dwopped ourselves, deah boy," Arthur Augustus pointed out.

"Fat lot of difference! We're going to loaf about behind the goal and look on! We can amuse ourselves counting up the Rookwood score. What the thump did you want to go down to Railton's study that night for, D'Arcy, you ass? That started all the trouble!" hooted Blake.

"I have already explained that I went down for Figgy's footah, Blake——"

"Fathead!"

"If there's a spot of trouble about, you can rely on Gussy to sit up on his hind legs and beg for it!" said Herries.

"Weally, Herries——"

"And after all, Cardew isn't the only fellow who thinks ——," began Dig. But he broke off, as Arthur Augustus's eye, and eyeglass, turned on him.

"Wobert Digby!" Gussy voice was stern. "Are you implyin' that any othah man in the House agwees with Cardew?"

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Dig.

"I wegard that as quite impossible," said Arthur Augustus, "Cardew is the only man in the House capable of such wascality. I am quite assuahed of that. But if you know of any othah man who entahtains the same suspicion, Digby, pway give me his name, and I will go and thwash him at once."

"Oh, you chucklehead!" said Blake.

"I wefuse to be called a chucklehead, Blake. Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus looked at three faces, in turn, searchingly. "I wequest you to speak out, Blake. I do not desiah to wemain in ignowance, if there is any othah wat like Cardew who is capable of thinkin' as he does. It there anybody else?"

Blake and Herries and Dig looked at him. Disgruntled as they were, as angry with Gussy as with Tom Merry and themselves and everybody else, they said nothing. It would have been too painful a shock to Arthur Augustus to learn that twenty or thirty fellows had been saying, or hinting, precisely what he had heard from Cardew in the day-room the day before.

"I am waitin' for an answah, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus, with stately dignity.

"Br-r-r-r!" grunted Blake.

"I do not wegard that as a sensible wemark, Blake. May I wequest you to talk sense!"

"What would be the good of talking sense to you, ass? You wouldn't understand it, would you?"

"I wepeat——"

"Oh, rats!" Blake jumped up, "No good jawing—we shall be rowing with one another at this rate. Let's get out and punt a footer—Figgins and Co. may try to get it off us—I'd jolly well like to punch a New House man just now."

"Yaas. But——"

"Oh, come on, and give your chin a rest. My hat! Where's that footer? I left it under the table after we had it just before class. You shifted it?"

Blake stared under the study table. Nothing was to be seen there, save the centre of the shabby square of carpet.

"I have not shifted it, deah boy——"

"You, Herries? You, Dig?"

"We haven't been up to the study till now," said Dig.

Blake gave an angry snort.

"Where's that footer, then?" he demanded.

"Pewwaps you put it somewhah else, and only supposed

that you put it undah the table," suggested Arthur Augustus, mildly.

"Chump!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Think I don't know where I put it?" roared Blake, "Didn't we have it out just before class, and didn't I cut up to the study when the bell went, and chuck it in, and didn't it go under the table? Think I'm blind?"

"Well, it's not there——!" said Dig.

"Look here, we haven't been up to the study, since class," argued Herries, "So you can't have left it under the table."

"Are you as silly an ass as Gussy?" demanded Blake, "I tell you it was left under this dashed table, and somebody's shifted it."

"Oh, bai Jove! Suppose Figgins——!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "They're aftah that ball, you know ——!"

"By gum! That's it!" yelled Blake, "One of those New House smudges has sneaked up to the study somehow——. Come on—we'll go over to the New House and mop them up——"

"Hold on," interjected Dig.

"Look here, come on, I tell you——."

"There's the footer!" bawled Dig, pointing to a spherical object under a chair close to the study wall, "I just spotted it——"

Blake spun round, staring! Evidently, there had not been any New House raid—for there was the football. As Blake had left it under the table in the middle of the room, he had not thought of looking under a chair by the wall. But there it was!

"Bai Jove! There it is," said Arthur Augustus, "You see, you couldn't have left it undah the table, Blake, aftah all——"

"I tell you I did leave it under the table!" bawled

Blake, "I tell you that somebody's shifted it from where I left it, see?"

Digby winked at Herries.

"Who'd come up here and shift a footer?" he asked.

"I don't know, fathead! I know somebody did! Somebody's been in this study while we were in class," hooted Blake.

"Oh, cwumbs!" Arthur Augustus gave quite a start, "The mystewy man——"

"The whatter?"

"Don't you wemembah, Blake, one day last week—bai Jove, it was Thursday, just a week ago—somebody was in this study, and locked me out, and I banged my nose on the door——"

"I remember you fancied somebody was——"

"Wats! Well, now he has been heah again," said Arthur Augustus, nodding his noble head with conviction, "It's the same wottah—he's been to the study again."

Digby chuckled.

"So there's a jolly old mystery man about, who drops into this study regularly every Thursday, what?" he asked.

"Sounds probable!" grinned Herries.

"Bai Jove! It does seem vewy odd," said Arthur Augustus, wrinkling his brow, "I weally cannot guess why he picks Thursday. But now it has happened twice——"

"Rats!" said Dig, "There was nobody in the study last Thursday, and there was nobody to-day. I expect the footer rolled after Blake chucked it in."

Jack Blake shook his head. His face was puzzled.

"The footer rolled under the table, and stopped there," he said, "I'm absolutely certain of that. I was going to pick it up just now, knowing it was there—but it wasn't! Somebody's been in the study. He doesn't seem to have done anything but shift the footer. Blessed if I make it out."

"I have no doubt that it was the same wottah——"

"Orris might have come up for the carpet, to give it a

shake," said Herries, "That would make the footer roll—he wouldn't notice it, or care, if he did——"

"Yes! But you can jolly well see that the carpet hasn't had a shake—it jolly well needs one, if you come to that—but it hasn't had one," said Blake, "Can't have been that."

He shook his head again. It was quite a mystery—as mysterious as the strange occurrence of the previous Thursday.

"Somebody's been up here," said Blake, "Dashed if I can guess who or why—unless it's Gussy's jolly old imaginary mystery-man——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Well, here's the footer anyhow," said Blake, "Let's get out." Blake was more disposed for a punt-about in the fresh air, than for solving mysteries. He picked up the old footer, put it under his arm, and led the way from the study.

As they were going out of the School House, a New House junior came in. It was Kerr of the Fourth.

Blake held up the footer.

"Coming after this?" he inquired, belligerently.

Kerr smiled, and shook his head.

"Well, what are you after, anyhow?" demanded Herries, suspiciously.

"Only going to speak to Orris," answered Kerr.

"Rot! You've nothing to do with our house-porter! He's after something, you chaps—kick him out!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kerr dodged.

"I'm really going to speak to Orris," he declared, "We want some wire for a fuse—I know Orris has got some."

"Oh, get on with it," said Blake, and he went out into the quad with his friends. There they punted the ball—Blake rather hoping that Figgins and Co. would make some attempt to capture it—he was, as he had remarked in the study, feeling like punching a New House man. Punching

New House heads would have been a solace. But Figgins and Co. did not appear in the offing, and Study No. 6 were denied even that small solace.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT!

“QUIET!” whispered Figgins.

Figgins had said “Quiet!” five or six times. Kerr and Fatty Wynn, who realised that it was necessary to be quiet, said nothing.

Certainly, nobody was likely to overhear a whisper, in the dark quadrangle at the stilly hour of midnight. But fellows who were out of the House at such an hour could hardly be too careful.

Seldom, or never, had Figgins and Co. of the New House at St. Jim's, heard the chimes at midnight. And they found it rather exciting, indeed thrilling, to creep softly out of the House while all St. Jim's slept. Like three shadows they flitted across the quad: with silent tread, they crept round the School House buildings, and arrived breathlessly under a small window on the ground floor. That was why Figgy whispered, once more, “Quiet!” for the next window was the window of Orris's room—and it was very important not to awaken Orris. Had the House-porter heard them and turned out, the game would have been up.

Under the little window of the servants' box-room, next to Orris's room, the three halted, and listened. There was a faint wail of the wind over the ancient roofs of St. Jim's: but no other sound. Not a single light gleamed from the School House at that hour. All was dark—all was silent—all was safe!

Everything—so far—had gone according to plan. The

plot that had been plotted had been kept a deep dark secret. Nobody knew. Mr. Ratcliff, if he was dreaming in a London Hotel, assuredly was not dreaming of the activities of Figgins and Co. Monteith, Baker, Webb, and the other New House prefects, had not the remotest suspicion that anything was scheduled for that night. And Kerr had been completely successful in his strategy—much more so than his chum Figgy in the strategic line. He had looked in on Orris and borrowed some fuse wire—tipping him a “bob” for the same: a transaction equally satisfactory to both: for Orris had a use for shillings, to lose on football pools, and a hank of fuse wire was always a useful sort of thing to have about. And on leaving Orris, Kerr had whipped into the next room—the box-room, and slipped back the catch of the window—the work of a moment.

Nobody was likely to notice that, for the catch was kept permanently fastened, so who should surmise that it needed looking at? And that slipped-back catch made all the difference!

Figgins, having cautioned his comrades to be quiet, reached up, and pushed at the sash of the little window. As the catch was unfastened, he expected it to glide up under his push. But it didn't!

“Oh!” breathed Figgins, “I say, sure you got it open, Kerr?”

“Yes!” whispered Kerr.

“Well, it won't move.”

“Let me try——”

“Not much good you trying, when I've tried, and it won't move.”

“That window's never opened—a bit stiff, most likely,” whispered Kerr.

“I'll have another shot! You fellows keep quiet—mind, I mean quiet!” said Figgins. “We're jolly near Orris's room—quiet, see?”

Fatty Wynn, in the shadows, winked at Kerr, who smiled. They both kept quiet—feeling that Figgins was making

noise enough for three!

Figgins, the tallest of the trio, was easily able to reach the window. He pushed and shoved at the sash again. Still it remained inert.

"N.G.," muttered Figgins, "If you slipped back the catch, Kerr, somebody must have spotted it and fastened it again."

Kerr did not reply to that. He saw no purpose in adding his voice to Figgy's, with Orris's room so near at hand. Quietly, he opened the largest blade of his pocket-knife, inserted it slowly but surely under the window-sash, and eased the sash up. The sash, seldom opened, was, as he had remarked, stiff—but that gentle easing did it—it stirred.

"Oh!" said Figgins. He stared at David Llewellyn Wynn, "What are you grinning at, Fatty?"

"Oh! Nothing!" murmured Fatty, still grinning.

The sash moved slowly—but it moved. A quarter of an inch—half an inch—and then Kerr was able to get fingertips under it, and lift. There was a creak, and up it went.

"I say, that's rather a row, Kerr," said Figgins, "Orris might hear that. Better let me do it."

Kerr breathed a little hard. But he gave place to his great chief. Figgins got both hands under the sash, and heaved. It shot up with almost a bang.

"Oh!" gasped Figgins.

"That's done it!" muttered Fatty Wynn. "Orris must be jolly fast asleep if he hasn't heard that."

"Quiet!" admonished Figgins.

"Look here——."

"Can't you be quiet, old chap?" urged Figgins. "We've got to keep quiet, you know."

Kerr pressed Fatty Wynn's arm: and David Llewellyn Wynn suppressed his feelings, and was silent. The three listened anxiously. The window was open now—that was all right. But if Orris had heard that thud of the sash shooting up—and if he turned out to investigate——!



Figgins clambered in at the window and disappeared into the blackness within.

The next minute was a long and anxious one. But there was no sound of alarm, and the New House raiders breathed again. Orris, evidently, had heard nothing, or at all events had not heeded it. All was silent as before.

"O.K." said Figgins, at last, "Now, I'll get in first, and you follow me. And for goodness' sake, don't make a row."

Figgins clambered in at the window. He disappeared into the blackness within, and a thud of boots announced that he had landed. Kerr and Wynn climbed in after him, and contrived to land without thudding boots.

They stood in darkness, in which they dimly discerned the vague outline of boxes and other lumber.

"This way!" whispered Kerr, leading the way across to the door. He opened the door without a sound, and they passed out into a passage that was as black as the inside of a hat.

"Can't see a thing," muttered Figgins, "I say, do you know which way to go, Kerr—you've been over the ground —."

"Silence!" breathed Kerr.

"Look here, Kerr——."

"We're just outside Orris's door."

"Well, the sooner we get away, the better. Keep quiet, though. Look here, do you know the way, or not? What are you dragging at me for?"

Kerr did not answer. He dragged at Figgy's arm, and led him along the passage, away from the perilous proximity of Orris's door. Fatty Wynn groped after them. They stopped, at last, at another door.

"I say, sure you're right, Kerr?" muttered Figgins, "I say, we don't want to butt into somebody's room. I'd better strike a match."

"It's all right!" whispered Kerr.

"Well, that's all very well, but we've got to be careful. I don't feel at all sure we're going right."

It was a real test of friendship for Kerr to keep silent and patient. But the Scottish junior only smiled, in the dark,

and opened the door. They passed through into wider spaces.

Kerr, still holding Figgy's arm, led him on through black shadow, as if he could see like a cat in the dark. Fatty Wynn followed confidently: but Figgins did not feel so sure, until, in a glimmer of starlight from a high window, he made out a great curving staircase.

"Oh!" whispered Figgins, "We're right after all."

There was no doubt about that now. The staircase led up to the study landing—and the Fourth-form quarters in the School House. Study No. 6 was at their mercy—and the coveted footer, and Gussy's Sunday hat, and anything else upon which their fancy fell!

"By gum!" murmured Figgins, "This is a winner, you chaps! We'll jolly well bag the footer, and Gussy's topper, and ship the study, and leave a message chalked on the wall "New House is cock-house!" "What?" Figgins chuckled, "Will those School House smudges stare, when they see it?"

They trod cautiously up the stairs, and reached the study landing. All was dark there: but this was familiar ground—they had been inside the School House often enough, in this part of the building. Cautiously they crossed the landing to the Fourth-form passage.

There was a glimmer on the landing from high windows over the staircase. But the study passage was black as a hat. They trod softly into it—and then Kerr suddenly stopped, and gave a startled whisper:

"Hold on! Quiet, for goodness' sake."

"O.K." said Figgins, "We're all right here—far enough from the dormitories—there's nobody about the studies at night—."

"For the love of Mike, quiet! There's somebody up."

"Rot! Who——?"

"Can't you see that spot of light?" breathed Fatty Wynn.

"What? Oh!" gasped Figgins. He stared, in sheer wonder.

Ahead of them, in the passage, the blackness was broken by a strange, unexpected glimmer, or rather, two glimmers. A faint glimmer came from under a study door. A clearer gleam came like a pencil of light from a keyhole. In blank amazement, the three startled juniors stared.

There was a light in Study No. 6—at midnight! Somebody was there! At midnight's hour, when everyone in the House should have been fast asleep in bed, there was somebody up, with a light, in the very study for which the raiders were heading. It was utterly, overwhelmingly unexpected—and Figgins and Co. could only stare, wondering almost dizzily who on earth could be up in Study No. 6 in the dead of night! And, as they stared, there came to their ears, from the study, a faint sound of muffled knocking!

CHAPTER XXXIII

LIGHT AT LAST!

FIGGINS and Co. stood silent, almost spell-bound, for a long minute, staring at the glimmer of light at the shut door of Study No. 6, listening to the faint knocking that came through the silence. Never in all their young lives had they been so astonished.

But, amazing as it was at midnight, one thing was clear—there was a light in Study No. 6, and somebody was there! It could not be Blake or his study-mates—that was impossible at such an hour. But it was somebody!—and it was some surreptitious “somebody” who obviously had no right to be there. The knocking, faint as it was, told its own tale—somebody was opening something that had to be opened by force, and was doing it as quietly as possible.

“What on earth can it mean?” breathed Figgins, at last.

"Couldn't be a burglar, in a junior study!" muttered Fatty Wynn.

"What do you think, Kerr?" Figgy was the great chief and leader of the New House Co., but he turned instinctively to his Scottish chum when he was puzzled or perplexed.

Kerr's face had set grimly.

"I think I can guess," he breathed.

"Blessed if I can! What——?"

"The pilferer!" said Kerr, "You remember the pilferer in Railton's study, that night last week when D'Arcy went down. He's never been spotted. Now he's at it again, in that study.' "

"Oh!" said Figgins. He thought a moment or two, and nodded, "Bet that's it! He's getting something open—— D'Arcy's desk, perhaps! By gum!" Figgins's eyes gleamed, "I say, if it's that rotter, we're spotting him."

"Just that!" said Kerr, grimly, "Better game than bagging a footer or a top hat—if we bag the pilferer, Figgy. That smudge Cardew has been making out that it was D'Arcy—and there's a split in the team over it. It will shut Cardew up—and some other cads, too—if we get the man."

"I say——!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"Well, what, Fatty? Kerr's jolly well right."

"Yes: but we shall get into a fearful row, if it comes out that we're in the wrong House in the middle of the night—"

"Oh! I forgot that," said Figgins.

"Keep on forgetting it, old chap," said Kerr, "We've got our duty to do, whether we get into a row or not. If that's the pilferer, we're getting him, and handing him over to the house-master, and clearing poor old Gussy."

"Right!" said Figgins.

"Well, we can stand a whopping, I suppose!" sighed Fatty Wynn.

"Never mind that now," said Kerr, "First of all, we've got to make sure—keep quiet for goodness sake, and don't alarm him. We're going to see what's going on in that study before we make a move."

Kerr trod softly on tiptoe towards the door of Study No. 6. Figgins and Fatty Wynn followed him on tiptoe—even Figgy contriving not to make a sound. From the study still came, intermittently, the muffled knocking.

The pencil of light from the keyhole into the dark passage was blotted out, as Kerr bent his head, and applied his eye to the orifice. Figgins and Fatty awaited their turn to see what was "going on" in Study No. 6.

Kerr caught his breath, as he looked.

He had a view of a considerable part of the study. He noted first that the table had been moved to the side of the room, and the shabby old square of carpet rolled back. Evidently, it was not a desk, or other locked receptacle, that was receiving the attention of the mysterious midnight prowler.

The bare floor was revealed, where the carpet had lain. On the floor, a man was kneeling. Kerr could not see who it was, as his back was towards the door, but there was something familiar about the form—he knew that he had seen the man before, whoever he was.

But it was the man's occupation that was most surprising. He had a chisel in one hand, a hammer in the other. The head of the chisel was wrapped in a folded handkerchief, to muffle, so far as possible, the sound of the knocking. Even at midnight, and at a distance from sleeping quarters, there was risk in hammering. But the man had to hammer, for Kerr saw, to his amazement, that he was prising up a short length of board in the floor.

Kerr had been in Study No. 6 often enough, and he remembered the creak of a loose board under the carpet. Apparently it had been nailed down since—and the kneeling man had all his work cut out to get it loose again, without making so much noise as might have given the alarm. The chisel had to be knocked in—there was no other means of prising up the board—but he dared not put force into the blows. It was slow and exasperating work.

For some moments Kerr was blankly amazed by the man's

occupation. But the explanation—the only possible one—dawned on his mind. Something was hidden under that board, and the man wanted to get at it.

He drew a deep, deep breath, as he realised what it meant—what it must mean!

Under that board was the hiding-place of the pilferer's plunder. He was there, either to add to it, or to take from it. It was his hide-out—under the floor of Study No. 6.

Kerr moved, to let Figgins look in—and Figgins barely repressed an exclamation of astonishment as he did so. He fairly blinked at the kneeling figure, prising up the board.

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Figgins, as he straightened up again, "What the thump is he up to, Kerr?"

Fatty Wynn peered in, in his turn. His plump face was excited when he turned to his chums.

"I say, know who it is?" he whispered.

"I couldn't see his face——."

"I did—he moved—I saw it——It's Orris."

"Orris!" breathed Figgins and Kerr together.

"The house-porter," whispered Fatty, "I say, he's the pilferer—you can guess what's under that board. I say, he wasn't in his room at all—he's here——"

"Quiet!"

Kerr peered in again. The man's face was turned away—but he knew him now. It was Orris, house-porter in the School House. And now, as Kerr looked, the short section of board came up, at last, and he heard the man pant as he pulled it out, leaving a dark opening in the floor.

Into that opening, a hand was dipped, coming up again with a little bunch of slips of paper in it. Kerr did not need telling that they were pound notes.

The man, still kneeling, brushed off an adhering cobweb, and detached five of the notes from the bunch. These he thrust into his pocket. The remainder he replaced in the cavity under the floor. Then he replaced the loose board above them. Clearly, that cavity was to continue to serve as a hide-out—for Orris to help himself from it, from time to

time, as he needed the money. Once more there was a sound of muffled knocking, as Orris proceeded to secure the board.

Kerr straightened up. He had seen enough.

"It's the pilferer—and he's got Railton's notes there—some under the floor, some in his pocket. I'm going to call Railton—you two watch that door. If he tries to get out before we come back, collar him and hold him—you two can handle him easily enough. I shan't be long."

"Go it!" whispered Figgins.

Kerr disappeared into the darkness.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn stood, silent and breathless, outside the door of Study No. 6. Faintly, from within, came the sound of Orris fastening the board he had replaced. No doubt he would have preferred to leave it unsecured, as it once had been—but since it had been nailed up, he dared not—and some of the nails Jack Blake had driven in, at least, had to be driven in again. Little dreaming of what was coming to him, the wretched man completed his task, and then spread out the study carpet once more, and moved the table back to its place.

The glimmer of light from the study was blotted out suddenly—Orris was finished now, and he had turned off the light. But at the same moment, there came a blaze of light in the passage, as the electric switch was turned on there: and Figgins and Fatty Wynn blinked round to see Mr. Railton, in dressing-gown and slippers, and with a very grim face, striding into the passage from the study landing, with Kerr at his heels.

The School House master did not speak. He strode directly to the door of Study No. 6. Almost as he reached it, it opened, and Orris stepped out—jumping like a startled rabbit in the unexpected light.

Face to face with the School House master, the wretched man staggered, catching at the door-post for support, every vestige of colour draining from his face. It was not necessary to "collar" Orris. It was necessary for the house-master to catch him as he collapsed!

CHAPTER XXXIV

FIGGINS GETS THE FOOTER!

TOM MERRY frowned.

Harry Manners frowned.

Monty Lowther sighed!

It was a sunny morning. St. Jim's generally had a cheerful aspect—the grey old walls, the red old chimney-pots, the ancient elms, the innumerable windows, glimmering in the morning sunshine.

But two members of the "Terrible Three" did not look sunny like the morning. Tom Merry had to think of the Rookwood match, due the following day—with a split in his team, and three places to fill almost at the last moment. He could not help feeling that a football skipper's life, like that of Gilbert's policeman, was not a happy one!

Manners sympathised with his chum in his difficulty: but he was not, at the moment, thinking of Soccer or Soccer matches. His eyes were on a fag loafing moodily under the elms. A dozen fags of the Third were playing leap-frog till the bell should ring for school: but Reggie Manners was not taking part—he hung about by himself, with his hands in his pockets, and a moody face. Manners major knew the reason—like D'Arcy of the Fourth, Reggie of the Third had not escaped suspicion in the matter of the pilfered pound note. Whether he was innocent in that matter, Manners did not and could not know, and it was a deep worry on his mind, and that worry brought a frown to his brow.

Monty Lowther was the only one of the three who did not feel just then that the uses of the world seemed weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable. But he found the disgruntled faces of

his chums a bit depressing—and he sighed!

Only too clearly, the “Terrible Three” of the Shell were not their accustomed bonny selves that sunny morning!

On the other hand, three fellows who sauntered over from the New House looked as if they found life particularly worth living. Figgins and Co. were as merry and bright as the morning itself.

“You School House men look jolly!” was Figgy’s greeting, “Trying to outshine the sun, or what?”

And Kerr and Wynn chuckled.

“Oh, don’t be a goat!” grunted Tom Merry, with unrelaxing brow, “Haven’t I got to find three new men for the eleven—owing to that ass Gussy going off at the deep end?”

“That’s an easy one!” said Figgins, airily, “I can give you the names of three New House men on the spot——.”

“Don’t take the trouble! I want footballers!” snorted Tom.

“Why, you cheeky ass!” roared Figgins, “Don’t we play your head off in the House matches? What?”

“Not that I’ve ever noticed! Run away and play marbles, and don’t bother a man who’s got to think about Soccer.”

“I’ll jolly well——!”

“Easy, old man,” murmured Kerr, “Tommy’s worried—no House rags now. Let him blow off steam if it does him any good.”

Tom Merry laughed.

“Well, it’s a spot of worry, and no mistake,” he said, “I’m thinking of Redfern and Owen of your House, and Digby of ours—but—I’m thinking too of banging Gussy’s head on a wall till he comes down off his high horse. I haven’t decided which yet.”

“Perhaps we can help,” smiled Kerr, “We’ve got a spot of news for you, that you don’t seem to have heard yet. Gussy will come down off his high horse if he gets a proper apology from Cardew.”

“Catch that swanky ass owning up that he’s in the

wrong!" growled Tom, "The fool believes what he said in the day-room the other day."

"He won't when he knows the pilferer's caught!"

"What?"

The Terrible Three all exclaimed together.

Figgins and Co. grinned joyously. They were the fellows with the news—startling news—news that redounded to the glory of their House. They had spotted the pilferer—they had cleared up the mystery—they had unearthed the secret of Study No. 6—School House men, on the spot, hadn't been able to do a thing—but New House men had dropped in and done it—and Figgins and Co. were in fact feeling rather like the gentleman in Horace who was disposed to strike the stars with his sublime head!

"Gammon?" asked Monty Lowther, staring.

"Honest Injun!" said Figgins, "We spotted him——."

"You New House fatheads spotted him!" ejaculated Lowther.

"Well, there were plenty of School House fatheads who didn't!" grinned Figgins. "But it's honest Injun—Railton's got him—got him last night."

Manners changed colour. He gave another glance at the moody fag under the elms, and caught Figgins by the arm. For a moment he felt an awful fear.

"You know who it was?" he asked, huskily.

"Orris!" said Kerr, at once. He understood Manners' look.

"Orris!" repeated Manners, blankly. Then he drew a deep, deep breath, as if a crushing weight had rolled from his mind and his heart.

"But is that official?" asked Tom.

"I tell you Railton's got him—we spotted him, and handed him over," grinned Figgins, "He had some of the notes on him, and the rest hidden——."

"Orris!" Manners repeated the name, "So that's what's come of his football pooling. And—and it might——" He broke off, and leaving the others, walked across to the moody

fag loafing under the elms. He had news now for Reggie likely to banish the moodiness from his brow.

"But how——?" asked Monty Lowther.

"How did it happen?" asked Tom. For the moment, Tom Merry almost forgot the Rookwood match, in his interest in this unexpected development.

"Oh, we'll tell you the thrilling tale!" chuckled Figgins, "Hallo, here comes Blake and his gang—they'd better hear it—this way, Blake!" bawled Figgins, "Got some news for you, old bean."

Blake and Co., in present circumstances, were rather disposed to keep clear of Tom Merry. However, they came up in response to Figgy's hail.

"Well, what's the news?" asked Jack Blake.

"Figgy says they've nailed the pilferer," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! That's jollay good, if twue," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "Has Inspectah Skeat been heah?"

Figgins made an airy gesture.

"Skeat couldn't do a thing," he said, "It was up to the New House, as cock-house of St. Jim's—and we did it."

"Wats!"

"Come off it!" grunted Herries.

"Gammon!" said Dig.

"Cough it up, Figgy," said Tom Merry, laughing.

And Figgins and Co. proceeded to "cough it up": the three taking turns in the narration of the thrilling tale of the midnight raid on Study No. 6, and its unexpected outcome.

The School House juniors listened with deep interest, considerable surprise, and many interruptions.

"By gum!" said Blake, with a deep breath, when the tale was told, "Our study—hiding the loot in our study—"

"What a feahful nerve!"

"Under the floor!" said Herries, "Why, that was the board that you nailed up the other day, Blake——."

"If I'd only looked under it before I nailed it—!" said Blake.

"Well, who could have guessed!" said Dig, "But to think that Railton's pound notes were hidden there all the time—."

"Bai Jove! And it was Owwis!" said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head sadly, "Do you know, deah boys, that he was vewy impertinent when I warned him about losin' his money on football pools—quite cheekay, I am sowwy to say. And he must have lost all his money, you know, to go and help himself to Wailton's—."

"Well, it's out now," said Tom, "And fellows who have been saying——." He broke off abruptly.

"What have fellows been sayin', Tom Mewwy?"

"Oh! Nothing! Jolly lucky those New House bounders came after that footer last night," said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Like their cheek, though," said Herries, "But they never got the footer—it's in the study now."

"We could have had the footer, if we'd liked!" retorted Figgins, "But we got the pilferer instead, as you School House chumps couldn't do it."

"Look here, you New House smudge—."

"Well, you look here, you School House smear——."

"Pway don't wow, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, benignantly, "We are all feelin' vewy much obliged to Figgins. It was a howwid mystewy and now it is cleahed up. It is a vewy wemarkable thing that New House men did it——."

"Fathead!" said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins, it is vewy wemarkable——."

"Ass!"

"I shall pass ovah those oppwobwious wemarks, Figgins, in wecognition of the gweat service you have wendahed," said Arthur Augustus, "Pway wait a minute for me, Figgy, old chap."

Arthur Augustus shot into the School House. He came back with a football under his arm—the footer from Study No. 6.

That bone of contention he presented to the surprised Figgy, with a graceful bow.

"Figgins, deah boy, pway accept this footah, to weplace the one I kicked into Wailton's window, and which he wathah thoughtlessly confiscated!" said Arthur Augustus.

"My dear chap——!" said Figgins.

"Pway take it, Figgins. I shall weally wegard it as a favah!" assured Arthur Augustus.

"Well, if you would weally wegard it as a favah," said Figgins, with a playful imitation of Gussy's beautiful accent, "I will accept it, deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Tom Merry and Co. and Figgins and Co. proceeded to punt that footer till the bell went for school, in so amicable a way, that no observer would have guessed that School House and New House were deadly rivals and foes!

CHAPTER XXXV

CARDEW COUGHS IT UP!

"CARDEW——!"

"Well?" said Cardew.

"There's D'Arcy!" said Levison, quietly. "Get to it."

"Um!"

"Cut off and speak to him now," growled Clive, "You've got to cough it up, so get it over."

Cardew stood silent.

It was after third school that morning. By that time, all St. Jim's knew of the strange happenings of the night. Some fellows, indeed, had seen Orris depart, in company with a policeman from Wayland. Everybody knew that the mysterious pilferer had been revealed, and that the pilfered pound notes had been recovered, with the exception of four

or five which the wretched man had lost on football pools. And fellows who had doubted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were, it was to be hoped at least, feeling properly ashamed of themselves.

Whether Ralph Cardew was ashamed of himself or not, his chums were ashamed of him, and quite determined that he should do the right thing now. Cardew certainly was feeling far from comfortable.

"You're not still making out that you'd got it right, are you?" asked Levison, with angry sarcasm.

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Cardew, "I got it wrong—that's clear enough now. But if there was anything in evidence, D'Arcy was the man. It turns out that he was only making a fool of himself—as usual—that night! But he asked to be suspected—fairly sat up and begged for it."

"Oh, shut that up" exclaimed Clive, "You've acted like a rotter, and a fool too. Now go and tell the chap you're sorry."

"I suppose you're sorry?" snapped Levison.

"Well, yes! But——."

"Well, it's up to you. Go and get on with it."

Cardew drew a hard breath.

No doubt he felt that it was up to him, as matters had turned out. But it irked him to own up that he was in the wrong: and still more, to ask pardon for it. But he made up his mind.

"O.K." he said, "I suppose a chap can say he's sorry he made a bloomer. I'll talk to him like a Dutch uncle."

And Cardew walked across towards Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was speaking to his minor in the quad. He loitered a little, till Wally of the Third cleared off, and then came up to the swell of St. Jim's.

"D'Arcy——!" he began.

Arthur Augustus looked at him. His aristocratic face was like ice, and his eye, behind his eyeglass, like steel.

"Did you address me, Cardew?" he asked.

"Sort of," agreed Cardew.

"I wegard it as impertinence on your part, Cardew, to address a single word to me. Pway keep your distance."

"I want to say——."

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus turned on his heel, turned his back on Cardew, and walked away, with his noble nose in the air. Cardew was left staring, with the colour flushing in his cheeks. He had made up his mind to offer an apology—— but it did not seem easy to "cough it up." The receptivity, so to speak, was not good.

He shoved his hands deep into his pockets, and walked away——almost walking into the Terrible Three of the Shell, who were looking for him.

"Oh, here you are, Cardew," said Tom Merry, "Hold on—I've something to say to you."

"About the football?" asked Cardew.

"No——about D'Arcy——."

"Wash it out, then! Talk any amount of Soccer you like——but I'm fed up on D'Arcy."

"That won't do," said Tom.

"'Fraid it will have to do," drawled Cardew: and he made a move to walk away. Tom Merry caught him by the shoulder.

"Stop!" he rapped.

"But you're boring me, my good Thomas!" said Cardew, plaintively.

"You're going to apologise to D'Arcy, and I'm going to see you do it," said Tom, still with a grip on the Fourth-former's shoulder.

"Just that," said Monty Lowther, and Manners nodded.

"Look here, Cardew," went on Tom Merry, quietly, "So long as the pilferer wasn't known, there may have been some sort of an excuse for you. There's none now. You've said rotten things about a chap whose shoes you're not fit to clean, and you've caused a split in the eleven. That's got to be set right. You're going to do it."

"Think so?" drawled Cardew.

"Or else," said Tom, "you're going to be kicked out of the eleven, and sent to Coventry by the House. Is that what you want?"

Cardew assumed a thoughtful look.

"It doesn't sound attractive," he remarked, "I can think of pleasanter things."

"Well, you know what you've got to do."

"Levison and Clive have been sayin' all that to me. But—."

"Wash out the butts and get going."

"But can you get his nibs to listen?" inquired Cardew, "I've tried once, if you're interested to know: and the result was quite unnervin'. Gussy froze me with a glance—practically petrified me, like jolly old Medusa, and left me turned to stone. I'm not sure that my delicate constitution would be equal to goin' through it again."

"Come on, and don't be a goat," said Tom, impatiently.

"Well, look here," said Cardew, "will it do if I apologise to his back?"

"What?"

"You see, he spins round like a teetotum when I speak to him," explained Cardew, "and I see nothin' of him but his back. If an apology addressed to the back of his jacket will meet your views, I'm your man. What do you think?"

"You silly ass! Manners, old man, cut off and get hold of Gussy."

"O.K." said Manners, grinning, and he cut off to capture Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, catching him by the sleeve and halting him.

"Now come on, Cardew," said Tom.

"You needn't keep that herculean grip on my shoulder. I'll come quietly, as I've no doubt Orris said to the policeman."

"Come on, and not so much gas." Tom Merry released Cardew's shoulder: and he walked airily between Tom and Lowther, to where Manners had brought Arthur Augustus to a halt. Gussy's voice was heard in expostulation as they came up.

"Pway welease my sleeve, Mannahs! You are wufflin' it. I vevy much dislike havin' my clobbah wuffed."

"Cardew wants to speak to you, Gussy," said Tom Merry.

"I wefuse to listen to a word fwom him, Tom Mewwy. I am surprised that you should suggest it," said Arthur Augustus, stiffly, "I wegard him with uttah despision—I mean contempt!"

And Arthur Augustus essayed to turn haughtily on his heel and walk away, as before. But this time he did not succeed, as Manners kept hold of his sleeve.

"Mannahs! Will you welease my sleeve?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, wrathfully.

"Not just now," said Manners, "Unless you'd like me to hold you by your ear instead?"

"I should uttably wefuse to allow you to hold me by my yah, Mannahs. If you do not immediately welease my sleeve——."

"Cardew wants to apologize!" bawled Tom Merry.

"Oh!" Arthur Augustus's stern brow relaxed a little. "That altahs the case. A pwopah apology will set any mattah wight. Are you weady to apologize, Cardew?"

"Yearning to," said Cardew, solemnly.

"Then you may pwoceed!" said Arthur Augustus, majestically.

"Thanks," said Cardew, "Well, I take back all I said, and all I didn't say—with all that everybody else said or didn't say thrown in. There!"

"Weally, Cardew——."

"And I beg a thousand pardons," went on Cardew, "No—dash it all—ten thousand pardons. I beg ten thousand pardons, and if that doesn't satisfy you, I'll make it twenty thousand. Can a fellow say more?"

"Weally, you ass——."

"But really and truly," added Cardew, moved by a better impulse, "I'm awfully sorry, and I'd like to kick myself. Forget all about it if you can."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's noble brow cleared.

“Bai Jove! If you put it like that, Cardew, I am bound to accept your apology,” he said, graciously, “Aftah all, you cannot help bein’ a bit of a wottah, can you?”

“What?” Cardew gave the swell of St. Jim’s a very expressive look, while the other fellows grinned.

“I shall ovahlook the whole mattah now,” said Arthur Augustus, “Undah the pwesent circs, Tom Mewwy, I am pwepared to play in the Wookwood match, with Cardew in the team.”

“And all was calm and bright!” remarked Monty Lowther. “Ha, ha, ha!”

Three names that had been subtracted from the football list reappeared therein: to the great satisfaction of Study No. 6 and the footballing fraternity generally: and, as Monty Lowther had remarked, ‘all was calm and bright!’

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE HISTORY OF THE MYSTERY

TOM MERRY lifted a dish of toast from the fender. Monty Lowther poured out the tea, with a calculating eye on the milk. Manners, with almost mathematical precision, divided four hard-boiled eggs into seven equal portions.

There were seven to tea in No. 10 Study in the Shell. If such items as milk, sugar, butter, eggs, were in short supply, there were other things in plenty, such as toast, and scones, and plum jam—not to mention a handsome cake, which Arthur Augustus D’Arcy had received from home, and brought along to grace the festive board.

Seven fellows, with seven healthy appetites, sat round the study table, and there were six smiling and cheery faces: and one very thoughtful, though equally cheery. Arthur

Augustus seemed in a reflective mood.

The talk over tea, naturally, ran on the strange secret of Study No. 6, now happily brought to light. It had been the talk of the school all day, and the affair had been discussed over and over again in all its bearings. Even the Rookwood match, due on the morrow, took second place as a topic.

"Toast, Gussy?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Thank you, deah boy."

"Jam or butter on it?" asked Monty, "I may mention, confidentially, that there isn't any butter—but what would you like?"

"I pwefer jam, please," said Arthur Augustus. He glanced round the table, "I have been thinkin', you fellows——!"

There was a general exclamation of surprise.

"You!" ejaculated Blake.

"Not really!" exclaimed Herries.

"How did you manage that?" asked Dig.

"Did it hurt?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Well, Gussy's always got some surprise for us!" remarked Manners.

And Tom Merry chuckled.

Arthur Augustus passed all these frivolous remarks by, like the idle wind which he regarded not. His noble brow was serious and thoughtful.

"I wepeat that I have been thinkin', and I have thought the whole mattah out," he said, "I can now make the whole thing cleah to you fellows—the whole histowy of the mystewy."

Monty Lowther winked at a smiling circle of faces.

"Let's have it," he said, "Sherlock Holmes always explained when the case is wound up! You can look on us as six Dr. Watsons, Gussy, hanging on your words."

"It wequiahed some thinkin', out, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus, "It was weally vewy mystewious. The whole wetched business started with that unfortunate fellow Owwis thinkin' that he could get wick quick by foolin' about with football pools. I spoke to him vewy sewiously on the subject,

but he did not wegard my advice with pwopah wespsect." Arthur Augustus shook his head sadly, "It was a twemendous surprwise to find that the loot was hidden in Study No. 6—but weally, it was not vevy surprwisin' aftah all. You see, the house-portah had to take the carpet away to shake, on the ware occasions when it was shaken, and so he natuwallly noticed that loose board in the study floor. That was how he came to think of it, when he wanted a hide-out for the loot."

"Gussy's thought that one out!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Wonderful!" said Blake, with great solemnity.

"Well, not exactly wonderful, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, modestly, "But it wequiahed thinkin' out. Next we come to the stwange and mystewious occuwence on Thursday last week, when I wan up to my study in second lesson for my map, and banged my nose on the door——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not weally a laughin' mattah, deah boys—it was a fwightful bang on my nose. It is now cleah to me that the person in the study was Owwis!"

"You've thought that one out, too!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Carry on," said Manners, "We shall all get it clear, at this rate."

"You see," explained Arthur Augustus, "Havin' nobbled the pound notes on Monday night, and left Wailton's window open to make it look as if the pilfewah came fwom outside, Owwis parked the plundah undah our study floor. Of course he did not dare to keep it in his own quartahs, in case of a search. Well, he did not want the money till Thursday, when he wanted it for his silly football pools—that was why he sneaked up to the study that mornin', while evewybody was in class, to help himself fwom it in secuwity."

"Marvellous!" said Monty Lowther, "Go it, Sherlock Holmes."

"He must have been feahfully alarmed when I wan up, not expectin' any fellow up in the studies in class, you see. I heard him pant——."

"I remember," said Monty Lowther, "Just one pant—not even a pair of pants."

"And that was how he came to dwop that pound note, which Weggie found latah in the day, see?" explained Arthur Augustus, "He was feahfully anxious to get cleah when I went down—and as a mattah of fact, he had only just time to do it, befoah Lathom came up to investigate. That was how he nevah noticed the pound note he had dwopped when he shoved the carpet back into its place, and bolted."

"Amazing!" said Tom Merry.

"Well, it may seem amazin' to you, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, innocently, "But I have thought the whole thing out, see?"

"What a brain!" said Manners, admiringly.

"I am wathah a bwainy chap, Mannahs, if I may say so. Howevah, to continue," said Arthur Augustus, "That wetched Owwis only wanted the pound notes for his football pools wubbish, so he had no weason to go to the study again till the followin' Thursday. Is that cleah?"

"Sort of!" chuckled Blake.

"So you see now why the mystewy man only dwopped in on Thursdays, which was vevy puzzlin' at the time!"

"Gussy's thought that out, too!" said Herries, with a wink at the other fellows.

"I have thought it all out, Hewwies, old chap."

"It reminds me of the johnny in Goldsmith," remarked Monty Lowther, thoughtfully, "How does it go——?"

And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew,
That one small head could carry all he knew!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows——."

"Carry on, Gussy," said Tom Merry, encouragingly, "We haven't had half the history of the mystery yet."

"Vevy well, deah boy! Next we come to a development

that Owwis cannot possibly have expected," resumed Arthur Augustus, "Owin' to Weggie findin' that pound note in my study, Blake and Hewwies and Dig looked undah the carpet to see whether there might be any more, and while the carpet was up, Blake attended to that loose board, which he had been goin' to do for weeks but nevah did. He nailed it down, and aftah that, it was not loose——."

"Not?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Certainly not, Lowthah!"

"Well, that's a masterly deduction," said Lowther, heartily, "Notice that, you fellows—after Blake nailed the board down, it wasn't loose——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats! Well, the mystewy man—I mean Owwis, of course—sneaked up to that study while we were all in class on Thursday aftahnoon this week," went on Arthur Augustus, "You wemembah, Blake, that the footah you left undah the table was not there when we wanted it, and it was quite a mystewy why it wasn't. But it is all cleah when you weflect that Owwis must have gone to the study to visit his hide-out, and of course the footah wolloed, when he shifted the carpet."

"By gum," said Blake, "I'd have liked to see his face, when he found that board nailed down."

"Yaas, wathah! It must have been a vewy unpleasant surprwise to him," said Arthur Augustus, "He could not venture to use a hammah and chisel in the daytime, or somebody would certainly have come to see what was goin' on—and there was no othah way of gettin' at the hide-out. That was why he left it till midnight when ewevybody was in bed and asleep——."

"You've thought that out, too?"

"Yaas, wathah!" smiled Arthur Augustus, "And leavin' it till the middle of the night, he was caught by Figgins and Co. comin' aftah that footah."

"Even New House men have their uses!" remarked Blake.

"And that," concluded Arthur Augustus, "is the whole

histowy of the mystewy. But if there's anythin' else you'd like me to explain——."

"I think you've explained the whole thing, Gussy," grinned Tom Merry, "You've told us everything we knew already——."

"Eh? "

"And explained everything that was as clear as noonday," agreed Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——."

"And made perfectly clear everything that a hundred fellows have been saying all day long!" said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs——."

"And this is where we say wonderful!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake——."

"Wonderful!" chorused the whole tea-party.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus gazed round at six laughing faces. It had not dawned hitherto on his noble brain that the "history of the mystery" was clear to everybody concerned, and did not need explaining.

"Weally, you fellows——!" he said.

"Any more?" grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, severely, "I wasn't goin' to wub it in, but now, bai Jove, I will jolly well wub it in. You fellows nevah believed that there was a mystewy-man in Study No. 6 at all. What about that now, pway? Who was wight, and who was w'ong? "

"A hit!" said Monty Lowther, "A very palpable hit!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's a fair catch, Gussy," he said, "No getting out of that! You were right, old scout, and we were all wrong. We own up!"

"We do!" agreed Blake.

"We does!" said Monty Lowther.

"Well, if you own up, deah boys, I won't wub it in," said Arthur Augustus, graciously, "Let it dwop! The whole

affair was wathah howwid, but all's well that ends well, as Tennyson wemarked——."

"Did he?"

"Or pewwaps it was Shakespeare—I know it was somebody,—and we're goin' to beat Wookwood to-mowwow——."

"Hear, hear!"

And the talk in No. 10 turned to the Rookwood match, in their interest in which Tom Merry and Co. forgot all about the "mystery-man" of Study No. 6, and everything else but the great game of Soccer.

AND on the morrow, St. Jim's did beat Rookwood: after a hard-contested game in which there was no score for either side until right at the finish—when the ball shot into the Rookwood goal from the most elegant foot on the field; and there was a tremendous roar from the St. Jim's crowd:

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"Good old Gussy!"

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THE END.

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