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The Silent Three.

A Splendid, NEW, Long, Complete School Tale of

TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S.

CHAPTER 1.
The Sentence.

THE Terrible Three were in earnest conversation at the foot of the School House dormitory stairs.

Tom Merry, their leader, looked serious, Manners worried, and Monty Lowther savage. Such expressions were seldom seen on the faces of the Terrible Three.

Gradually the solemn expression on Tom Merry's face changed to a broad grin. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was coming down the stairs, and he was got up for the occasion, whatever that occasion might be.

"Weally," exclaimed D'Arcy, sticking his eyeglass in his eye, and gazing at the Terrible Three, "I don't know what you fellows are gwinning at, but I call it beastly wude!"

"Are you going to play footer, kid?" inquired Tom Merry.

"I'll wequest you not to play the fool, Tom Mewwy. I am going for a wide."

"My hat, he's going to ride!" murmured Manners.

"If he goes to Ryde he had better keep away from Cowes, or he will frighten them with that red waistcoat," said Lowther.

"I don't undahstand your silly wemarks at all," observed D'Arcy loftily. "I suppose I have the wight to go foah a wide if I choose, without consulting the boundahs of the Shell?"

"Of course you have, Gussy, dear boy," said Tom Merry. "You also have a perfect right to please yourself with your attire. Doing it that road you are bound to amuse others, so there's pleasure all round."

"If you fellahs can't wide, you haven't got the wight to laugh at those who can."

And D'Arcy passed on, while the grinning three followed.

They thought they would see some fun if D'Arcy mounted anywhere near St. Jim's. Should he mount away from the college they would not have the pleasure of seeing him, because, although it was a half-holiday, they were detained.

"Just our luck," said Tom Merry. "It was really the fault of those New House kids, too. We didn't begin the row."

"Certainly not," observed Manners. "We only followed it up."

"And Ratty followed us up," said Lowther.

"Merely our rotten luck," declared Tom Merry. "What right has Ratcliffe, a master of the miserable New House, to interfere with us fellows of the School House? It was Railton's duty."

"Yes. Of course he happened to be absent," said Manners thoughtfully.

"Rats!" exclaimed Lowther. "We didn't need him to be present. But look here, old chaps, we must see Gussy mount."

"And dismount, probably," said Tom Merry. "Oh, my hat!"

It was Figgins' fault. The New House fellows happened to be coming along the passage, and Figgins was carrying a football. Figgins felt joy at the prospect of a game. He and his chums had been kicking the ball about outside, and they had made it muddy.

Figgins may have wanted to kick some of the mud off the ball before they commenced in earnest. If so, he was quite successful. He did not see D'Arcy coming, but the next moment the swell of St. Jim's felt the ball coming; for Figgins, in the pure exuberance of his spirits, or to get rid of the mud, took a drop-kick at the ball, which landed on D'Arcy's red waistcoat, and he sat on the floor, while his eyeglass dropped from his eye.

"I'm sorry!" exclaimed Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha! I'm sorry!"

"Then I weally don't see that you should laugh," observed D'Arcy, picking himself up, and sticking his eyeglass in his eye to gaze at his ruined waistcoat.

"Quite an accident!"

"I accept your apology on this occasion, but I'm weally most annoyed. How can I go foah a wide in this waistcoat?"

"Take it off, and go for a ride in your trousers," said Lowther. "They are pretty enough for anything."

"I pwotest against that wude wemark! I won't be addwessed in that manner!"

"Don't blame Monty, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "It was all Figgins' fault, and your misfortune, but what can you expect from a New House bounder?"

"Look here, Tom Merry," cried Figgins, striding up to him, "I'm not going to——"

"Cave!" murmured Fatty Wynn, who was behind Figgins, and saw Mr. Ratcliff emerge from one of the studies, and stride towards the rivals of the Shell and the New House.

Figgins might have seen him, too, had he not been so intent on Tom Merry. And Mr. Ratcliff might have seen the football had he not been so intent on those rivals. As it was, he stepped upon that ball, then his leg shot into the air, and he sat on the floor with a bump that shook it.

"Ha, ha—ahem! Sorry, sir!" spluttered Figgins.

"We are extwemely sowwy, sir," observed D'Arcy.

"So's he, you bet," murmured Monty.

Mr. Ratcliff did not hear that last remark. He only heard the first two, but, unfortunately, he also heard the laughter.

He rose to his feet, and looked somewhat dangerous.

It would be difficult to know who was to blame, for it was certain the rivals would never incriminate each other. They might quarrel amongst themselves. In fact they often did so, but when it came to a master, they were staunch.

Mr. Ratcliff pitched on Tom Merry without asking questions.

"How dare you behave in this manner, boy?"

"I regret the incident, sir," answered Tom Merry. "It was entirely accidental."

"It was, sir," observed D'Arcy. "Quite as much an accident as when the ball caught me in the waistcoat. I have pardoned the fault, merely pwotesting against——"

"Such conduct is disgraceful," declared Mr. Ratcliff. "If you three boys in the Shell imagine that——"

"It was my fault entirely, sir," said Figgins. "I kicked the ball."

"Did I not forbid you to quarrel with Merry?"

"Well, sir——"

"Silence! I am speaking. You boys were about to fight."

"I don't think so, sir," said Figgins. "We were having a sort of dispute."

"Don't interrupt me, Figgins. I say you were about to fight, and it is only this morning that I was compelled to punish Merry, Manners, and Lowther for similar misconduct."

"Weally, sir, I pwotest!" cried D'Arcy. "It was a genewal wow between our lot and his. Only a sort of fwiendly wow in the School House. I mentioned the fact at the time."

"Silence, boy! I will put a stop to these disturbances. Merry and Figgins, I forbid you or those in your studies to speak to each other for a month. If you cannot speak without quarrelling, I shall forbid your speaking at all. I shall not punish you further now, if you give your words that you will not speak for one month. Perhaps by that time you will have learnt not to quarrel."

"But, sir," exclaimed Tom Merry, "I bear Figgins no malice for having kicked a football into D'Arcy's chest. Of course, he is only a School House kid, but he can't help that. It is his environment."

"Silence, boy! Do you dare to impress me with your cleverness?"

"I beg pardon, sir, but you are the first master who has ever accused me of anything like that, and I feel quite sure that you are mistaken."

"I require your promise that the Shell will not speak to the New House boys for a month. Do you give me that promise, Tom Merry?"

"Certainly, sir; their loss will be——"

"Silence! Do you give me the promise, Figgins?"

"Yes, sir; and their loss will be greater."

"I will not have any rowdyism in my House. Merry, your master is absent, but his place will be taken to-morrow, and I trust I may see an improvement in your conduct."

"I know it," murmured Tom Merry. "I know it to my cost."

But his words were too low for Mr. Ratcliff to catch; which, perhaps, was a lucky thing for Tom Merry.

"I accept your pledge," said Mr. Ratcliff, striding away; and he nearly convulsed the lads by keeping two feet away from the offending football.

"It's wotten," declared D'Arcy—"downright wotten! I pwotest!"

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Figgins. "What's the good of protesting against Ratty? He ought to be thrown to Herries' bull-pup!"

"I think Pongo could tackle Ratty," said Lowther. "My lips are closed as regards the silly kids of the New House."

"A bulldog named Towser has been mentioned," observed Figgins; "also another dog named Pongo. I am prohibited from speaking to the Shell fellows, and would only mention that Towser should be turned into their study when he is hungry."

"I don't see why School House dogs should be referred to approbriously by certain kids belonging to another House too contemptible for me to name," said Lowther. "Allow me to deal with one of the New House puppies."

Monty bent to the floor, pretended to pick up something, and then to give it a drop kick, and his action was so realistic, that it caused Tom

Merry and Manners to shout with laughter; but Figgins & Co. never smiled. They strode away with dignity.

And D'Arcy sighed as he gazed at his damaged waistcoat through his eyeglass, and remembered that he was paying five shillings an hour for a waiting horse.

"It's positively wotten!" he exclaimed, mounting the stairs to his dormitory.

CHAPTER 2.

How the Messenger Fared.

"PRETTY go this!" said Tom Merry, seating himself in his study. "Why shouldn't we speak to Figgins & Co.?"

"Seems to me the chief reason is because Ratty tells us we mustn't," said Lowther.

"But why?"

"Who can tell what's running in Ratty's brain?" observed Manners.

"Hair oil, I'd say," observed Lowther. "But it's awkward."

"Of course, the New House kids are nothing to us," said Tom Merry. "At the same time it's rotten not to be able to speak to the bounders. Oh, my hat! What's this?"

"Performing monkey, I think," answered Lowther.

"Or a giddy kangaroo," said Manners. "It only wants a tail."

It was Figgins. He had given a kick at their study door, and flung it open. Then Figgins' antics were peculiar. He went prancing up and down the study, occasionally tapping his head.

"He evidently wants us to take him to a lunatic asylum, Monty."

"Unless he's qualifying for a performing grasshopper."

"Have you chaps ever seen a spider walking over hot cinders?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha! Lunatics ought not to be at large."

And Figgins, in the kindness of his heart, was merely trying to tell them that Mr. Ratcliff was going to the Head!

The Terrible Three held a whispered consultation. It lasted about three seconds, and then the chums rushed at the unfortunate Figgins, seized him by his long legs and arms, rushed him from their study, and bumped him on to the floor. After that they retired, and shut their door on the intruder.

"What's to be done, chaps?" inquired Tom Merry. "We can't even express our displeasure. It's a serious matter if we have got to sit here like moping owls and be japed by those kids."

"Treat them with silent contempt," suggested Manners.

"Well, our contempt will necessarily have to be silent. But I tell you what it is. If Ratty wants to stop rows between the Shell and his House, he has gone the wrong way to work."

"When a giddy kipper comes prancing round a fellow's study," observed Lowther, "making mouths at you, and jabbing at his own head, silent contempt isn't adequate to express a fellow's feelings."

"Perhaps he wanted us to punch his head, though that seems hardly likely," observed Tom Merry. "The situation is unbearable."

"And unalterable."

"Unless——"

"Go on, Tom Merry. Unless what? Don't be nervous."

"Unless we got Blake & Co. to intervene—to act as sort of intermediaries. Suppose, for instance, we wanted to tell Figgins he's an ass, we could send Blake. He's not a bad-natured chap, and I think he would do it for the

honour of the School House. Or we might make use of Gussy; and if that didn't meet the case, Herries could go."

"He would be convincing," murmured Manners, "especially if he took Towser."

"Good biz! Towser would convince anything from a rat to a New House master," declared Lowther. "You've hit the idea on the head."

"I didn't know ideas had heads."

"Rats! You can't get an idea without a head, though you can get plenty of heads without ideas. We can't catch them yet."

"What, the ideas?"

"No; Blake, D'Arcy, and Herries. They will be out."

"Lucky bounders! And we have got to stew in this study, just because Ratty takes it into his head that we have been worse than usual!" grumbled Tom Merry. "It doesn't give a chap a fair chance to have the master of another House over him. Never mind; let's come to the gym. till tea-time."

"Come in!" bawled a voice as, later, Tom Merry tapped at Blake & Co.'s door.

Blake, who had given that permission, looked surprised. He was expecting someone else, and the Terrible Three were not very welcome visitors just then.

"Look here, Blake," exclaimed Tom Merry, "we are in a fix, and we want you chaps to help us out of it! Has Gussy told you?"

"Wathah! I was not tweated with pwoper wespect. I wefuse to have footballs kicked into my chest!"

"Well, that's a thing of the past, and——"

"It still feels like a thing of the pwesent, and——"

"Dry up, Gussy!" said Digby. "Give the fellows a hearing."

"We are prohibited from talking to Figgins & Co.," continued Tom Merry, and they must not talk to us. See? Well, we are bound to have certain remarks to make to them. It stands to reason that the School House fellows are not going to be crowed over by the New House kids."

"Wathah not! I wefuse to be crowed ovah by anyone; and I must say Figgins was beastly wough."

"Well, suppose you take any messages we may require to send to the bounders?" suggested Tom Merry.

"Wight-ho! I'm always weady to oblige."

"Figgins has been making fools of us for the start."

"He made a fool of me, and I wefuse——"

"Dry up!" exclaimed Lowther. "He would have an easy task there."

"I considah your wemark beastly wude, Monty! I wefuse to have those wemarks in my pwesence."

"Well, cheese it, and listen to Tom Merry's words of wisdom!"

"We want you to go and tell Figgins plainly that we consider him an utter ass, and that if another daddy-longlegs comes buzzing into our study again we'll squash it!"

"Undah the circs., I have no objection to take your message. Figgins's conduct has been wough, wude, and widiculous, and I wefuse——"

"Oh, ring off, and go and take the message!" said Blake.

"I wefuse to wing off, Blake. I shall not wing off until I have made my wemarks. I wefuse to be turned into a net for football practice. It's degwading!"

"Are you going to jaw there all night, or are you going to take that message?" inquired Blake. "I've got a visitor coming directly, worse luck, and I want to get rid of the Silent Three. Ratty will be a jolly clever

fellow if he closes their little mouths for a month, though. What are you trying to do, Gussy?"

"Dwess for the occasion."

"You don't need a tall hat to go to Figgins & Co."

"I intend to make an impwession," retorted D'Arcy, sticking his eyeglass in his eye, as he carefully brushed a practically new hat. "I considah that I have been tweated with indignity, and——"

"Ring off! You are wasting time. I am expecting a call, and I want to get the line clear."

D'Arcy favoured Blake with a haughty stare, and then he left the room. Blake grinned, while Herries and Digby laughed. But Tom Merry never smiled. He looked upon the matter as a serious one.

Loud laughter came from Figgins & Co.'s study, but it ceased immediately D'Arcy entered it.

"Look heah, you boundahs," began D'Arcy, "I have come on important biz!"

"Reel it off," said Figgins. "We are busy."

"I wefuse to be huwwied. Tom Mewwy is annoyed that he cannot speak to you, especially as it was all your fault."

"Rats! How was I to know Ratty was coming. I'm not answerable for his giddy temper."

"He ought to contwol his tempah."

"Well, go and tell him so, and vacate these premises!"

"We are just going to have tea," said Fatty Wynn. "If you have got a message, trot it out. Our sausages are spoiling."

"As an intahmediawy, I wefuse to be dictated to. Tom Mewwy considahs you are an uttah ass, Figgins, and I think he's wight. If you go buzzing into his study again like some old daddy-longlegs he will squash you!"

"Now, I put it to you, Kerr, what do you think of that?"

"It's both ridiculous and insulting, especially from the Shell bounders."

"I would like your candid opinion of the message, Fatty."

"Rot—utter rot! Here's our tea waiting, and——"

"Never mind our tea; we can have it for supper."

"But that's exactly what I do mind, Figgy, and——"

"If the School House fellows fondly imagine that they can bring messages like that to the gentlemen of the New House, they are mistaken, and they must be taught the error of their ways. Leave the study, you bounder, and if you show your nose in it again with a message like that I'll pull that nose!"

"I wefuse to have my nose pulled, and I considah yoah wemarks most wude, Figgins."

"Who cares for your considerations?"

"Weally——"

"Mizzle off!"

"I wefuse to do anything of the kind, Digby. Undah all the circs., I——"

"He's spoiling our sausages, and he refuses to mizzle off," observed Fatty crossly. "What's your opinion on that point, Figgy?"

"The impertinence exceeds all bounds of patience."

"And his remark about a daddy-longlegs was personal if pertinent," said Kerr.

"Rats!" exclaimed Figgins, not relishing this last reference. "Under all the circumstances of the case, I consider that Gussy should be bumped, and flung off the premises!"

"Seconded!" cried Wynn. "Our sausages——"

"Carried nem. con.!" cried Kerr.

"Oh, you wough wottahs!" yelled D'Arcy, as Figgins & Co. rushed on him. "I will give you the most fwightful thwashing, and——"

"Biff him!"

"Insults shall not be heaped on the New House."

"Not if we know it! Besides, our sausages are spoiling."

"Hang our sausages!" cried Figgins. "Sit on his chest, Fatty! That ought to still his struggles."

"Oh, you silly woughs! Will you leave off? You have wipped my waistcoat up, Figgins, and that's the second waistcoat you have spoilt to-day! It's wotten!"

"It must have been rotten to tear like that!" panted Figgins. "I only tried to lift you by it."

"It's a silk waistcoat, ass, and it isn't intended to lift me by! You are a lot of wetched, wough wowdies!"

"I refuse to be sat on by the School House bounders!" panted Figgins.

"And I wefuse to be sat on by Fatty. His weight is extweme. Get off my chest, you beastly boundah!"

"Let him up, Fatty!" exclaimed Figgins, rising. "He will form a good object-lesson to the Terrible Three. I call it simply rotten of a fellow when I try to do him a good turn that he should cut up rough!"

"I wefuse to considah you have twied to do me a good turn at all."

"Oh, go away! I was referring to Tom Merry and his little tribe, and not to you."

"Look what a beastly wotten state you have made me in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause foah laughtah. I considah your conduct most wepwehensible! You are wude hooligans!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You are standing on your hat!"

"Wats! So I am!" gasped D'Arcy.

And Figgins slammed his door.

CHAPTER 3.

The Arrival of a New Boy.

PICKING up his flattened hat, D'Arcy made his way back to the study.

He expected sympathy there, and was greeted with roars of laughter.

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake. "You have been in a scrum this journey!"

"Look at my hat!"

"It's no good looking at it, Gussy," said Lowther. "It will require more drastic treatment than being looked at. And, to tell you the truth, it isn't much to look at."

"Isn't it wotten?"

"Well, it's badly damaged. But tell us the giddy plot."

"I only gave your message in a gentlemanly mannah, Tom Mewwy, and because Fatty wanted to eat sausages in a huwwy——"

"Fatty is always in a hurry when there is any eating to be done," said Tom Merry, trying to look sorry for his messenger, although he did not succeed at all well, for D'Arcy presented a remarkable appearance.

"The boundahs came at me with a wush."

"Well, you fellows will have to shunt," said Blake. "I've got an important matter to attend to, and I can't help you any more. I consider Gussy has done his best."

"And I considah that my best has pwoved vewy bad on this occasion."

"Well, look here, Gussy," exclaimed Tom Merry, "just you go and tell Figgy that——"

"I wefuse to tell the silly ass anything! I wefuse to be your messengah fwom the pwesent time. I have been tweated with indignity, and I wefuse to act in the same capacity again!"

"But we School House chaps are not going to be sat on by those New House bounders!" persisted Tom Merry. "It is our duty to uphold our dignity."

"Our dignity is not going to be upheld by my being knocked down, deah boy!" exclaimed D'Arcy, sticking his eyeglass in his eye, and gazing somewhat coldly at the speaker. "I am always weady to oblige a fellah, but I dwaw the line at being knocked down and sat on, especially when the sittah is Fatty Wynn!"

"Will you chaps ring off?" cried Blake, who appeared to be uncomfortable about something.

"Come along, my children!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Some kids haven't got the slightest sense. They ought to be in the New House. Of course, we are obliged to you for your services, Gussy; but we think you should have used a little more tact. If you had only convinced Figgy we would not have minded, but he appears to have convinced you!"

"We forgive you freely, all the same," said Lowther. "We do not bear you the slightest animosity, and hope you will be more successful on any future occasion when we require your services."

"Weally, Monty, I pwotest——"

But the Terrible Three had fled.

"Well, of all——" gasped Tom Merry, as he opened the door.

"Did you ever see such horrid cheek?" cried Manners. "What do you think of that trick, Monty?"

"It's a Shell-fish trick!" said Lowther, though he did not feel in a joking humour at the moment.

"Rats! There's nothing to joke about, Monty!" exclaimed Tom Merry severely. "The cads have nailed oyster-shells all over our walls."

"So I see, dear boy! The wheeze gave me inspiration for the joke."

"What's the meaning of it?" inquired Tom Merry, flinging himself in a chair. "My hat! I've sat on something soft! It's butter—half a pound of Dorset!"

"Which gives me a clue," said Lowther. "It's a message, and it's a lot more intelligible than a message from Mars. You see, this is the Shell study. You say the butter is soft?"

"It was, and sticky! Bother it!"

"Figgy must not speak to us."

"That's as obvious as the butter, and about as pleasant!"

"Well, that's Figgy's way of communicating with us, and politely telling us that the Shell fellows are as soft as butter."

"My hat! There's something about the idea, too. If it wasn't for hurting the bounder, we would fling a flatiron at his stupid head, to indicate that we are as hard as iron."

"We must answer this message, Tom," said Manners crossly.

"Of course; but, don't you see, we are only following on his idea. It is galling to think that the School House should have to follow the idea of a New House bounder."

"Rather!"

"Perfectly disgusting!"

"Rotten!"

And the three gazed at each other.

"It's a loss of prestige," said Tom Merry, "because, mind you, the wheeze is not a bad one. Figgy thought that little lot out. Of that I'm confident. I can read his handwriting plainly, and I must admit he has scored one. Well, there's only one thing to be done. We must answer that message."

"How?" inquired Manners.

"Do you know, Monty?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Can't say I do. It wants thinking out. The Head might be able to manage it, only he wouldn't catch on if we were to ask him."

"My hat, no!" exclaimed Tom Merry, scraping the butter off his hair. "You might as well ask Ratty to——"

"Tom Merry, you are a genius!" cried Lowther. "Really, a genius!"

"Rats!"

"There you go again."

"Who are you getting at?"

"Figgy. Don't you see, you have given me an inspiration for our answer to that rot? Our answer is rats! See?"

"Good idea!" declared Manners. "The answer is short and to the point, and we all know that brevity is the soul of wit."

"The answer will do all right," said Tom Merry, without enthusiasm. "It is a workable answer. I only wish that we had thought of the wheeze first. Don't you see, the New House take the kudos?"

"Bad luck!"

"We must get level."

"My children! We must go one better!" said Tom Merry, thoughtfully.

"How?"

"My ideas don't come with the rapidity of Monty's."

"Get off my neck! You gave me the inspiration by mentioning Ratty, and then elegantly exclaiming 'Rats!' There was the full-blown answer."

"And such a simple one to illustrate."

"Quite so!" assented Tom Merry. "But what I look at is this, old chaps. We were at peace with Figgins & Co."

"Unusual, but correct."

"Granted. Well, here a master goes away for reasons of his own."

"Temporary reasons."

"Once more granted. Very well, what does this New House master do? He takes it into his head that we are quarrelling, and we were doing nothing of the sort; then, to stop what we were not doing, he binds us to silence."

"And starts us on an illustrative quarrel," said Lowther.

"Turns us into a kindergarten on Froebel's system," remarked Manners.

"What annoys me is that it was New House fellows who thought out a scheme for talking without words," continued Tom Merry. "When——"

"Is this 'ere Blake's study, mates?"

"My only hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Would you kindly hold me up, Monty?" murmured Manners.

"Who are you getting at? I'm the new boy!"

The new boy was a sturdily-built youth. He wore a new grey suit, a bowler hat, and hobnail boots. He was thick-set, and although his face wore a stolid expression, there was an expression in his eyes that gave one the impression he could be funny when he chose.

"Are you sure you do not require the Grammar School?" inquired Tom Merry.

"I want St. Jim's, and I've found it. Now, I want Blake's study, and if this ain't it, I'll find which one it is."

"Fine determination of character," murmured Tom Merry. "What is your name, my child?"

"Child to you! I'm Billy Barnes!"

"Well, Billy, I will show you Blake's study," said Tom Merry. "Will you be pleased to walk this way?"

"He could not if he tried," murmured Monty.

"No larks?" inquired Billy.

"Not at present," answered Tom Merry. "I will show you Blake's study. Follow me, and the same remarks apply to the other two of the Terrible Three. I know that Blake was expecting a visitor."

Tom Merry tapped at the door of Blake & Co., and was told to come in. He tapped again and again.

"Will that woodpecker kindly fly in?" roared Blake.

Tom Merry opened the door, and bowed politely.

"I have the pleasure to usher in your friend Mr. Barnes," said Tom Merry.

"How do you do, my dear fellow?" exclaimed Blake, stepping forward, and grasping Billy's hand. "Glad to—to make your acquaintance!"

"How do you do, old chap?" exclaimed Herries, shaking hands with him.

And Digby did the same.

All this was astounding enough, but now D'Arcy stepped forward.

"Weally, my deah Billy, I'm moah than delighted to gweet you! I hope you will like St. Jim's, and have not the slightest doubt that you will impwove——"

"Ring off, Gussy!" cried Blake.

"I wefuse to be dictated to as to when I shall wing off, Blake! I consider your wemark wude in the extweme, and if it were not foah the pwesence of a stwangah I should be compelled to give you a most fwightful thwashing! As I was saying when that wude fellow intewwupted me, I considah——"

"He considers," interposed Blake.

"Good old considerer!" exclaimed Digby.

"If Gussy starts considering, what will be the result of his consideration?" inquired Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I considah that wibald laughter vulgah in the extweme, and the only wemark I can make to such vulgawity is—Wats!"

"Good old Gussy!"

"I wefuse——"

"He's like the brook."

"I wefuse to be likened to a wivah!"

"Take no notice of him, Billy," said Blake. "He's quite harmless."

"I gweet you, Billy, as a wepwesentative of this study, which, I may inform you, is the first study in St. Jim's."

"After the Shell," corrected Tom Merry.

"Run away, kiddy, and eat coke!" said Blake. "It is a great pity to interrupt Gussy when he happens to make a sensible remark."

"The occurrence is so rare," observed Digby.

"Wats to you, Dig, and if you wepeat wemarks like that you are likely to find them extwemely painful! Come in, Billy, and shut the door on those gwinning boundahs!"

Then Herries shut the door with his foot, without rising from his chair, and the chums stood in the passage gazing at one another in blank amazement.

"My only hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "I thought we would see some fun, and they greeted him effusively, not to say affectionately. It takes the cake!"

"Rather!"

"Theirs the first study, mind you! Did you hear that giddy observation?"

"It's the most awful rot I ever listened to!" declared Lowther. "Pure undiluted rot!"

"But we can't allow things to go on like this," said Tom Merry. "Here is Figgy taking a rise out of us, and teaching us the only way to communicate with each other without speaking."

"What about writing?" inquired Manners.

"Wouldn't wash," answered Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Ratty would call it speaking. He would tell us it came in the same category. But, you see, we didn't give Billy a remarkably polite reception, while those bounders didn't know how to be polite enough. If they had been trying to give us an object lesson in politeness, they could not have been more polite to Billy. Suppose we interview Taggles?"

"He's such a surly brute!" objected Manners.

"Why, so he is!" said Lowther. "All the same, we must interview him about the rats, so come along!"

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "This is an important matter, and we can afford to lose our tea over it. I don't know what the new temporary master will be like, but if he's anything like the new boy he won't improve our English!"

"Which is not always too elegant as it is."

"Speak for yourself, Monty! My confidence in the fitness of things is shaken."

CHAPTER 4.
Rats!

TAGGLES was just about to have his tea.

A pile of muffins and crumpets was in the fender, and the kettle was nearly on the boil.

Taggles, teapot in hand, was only waiting till the water was quite on the boil.

At that critical moment the Terrible Three entered his room, and this made Taggles cross.

"Nice evening, Taggy?" observed Tom Merry.

"Now, you see here, I'm busy!"

"You will be, Taggy, when you start on that giddy pile!"

"I suppose an 'ard-working man is entitled to his tea?"

"Undoubtedly! But don't you bother yourself about us, Taggy; we——"

"I ain't a-going to; but you will bother about me if you don't clear out of my room, and leave me to 'ave my tea in peace."

"It's a good large piece, too!" said Lowther. "Almost enough to satisfy Fatty till supper-time!"

"Master Lowther, if you don't——"

"Look here, Taggy," interposed Tom Merry, "we are seeking information and something else, which shall presently be named. Who is this new boy?"

"Billy Barnes! Now, will you go?"

"But where does he come from? Go on with your giddy tea! We have a lot of questions to ask you."

"Then I ain't going to answer them, and that's straight! I don't know where he comes from, and I don't know nothink about him, except the master said as he was coming, and he said I was to show him straight to Master Blake's study, which I did."

"Which you did not!" corrected Tom Merry. "But that doesn't matter

at all. Billy Barnes found his way. Are you sure the Head did not tell you to bring him to our study?"

"Of course I am! If he 'ad said that, I would 'ave done it; but he said nothink of the sort!"

"You don't appear to have complied with the Head's instructions very literally, Taggy, but that does not matter to us. What we want to know ——"

"Master Merry, I request you to clear out of my room!"

"I suppose a shilling would be of no service to you?"

"I don't know what put such a silly thought into your 'ead as that, Master Merry. I'm a poor man, and——"

"We want to know a bit more about Billy Barnes."

"I've told you every word I know about him."

"It's extraordinary the Head didn't send the kid to our study," mused Tom Merry.

"Not if he wanted him took care of," said Taggles, placing his pile of muffins on the table, for he had now made his tea.

The mention of a shilling had not made him so anxious to get rid of the Terrible Three. He took half a muffin at a bite by way of a start.

"Taggy is too busy to give further information," observed Tom Merry. "Fire ahead, Monty! Tell him what we require for the shilling!"

"Caught any more rats in the cellar lately, Taggy?" inquired Lowther carelessly.

"I caught three this afternoon."

"Where are they?"

"Drownded."

"Poor, dear things! It was a rotten stupid thing to drown them!"

"Cruelty to animals!" said Manners. "I am not sure that you are not liable to six months' imprisonment with hard labour, Taggy."

"Rats is vermin, and they must be drownded. It's our dooty to kill 'em."

"It's a pity," mused Lowther. "Live rats are infinitely better than dead ones. But where are the corpses?"

"In the bucket."

"What are you going to do with them?"

"Bury 'em."

"Look here, Taggy, you leave the burying to us, and we will give you a shilling for the bodies!"

"Now, see you here, Master Lowther. I ain't going to be a party to any of your tricks. Young gentlemen didn't ought to play tricks. Besides, I wouldn't be doing justice to myself to sell three fine rats like them for a shilling."

"But they are not your rats, Taggles!"

"They are my perquisites."

"Hold me up! Three dead rats are his perquisites!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I ain't going to aid and abet you in your tricks. Besides, I couldn't take less than two shillings for them three rats. They are really worth a shilling apiece."

"We will give you one-and-threepence for them," said Lowther.

"Say one-and-a-tanner, and they are yourn."

"One-and-three is our limit, and we must have them immediately."

"You ain't going to wolf my muffins while I'm gorn?"

"What do you take us for?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We sha'n't touch your tea."

"Honest hengine?"

"Honest injun!"

Taggles placed his muffins in the fireplace again, then he left the room.

"I wish they had been alive," observed Lowther.

"It's a pity," mused Tom Merry. "At the same time there is our answer to their impertinence. Rats! Nothing could be more explicit. They will see that we are not as soft as butter. The only thing that bothers me is that the wheeze did not emanate from us. Then again, fancy the Head sending Billy Barnes to Blake's study."

"We don't want the bounder!" said Manners.

"Right-oh! But we are over-stepped, don't you see. The Head has passed over us in favour of Blake & Co."

"He must be off his rocker!" said Lowther.

"Perhaps he thought that Gussy's aristocratic airs would be beneficial to the child," suggested Manners.

"Bothered if I know!" said Tom Merry. "I only know that we have been overstepped. Of course, they can't be going to keep the kid in their study."

In due course Taggles returned with three enormous rats.

They were extremely wet, but he refused to wipe them on the tablecloth, as Lowther suggested he should. However, he wrapped them up in a newspaper, and the comrades handed him one-and-threepence.

"Mind, you ain't to get me into trouble over this," said Taggles.

"Certainly not, Taggy!" said Tom Merry with confidence. "There will not be the slightest trouble over the matter, for the simple reason that no master will know anything about it. You won't give the show away to the boys?"

"No fear! I'm mum."

"He's mum," said Manners. "As mum as a maggot."

"I will trouble you not to call me them names, Master Manners."

"I was only speaking metaphorically, Taggy."

"Metaforical or unmetaforical, don't you do it again! It ain't respectful."

"I'm surprised at you, Manners, for not treating Taggy with respect," said Tom Merry, looking very serious. "But come along, my children; and place those rats under your coat, Monty. We might meet Ratty, and he would think it personal."

As a matter of fact, they did meet Mr. Ratcliff, and he little thought how his keen glance filled them with misgivings.

He passed them, however, without speaking, and they reached their study in safety.

"I made sure we were nabbed that time," said Tom Merry. "All the same, a miss is as good as a mile. Now for tea, and then for the giddy plot."

"Right-oh!" exclaimed Lowther, depositing the rats in their cupboard. "Are we as soft as butter?"

"I don't think!" answered Manners.

But Tom Merry was not satisfied. The message system appealed to him as ingenious, and he was chagrined that it did not emanate from the Shell.

"Figgins always prides himself on being the first in the field," he said. "The bounder has certainly been the first this time. Then—— Come in!"

"Oh, sorry to disturb you, Tom Merry!" exclaimed Blake, entering. "Could you lend me a little butter? We are short of it."

"You will find some cart-grease in the stables!" retorted Tom Merry. "That will be quite good enough for little boys in the Fourth Form. Run away and play, my kiddy, and if you are a good child I will buy you a pennyworth of marbles some day."

Tom Merry waved him away with a dignity worthy of a master.

Then there was a roar of laughter as Blake shut the door with a bang.

"That's a chalk up to the Shell," said Manners.

"Yes," answered Tom Merry, "it shows you Figgy has been making merry at our giddy cost. We have not heard the last about the butter, unless I am very much mistaken. Now for tea, and then we will do a little scouting. We must invade the bounders' study to-night, and it follows that they must be out of it. But that's a cert."

The Terrible Three made a hurried meal, and they were just finishing it when their door was opened, and Figgins poked his head round it, pretended to pat a small boy on the head, and disappeared.

A few minutes elapsed, and then there was a gentle tap.

Lowther picked up about a quarter of a pound of butter, and held it in readiness.

"Come in!" said Tom Merry gently.

It was D'Arcy, and he had his eyeglass in his eye.

"Oh, I say," he exclaimed, "could you boundahs let me have a little buttah?"

"Certainly, my dear lad!" answered Lowther, sending that butter with deadly aim. "Will that be sufficient to go on with? If you require any more, call again."

It caught Arthur Augustus full in the mouth, and some of it scattered over his face, the rest entered his mouth, causing him to splutter.

"Oh, I say, this is wotten!"

"It's the best butter we have got, Gussy," answered Lowther. "But if you call again to-morrow we will try to let you have a better sample."

"You beastly boundahs! I'm choked!"

"You asked for butter," said Tom Merry, "and Monty naturally imagined that was what you required. Well, you've got it. If you want any more, come again, my child; only you must not come too often, because we do not like to encourage beggars. Run away and have a nice little game with that other kiddy, Blake."

"I wefuse to be spoken to like that, Tom Mewwy. I have a good mind to come in and give you a good thwashing. Undah the circs., I shall tweat you with the contumely your caddish conduct mewwits."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Three in unison, as D'Arcy slammed the door.

"Two scores to the Shell," said Tom Merry. "Jolly good shot, Monty."

"Splendid!" assented Manners.

"Glad I satisfied you," said Monty.

"Bet you have satisfied Blake & Co.," said Tom Merry. "If I am not mistaken, the bounders will ask for no more butter."

And Tom Merry was perfectly correct.

Stealthily along the passage the three figures stole.

The study door of Figgins & Co. was unlocked. One of those forms opened it, and all three strode in.

The table was laid for supper. A covered dish was at one end. That cover was raised, and a cold roast fowl revealed. Manners lifted the fowl, and Lowther put three fine rats in its place.

Within another three minutes the three forms were in their own study.

They were the Terrible Three—now, so far as Figgins & Co. were concerned, the Silent Three.

"Ha, ha, ha! They have got their answer now!" cried Manners.

"Yes; they've got their giddy answer," said Lowther.

"And it was a silent answer," observed Tom Merry. "We haven't spoken a word to the kiddies. All the same, I wish we had thought of the wheeze. Figgins will make a lot out of his idea."

CHAPTER 5.
Retaliation.

"IT was a brainy wheeze, Figgy!" exclaimed Kerr, as the New House fellows made their way to their study with a view to supper.

"Pretty fair, I think," admitted Figgins modestly. "You see, they can't mistake our meaning. The Shell are as soft as butter."

"The only fault I have to find with it," said Fatty, "is we lost our butter. I don't like wasting food."

"Oh, dry up! What does a little butter more or less matter?" demanded Kerr.

"Well, sit down, chaps. Let's be having supper while we discuss the matter," said Fatty. "I had no tea to speak of. Now, I've got a little something here that you will like. Something substantial. Guess what it is, Kerr."

"Bloaters! No, it can't be that. I should smell them. Pork pies!"

"Guess, Figgy."

"Something substantial, if you have provided it. German sausage!"

"Rats!" exclaimed Fatty, raising the cover; and then he dropped it to the table.

"My hat!" gasped Figgins. "You silly rotter! Do you suppose we are going to eat dead rats?"

"I wouldn't even eat live ones," said Kerr. "I know you will eat almost anything, Fatty; but I should have thought you would draw the line at giddy rats."

"You can eat those by yourself, Fatty," said Figgins sternly; "and if you think this is a clever wheeze, I don't."

"Oh, rats!" mumbled Fatty.

"I know they are, silly ass!" said Figgins. "Any fathead can see that. He's smelling them now to see if they are fresh enough for his liking."

"Dry up!" mumbled Fatty. "I suppose you think you are jolly smart. Where's the fowl, Figgy?"

"What fowl?"

"The fowl that was on this dish."

"Fowl?"

"Yes; fowl! You and Kerr know all about it. Come, I call this a rotten joke. I believe it has turned me against my supper."

"I haven't seen your giddy fowl."

"Well, what have you done with it, Kerr?"

"Haven't touched it."

"Then I tell you what it is, kids," said Fatty slowly. "The Terrible Three have been here and sneaked our fowl, and they have shoved those giddy rats in its place."

"Didn't you know?" inquired Figgins suspiciously. "You said they were rats before you lifted the cover."

"I was only saying 'rats' to your silly remarks."

"I don't see any sense in the thing," said Figgins loftily. "Now there was sense in—in—— What!"

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed Fatty.

"It's the answer to our remark that they are as soft as butter," said Kerr. "You see! Rats! That's their giddy answer."

"It's their answer right enough," admitted Figgins.

"But where's our fowl?" groaned Fatty.

"What a silly question!"

"You think they have collared it?"

"Oh, dry up!"

"What's to be done?"

"Throw those rats out of the window, ass!"

"I'd like to stuff them down Tom Merry's throat!" declared Fatty, opening the window and flinging the three rats out. Then his breath came with a gasp, for a cry arose from beneath.

"What boy did that?" demanded a voice that sent shivers down Fatty's spine.

It was Mr. Ratcliff's voice.

Three fine rats had dropped upon his head.

There was no mistaking that voice. All three knew it, and all three gazed at each other in silent dismay.

Figgins was the first to speak.

"My only hat!"

"It's simply rotten luck!" murmured Fatty.

"Horrid!"

"What right had he to be passing when I wanted to throw the rats out?"

"He will want to know what right you had to throw three rats on his noble napper," said Figgins. "Of course, we are all in for it."

"But the worst of Ratty is that he won't listen to an explanation. He's so beastly!"

Figgins looked worried, which was quite an unusual thing with him.

He foresaw serious trouble, but his meditations were cut short by the entrance of Mr. Ratcliff.

That gentleman had been out. He was wearing a soft felt Alpine hat, and, as Fatty's luck would have it, one of the rats had lodged in the dinged-in part. It looked as though it had come to stay, and its head was poking over towards the delinquents in such a comical manner that it required their utmost efforts to refrain from laughter.

Mr. Ratcliff gazed from one to the other without speaking. He imagined by their faces that they treated the matter as a joke, although he considered it in a very serious light.

"What have you to say for yourselves, boys?"

There was an unpleasant harshness in that voice.

Figgins gazed at his chums, and his chums gazed at him.

No one cared to speak, and, having waited as long as they dared, they all spoke at once.

"If you please, sir——"

"Go on, Figgy!"

"Go on, Fatty!"

"Don't let me interrupt you, Kerr."

"Speak one at a time, boys. Figgins, what have you to say?"

Figgins thought he ought to say that there was a rat on Mr. Ratcliff's hat, but he really lacked the courage.

"If you please, sir, I—er—that is to say—er—we—we happened to throw some rats out of window."

"You admit you threw two rats at me?"

"No, sir!"

"Take care, Figgins. When I told you to speak, I required you to speak the truth."

"I am speaking the truth, sir."

"At whom did you suppose you were throwing them?

"If you please sir, he——"

"Silence, Wynn! How dare you interrupt me?"

"I only wanted to say——"

"Silence! I command you! You must not think that I will be trifled with!"

"I don't think that, sir, but I was going to say——"

"Silence! I shall speak to you presently. Answer my question, Figgins!"

"We didn't think they were being thrown at anyone, sir. We merely threw them out of the window, and, most unfortunately you were passing at the moment. We—er—much regret the unfortunate incident."

"Very well! I will take your word that you did not intentionally try to insult me, Figgins. Now——"

"If you please, sir——"

"Understand me, Wynn, if you interrupt me again I shall send you to my study."

Wynn only wanted to explain that it was he who threw those rats; but he found it quite impossible to do so. Mr. Ratcliff was in a white rage, and he was dangerous when he got like that.

"As I was about to say, Figgins," continued Mr. Ratcliff, daring Fatty out of the corner of his eyes, "I now require to know why you threw those two rats out of window."

"Three rats, sir."

"It makes no difference. Answer my question."

"If you please, sir, the third rat——"

"Will you answer my question? Why did you throw those rats out of window?"

"To get rid of them, sir."

"How did they come here?"

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Boy!"

"There are rats about the place," murmured Figgins weakly.

"You tell me you do not know how they came in your study. Now, where did you find them?"

This was a very awkward question. Nothing would have induced Figgins to incriminate the Shell fellows. He remained silent.

Mr. Ratcliff fixed his eyes on the table. He saw the empty plate and the cover beside it.

"What have you had for supper?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff.

Figgins looked startled.

"Nothing, sir."

"Were those rats placed on that empty dish?"

"I—er—beg to mention, sir—your hat—er——"

Whether Mr. Ratcliff imagined that Figgins was having the audacity to tell him to take off his hat or not remains in doubt. All the same, Mr. Ratcliff seized the soft hat by its crown, and at the same time he seized the still clammy rat; then both those articles dropped to the floor, and Mr. Ratcliff uttered a yell, and leapt off that floor.

Few people like rats. Mr. Ratcliff detested them. They were his pet aversion. He picked up his hat, strode from the study without a word, and shut the door hard.

Figgins looked more worried than ever.

"Isn't this downright rotten?"

"It's the last word in beastliness."

"Blest if it isn't worse than losing our supper, and that's bad enough!"

Figgins became pensive.

"Don't you see he will smell a rat?"

"Rather—three of them."

"Dry up, Kerr. This is a jolly serious matter. Ratty knows that we are at loggerheads with the Shell fellows. Well, he will naturally jump to the conclusion that they placed the rats there, and wolfed our supper. We admitted we had had no supper."

"That was the stupidest part of the trick."

"Bother the supper! I don't care twopence about that."

"I do!"

"Rats!"

"Don't mention 'em, Figgy. They make me feel ill. I don't believe I'll ever like the little brutes again."

"I never did like them," said Kerr.

"Silly asses! You don't seem to grasp the situation. Ratty knows exactly what happened."

"He's bound to do that when he found one of the rats in his hat."

"Ring off! Ratty will go to the Shell and put the whole evidence before the bounders, and they will jump to the conclusion that we have split."

"But if he mentions that he found out the rats were in our study because we flung them out of the window, and hit him on the head with them, Tom Merry will——"

"Rot! Ratty will mention nothing of the sort," interposed Figgins. "He will just begin in his usual way: 'It has come to my knowledge——' You chaps know it. Rotten! The Shell wil take it for granted that he could not possibly have known that the rats were there unless we had told him."

"Ratty may tell the lot."

"Rats!"

"I wish you would say something else, Figgy," said Kerr. "I'm like the mayor in 'The Pied Piper':

"'Anything like the sound of a rat
Makes my heart go pit-a-pat.'"

"The mention of a fowl seems to upset me most," said Fatty. "I'm fearfully hungry. Let's have some bread and cheese."

"Cheese it! I can't eat. I feel too sick," said Figgins. "I don't want the Shell bounders to think that we are a set of cads, and yet we can't possibly tell them we are not, because we must not speak to them to explain. It's one of the beastliest positions I have ever been in, and I see no way out of it. It's rotten to think that they will take our caning for having flung rats in Ratty's eye. I would rather it had been Railton. He would have listened to reason."

"Well, they can't kill us," said Fatty. "And even if I have got to die, I'm not going to do it on an empty stomach."

Fatty grumbled considerably at his bread and cheese, but he ate it all the same.

He was the only one in Figgins & Co.'s study who had any supper that night. Figgins and Kerr were too exercised concerning what the fellows of the Shell would think of them on the morrow to care for even roast fowl, let alone bread and cheese; but it took a lot to spoil Fatty's abnormal appetite.

CHAPTER 6.
A Call to Order.

THERE was mirth that night in the study of the Shell. Its occupants felt that they had got some of their own back, and the only thing that marred their pleasure was that they could not watch Fatty raise the cover and reveal the rats.

"The kid is bound to know who did it," said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha! I should smile."

"Well, don't smile so loudly, my child, otherwise they will hear you."

"Rats!"

"Just so. That is what Fatty will exclaim when he raises the cover."

"They were fine rats, too—remarkably fine rats," said Manners thoughtfully. "I don't know when I saw finer rats. I consider that it was one-and-three well spent, and——"

"Cave! Come in!"

"I say, Master Merry, I hope you ain't given me away," mumbled Taggles, entering the study, and closing the door behind him.

"Rats! Don't know anyone who would take you at a gift."

"Now, I don't require any of your impertinence, Master Merry. I relied on your word of honour—which I hope you ain't broke."

"We haven't broken anything, Taggy, not even a beer-jug. What's up?"

"Mr. Ratcliff says you are to go to his study immejiate. Says he to me, says he, 'Taggles!, do you know anything about some rats?' which was his very words. Says I, 'Yus, sir,' which was truthful, 'cos I did know something. Says I, 'I caught three this afternoon in the cellar. I drownded them in a pail. I'll go and show you.' 'Stop!' says he. 'Are those rats still there?' 'Yus, sir,' says I—jest like that——"

"Oh, ring off, Taggles!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "If Ratty wants to see us we must go. You have made your slate clean, and we shall not put any chalks against you; only you are not so truthful as you ought to was, because you knew jolly well those rats were not there."

"But don't you see my point, Master Merry? I had to clear myself, and if I had said those rats wasn't there—which I wasn't to know—he would have said, 'Where are they?' and then I should have got into trouble, which is a thing I'd never think of——"

"Ring off! That's Taggy's latest. Are you sure he wanted to see all of us?"

"That's what he said."

"Then we don't reciprocate his wishes. Come on, my children. Look pleasant."

"I wouldn't have thought this of Figgy," said Manners.

"It may be Taggy," observed Monty.

"No fear. There is one person at St. Jim's that Taggy would never incriminate, and that is the porter. Allow me!"

Mr. Ratcliff was seated at his table, and he looked very stern, not to say angry. Tom Merry's eyes glanced from him to the cane hanging on the wall.

"Have you boys been into Figgins' study this evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"For what purpose?"

Tom Merry thought this was not playing the game. He remained silent, looking the angry master full in the eyes.

"You went into that study, took their supper from the dish, and placed three large rats there. You need not deny it."

"I am not going to deny it, sir. It is the truth."

"Do you know the result of your disgraceful trick?"

"No, sir, but I can jolly well guess it."

Here Tom Merry glanced at the cane in a manner that was comical, although he did not feel anything like that.

"Have you anything to say for yourself, boy?"

"My idea, sir——" observed Lowther.

"Silence, Lowther! I shall deal with you presently."

"Once more, Merry, have you anything to say for yourself?"

"No good sir. You appear to have got all the information from Figgins' lot."

Tom Merry was seeking information, but he did not get any.

Mr. Ratcliff did not see that he was called upon to contradict Tom Merry's remark. Moreover, he foresaw that if there were a real feud between the Shell and Figgins & Co., it would save a lot of trouble.

"It was an abominable trick to play, and you are all equally implicated," declared Mr. Ratcliff. "Hold out your hand, Merry."

Mr. Ratcliff did not spare them. He was punishing them for consequential damages. He felt that they had grossly insulted him, which was about the last thing they would have thought of doing.

"Pleasant interview that," said Tom Merry gloomily, when they were back in their study.

"Phew! Short and sweet!" said Manners.

"He's hurt me, bother him," grumbled Lowther.

"Rum thing that!" exclaimed Tom Merry, examining the palm of his hand. "Ratty is down on us, kids. Don't belong to his House, you see. It wasn't worth a caning."

"Then we ought to be pleased," declared Lowther, "because we got paid more than we deserved."

"My hat! But that was a mean trick of Figgy. Fancy splitting. I wouldn't have thought it of Figgy."

"It's downright caddish!" declared Manners.

"We can't speak to the bounders!" said Tom Merry. "I call the whole thing rotten!"

"I expect they will get over it, by saying they didn't tell who shoved the blessed rats there," said Manners.

"What difference does that make. They got Ratty into their study to see the little wheeze," said Tom Merry gloomily; "and they knew jolly well he would twig it was us."

"We must let the bounders know what we think of them, Tom Merry."

"Right-oh! You bet we will, and that before long," said Tom Merry angrily. "A lark's one thing, but I call their latest wheeze downright sneaking. It's rotten. Oh, come in!"

Then an angry light came into Tom Merry's eyes, for Figgins entered the study.

Figgins' one idea was to express his sorrow at the unfortunate incident, but the Terrible Three were not in the humour to appreciate his dumb show. They jumped to the conclusion that he was mocking them.

He held out his hands, shrugged his shoulders, and sighed deeply. Then he took out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes by way of expressing more sorrow. After that, he pretended to fling the window up, and throw out some imaginary article. Then he banged himself on the top of the head, and went prancing round the study, by way of illustrating how Mr. Ratcliff had come rushing up the stairs. After that, he shook his fist in Tom Merry's face.

To Figgins, who knew exactly what he wanted to illustrate, it appeared certain that the Terrible Three must understand this dumb show.

They did nothing of the kind. When he pulled out his handkerchief, they thought that he was mocking their imaginary tears. His action with the window they were inclined to think meant that they would fling them out of it.

But all doubt concerning the matter was at an end when he shook his fist in Tom Merry's face.

With one accord they sprang at him, and Figgins went flying into the passage. Then they slammed the door.

"Rotten insult!" exclaimed Tom Merry, grimly. "Their giddy sneaking

trick is bad enough, but to come and mock us. Hang it all, it's carrying things too far!"

"I wouldn't be surprised if they come back in force," said Manners. "Shall we lock the door?"

"Rats! We are not going to let them think we are jolly well afraid," cried Tom. "Tell you what! We'll give 'em a dose. Bring me that water-jug."

"Good biz! We will douse them with water."

"With a little soot in it," said Tom Merry. "Those kids must be taught a lesson."

"A lesson to soot them," said Lowther.

"Oh, dry up, Monty!" said Tom Merry, busily engaged in getting down soot from the chimney.

At first he could not get enough; then he got far more than he required.

"Phew—aytishoo! This blessed chimney couldn't have been swept for ages. I've got enough to cover cornfields."

"You are not making much howling mess, either."

"Aytishoo!"

"Got the floo, Tom Merry?"

"Got a bit ob beastly soot up by dose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Aytishoo!"

"Stop that giddy noise, else they will smell a rat when they come—if they do come."

Tom Merry saw the wisdom of this advice, and he nearly choked himself in endeavouring to suppress another sneeze. He mixed the soot in the jug of water with a fencing-stick, and had just completed his operations to his satisfaction, when there was a knock at the study door.

Tom Merry raised the jug, and as Lowther saw that he was trying to suppress another sneeze, he shouted out:

"Come in!"

The door was flung open, and then that jug of sooty water was flung into the intruder's face.

"Oh, you wotten boundahs!" yelled an unmistakable voice. "I'm dwenched—and it's all black! That's the third waistcoat I've had spoiled to-day."

"Silly ass!" gasped Tom Merry. "Why didn't you tell us chaps who you were? How were we to know it was you?"

"How could I tell who I was when you dashed a jug of black watah in my face, you wottahs!"

"Never mind, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, magnanimously. "We'll overlok your omision this time—only next time you come jolly well tell us who you are. You have made yourself in a fine old state."

"I pwotest against this tweatment!"

"Don't see what good that will do."

"I'll thwash you, Tom Mewwy!"

"Rats!"

"I came about wats."

"Might almost call them water rats," said Monty.

"Come in, you giddy scarecrow, and tell us what you have got to say about the rodents."

"I wefuse to be called a giddy scarecwow, Tom Mewwy. Your remark is wediculous and wude, and youah action is wowdy in the extweme."

"Giddy accidents will occur. We thought you were Figgins & Co."

"I wefuse to be mistaken for Figgins in that wude manner. Look at my waistcoat—and twousahs!"

"They'll dry. What about the rats?"

"I wefuse to tell you anything about the wats or any othah wodents. I considah your conduct wude and widiculous, and I wefuse to speak to you boundahs any moah!"

Then Arthur Augustus stuck his monocle in his eye, and glared at the Terrible Three, who burst into roars of laughter, for D'Arcy did not look very dignified with his blackened face and clothes.

CHAPTER 7.
Facing Grave Difficulties.

FIGGINS was waiting in Blake's study. He had gone there alone, for, being a decent fellow, Figgins did not relish his unfortunate situation.

Blake was laughing, and anxiously awaiting D'Arcy's return.

They heard him coming.

"Beastly wotten! I'm as—— Oh, I say, look heah, Figgins!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "I thought you were venturesome, Gussy. Have you been sweeping chimneys?"

"I wefuse to be held up to widicule! Figgy, you are a cad to send me on an ewwand like this!"

"Ha, ha, ha! My only hat! You were perfectly right when I started you off. I wouldn't have employed such a dirty-looking messenger-boy."

"I wefuse to be weferred to as a messengah-boy. It's wude. It's a dirty twick, Figgy, and I have a vewy good mind to give you the most awful thwashing for it."

"How was I to know the bounders were going to drench you with dirty water? And it looks as though they have done it."

"It's a wude twick."

"Rats! I didn't play it. Look here, go again, and explain to the silly asses that——"

"I'll have nothing moah to do with the boundahs. Blake can go if he likes, but I would much wathah not; and what's moah, I won't."

There was a certain amount of determination about Arthur Augustus that convinced Figgins further argument would be useless.

"Some bounders are so jolly careful about their personal appearance," he remarked, leaving the study, and he heard Blake's roars of laughter as he went.

"It's no go, old chaps," said Figgins. "Those empty-headed asses won't take a hint, and when I sent Gussy to explain matters they drenched him with some black slop. He looks like a piebald nigger, and if he hasn't spoilt another giddy waistcoat I shall be surprised."

"What's to be done?"

"Nothing," answered Figgins, disconsolately. "We are like Lord Tom Noddy:

"Nought could be done, nought could be said,
So my Lord Tom Noddy went home to bed."

"Did he go without his supper?" grumbled Fatty.

"Oh, go and eat coke if you are so hungry!" retorted Figgins crossly. He was disgusted with the whole affair.

Fatty was the first in the dormitory that night, and he uttered a yell as he gazed at his bed.

"What giddy kipper has got into my bed?" he demanded. "Why, it's our blessed fowl, dressed in my sleeping togs!"

And so it was. The Terrible Three had used the roast fowl to represent Fatty's face, and a bolster to represent his body.

"Those Shell bounders have scored this time!" growled Figgins.

"Rather!" assented Kerr.

"Rot!" exclaimed Fatty, wrenching off a leg of the fowl. "Let's have supper. Here you are, Figgy."

"I don't want any supper, and I should say you didn't want any more, after that bread and cheese."

"Then that's where you are mistaken, Figgy. I'm going to eat this fowl. I'm glad it's not lost to us. Will you have some, Kerr?"

But Kerr declined.

The following morning, just after breakfast, Figgins & Co. were discussing matters in their study, when Tom Merry, in a master's cap and gown, and with a cane in his hand, was led by Lowther into their study.

Lowther pointed to the table, and Tom Merry looked frightfully fierce; then he smiled sweetly, and patted Lowther on the head, and Lowther went down on his knees and pretended to lick Tom Merry's boots.

After that, Tom Merry stroked him down the black, smiled into his face, and pointed to the door.

Lowther disappeared, and brought Manners in by the collar.

Then Tom Merry seized him, and pretended to give him a caning.

Manners waited till the dumb show was over, and then he gazed at Figgins & Co. with withering contempt, and he really did it very well.

Tom Merry waved him out of the study, and then followed in a dignified manner.

Figgins' face flushed with anger.

"This is worse than rotten!" he cried.

"No mistaking the bounders' meaning," said Fatty.

"Of course, they imagine that we sneaked," said Kerr.

"Silly asses!" exclaimed Figgins. "Why won't they listen to our messenger?"

"Of course, we didn't treat that messenger in a very friendly manner."

"Bother it! We explained afterwards."

"I expect they did the same."

"Surely, Kerr, you are not taking the asses' part!"

"Rather not, Figgy! I think they are the stupidest babblers I ever met. At the same time, it would rile them if they thought we had sneaked."

"They have no right to think it until we have given them an explanation."

"Right-ho! But how to give it? We can't, in honour, write to the bounders, because that would be just the same as speaking, and they are too fatheaded to understand our signs."

"The worst part of the biz is, that the whole thing had nothing to do with the Shell fellows," said Figgins. "It was my fault really, and Ratty not only pitched on them for what we did, but now he has given them a caning for what we did. It looks so downright mean, that I feel utterly ashamed of myself."

There was laughter in the Shell study when the Terrible Three reached it.

"My hat! You played your giddy part well, Tom Merry!" cried Lowther. "That scornful gaze was a treat!"

"Why, don't you see, I really felt contempt for the cads, so the expression came natural."

"I thought you were going to make Figgy sink through the floor. Ha, ha, ha! My only hat! He did look ashamed of himself. Come in, there! Now then, Taggy! We are not buying any more rats."

"'Ush! If you get talkin' like that someone will 'ear you. You are to go immejiate to the Doctor's study."

"What for?"

"I never arst him; but he says to me, says he, 'Mr. Taggles——'"

"Rats! The Head never said anything of the sort. Hum off! We don't need you."

"You'd best go."

"Mind your own business!"

"Well, I don't care, only don't you speak about them rats!"

"We are getting piles of luck heaped on our blessed heads."

"Do you think it is Figgy again?"

"Don't know. A chap who would sneak to Ratty would blab to the Head. Come on, kids. It's no good funking."

They reached the study door with fluttering hearts. Tom Merry tapped lightly.

"Come in!"

"What shall I say, kids?"

"Come in!"

"Depends on what he says. Don't keep tapping at the door, you'll——"

"Come in! Come in!"

Tom Merry did so, and to his delight he found the doctor had a gentleman in his presence.

"Beg pardon, sir. Didn't know you were engaged."

Then Tom Merry tried to slip out, but the Head called him back, and the Terrible Three had to enter the room.

They looked at the stranger, a man of about thirty, of slim build, and fair. What the chums did not notice was that he was very good-looking, and although his eyes were grey, and his hair such as a society lady would have liked to own as far as colour went, his eyebrows were almost black, as were his eyelashes.

"I presume you know the reason why I have sent for you, Tom Merry?" inquired the Head.

"Rats, sir."

"Boy!"

"I—I—er—beg your pardon, sir. I meant that you had sent for me about rats."

"I do not comprehend you, Merry."

"Wasn't it about rats you sent for us, sir?"

"Merry! Do you consider this funny?"

"No, sir. Far from it."

Dr. Holmes fixed his gaze on Tom Merry, and Tom Merry fixed his eyes on the carpet. The Head of St. Jim's had a way with him that boys were likely to remember when they became men, and it did them a lot of good.

"Explain what must appear an impertinence to me."

"Honest Injun!—I—I mean, on my honour, sir, I never meant it. I thought you had sent for us about rats."

"My lad! How could I possibly do such a thing as that?"

"I thought Mr. Ratcliff had jolly well told you, sir."

"Jolly well told me what?"

"I would rather not say, if you don't know, sir."

"I have not the slightest knowledge concerning what you mean, Merry. I wish you to tell me."

Now, had Tom Merry been alone with his chums, he would probably have remarked:

"Kick me, someone," and there is not a doubt that Lowther would have complied with the request.

Tom Merry saw that he had bungled. For, say, half a minute he remained silent, with his eyes fixed on the carpet, then that British courage that was his inheritance came to his rescue.

"Sir, I placed three rats for Figgins' supper instead of a fowl that Fatty—that Wynn expected, and Mr. Ratcliff found them, and—er—and I thought he had reported to you."

Dr. Holmes glanced at the stranger, and as they gazed at each other their faces were so grave that the Terrible Three felt more terror than terrible.

There was a dead silence for nearly a minute, and then Dr. Holmes spoke again. There seemed to be a change in his voice.

"My lads," he said, "I have sent for you to speak about a new boy who has come here. I think you know of his arrival?"

"Yes, sir. He called at our study first. He said that you had sent him to Blake's."

"Quite correct. I did send him there. I dare say, my lads, that you noticed he is in a different station of life to yourselves?"

"Yes, sir; but the Shell are not like that. Blake is a jolly good fellow, so are his chums, but—well, I suppose it's our fault."

"Do you know why I sent Barnes, the new boy, to Blake's study. I expect Blake has told you all about the matter."

"Not one word, sir."

"I sent Barnes to that study because he had saved, at the risk of his own life, a relative of the D'Arcy family. That relative wished to help the lad in life. He desired, first of all, that he should have a high-class education. He requested that William Barnes should come to St. Jim's. I pointed out certain difficulties. I think there are three lads in the Shell who will understand those difficulties. I have sent for those three lads to-day to explain the matter to them. On that subject I have nothing more to say. This is Mr. Brown, who will take Mr. Railton's place until that master returns. You can go, my lads."

And the Terrible Three bowed themselves out of the dread presence.

"I don't believe I've ever made such an idiot of myself before," said Tom Merry, seating himself in his study chair.

These were the first words he had spoken since they left the Head's study.

"You are a silly ass, Tom Merry," said Manners. "You will excuse me for calling you a fathead. But, you see, you can't alter facts."

"I know it, kid."

"You are the giddy kid. You have done more good for the Shell to-night than you've ever done before."

"The Head trusts us," observed Lowther. "Never said one word about those rats. Buck up, Tom Merry, if you never bucked up before."

"What! You don't think my howling stupidity has done us harm?"

"My child, it has done us good," declared Manners. "On the face of this round sphere there is nothing that the Head loves more than truth. Ha, ha, ha! My oldest hat, he got it out of you this day! No matter."

"Oh, ring off! I know I have made a silly ass of myself."

"That's granted, Tom Merry," said Manners, with delightful candour; "but you have got to remember that your glaring bungle has done us good. A lot of good!"

"Dry up!"

"But you must see, Tom Merry, that——"

"Ring off!"

"Rats!"

"Manners, you are a silly ass."

"Tom Merry, you have no manners."

"You silly bounder!" growled Tom Merry. "Why don't you start the wheeze that your remark is sure to make me merry."

"Rats!"

"I'll jolly well have nothing more to do with them," said Tom Merry, looking serious. "I object to the mention of rats—especially dead 'uns. As Gussy would put it, I wefuse wats in any shape oah foahm. They are wubbish."

"Ha, ha, ha! The Head evidently understands our little expression of rats," said Manners."

"He thought Tom Merry was saying rats to him."

"Oh, do leave the giddy rodents alone!" cried Tom Merry. "Look here, the New House kiddies mustn't get hold of that howler!"

"I don't think!"

"I've noticed that, Manners," said Lowther. "Perhaps it's because you haven't got the capacity."

"You ring off, Monty. Tom Merry thought too much just now. It was almost like walking up to the Head and saying: 'Kindly cane me, sir. I deserve it. I feel sure it will do me good. Hard, please.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do dry up, you silly asses! Talk about letting the cat out of the bag. Brown will think he's got some pretty asses to tackle in the Shell. Jolly rotten, I call it. Cave!"

It was Mr. Brown.

"I hope I am not disturbing you, my lads," said the new master, taking the chair that Tom Merry politely placed for him.

"Honoured by the visit, sir."

"I want all the help I can get from you."

"My only hat!"

Tom Merry murmured this beneath his breath.

How Mr. Brown caught the words was a mystery to him, but it was evident that he did so.

His face remained perfectly grave, but there was an amused expression in his grey eyes.

"I think you have dropped it on the floor, Tom Merry," he said, then he gazed in wonder at Figgins, who entered the study at that moment. It was evident that he did not see Mr. Brown, for he commenced some more of his pantomime work, it having come to his knowledge through Taggles, that the Terrible Three had been carpeted. Figgins wanted to express his regret.

He raised his foot to indicate that someone ought to be kicked, then he wrung his hands, and wiped his eyes, and ended in a melancholy howl.

After that he caught sight of Mr. Brown, and before that gentleman could speak Figgins had bolted from the room.

The expression of blank amazement on the new master's face was too much for the chums. They burst into roars of laughter.

"Is the boy demented?" gasped Mr. Brown.

"Ha, ha—ahem! No, sir. Talk about idiots. It's Figgy, sir."

"What was he trying to do?"

"Convey some meaning to us, sir," said Manners, seeing that the other two were too convulsed with laughter to give an intelligent reply to the question.

"But did you understand his meaning? I really did not."

"Not much, sir," answered Tom Merry, meaning not at all. "He has been making his giddy signs before. We understood one of them."

"But why does he not speak?"

"We're cut off, sir."

"Cut off?"

"Sorry! I mean, Mr. Ratcliff has forbidden us to speak. Causing no end of rows."

"I hope you are not bad friends."

"Oh, no, sir! Figgy is a decent sort! Bit presumptuous for a New House kid, but he's all there when wanted. He isn't wanted, and the kid will keep coming and making his signs."

"Well, a little tiff is one thing; but a quarrel is a serious matter. I will speak to you later on."

CHAPTER 8.
An Unwise Decision.

MR. BROWN, who had already been introduced to Mr. Ratcliff, made his way to that gentleman's study.

Now, there was a little rivalry between Mr. Railton and Mr. Ratcliff, but there was jealousy with the latter in connection with Mr. Brown.

In the first place, Brown was quite a young man; then Ratcliff considered that he should have taken Railton's place during his absence.

"Could you spare me five minutes, Mr. Ratcliff?" inquired Mr. Brown.

"Will you be seated?"

"I understand that you have prohibited the lads in Figgins' study speaking to those in Tom Merry's study."

"Perfectly correct. It was for gross misconduct."

"I regret to hear it. I have come to ask if you could see your way to pardon the fault, and——"

"Mr. Brown, I can do nothing of the sort. Of course, the rule in the School House is now in your hands, and if you deem it right to countermand my orders you are at liberty to do so."

"I should not feel justified in doing anything like that, Mr. Ratcliff."

"I am glad to hear you say so. I may say that the fault was with the Shell boys."

"Then could you see your way to remove the prohibition in Figgins' case?" inquired Mr. Brown, with a view to getting in the thin end of the wedge.

"May I ask your reason for making the request, especially as it concerns boys under my rule?"

"I thought it would simplify matters. Figgins is trying to communicate something that seems to be of importance to the Shell boys, and I fancy if he were allowed to speak it would put an end to a quarrel."

"They are always quarrelling. Those Shell boys are a source of continual trouble."

"Do they fight?"

"Well, not exactly fight, but they have disturbances. They call them rows."

"Exactly. Do you think the justice of the case would be met by removing the prohibition so far as your House boys are concerned, supposing you see your way to accede to my request."

"Did the boys ask you to speak to me?"

"Certainly not. They do not know I have come here."

"If I grant your request, shall you give the Shell boys permission to speak?"

"I shall not interfere with your orders in any shape or form. I should not consider myself justified in doing so under any circumstances. The Shell boys have committed a fault for which you are punishing them. It would have a most disastrous effect were I to deal with the matter in any way, except to confirm your decision."

"I quite agree with you on that point. I cannot alter my decision concerning the Shell boys, seeing that they were the chief culprits; but I am willing to accede to your request as regards the others, after what you have said concerning not interfering with my orders as regards the others."

"I thank you very much, Mr. Ratcliff," said Mr. Brown quietly. "My only object in intervening is that I fear what is now a boyish tiff may become a serious quarrel."

"My rule is not to alter a punishment. On this occasion, in compliance with your request, I will make an exception to that rule. At the same time I would like to point out to you that I consider the punishment was a light one."

Mr. Brown considered that the punishment was an error of judgment, but he had no intention of expressing such an opinion. He merely bowed; and Mr. Ratcliff rang the bell, then ordered Taggles, who answered it, to send Figgins, Wynn, and Kerr to him.

"What's he want?" muttered Figgins, making his way to the study.

"Blest if I know!" said Kerr. "It can't be about the rats, because they are disposed of."

"The fowl?" suggested Fatty.

"That's disposed of," said Figgins. "A cooked fowl doesn't have a long life in your company."

"I chucked the bones under my bed. P'r'aps it has been reported."

"Don't know; but come along. We shall soon find out what he wants—probably sooner that we care for. Ratty's invitations never are agreeable."

Mr. Ratcliff did not look at all amiable when they entered his study.

"I am assuming that you have not spoken to the Shell boys since my prohibition?"

They assured him.

"Very well. At the request of this gentleman I withdraw the prohibition as far as you are concerned. You can go."

They did, and after a short consultation they decided on paying Tom Merry & Co. a visit, and explaining the whole matter to them.

Meantime, Tom Merry was holding a consultation with his chums.

"Figgy's giddy antics must be stopped."

"Rather!"

"We'll bump the bounders if they come here again."

"Shell chaps aren't going to sit down while New House kids jape them."

"Not much."

"Not built that way. Better foundation to our structure."

"Right-oh, my children!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We will show them the meaning of a rough-and-tumble."

"Let them do the tumbling while we do the rough part of the business," said Lowther.

"You bet," said Tom Merry. "We'll convince the rotters. Don't give Figgy time to start his giddy games. If he thinks he's going to silently jape us, he's come to the wrong show. My hat! I can hear their lamblike bleating now. All together, mind. Never mind the sticks."

Tom Merry referred to the furniture in the study, which never did receive that gentle treatment which furniture should receive. On this occasion it received the roughest treatment imaginable.

Figgins and his friends were followed up by D'Arcy and Billy Barnes, who had come on quite another errand, although they had had no time to compare notes.

Figgins was very anxious to prove his innocence, and he was in a hurry. Majestically waving D'Arcy away, he boldly entered the study, and he

had no sooner done so than he was hurled backwards on the top of D'Arcy, while both fell to the floor.

"Stop it, you wude boundahs!" yelled D'Arcy.

Fatty Wynn was not going to see his study chums annihilated, so he dropped his weight on the struggling lads. He did not improve matters for Figgins, while from D'Arcy's point of view he made them much worse, for that worthy got a bang on the nose from the back of Figgins's head.

The Terrible Three did not speak, but they acted, and Kerr acted on the other side.

Barnes got hold of D'Arcy's arm, and nearly pulled it out of joint by striving to wrench him from the struggling throng.

"You wude, silly asses!" yelled D'Arcy. "Won't I give you a fwightful thwashing for this! I'm fwiendly disposed towards you boundahs, and you are not tweating me in at all a fwiendly mannah. I call it beastly wough."

Barnes did not understand the matter at all. He knew nothing about school life, but it seemed to him the sooner that combat was stopped the better it would be for all parties. He acted on the same lines as he would have done had he desired to separate two fighting dogs. That is to say, he seized one of the combatants by the leg and wrenched him out of the scrimmage.

It happened to be Figgins's leg, perhaps because that one was the longest and most conspicuous. Figgins was trying to make himself heard above the uproar. So were Wynn and Kerr; but as they were all shouting together, with D'Arcy joining in, what they said, or attempted to say, was perfectly incomprehensible.

Barnes had plenty of strength, far more than most lads of his age. He ran Figgins along the floor and into his study.

"You silly ass!" cried Figgins. "What do you mean by this? You have dragged me all along the dirty floor! Who are you?"

"All right, mate! Don't you get bothering yourself about me. You ain't going to knock Gussy about."

"I wasn't knocking anyone about, idiot!"

"Looked just as though you was."

"I was going to convince those Shell duffers that our feelings towards them are of a most friendly nature."

"My eyes! I don't understand much about these 'ere swell schools, but if that's the way you convince a chap of your friendliness I wouldn't care to see you turn on a bit of your savage feelings—not if I was the chap you had a grudge against. But here comes Gussy. Ho, ho, ho! He looks as if he had been having a game at skittles with someone, and he was the skittles!"

"Just look at the state those wude, wough wascals have made me in!"

"This is rotten!" declared Figgins. "I will speak to the silly asses. Hold on! I'll have another try."

Figgins made a rush into the Shell study, jumping over them as they struggled in the doorway, and landing on the calf of Tom Merry's leg with a weight that made him yell.

Tom Merry struggled to his feet, and then sprang at Figgins, with a view to turning him out of the study.

Figgins dodged round the table.

"Listen to me, you silly bounder!" roared Figgins. "You have got to remain as mum as a maggot, but I may speak to you. Ratty's decision. Silly ass, will you keep still and listen to reason? I've been trying to make you understand by signs how beastly sorry we are for what has happened,

but it had nothing to do with us. I believe you think we sneaked. Well, we never did anything so caddish.

"You are making me giddy, but if you will only keep still a moment I'll explain.

"We found the rats. See? Chucked 'em out of window. Hit Ratty on the noddle. See? Don't be a giddy idiot, Tom Merry. Stop and listen."

There was an earnestness about Figgins that was convincing.

Tom Merry stopped. He was panting hard.

"My hat! I'm bruised all over!" exclaimed Fatty, struggling to his feet.

"Has anyone seen my legs?" inquired Kerr. "Right-ho! I see they are in their correct places. Thought the beastly things had got torn off."

Figgins glanced at his chums, and was satisfied with their appearance; but then he was easily satisfied in that respect.

"You are pledged to silence, Tom Merry," he continued, becoming a little more patronising as he proceeded, "and I'm sorry for you, because your position is trying."

"It's wough on wats!" said D'Arcy, sighing as he gazed at a great tear in his coat. He did not yet notice that one of his sleeves was wrenched nearly out of its socket.

"Silly ass, shut up!"

"I sha'n't shut up, Figgy, and I wefuse to be called a silly ass by a New House boundah!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"I wefuse to eat coke."

"Muzzle him, someone! You see, Tom Merry—and the remarks apply to you other rotters—you have been making utter asses of yourselves; but we'll forgive you, because you can't talk. All we wanted to explain to you was that Ratty discovered the rats of his own accord. We never told him who put them there. It isn't likely that we would have sneaked. Besides, we did not know for certain who had put them there, though we made a pretty good guess.

"Well, Ratty evidently did the same. The reason why he knew anything about those rats was because we flung them out of window, and they happened to hit his noble noddle. He asked where we got them from, and all we said was there were some rats in the place. At that critical moment he took off his hat, and found there was a rat sticking in the dinged in part. See? You can't say yes, and you can't say no; so what you had better do is just to go down on your knees to show me that you are sorry for your beastly stupidity in suspecting us. I'm not certain that you do suspect us, but I expect you do, and if you go down on your knees I'll overlook the matter on this occasion."

Tom Merry looked unutterable things. Figgins shifted his position slightly.

"Gussy, you silly bounder!" cried Tom Merry. "If you don't shunt, we'll jolly well shunt you, and the same remarks apply to other people in this study."

"I wefuse to shunt. I came heah to ask you chaps to tea to-night, and I considah that you have tweated me in a wascally mannah!"

"Idiot! Why didn't you tell us what you jolly well wanted?"

"I wefuse to be called an idiot. And how could I tell you what I wanted when you thwew Figgins & Co. at my head?"

The grim expression left Tom Merry's face. A grin took its place, and then he burst into a roar of laughter, and Figgins felt relieved.

CHAPTER 9.
The Shell's Reply.

"WELL, now we have convinced the Shell bounders that we are in the right, we will give them a chance of replying to our remarks. D'Arcy, you shall be their mouthpiece. Suppose you are Tom Merry. Make your remarks to me."

"Why, weally, Figgy, I don't caah to suppose that I am anothah fellow, especially a silly ass who has gweeted me in the way Tom Mewwy has. Howevah, as he is in a beastly difficulty I will wepwesent him on this occasion. You will now considah that Tom Mewwy is wemarking the following, though I am afwaid I can't mimic his silly bleat:

"I considah you an awful wottah, Figgy, and the same wemarks apply to the othah boundahs in your studday. I also considah that I'm a fearful wottah, and the same wemarks apply to Mannahs and Monty. I consider that A. A. D'Arcy, Esquiah, ought to kick me and give me an awful thwashing."

"Idiot!" cried Tom Merry. "I'm not saying that."

"Be quiet, Tom Mewwy! You have got to say what I make you. I considah that the afoahsaid D'Arcy ought to give you New House boundahs a fwightful thwashing, and I don't know what makes him westwain his hand."

"Rats! I do," said Figgins.

"Shut up, Figgy! Tom Mewwy is speaking. I considah that we are all silly asses, and I wegard Figgins & Co. as stupid, wascally boundahs—almost as wascally as we are."

"Let's give him a thick ear, boys!" cried Figgins.

"Bump him!" cried Kerr.

"I wefuse to be bumped. Oh, you wottahs! This is wascally aftah all the twouble I have taken to interpwet your thoughts, Tom Mewwy!"

"Boys!" cried a voice that caused them to drop Arthur Augustus with the heaviest bump of all. "What is the meaning of this disgraceful behaviour?"

It was Mr. Ratcliff.

"Sorry, sir," murmured Figgins. "A little misunderstanding."

"Why are you not in class?"

"The bell hasn't gone yet, sir. We are—er—waiting for the bell."

"The bell has gone ten minutes ago."

"We did not hear it, sir."

"Of course you did not hear it when you were fighting like hooligans!"

"Beg pardon, sir. We were not fighting."

"You dare to tell me that you were not fighting when you are all in this disgraceful state? What were you doing, then?"

"I—er—we—we were convincing the Shell fellows that we are in the right and they are in the wrong, only they are so thick-headed, sir, that——"

"Silence, boy! If you don't call that fighting, I don't know what it is!"

"Theah's a diffewence, sir," said D'Arcy. "If I had been fighting with the boundahs, I should have given them a fwightful thwashing!"

"Silence, boy! I have nothing to do with your House now, a thing for which a master might be truly thankful! Figgins, Wynn, and Kerr, you will write a thousand lines each! If you are not in class in five minutes in a respectable condition, I shall double the imposition! As for you other boys, I shall report you to Mr. Brown."

"Weally, sir!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "If you will kindly listen to me, I shall be able to explain that no one was weally to blame. I call this wotten!" added D'Arcy, as Mr. Ratcliff strode away, after favouring him

with a contemptuous stare, which he really did not deserve, under all the circumstances of the case. "I considah that I stand in a vewy ambiguous posish."

"Good old D'Arcy!" grinned Tom Merry. "It's what you might call rough on rats!"

"I wefuse to be descwibed as a wat, or any other wodent!"

Tom Merry glanced at his chums, and grinned.

"Buck up, D'Arcy! Don't get downhearted! Ratty won't always listen to reason, especially when he's vexed. It wouldn't have taken you more than a giddy half-hour to have proved to him that none of us was to blame."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Well, say an hour. Ratty wants a lot of convincing. Giddy appearances were against us. Suppose we scoot?"

"Wathah! I only wish to wemark that I shall depute Fatty to pwepare the feast to-night in Figgins' studday. Five of us will come. I shall be the host, and the othah wottahs will be the guests. I will awwange the mattah with you, Fatty, latah on."

"Good old Gussy!" said Tom Merry. "You shall not be disappointed so far as the Shell fellows are concerned. Come on, you children! I have an idea that we are wanted in class."

"Just look at my coat!" murmured D'Arcy. "It's wotten!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Must have been, to tear like that. Complain to your tailor. Tell the bounder that we only had a gentle scrap. Looks as if he couldn't have stitched that sleeve properly."

"I heard suthin' go as I was a-pulling you," said Billy Barnes.

"Come on, my children!" said Tom Merry. "Your uncle will take you the way you should go."

"Bai Jove! I must change this beastly wotten coat!" said D'Arcy.

"Rot! You look supreme!"

"I look a wegulah howlah!"

"Well, you will match the other Fourth Form kiddies! Come on, and don't be so particular!"

"I wefuse to come on in this state, Tom Mewwy! I know my collah is wumpled, and the buttonhole is burst out. I nevah knew such howwid wough boundahs to weceive a polite message fwom a fellah to tea!"

"You wanted us to accept the invitation, kid. Well, we've done it."

"Bai Jove! But look what a howwid wough manner you have done it in!"

Tom Merry gazed at the unfortunate swell of St. Jim's.

"Ha, ha, ha! Sorry, but you look funny. We must scoot, else we shall feel funny!"

"It's wotten—downwight wotten! Come on, Billy! They are the woughest wascals I evah came acwoss!"

"Ho, ho, ho! They don't treat a bloke——"

"You shouldn't use that expwession, Billy! It's vewy vulgah, and the St. Jim's chaps are vewy keen on any wough expwessions!"

Billy's eyes opened wide.

"You will soon get into our ways, deah boy!"

"It will cost a bit for my clothes before I do," said Billy.

This was a matter that had been exercising D'Arcy considerably.

Billy's present attire did not suit D'Arcy's aristocratic notions at all. Had Billy been of similar build, it would have been all right, because D'Arcy always had plenty of clothes. They accumulated rapidly, for he was always buying new ones.

That afternoon D'Arcy took his protege into Blake's study, where a large portmanteau filled with D'Arcy's clothes lay open.

"Weally, deah boy," exclaimed D'Arcy, locking the door, "I am in wathah a diff. I want you to appeah at yoah best at the tea. I am afwaid you are somewhat bwoader acwoss the shouldahs than I am, but I have a dwess-suit heah that may fit. I have got a wed wose heah for your button-hole, and an eyeglass. That weally gives a finishing touch to a fellow's appeawance. Now, these twousers have an elegant gween shade, and this is about the latest thing in waistcoats. I know a wed waistcoat is wathah conspicuous for evening-dwess, but I want you to look conspicuous."

"I shall in them togs."

"Those togs, deah boy! That's the cowwect expwesh. The dwess-coat is what's wowwying me. I'm afwaid about the shouldahs."

The whole idea was worrying Billy. However, he wanted to please his new friend, and so he dressed in the clothes, with a result that seemed to him peculiar.

He was afraid to move his arms for fear of splitting his coat, and the brilliant red waistcoat and white tie had a weird effect.

"Deah boy," declared D'Arcy, "you look supweme! At the back you might pass foah a—weally, you might pass foah me! Now foah the wed wose and the eyeglass! I will show you how to weah the eyeglass. This one is youahs, and you fix it—so! Don't tilt the wight side of your mouth up like that, deah boy! It looks as if you weah twying to bite the stwing of the eyeglass!"

"It won't stick in!"

"You must pwactise a little. Stand in fwont of that glass and pwactise, while I go and see if those boundahs are weady. You come into the studday in five minutes. I must intwoduce the Shell boundahs, because they can't talk to Figgy. Then when you come in I will intwoduce you. Twy to get wid of that twist in the mouth, deah boy! It weally looks as if you weah in agony, and it might make the boundahs sowwy for you!"

"Suppose they smash the thing in my eye?"

"Bai Jove! I would give them the most awful thwashing if they did that!"

"But it might knock my eye out."

"They are a decent lot of boundahs, and they wouldn't wot like that—at least, only by accident. Keep your tongue in, and twy not to show your teeth."

"Couldn't I stick the thing on with a piece of stamp-edging?"

"Wot! It would look widiculous, and cause the boundahs to laugh!"

"They are bound to laugh at me in this get-up."

"I will give them a fwightful thwashing if they do!"

"I don't mind 'em laughing, and I don't much mind 'em fighting——"

"We sha'n't fight with Figgy's lot, or the Shell boundahs—— Twy to wesist the twist to the mouth! It's the wight side."

"Thought you fought this mornin'?"

"Deah boy, that was meahly a diffewence of opinion. I must say it was a wough-and-wude way of accepting an invitation to tea, but we shall be quite fwiendly to-night. Now I'm off! Keep up the pwactice!"

"I can't see through the thing."

"P'w'aps that's because you shut your eye. You should keep the eye open to get the full benefit of a monocle."

Billy kept on practising. He wanted to please his mentor in every way he possibly could, for he had come to the conclusion that D'Arcy was a very decent fellow. Barnes was as imitative as a monkey when he chose

to be, and he meant to be now, wishing to make a favourable impression on the company.

He allowed what he considered to be five minutes to elapse, and then he made his way to Figgins' study, and, being told to come in, entered it.

Then Billy determined to copy not only D'Arcy's aristocratic manners, but also his mode of speech.

"Weally, deah boys," he exclaimed, out of the corner of his mouth, "I'm vewy pleased to see you, and no kid!"

Figgins gazed at the extraordinary-looking apparition, then at his chums, and his face turned red.

He appeared to be choking. Then an idea appeared to flash through Figgins' fertile brain.

"Glad to see you, Gussy! Sit down, my giddy bounder! This is your feast, and you must preside. Hake the head of the table!"

"What! Lift it up?"

"Don't be funny, Gussy! Pray be seated there! Those little kids from the Shell will be here presently. They must not speak to us, but we may speak to them. The position is peculiar."

"Somewhat," murmured Kerr.

"You think this 'ere get-up is weally quite all wight?"

"Gussy, don't mention it!"

"I'm Billy Barnes; I ain't Gussy!"

"Rats! You are as like as two pins!"

"Get off my neck!"

"Don't you see, my dear fellow, the one and only Gussy represents Tom Merry and those bounders. He's their mouthpiece, as it were. Well, he can't be himself, so that we consider you are the original Gussy, and he is merely a shadow. Here they come! Do the honours!"

"Look here, mates," said Billy, "I know I ain't your equal. I didn't exactly want to come to this 'ere school, 'cos—well, there was a lot of reasons. You can kid me as much as ever you please, or even if you want to fight I don't mind that. I ain't much at it, but can do my share. But I hope as you won't make it too warm for Gussy, 'cose he's a downright decent chap. He's been good to me, so's his people, and I'll stick to him through thick and thin! I will weally, deah boys!"

"Billy Barnes," said Figgins, stepping up to him, "you are a brick, and there's my hand on it!"

"We'll make him one of us!" declared Kerr, shaking hands.

"We'll feed him up!" declared Fatty. "He shall live on the fat of the land!"

"He isn't a cannibal," said Kerr.

"You dry up, Kerr!" said Fatty severely. "It wasn't them."

"Worthy of Billy Barnes," murmured Figgins, referring to Wynn's little slip in grammar.

CHAPTER 10.
A Tea-Party Under Difficulties.

IT was Tom Merry who entered that study first, but the rest were close behind him.

There was a somewhat stern expression on Tom Merry's face when he first entered, but when he fixed his eyes on Billy Barnes, his face also went red, then he looked at Figgins, and Tom Merry's expression now gave the impression that he was about to burst into howls of laughter.

Tom Merry made a gurgling sound.

"My only hat!"

"Allow me to introduce you to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Esquire," said Figgins, bowing politely to Tom Merry. "A little kid named Tom Merry, Gussy! You have met the kiddy before. He's quite harmless, and you will get over his stupidity and silly-assishness in time. The same remarks apply to these other Shell children, Manners and Monty. They sometimes try to be funny, but as the bounders never succeed, it does not matter."

Tom Merry no longer looked as though he would like to laugh. His expression was severe. He thought Figgins was taking an abominably mean advantage, because he could make no retort.

"Weally, deah boys, I'm thumping glad to meet you, mates!" said Billy Barnes, snarling at them like an angry wolf, as he strove to fix his eyeglass.

"Glad to meet you, kiddy!" said Tom Merry. "You are as like Gussy as two pins."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I wish you would wefwain fwom——"

"The only thing is that you look rather more advanced than the Fourth Form kids. I wouldn't mix too much with the New House bounders, because they might contaminate you. I would not like to say they are rotters, but you will notice the fact before you have been with them long. There's a kid amongst them with long legs and long ears. Were they stretched out a little more, he would be a perfect representation of the quadruped he so closely resembles. However, he's all right as regards the donkey's intellect. Like the other silly ass, he hasn't got any. Don't knock against him too much, or you'll jolly well catch his complaints."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy!"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to dwy up. I have some wemarks to make, and I wefuse to be told to dwy up. I considah it an oppwobwious wemark. I have invited you to tea to——"

"Good old Gussy!"

"Let's cut the cackle, and get to the 'orses."

"I considah youah wemark widiculous and vulgah, and you can go and eat coke, Mannahs!"

"I would prefer some of these cakes, Gussy. They look a lot more tempting. Suppose you be aunty, and pour out tea."

"I considah your wemark is wude, Manners. I wefuse to be called aunty. Seeing that you are my guests, I shall meahly answah, Wats!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Don't mention 'em, Gussy. Rats have a painful significance to certain kids in the New House. What are you doing?"

"Pouring out tea. It looks wathah weak, too."

"P'r'aps it caught the floo while it was near the chimney," suggested Monty.

"Give it a stir, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "My hat! Tea like that will spoil our nerves."

D'Arcy gave it a stir, and then tried again, but the result was hot water. D'Arcy opened the lid and, fixing his monocle, tried to look into the pot.

"How many spoonfuls did you put in, Gussy?" inquired Wynn.

"Eight! I wathah think it was ten, because I lost count, and thought I would wisk it on the side of stwength."

"That stuff hasn't got the strength of Squeers's milk," said Tom Merry.

"P'waps it wants to dwaw."

"Not it, Gussy. It's too weak to draw anything."

"It couldn't even draw a picture on a clean sheet of paper," added Lowther.

"Do stop wotting! I know I put the tea in somewheah."

"Perhaps you put it in your mouth, Gussy."

"I wegard that wemark as widiculous, Tom Mewwy."

"Not as ridiculous as your tea, kid."

"Weally——"

"I believe you have put it on the floor, Gussy," said Manners. "There is some black stuff down here."

"Only the dirt that you might expect to find in the New House study," said Tom Merry.

"Your wemarks are wude, Tom Mewwy, and it is hitting cwipples with theah own cwutches."

Now, Figgins had seen D'Arcy put that tea in, and he went to the cupboard to investigate.

"Why, you silly bounder," he cried, "you have rammed the tea into the coffee-pot, and you've put the water into the teapot! Did you ever see such a silly ass?"

"I wefuse to be called a silly ass, Figgy. You can keep those wemarks foah Tom Merry. I didn't put the watah in. My impwesh. is that Fatty did it."

"Well, you silly bounder, I didn't expect you had made the tea in the coffee-pot," said Fatty. "You are an ass, Gussy! That's my impwesh."

"I wefuse to be called a silly ass, Fatty. My impwesh.——"

"Shut up, Gussy. If we stop listening to your impressions we sha'n't get any giddy tea to-night," said Tom Merry. "Put in another shovelful."

"Suppose we use the coffee-pot," suggested Monty.

"Wouldn't do at all," said Figgins, answering the suggestion, although it had not been made to him. "We didn't wash out the pot after using it last. We wouldn't know whether we were drinking tea or coffee. Here, Fatty! You make the tea. You are always reliable when there is anything in the way of eating or drinking to the fore."

"Chaps who do not eat sufficient die of consumption," said Fatty, pouring D'Arcy's "tea" back into the kettle, in order to boil it up again.

"You jolly well won't die of consumption," Figgins remarked; "unless it's rapid consumption of food. He will stick you for a pretty penny to-night, Gussy."

"Weally, Figgins, I must say your wemarks are most personal! But sit down, deah boys! Weally, Tom Mewwy, you had bettah sit this side of the table. If you get next to Figgy you two wottahs will upset the company."

The rivals gazed into each other's eyes. Figgins had a frightful advantage over Tom Merry now.

"Run away to the other side of the table, Shell kid. Watch Barnes a bit, and see if you can learn some manners from him."

Tom Merry's mouth was closed. He could only express his indignation by looks.

"What's the matter with the child?" said Kerr. "Have you got a pain, kid? You look just as though you have got a pain. Take my advice and screw up your courage and have it out."

"He's hungry," said Fatty. "My advice is to take it in."

"Try some ham for a start, Tom Merry."

"As spokesman for Tom Merry, I must wemark, Wats," said D'Arcy. "I wish you would behave with moah politeness, Figgins, when stwangahs are in the woom. Now, deah boys, help yourselves to what you want. Be sure you eat all you wequiah."

"Don't mention it!" exclaimed Fatty, going ahead. "There's plenty of time before we go to bed."

"If Fatty hasn't time before prep. he will be able to have another go afterwards," remarked Figgins. "Don't you think it would have been more appropriate, D'Arcy, if you had supplied a little gap for the Shell kiddies. All these rich things are likely to upset the little boundahs."

"Weally, Figgins, I considah your wemarks extwemely oppwobwious, and on behalf of Tom Mewwy, Mannahs, and Monty, I wemark, Wats!"

"Did you supply any of the giddy rats for this feed, Gussy?" inquired Tom Merry, joining the others in the onslaught. "There are some bounders who have rats for supper. They might like them for tea. You haven't put any sugar in my tea, Gussy."

"Nor mine," said Manners.

"Nor mine!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Weally, you fellows wequiah more sugah than is good foah you!"

"I've got it!" said Billy Barnes. "My cup is nearly full to the brim. Wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy has romped it all into one cup," cried Tom Merry. "You silly juggins, D'Arcy!"

"I wefuse to be called a juggins, Mannahs. Sugah is cheap enough. Pass your cups back, and I can soon wectify the ewwah. Now, dear boys, I wish to wemark——"

"Get on with your tea, Gussy. We are too jolly busy to listen to your remarks at present," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Pass him the puffs. He won't be able to talk when his mouth is full," said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgy, your wemarks under the circs. of the posish are extwemely wude, not to say vulgah and widiculous. The object of this fwiendly——"

"Sugar, Gussy, if you please," said Figgins, passing his cup. "Mine is one of the missed ones."

"The object of this fwiendly——"

"Might I trouble you for a little more milk?" said Manners.

"Certainly, deah boy. The object of——"

"Would you oblige with another lump of sugar, Gussy?"

"Certainly, Kerr. The object——"

"Sorry to interrupt you, Gussy, but we forgot to order any cream."

"Cweam is not a necessary. The object of——"

"Then perhaps you wouldn't mind giving me a little more milk?"

"The object——"

"Can you tell me, Gussy," exclaimed Lowther, "how many buns Fatty will consume if he eats them at the rate he has started?"

"Weally, Monty, you are not allowed to speak to the New House boundahs."

"I'm not; I'm speaking to you."

"Then I wish you wouldn't intewwupt me with youah widiculous questions in the middle of my speech."

Tom Merry looked serious immediately.

"Silence for Gussy's giddy speech! If New House kids would stop smacking their lips we might be able to hear it."

"Ratty ought to stop them smacking their lips by smacking their heads," observed Lowther.

"Don't make your speech too learned, Gussy," said Figgins. "You must remember that you have the poor, ignorant Shell children to deal with, and they won't jolly well understand you if you make your speech anything like learned."

"If the rotters of the New House would stop making puerile remarks," said Tom Merry, gazing somewhat coldly at his spokesman, who he did not consider was doing his duty, "we might be able to listen to the lucid and able speech of Gussy."

"It's wotten!"

"I dare say, Gussy, but reel it off your chest," answered Tom Merry.

"Silence for the speech!"

"Let it flow!"

"Why not let it pour while you are about it?"

"That's a poor joke!"

"If you boundahs weren't my guests, I would give you all a most fwightful thwashing!"

"Silence!"

"You won't get silence by howling like that, Tom Merry," said Figgins. "Strive to behave yourself like a little gentleman, my child. Run down to Taggles, and he will give you a few lessons."

Tom Merry was mute, but he reached his arm across the table, and, making an imaginary nip at Figgins' nose, pretended to pull it.

This caused a roar of laughter from the Shell fellows, and Barnes and D'Arcy joined in it.

Figgins' face flushed, but, thinking that matters had gone far enough, and that if they went farther their tea was likely to do the same, he wisely made no reply.

The others, under the impression that D'Arcy's speech would be worth listening to, suddenly became so silent that D'Arcy forgot what he was going to say.

CHAPTER 11.
D'Arcy's Conjuring Tricks.

"THE object of this fwiendly meeting——"

Thus began D'Arcy, then he paused. He had worked that speech up, and, knowing how good his words were, he did not want to alter them, or lose any of them. D'Arcy had another try.

"The object of this fwiendly gweeting——"

Tom Merry glanced up.

"You said meeting once before, Gussy."

"He said it half a dozen times before," observed Monty.

"Which is it, Gussy?" inquired Monty. "It makes all the difference in the posish, deah boy."

"Dry up, you miserable asses of the Shell!" cried Figgins. "Make it 'meeting,' Gussy."

"I wefuse to be dictated to as to what I shall say."

"'Greeting' is the better word, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "You stick to greeting like glue."

"If you take the advice of Shell bounders you will get on the rocks, Gussy. 'Meeting' is the word."

This from Figgins. He had no intention of allowing Tom Merry to have his own way in the matter.

D'Arcy fixed them through his eyeglass for nearly half a minute, and they looked as nearly solemn as they could.

"The object of this fwiendly gweeting——"

"Meeting!"

"The object of this fwiendly meeting——"

"Greeting!"

"Call it 'greeting-meeting,'" suggested Monty.

"Look here, mates," cried Barnes, dropping his eyeglass into his tea-cup, "I'm not your equal, and don't understand what's right as well as you, but Gussy is my mate, and I'm going to stick by him. I say you ain't treatin' him fair. It's his show, and he's got the right to say what he likes. I may be wrong, but that's my way of thinking. He's stood us a slap-up treat, and, set that aside, I'm standing by Gussy, even if the whole lot of you set on us."

Tom Merry looked serious.

"Barnes, my boy," he exclaimed, "you don't quite understand us yet. All the same, I jolly well agree with your remarks. It was only a little japing, and, as you say, Gussy is worth the whole New House put together. Fire on, Gussy; call it what you jolly well please."

"The object of this friendly gweeting"—Figgins let it pass without comment, and this redounded to his credit, and showed that Billy Barnes' word had taken some effect—"is to intwoduce to your notice a fwiend of mine——"

"Good old Billy!" cried Figgins. And the others cried "Hurrah!"

"A wespected welative of mine was cwossing the woad—so was a motor-car, deah boys. Now, that wespected and wespectable welative—like a silly ass—wasn't looking. I've nevah seen him, so don't know whethah he's a wottah or not——"

Tom Merry frowned.

"Impossible! He's a D'Arcy, and, as a rule, there's only one ass in a family."

"Weally, Mewwy! Don't you see, deah boy, he may be the ass in our family? Still, he was cwossing the woad. I now call on my fwiend Billy Barnes to explain how he was cwossing the woad, and how he did not cwoss it. Barnes will commence to speak when I have finished——"

"Make a day next week as a convenient time," suggested Monty.

"Wats to you, Monty. The second part of my speech is to inform you that I intend to amuse the company with a few conjuring twicks that I have been studdaying. I now call on William Barnes, Esquiah, to explain how the wottah—how my wespected welative did not cwoss that woad."

"'Cos I shoved him into the ditch," said Barnes.

"Weally, Barnes!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I am informed by the Head that you wisked your life. That the motor-car caught you, and you jumped on the fwont of it, and weah cawwied along, while my wespected welative wolled into the ditch."

"Wats!" exclaimed Barnes, striving to emulate D'Arcy's aristocratic manner.

Tom Merry glanced at Barnes. He had fairly well grasped the situation, and it mattered nothing to Tom Merry if Billy Barnes was in his own station of life or not.

There could scarcely be a doubt that he was a brave lad, and that was quite sufficient for all in that room.

"Suppose we have the conjuring twicks," said Figgins, who felt in need of fun, and was perfectly confident that there would be some if D'Arcy started conjuring tricks.

"The first twick is with a kettle," observed D'Arcy. "You will notice that I have placed one on the fiah with a view to getting the water boiling."

"Thought you were making too much giddy tea," observed Tom Merry.

"Dry up, kiddy!" exclaimed Figgins. "Little boys in the Shell should remain in their shells, and speak when spoken to. I am glad to see that you take my reprimand in a proper light."

"Quite a proper light," assented Kerr.

The expression on Tom Merry's face gave the impression that he was taking it in anything but a proper light, but as his lips were sealed, and as his spokesman was busy with his conjuring tricks, Tom Merry had to let the matter pass.

"Now, you see the steam is coming out of the giddy kettle," remarked D'Arcy. "Vewwy well, the first twick is to place the kettle on the palm of the hand."

Tom Merry looked dubious.

"Whose hand?"

D'Arcy gazed at him through his glass with surprise.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I don't mind whose hand it is."

"He doesn't mind whose hand," mused Lowther.

"Not a bit."

"What an obliging kipper!"

"I will twy Fatty's hand," observed D'Arcy, as though conferring a favour.

"I'm using my hand to eat with," said Fatty.

"You appear to be using your mouth as well, Fatty."

"Don't wot, you fellows. This is a wewwy clevah twick. Tom Mewwy, I will use your hand."

"Suppose you use your own?"

"You would think it was pwepared."

"I would think you were a sillier ass than I do at present."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, that is a most oppwobwious epithet to apply to me."

"You are not going to apply a boiling kettle to my hand."

"It won't hurt you in the slightest."

"I jolly well know that."

"Well, twy."

"What's the good of trying if I know."

"You can't know for pos. if you don't twy."

"I'll take your word for it."

"Barnes will twy, then. Hold out youah hand, deah boy."

Now, to knock a noble aristocrat from the front of a motor-car, then leap on that car to escape death must be done on the spur of the moment; but to hold out your hand, and have a kettle of boiling water placed on the palm in cold blood, is quite a different matter; however, Barnes wanted to help his mentor all he could, so he held that hand out.

Fatty Wynn seized a large open jam tart to be going on with, and, taking a full-sized bite out of it, stepped forwards to watch the trick.

"You see, deah boys, I place the kettle so, and——"

That was as far as the great conjurer got.

Barnes uttered a wild howl, and hurled the kettle into the air, and it dropped on Fatty Wynn's head, splashing him badly.

"Woo-hooh!" yelled Fatty Wynn, and as his arms shot out he smashed the jam-tart in D'Arcy's aristocratic face, then he went dancing about the room.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it's nothing to laugh at," said D'Arcy. "Oh, I'm sticky. You are a wottah, Fatty. I wefuse to have jam-tarts smashed in my face."

"And I refuse to have kettles of boiling water hurled at my head."

"Deah boy, why didn't you keep your giddy hand still?" inquired D'Arcy, turning to Billy Barnes.

"It was too jolly hot, deah boy. You can't keep your hand still when a

kettle about as hot as red-hot pokers is shoved on it. It ain't in human nature. Wight-ho, and wats!"

The way Billy Barnes said this, as he fixed his eyeglass in his eye, and screwed up his mouth till he showed all the teeth on the right side, made the lads burst into fresh roars of laughter.

Tom Merry was the first to speak, save for the few remarks Fatty Wynn was making about silly asses.

"Where did you learn that giddy trick, Gussy?"

"Out of a book, deah boy."

"Take my tip and burn that book. If you don't, you'll jolly well burn other people."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Really! It's a dead cert."

"I don't think the watah could have been quite boiling," mused D'Arcy. "It says it must be quite boiling."

Fatty Wynn grunted.

"It was."

"You can't tell by the feel whethah it's quite boiling."

"I'm positive that felt like quite boiling."

"What's your impwesh, Barnes?"

"Felt about hot enough for me. I've got the feeling now. Wathah, deah boy."

"I'll twy the twick latah on," declared D'Arcy.

"Try it with Taggles—or Ratty."

"Don't wot. Now, deah boys, the next twick is cutting off a chap's nose. That's an easy twick, and theah won't be any accident this time. You stand where you are. Tom Mewwy, come this way."

"What for?"

"To help me with the twick."

"Do you want me to amputate your aristocratic snout?"

"I wefuse to have that oppwobwious epithet applied to my nose."

"I jolly well refuse to have a knife applied to mine."

"It won't hurt you. It's only a twick."

"So was the last, but that seemed to hurt two chaps pretty considerably."

"But the posish. is different this time, deah boy. I think the book must have been wong about the kettle."

"So it might be about the nose. If you like to take a New House kid's nose, you are welcome as far as I am concerned. It might do some of their noses good, for they are a lot too long; but you jolly well won't take my nose."

"We will show the boundahs that we are not afwaid, Barnes," said D'Arcy.

The expression on Billy's face did not give the impression of great bravery; however, he allowed the great conjurer to push him into a chair.

Gussy had got the needful knife, with the notch ground out of its blade, so as to fit over the patient's nose, and make it look as though the blade had really cut into that organ, he had also got a small bottle of red ink in the palm of his hand to represent the bleeding.

This was not at all a suitable fluid for the purpose, for obvious reasons, but it was the best D'Arcy could manage, under the circumstances.

D'Arcy was not a born conjurer. He may have been cool enough, but he was not nearly careful enough.

Barnes submitted to the knife all right, but when the red ink poured down his face, and trickled into his mouth, it was more than he could bear.

"Groo—— Murder! I'm poisoned—— Bai Jove! Wight-ho! Wats!"

CHAPTER 12.
A Double Decision.

THE study door was thrown open, and Mr. Ratcliff and Mr. Brown, in caps and gowns, entered the study.

Both gentlemen gasped for breath, and truly the sight was trying to the best of nerves.

D'Arcy was flourishing a large knife, and Barnes was gurgling and spluttering, while red ink was all over his face and down his white shirt-front.

Tom Merry was trying to refrain from laughter.

"My hat, he looks jolly horrid!"

"Meahly a little twick, sir," observed D'Arcy, waving his knife.

"Are you injured, my lad?" inquired Mr. Brown anxiously.

"Groo—no, sir—only about poisoned. Wight-ho! Weally. Not 'arf!"

Barnes was merely trying to appear his best before the master, and having an idea that D'Arcy's mode of speech was the correct thing, he was doing his best to mimic it.

Mr. Brown said no more. He left Mr. Ratcliff to deal with his boys.

"This is positively disgraceful!" declared that gentleman. "Figgins, Wynn, and Kerr, how dare you behave in this manner? How dare you allow——"

"Sorry, sir. Little——"

"Silence, boy. How dare you invite those unruly boys to tea! Did I not order you not to speak to——"

"If you please, sir——"

"Silence, boy! It is true that at the earnest request of Mr. Brown, I gave you permission to speak to them, and this is what comes of it. I will stop these disgraceful fights——"

"If you please, sir, we were not——"

"Will you be silent, boy. I am speaking to you three boys. You belong to my House, and if you imagine that I am going to allow that House to become like the School House, you are mistaken. Water is pouring through the ceiling."

Figgins hurriedly picked up the kettle. He need not have hurried, for it was quite empty. He had overlooked it.

"To the Shell boys I have nothing to say," continued Mr. Ratcliff. "It is Mr. Brown's province to deal with them, and the same remarks apply to you other boys——"

"Weally, sir——"

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"I wanted to explain, sir, that it is no mattah of diswespect. I invited——"

"Will you be silent, boy?"

"Certainly, sir. But if you would allow me to explain the posish., it's a cert. you——"

"Silence! I refuse to listen to one word you have to say. I am not responsible for your shameful conduct——"

"Weally, sir, I assuah you with all wespect——"

"Will you be silent, boy. I can assure you that this is a very much more serious matter than you appear to anticipate——"

"Weally, sir, we——"

"You are a most impertinent boy to interrupt me in this manner."

"We meant no diswespect——"

"Dry up, you silly ass!" murmured Tom Merry.

"I sha'n't dwy up, Tom Mewwy, and I wefuse to be called a silly ass!"

"Why, the boys are actually daring to quarrel in my presence!" cried Mr. Ratcliff.

"Weally, sir, we weah not quawwelling——"

"For the last time, I command you to be silent. Figgins, Wynn, and Kerr, after Mr. Brown has spoken to the ringleaders of this shameful disturbance, you will come to my study, and I shall cane you."

Mr. Brown looked troubled as Mr. Ratcliff ceased speaking. The new master was anxious to do nothing that might seem in opposition to Mr. Ratcliff's rule, at the same time he was quite determined to act with strict justice.

"Merry," he said, "you are leader of the Shell. You will tell me in as few words as possible exactly what happened to cause the disturbance. D'Arcy, you will not interrupt. You shall speak after Merry has finished."

"Weally, sir, Tom Mewwy is such a silly ass——"

D'Arcy ceased. Mr. Brown's eyes were fixed on him, and the master was holding up one finger.

"I hope you won't considah that I am diswespectful, sir——"

"I shall not think so if you obey my order and remain perfectly silent. If you persist in speaking, I fear you will give me no alternative but to consider you very disrespectful. Proceed, Merry, and be brief."

"D'Arcy stood a tea, sir—slap-up tea, too. He tried a conjuring trick—holding a giddy kettle on Barnes' hand. Barnes was burnt, and sent the kettle flying. It dropped on Wynn's head, and then he was burnt—badly. It was a failure."

"Weally——"

The upraised finger and Mr. Brown's gaze were sufficient to check D'Arcy's impulse to speak.

"The next trick was cutting off Barnes' nose. That seemed rather successful till the 'blood' ran into his mouth, and then he seemed to be jolly well poisoned."

"Only wed ink, and——"

"D'Arcy!"

"Sowwy, sir. Difficult posish."

"Was there any fighting, Merry?"

"No, sir—a little japing."

"Any blows struck?"

"No, sir."

"You were forbidden to speak to Figgins, Wynn, and Kerr."

"We never spoke a word to them, sir. They japed us, and we couldn't answer. We were practically friendly, though. Nothing like a scrap."

"Now, D'Arcy, if you wish to speak, do so."

"Weally, sir, you are most kind, but Tom Mewwy has explained mattahs so exactly that I don't know I need twouble you any moah, except to wemark that although I mentioned Tom Mewwy is a silly ass, I meant only sometimes when he doesn't agwee with my opinion. What twoubles me is that you considah we have tweated you with diswespect——"

"I did not say so, neither do I consider it."

"Bai Jove! Weally—— But, you see, sir, I'm the only one to blame in the mattah."

"How are you to blame more than the rest?"

"I invited them, sir. I wanted Barnes to become fwiendly with the fellows."

"Did you purposely burn Barnes?"

"Bai Jove! No, sir. The posish. is this. The book of twicks must have been wong, or else I didn't wead it wight. I assure you there was no diswespect intended to the mastahs, and——"

"That is quite evident to my mind. You need not refer to it again."

"Weally, then the posish is pwetty cleah, and I wegard the blame to be mine."

"Yes, I think it is to a certain extent, because the tricks you attempted no doubt caused the water to pour through the ceiling, and I dare say caused some extra noise; but it is evident to me that your object was to amuse the boys, and certainly not to annoy the masters. Doubtless there has been too much noise in this study, but under all the circumstances of the case I shall consider the matter at an end. Might I have a few words with you in private, Mr. Ratcliff?"

That gentleman bowed coldly, left the study, and closed the door. The lads could guess what the words were about, for, although they did not once hear Mr. Brown's voice, they heard Mr. Ratcliff's answers with perfect and, as far as Figgins & Co. were concerned, painful clearness.

"No, Mr. Brown."

"I have my duty to perform. I shall perform it."

"It is useless."

"I will not overlook such gross misconduct."

"Then our views differ."

"If a boy commits a grave fault he must be made answerable for the consequences."

"Pardon me, I consider it was a grave fault."

"I cannot help that."

"My time is much occupied just now. Your request is quite in vain."

"It would be quite useless for you to say more."

Then the door opened.

"Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, you will come into my study in ten minutes' time."

"Jolly rotten!" grumbled Figgins.

"Beastly!"

"And I haven't nearly finished my tea yet."

And Wynn proved his words by seating himself at the table and helping himself to a jam puff.

"I believe he would eat if he were going to have his head chopped off. Now, you Shell kids, listen to my words of wisdom. You got a licking which was ours. We are going to get a licking that doesn't belong to anyone. You are a lot of silly asses ever to have imagined we sneaked. All the same, it certainly looked jolly black against us. You are not allowed to speak to me, but I would like to know that you don't think we are such rotten cads as to sneak, and that you believe me when I declare Ratty found the rats because we chucked 'em on his noble noddle. I put the question to the judge and jury. Are the prisoners innocent or guilty? Those who are in favour of innocent will say one word to D'Arcy, beginning with the letter 'I.' Those who are for guilty will say one word to him, beginning with the letter 'G.' Talk about a sign system after that little lot."

Lowther started.

"Ego!" he cried.

"You silly cuckoo!" exclaimed Figgins. "It's got a 'G' in it, but then it means 'I.' What you mean is beyond the comprehension of any bounder."

"P'r'aps he means half and half," suggested Kerr.

"Can't the silly ass think of one word in the English language commencing with an 'I'? exclaimed Figgins, who rather prided himself on his little scheme.

Lowther fixed his eyes on Fatty Wynn, who was very busy.

The insinuation that a Shell fellow could not find one word commencing with an 'I' was an error that Lowther intended to correct.

"Indigestion indicates individual indiscreetness."

"Weally, Monty," exclaimed the umpire, "that's more than one word, you know, deah boy! Still, theah are plenty of 'I's' knocking awound. So we put you down as wegarding them as innocent. Now, Mannahs, twy your hand."

"I?"

"Yes, you deah boy. You twy."

"I?"

"Rats! I keep telling you so. I want you to give a word."

"I?"

"Silly ass! Why do you want to start wotting in a sewious mattah?"

"I?"

"Yes, you. You are always wotting."

"I?"

"That's his word," said Figgins. "It begins with an 'I'."

"Does it?" mused D'Arcy. "Why, weally——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dwy up, you wottahs! Of course, I knew that it began with 'I'."

"Gussy is getting too much jolly knowledge," said Tom Merry.

"I caught him stewing the other day," said Lowther.

"Dry up, you wottahs! Now, Tom Mewwy——"

"Idiot."

"I wefuse to be called an idiot, Tom Mewwy!"

"Idiot."

"I will give you the most fwightful thwashing if you call me that again."

"Idiot."

Billy Barnes pulled off his coat—or, rather, Gussy's coat—and strode forward in the most business-like manner, under the impression that there was going to be another little dispute. He was never more mistaken.

"Weally Tom Mewwy, your wemarks are most oppwobwious."

"Idiot."

"I wegard the wemark as vulgah and widiculous."

"Idiot."

"You silly ass!" exclaimed Figgins. "Doesn't it occur to you that Tom Merry is giving a word with an 'I' in it?"

"Weally, deah boy! Why, so he is, but I must say the word seemed wathah personal. Still, as you are innocent, you had better go and take your giddy caning."

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

"Brown is a jolly good chap."

"He's a downwight weasonable boundah! I call him wippin'!"

"Whipping sounds more applicable to Ratty," said Figgins. "Come on, Fatty! You will be like a dirigible airship, and burst."

Fatty poured himself out a cup of tea, drank it off, then, sighing deeply, followed his chums to the lethal chamber.

"Of all the rotten arrangements, I think Ratty's is the worst," said Tom Merry, when he and his chums reached their study. "I believe Brown tried to make him alter it. Ratty has gone half way, but he's given his kids the advantage. Mind, they are right about sneaking."

"Rather! Not a doubt about that."

"I should smile."

"Didn't really think Figgy would play the giddy goat like that," said Tom Merry. "It certainly looked like it, too. We weren't to know they had flung the rats at Ratty's noddle."

"I don't wonder that it made him ratty."

"Dry up, Monty. The thing is so rotten. Fancy forbidding us to speak

in order to save rows. Why, it's the very way to make us have giddy rows. It's like screwing down the safety-valve to stop the boiler from bursting."

"Rather! Are you going to do any prep. to-night?"

"My hat! I forgot all about it."

CHAPTER 13.

Arthur Augustus's Great Ride.

IT was a half-holiday, and a discussion was obtaining in the Shell study. The fact is, there was a little dissension as to what the Terrible Three should do with themselves.

Tom Merry wanted to go rowing. Manners was inclined to fishing, and Lowther did not seem to know what he wanted, except that it was something that the others did not want.

"Fishing is rotten!" observed Tom Merry. "It's jolly cruel, too."

"Why?" demanded Manners.

"Well, how would you like to be hooked by the mouth?"

"I'm not a fish."

"No, and if you were a fish you jolly well wouldn't like it."

"You don't know what fish like."

"Rats! I know they don't like being hooked by the mouth."

"If Manners goes fishing he isn't at all likely to do anything like that," said Lowther, with conviction.

"Well, what about the worms?"

"I am not going to hook them by the mouth," said Manners. "I'm only going to hook them through the body, and they don't mind that. My only hat! What is it?"

"I pwotest against being weferred to as 'it,'" said D'Arcy, entering the study at that moment.

He was got up in riding costume, and his eyeglass was stuck in his eye.

"Where's the organ?" inquired Tom Merry, pretending to look round the door for it.

"And the organ-grinder?" murmured Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs, I pwotest!"

"What are you going to do, D'Arcy?"

"Wide. You ought to be able to see that. I lost my wide the othah day, and wide I nevah had cost me a lot of money. The horse was waiting for me."

"Lucky thing for you he didn't catch you," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I considah your wemarks most oppwobwious."

"Why not have a donkey with side baskets, D'Arcy?" inquired Manners.

"I'm going fishing."

"Fishing is wotten. Widing is much moah the thing."

"That depends on the horse and the rider."

"The horse is a thowoughbwed, and the widah——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Mewwy!"

"My hat!"

"I pwotest at youah insinuation."

"But look at the rider!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Just what we will do!" declared Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha! It will be funnier than fishing. Come on, Manners!"

"I think I will. I wanted to catch some fish for tea, too."

"We shall be hungry by tea-time, and shall require something to eat," observed Tom Merry.

"Well, what's the matter with freshly-caught fish?"

"Nothing, so long as they are caught."

"Ass! You can't eat them if they are not caught."

"That's why I am afraid of being hungry."

"Dwy up, you wottahs!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "If you weally want to see some good widing, just watch me on Jupitah."

"A horse with a name like that ought to be worth watching."

"He isn't bwoken in. I'm going to bweak him in."

"Mind he doesn't break you, Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Merry, your wemarks are most widiculous."

"Which way are you going?"

"Across countwy. Look heah, deah boys, suppose you wide with me?"

"On Jupiter?"

"Wats! You can hiah thwee hoahses."

"Why not hire the chaise?" suggested Lowther. He was dubious as to his riding capabilities.

"Wats! How can you jump ovah hedges in a chaise?" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"I don't want to jump over hedges," observed Lowther.

"Weally! You can't wide thwough them."

"Farmers might object," observed Tom Merry. "But come on, Monty. You can ride all right."

"You are a gwand wider, Monty. All you need is pwactice."

"Fishing isn't so bad."

"Rats! Think of the worms!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I don't believe it would hurt the worms as much as riding will hurt me," mused Lowther. "Especially the next day."

"Weally, Monty, you only need pwactice. Come with me, and I will take care of you."

"Hark at the child!" exclaimed Lowther. "Just look at what is going to take care of me!"

"Weally, Lowther——"

"Come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry, "we shall waste all the afternoon while you fellows are discussing your riding capabilities."

"And it is ridiculous for Lowther to discuss things he hasn't got," observed Manners.

"I'll race you any day!"

"Then come and do it. It is a pity we haven't got a fox to match the huntsman."

They made their way to the station, and Jim the ostler said he had the three horses required. Jupiter was in a loose box by himself, because no one in their senses would have kept that horse with others. There would probably have been a death in the stables had he done so.

"Bwing them out!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Then bwing out Jupitah!"

"Are you going to ride through the village, sir?" inquired Jim.

"No; we are going acwoss country."

"He's a horse as wants some riding, young gent."

"Weally——"

"No offence, but he's restive."

"I shall take him acwoss countwy. He won't be westive after that."

"You may be restful," said Manners.

"Weally, Manners!"

"Jim had better tie you on."

"Wats! I'm going to bweak Jupitah in."

"So long as he doesn't break you it won't matter," said Tom Merry. "Don't you think you had better let Lowther ride him for you?"

"I will meahly wemark wats! Jupitah has got to be twained, and I told his ownah that I would twain him. Bwing him out, Jim."

Jim did not appear to relish his task. When he entered the loose box with the saddle and bridle, Jupiter put his ears back, then tried to kick him. After that he tried a little biting; and, failing in that, succeeded in crushing him against the side of the loose box.

"My only hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Jupiter is a sweet-tempered creature."

"He only wants twaining," declared D'Arcy. "He's a fine specimen of a quadwuped."

Jupiter was certainly a fine-looking horse, but no one could have called him amiable-looking.

He kept his ears back like an angry cat, and showed his teeth when anyone got near him.

The chums knew that D'Arcy was a fine rider, but they had their doubts now.

"Weally," exclaimed D'Arcy, sticking his glass in his eye, and gazing at the fiery steed, "I think he wants to bite me!"

"It may be his affection," suggested Tom Merry.

"Wats! He wouldn't show his teeth out of affection. Hold him tight, Jim, while I mount."

D'Arcy mounted without the slightest difficulty. Jupiter might have been a bronze horse, so motionless was he.

Jim knew his playful ways, and got out of range.

"I wondah why he does not start?" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"P'raps he's tired," suggested Tom Merry, mounting his own steed, which, as far as appearance went, was not to be compared with Jupiter.

"Wats! How can he be tired when he has not started?"

"Then start him, and make him tired."

"Seems to me he's more likely to make Gussy tired," said Manners.

"Weally, Manners, your wemark is widiculous! How can I get tired, deah boy?"

"Wait and see, and don't be too previous."

"I'm not pwevious at all, and I wesent the wemark. If Jupitah would only be a little moah pwevious we might get on bettah. Go on, you silly bwute!"

Jupiter did not exactly obey, so D'Arcy used the whip, and then there was trouble.

Jupiter leapt into the air, and lashed out his hind legs.

Jim bolted into the stables, considering them the safest place under the circumstances of the case.

There were some ducks and fowls in the stable yard, and they promptly scattered, while the chums got their horses as far away from the prancing Jupiter as they could.

Jim fully expected to see D'Arcy come off, but he was quite mistaken. He stuck on in a manner that did him great credit.

"Aren't you coming, Gussy?" inquired Tom Merry.

"I'm waiting for this bwute of a horse."

"Don't abuse him, or he may resent it."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Ha, ha, ha! He must think he's an aeroplane, and wants to go up."

"Wats! You wide on, and pwaps Jupitah will follow."

They did so, and Jupiter watched them. He did not appear to have the slightest intention of following, and when his rider tried to make him do

so, he tried a little more buck-jumping; but he failed to unseat his rider, although that was his obvious intention.

Suddenly Jupiter changed his mind. He was a horse that invariably did everything suddenly. He got the bit between his teeth, and went out of the stable-yard like a flash of lightning, and he very nearly caught D'Arcy's leg against the gatepost.

Jupiter had a bad list to starboard as he turned the corner, then down the lane he went like a rocket.

"Hold him up!" yelled Lowther. "You will run us down."

"Get out of my way, deah boys!" cried D'Arcy. "I can't hold the bwute."

It is doubtful if the strongest man could have done so.

Lowther was looking round, and trying to steer his horse out of the course of the oncoming charger; then suddenly he toppled over. There was a ditch at the side of the lane, and Lowther had pulled his horse into it.

He got into a fearful mess, and was considerably scratched, but he escaped the charging Jupiter.

"Jump up, Monty!" cried Tom Merry. "You are not hurt."

"I'm not so sure about that," grumbled Lowther, extricating himself and his horse. "And I'm downright certain that I'm beastly muddy."

"Never mind a little mud."

"I don't; but I've got bucketfuls of it."

"It will all brush off when it dries."

"I don't believe these rents in my clothes will brush off."

"Well, mount! Gussy will be in the ocean before we catch him up. Dick Turpin wasn't in it."

"Wish he had been in this beastly ditch instead of me. I knew it would have been better to have had a chaise."

"Rats! There's no excitement in a chaise!" declared Tom Merry.

"You can bet there would be if you got it anywhere with Jupiter."

"My only hat, Gussy can ride, too!"

"Wish he would give me some lessons," muttered Lowther, mounting his steed with difficulty.

All went well until they came to a sharp bend in the lane.

Apparently, D'Arcy wanted to get Jupiter round that bend; but the horse desired to go straight. He cleared the hedge by a good two feet, then dashed across a cornfield, and the men who were working on it howled at the tops of their voices.

This was bad enough, but worse was to follow, for Jupiter dashed straight towards a small farmhouse.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry, who, with his chums, had followed, although instead of leaping the hedge they burst their way through a thin part, "Jupiter is going to leap the house!"

"I hope this brute won't follow, then!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Ass! He couldn't leap over a couple of bricks!" cried Tom Merry. "Hi! Pull up, Gussy!"

"Wats!" came a distant cry.

"Why doesn't the ass take your advice!" exclaimed Manners.

"It's good advice," declared Tom Merry.

"Rather!"

"I know he will get into trouble."

"He's getting into it already. Can't you hear those chaps howling at him."

"I thought they were howling at us."

"Rats! What should they be howling at us for."

"I don't know for certain, Monty," exclaimed Tom Merry, letting his

horse go; "but I rather fancy we are trampling down their beastly grass."

"Ass! That isn't grass."

"It's green."

"So are you. It's wheat."

"Well, what difference does that make?"

"We are making a difference to the giddy wheat. I believe we are spoiling loaves of bread."

"Never mind. We——"

"I don't. But it's pretty certain those farmer men do. No man would howl like that if he were not vexed."

"Unless he was in pain."

"Rats! They are not in pain."

"No. But we shall be when they get at us with those sticks."

"Ha, ha, ha! Look at Gussy!"

It must have been exciting for him. Jupiter changed his mind about leaping the house. Perhaps it was taller than he had imagined in the distance. At any rate, he turned off to the left, and leapt the hedge surrounding the kitchen garden instead; and then there was a lot of trouble.

The garden belonged to Farmer Giles, and that worthy was in his kitchen garden hoeing little cabbages, and rendering the place tidy.

With three great strides, Jupiter made it fearfully untidy; then he tried to leap two beehives that were on a bench, and he kicked those beehives over.

Possibly he now required a rest, or it may have been that he was hungry. At any rate, he stopped, and commenced to sample Giles's cabbages.

D'Arcy had retained his seat, and now he stuck his monocle in his eye, and viewed the indignant farmer, whom he knew by sight.

"Weally, Giles," exclaimed D'Arcy reprovingly, "I wesent your wemarks!"

"Resent my remarks, you young varmint——"

"I wefuse to be called a varmint. I don't know what they are like, but I considah the epithet oppwobwious, and I wesent it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mind the cabbages, Gussy."

"My only aunt!"

D'Arcy turned his gaze towards the hedge, and saw three laughing faces over it.

"Weally, I wesent your laughtah. This is no laughing mattah!"

"That is what Giles is saying to you."

"The man is saying much moah than that, and I wesent it."

"Resent it, be hung!" hooted Giles. "Do you suppose I am going to have my cabbages trod under. Bust!"

"Weally, Giles, your wemarks are vulgah in the extweme. As a farmer you ought to know that it is weally inevitable to have some losses, and you can considah this one of them."

"Quite right, Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry approvingly. "Talk to him like a Dutch uncle."

"Wathe!"

"See here, young swell," roared Giles, "if you ain't thundering careful, I'll treat you like a father—least, like a father ought to treat his son. If you think as you are going to amuse yourself riding across my wheat and cabbages, then I tell you straight you are mistook."

"My deah man——"

"Oh, bust your 'dear man'! I don't want none of that from you."

"Weally, Giles, you disgust me."

"Well, I'm blowed!" gasped the unfortunate Giles. "Is that all you've got to say to me?"

"If any damage has been done——"

"If the damage has been done! Bust it! Look at them cabbages!"

"They will grow again. Cabbages always spwout when——"

"I know all about cabbages without your telling. You can't make a young cabbage sprout by trampling it beneath a horse's hoofs."

"Weally, I don't considah that the damage done is worth speaking about," observed Arthur Augustus, eyeing the damaged plants through his monocle with a calmness that enraged the farmer all the more.

"Still, if any damage has been done——"

"Don't I tell you there has been damage. You don't need that blessed glass to see it. Then look at my bees!"

Arthur Augustus did so. They were buzzing about in the most frisky manner.

"Wemarkable!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I weally think that——"

What he thought never transpired.

CHAPTER 14.
How Giles Gave Evidence.

THE reason why D'Arcy's great thought was nipped in the bud was because Giles commenced to leap about worse than Jupiter had done; and Giles howled. He really made a most extraordinary noise.

"I think he has got stung by a bee," observed Arthur Augustus.

"Judging by the noise he is making, I would say he had been stung by a score of the little jokers."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Yes, really, Gussy."

"Wats! He will fwighten Jupitah."

"He would frighten Venus, too, and make her laugh."

"Weally, Giles, you should be calm," said D'Arcy. "In times of pewil——"

"Bust! Wooh! Murder!"

"A bee sting is not dangewous," observed D'Arcy thoughtfully. "Some people say it cures wheumatism. If you have got wheumatism you ought to be glad, Giles."

"My only hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Look at him being glad."

"Bai Jove, isn't it stwange how excitable some men are? Bai Jove, get out of my way, Giles!"

Jupiter made a sudden leap into the air, and it spoke well for D'Arcy's horsemanship that he did not come off. The fact of the matter was that Jupiter had been stung by one of the angry bees, and it made him mad.

He leapt the hedge, and then went straight for home.

"It's no good waiting here," declared Tom Merry.

"Rather not," exclaimed Manners.

"Giles is too excited and vexed to listen to reason," said Lowther. "I wish we had gone fishing, and I know I shall wish it still more to-morrow morning."

"But the worms and fish won't," said Tom Merry. "You ought to consider your fellow-creatures, Monty."

"Ass! A worm isn't my fellow-creature, and there is not the slightest necessity to consider the fish, because Manners would never have caught any."

"Go and eat coke!" exclaimed Manners.

They galloped back, and once more got howled at by the farm labourers.

"Don't take any notice of them!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It's all rot, because, don't you see, we must cross the field."

"I don't suppose we are doing any damage, either," said Manners.

"It was Jupiter's fault," declared Lowther. "If the brute hadn't come this way, it stands to reason that we wouldn't have followed."

"After all, we are doing half the damage that huntsmen do," said Tom Merry. "All the same, we are going to get into a row over the job."

"Giles will listen to reason," said Manners.

"So he will," assented Tom Merry; "but he will require that reason to be backed up with coin of the realm. He will want something for his upset bees."

"And something more for his upset temper," declared Manners.

They arrived at the livery stables considerably after Arthur Augustus, and they found him discussing Jupiter's points with Jim.

"You have done him no end of good, young gent," observed Jim.

"But you don't understand the posish," said D'Arcy, looking grave. "Weally, we haven't done ourselves a bit of good. We have angered Giles pwetty fweely. We have damaged his cabbages, bai Jove, and upset his giddy bees!"

"Cabbages is cheap, and you can easy right bees. They often get upset."

"They upset Giles," said Tom Merry.

"What—knocked him down?"

"Not exactly. A bee can't knock a man down. I mean, they upset his temper."

"It don't take much to do that. He shouldn't keep bees if he don't want to get stung by 'em."

"Well, we must get back," said Tom Merry. "I have an idea that Giles will call at the college, and I would much rather he saw us than the Head. Come along, my children. If we don't square Giles he will round on us."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, that's a most assish joke. I don't see that Giles has any wight——"

"Ring off!"

"I sha'n't wing off, and——"

"He is disconnected enough," said Manners. "But come along. While you are arguing about Giles's rights he will be enforcing them in our absence. It is necessary for us to reach the college before him, and then we can explain to him how stupid he is to mind being stung by bees."

"Undah the circs., I don't considah that he ought to mind," said D'Arcy. "He weally ought to wemembah that we didn't do it on purpose."

When they reached the college they thought it advisable to question Taggles, as he would be sure to let them know if Giles had yet been there.

By cutting across country he could easily have reached the college before them; but they had an idea that it would take him some time to recover from the sting of the bees, and that he would not start at once.

Taggles was in a bad temper. That was obvious to the chums directly they entered his lodge.

"Now, see here!" he cried. "I don't want you humbugging about here. It's bad enough to be badgered by masters, without having a lot of imps of mischief——"

"Weally, Taggy, I pwotest against being called anything of the sort!" cried D'Arcy. "It is widiculous and wepwehensible!"

"Well, take yourself off!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy, fixing his eyeglass, and gazing at the

angry man in the most dignified manner he could command. "I wesent such an obsahvation."

"Resent your grandmother!"

"I wefuse to wesent the old lady, Taggy, and I am surpwised that you should expect me to wesent one of my welatives, especially as she is dead. I considah your conduct most wepwehensible and——"

"And I consider yourn in the same light!" roared Giles, bursting into the lodge. "I want to see a master immejiate, and I ain't going to leave——"

"You shall see that 'ere master immejiate, Mr. Giles!" cried Taggles, hurrying from the place.

"Here, you come back!" cried Giles.

But Taggles saw a chance of getting a little of his own back, and he took no heed of the call.

"Now, see here, young gents!" Giles exclaimed, rubbing his face, which was considerably swollen. "I think you ought to compensate me. I don't want to be unreasonable, but you ought to pay a sovereign for the damage you have done."

"Well, that's a weasonable posish," declared D'Arcy, handing him that coin. "I considah that it is only weasonable that you should weceive some compensation, although the beastly thing was quite an accident, and——"

"Ring off, ass!" murmured Tom Merry. "Here comes Ratty!"

"I will explain the posish to him."

"Don't you do anything of the sort, young gent!" exclaimed Giles, well content with the turn of affairs. "You leave me to deal with him."

Mr. Ratcliff strode into the room, looking very stern.

"I understand, Giles, that you have a complaint to make concerning these boys, and——"

"Me, sir?" exclaimed Giles, looking innocent and swollen.

"Yes, you. I believe you heard my words. What have they done?"

"They ain't done nothink, sir."

"Weally, Giles, if you will allow me to——"

"Silence, D'Arcy. How dare you interrupt me when I am speaking to Giles?"

"I am extwemely sowwy, sir, but——"

"Then do not let it occur again."

"I would not like you to think me diswespectful, sir; but the posish is——"

"Silence, boy! You say these boys have done nothing, Giles?"

"Nothink to my knowledge."

"Then why did you tell Taggles that they had assaulted you and seriously injured your face?"

"Why, I never told him anything of the sort!"

"Oh, you sinful man!" cried Taggles.

"How could I tell you that the young gents had assaulted me when they never touched me?"

"Then what did you come to this college for?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff.

"Honey, sir."

"I don't understand you."

"I've got some nice honey, and thought as the masters would like to buy some for their teas."

"Weally, Giles——"

"Ring off, ass!" murmured Tom Merry. "You will get into trouble with Ratty if you will persist in speaking, so shall we."

"Is that all you came about?"

"Yes, sir."

"We do not require any honey; but——"

"Thankee kindly, sir. Good-day!"

And Giles was out of the place in no time.

Mr. Ratcliff looked disappointed. It was Mr. Brown's province, but Mr. Ratcliff was taking duty that afternoon. He wanted to be able to report the matter on the new master's return.

"Tell me exactly what has happened!" he ordered.

Tom Merry commenced; the others followed on. They were not at all coherent.

"The posish is——"

"Ring off, Gussy! If you please, sir——"

"Giles's mistake."

"The fault of a restive horse——"

"The exact posish is, sir——"

"What do you mean by posish, boy?"

Mr. Ratcliff knew perfectly well what he meant.

"Weally, sir, sometimes in speaking quickly——"

"It is a pity you do not speak more slowly, and pronounce your words correctly."

"Weally, sir, I considah my pwonunciation vewwy excellent."

"No one else could possibly be of the same opinion."

"Weally, sir, if you will allow me to explain the circs. I feel——"

"I have told you not to clip your words in that ridiculous manner!"

"No diswespect was weally intended, sir. It's a habit that——"

"Then get out of the habit."

"There was no diswespect, sir, and——"

"You have already said that."

"Yaas, sir. But under the circs.——"

"Boy, what do you mean by circs.? I see nothing to laugh at, boys. I wonder you like to laugh at your schoolfellow's stupidity."

"Weally, sir, I think, without diswespect, you have used the w'ong word—I do, weally."

"I said stupidity. I might have used the word idiocy."

Then Mr. Ratcliff strode away, feeling that he had been nonplussed; although it was really his own fault, for if he had given D'Arcy time to speak he would have learnt exactly what had occurred.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry, looking serious. "Stupidity!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Idiocy!" cried Lowther.

"Of course, you cannot expect much from the chaps in Blake & Co.'s study," observed Manners. "Poor little kids!"

"Weally, Mannahs, I considah——"

"Poor little Gussy! What is the good of your considering anything? How can a stupid boy, or an idiot of a boy, consider?"

"Bai Jove, I shall have to give you a fearful thwashing directly, Mannahs!"

"You had better be careful, Manners!" exclaimed Lowther. "I have heard that idiots are deadly strong when they let themselves go."

"Weally, Monty, I considah——"

"There you go again! Don't try to consider, Gussy."

"Weally, Mannahs, I pwotest——"

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

"Kids, Ratty may have his faults, from our point of view——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But we must all be impressed with his surprising keenness in reading Gussy's character."

"Bai Jove, I'm surpwised at you, Tom Mewwy! I pwotest against the insinuation, and Ratty ought to have allowed me to explain."

"Oh, ring off! We didn't want the matter explained. Giles is satisfied, and as we have been fined, that ought to jolly well meet the justice of the case! Besides, the fault wasn't ours at all; it was Jupiter's. If a gee-gee won't go the way he is wanted to, it's hard cheese if his rider is to bear the blame of it. Have you lost your hat, Taggy?"

Taggles was making frantic dives into his pockets, and stamping about the room.

"And was your head in it?" inquired Manners.

"Bust it!"

"Then take it outside for the purpose, my dear man."

"I've been robbed!" howled Taggles.

"Bai Jove!"

"You give me back my suvereign!"

"What!" gasped Arthur Augustus, sticking his eyeglass into his eye, and gazing at the excited man with a haughtiness that should have caused him to sink through the floor.

Taggles, however, was not sensitive.

"You have took my suvereign!"

"My only hat! Wobbed the portah. Oh, weally, this is wathah too much!"

"Bust you, so it is! It's twenty shillings too much! If you don't return that ere suvereign—— Bust it! I put it on the mantelshelf for safety. If it ain't you, it's Giles; else it's that new boy, Billy Barnes, as they calls him. I'll report the lot of you—bust me if I don't! I'll have my suvereign back! I'll go straight to Mr. Ratcliff if you don't return it!"

"Oh, weally! To be accused of stealing a sovereign! Ass! Do you imagine——"

"I'll report you! You called me an ass!"

"It's the most sensible thing I have heard Gussy say for a long time," said Tom Merry. "You are an ass, Taggles!"

"That's better than being a thief."

"Not a doubt about that."

"I'll report you—mark my words, I will! You will all be expelled from St. Jim's. I'll have justice! I'll report the lot of you!"

"What is the matter, Taggles?"

And Taggles gave a spasmodic leap, for Mr. Brown entered the lodge, attracted by the extraordinary noise. He had just returned from a walk.

CHAPTER 15.
Taggles's Serious Accusation.

"I'VE been robbed, sir!" shouted Taggles.

"When you address me, Taggles," said Mr. Brown sternly—and he could be very stern when he chose—"you will do so in a proper tone of voice, and not shout at me!"

"I've been robbed of a suvereign, and I report these 'ere boys!"

"What have the young gentlemen done?"

"Robbed me of a suvereign."

"Preposterous!"

"Jest my very words. I told 'em straight it was propusterous. It's the worst propusterous theft as I ever came across. And me a poor man! If they had robbed you, sir, or some other rich man, it——"

"You are very ridiculous. I am not a rich man. Neither have these young gentlemen robbed you."

"How can you tell that, sir?"

Mr. Brown glanced at the lads, and smiled.

"They know how I can tell, and so do I. I know that they have not robbed you just as well as they know that I have not robbed you."

"Oh, weally, sir, that would be a feahful insult if we thought you had wobbed him!"

"Quite so, D'Arcy!" answered Mr. Brown quietly. "And so would it be a fearful insult if I thought you had robbed him; but as it is about the last thing any of us would think, why, there is no insult."

And the manner in which Mr. Brown smiled at the indignant lads took away all their indignation, and made them regard the matter more as a joke.

But Taggles thought it no joke at all, and he made so much noise that Mr. Ratcliff came in to stop it.

The unfortunate master was striving to read, and it was really impossible with that uproar, for Taggles could not possibly help howling.

"What is the meaning of this uproar, Taggles?" he demanded.

"Now I'll get justice. New masters don't understand the ways of boys. These boys have robbed me of a suvereign, sir, and I'm——"

"Preposterous!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff. He might be a stern master, but he strove to be a just one. It was strange that he used the very same word that Mr. Brown did.

"Weally, sir, I wespect you," exclaimed D'Arcy, gazing at him through his glass. That glass always vexed Mr. Ratcliff, and he felt angry with the School House boys; at the same time he was not going to believe that they had stolen money.

"Have you taken his money by way of a joke, boys?" inquired Mr. Ratcliff.

"No, sir; we wouldn't do that," answered Tom Merry.

"I thought not; but knowing how partial you are to practical jokes, I asked the question. How dare you accuse the young gentlemen of stealing, Taggles?"

"Well, I never. Am I to be robbed of my hard-earned wages, sir?"

"You are not to accuse scholars in this establishment of theft. You have not the slightest evidence."

"They was in the room, sir."

"So am I in the room."

"They was in the room in my absence."

"I was in the room in your absence."

"It looks suspicious."

"Do you mean to accuse me, man?"

"Suttinly not, sir. I know as you didn't do it, 'cos you wouldn't be hard up for a suvereign; besides, if a master got found out——"

"The man does not appear to know what honour means," gasped the astounded master.

"Weally, sir! I wepeat——"

"There is no necessity for you to repeat any of your remarks," snapped Mr. Ratcliff. He was savage at the whole affair, and, to do him justice, he was very angry that the chums should have been so accused.

"One to Gussy's account!" murmured Tom Merry.

"If it wasn't these boys, it was either Giles or Master Barnes," declared Taggles. "Billy Barnes was sneaking about here in my absence. I put the suvereign on the mantelshelf, jest there."

"Then why were you feeling in your pockets for it?" inquired Manners calmly.

"I thought I might have put it there by mistake."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Mr. Brown. "You will probably discover that you have put it somewhere by mistake."

"I ain't done nothink of the sort, sir. I put it on that mantelshelf."

"Then why did you feel in your pockets?"

"I was only feeling permiscuous."

"And did not feel the sovereign," murmured Tom Merry.

"But felt its loss," said Manners.

"If it ain't these boys, it's either Billy Barnes or Giles," declared Taggles.

"Weally, I wesent that!" cried D'Arcy. "A boy who would save the life of my wespected welative when the silly ass got in the way of a motah-car would not steal a soveweign."

"And I know it was not Giles," said Tom Merry. "He never went near the mantelpiece, and he never picked up anything. Besides, he would not think of doing such a thing."

"I warn you, Taggles," said Mr. Ratcliff sternly, "that you had better be careful whom you accuse. It would not be well for you if it came to Dr. Holmes's knowledge that you had accused one of these young gentlemen of theft."

"But Billy Barnes is no more a gentleman than I am, sir, and——"

"He is a very brave lad, and not one at all likely to commit a theft."

"Why, here he comes!" exclaimed Taggles. "Well, I'm blowed!"

Billy Barnes certainly looked funny, dressed in some of D'Arcy's loudest clothes, and with a waistcoat that was what might be called striking. He was showing his eye-tooth on the right side as he made heroic attempts to keep Arthur Augustus's eyeglass in his eye.

"Weally, I wathah considah I'm sort of fetching!" said Billy, trying to mimic his fidus Achates' mode of speech.

"Ridiculous!" muttered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Where's that suvereign you've stolen from me?" cried Taggles.

"Weally! Bai Jove and not 'arf! I think I shall have to go in for two of these things, and stick 'em on my nose. Blest if I know how you keep it in your eye, Gussy!"

"You weally only need a little moah pwactice, and——"

"I've been taking moah pwactice in front of the glass for hours together. I've made the right side of my face ache a treat and my gum all cold, and I've got a kink in the right eye."

"It's wathah telling. You weally look impwoved, Billy."

"This 'ere won't do for me. What about the .suvereign you stole from me?"

"What-ho and wats!"

"You've tuk my suvereign."

"Silly ass! Wathah! I pwotest; and go and drown yourself!"

This made Tom Merry laugh, and his chums joined in. Arthur Augustus appeared to consider it all right. The two masters glanced at one another, and then left the lodge. They had an idea that the youngsters would be quite competent to convince Taggles of the absurdity of his suspicions.

"Good old Taggles, and his lost suvereign!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"What-ho! Wathah! Haw, haw, haw! He's lost a sovereign. Sure you didn't put it in your mouth, mate, and swallow it?"

"You think yourself funny, don't you?"

"Wats! I ain't as funny as you, and chance it."

"Here I've saved scores of lives, and no one never sent me to school. You are only a gutter brat, all said and done."

"I pwotest!" exclaimed Billy, gazing at Taggles, with one side of his face all twisted up. "Wats to you; and when you've done with that little lot, more wats! Yaas, wathah!"

"My only hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "He has got your mannerisms down to the ground, Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wefuse to listen to such wemarks."

"Then listen to Taggy's remarks. They are bound to be instructive. Fire ahead, Taggy! Throw it off your chest! But you've got to recollect that if we all stole your suvereign, as you assert, and Giles did the same, you must have had six sovereigns, and I know very well you never saved as much money as that in your life."

"Well, I don't care——"

"Then ring off, old boy!" said Manners. "If you don't care, you can bet we don't. Perhaps you lost your sovereign at the inn. You had better go and ask the landlord whether you spent it there. Come on, kiddies! It is useless to speak to such a burbling idiot as Taggy."

"He doesn't use his common-sense."

"You wouldn't use your common-sense, Tom Merry, if you hadn't any to use. You might as well expect common-sense from a boy accused of stupidity and idiocy."

"Weally, Mannahs, I pwotest against youah wemarks. I considah them most oppwobwious."

"But they were Ratty's remarks. I am only quoting."

"Bai Jove, he weally didn't mean what he said! Watty is a man of common-sense, and he must know when a fellow has it."

"I am not disputing that, Gussy. I know he has plenty of common-sense. Perhaps that is how he has discovered your deficiency."

"Weally, Manners, I'm surpwised——"

"So was Ratty when he made his discovery. Let's come and have some tea."

Now, had Taggles let the matter drop, no particular harm would have come of it; but, unfortunately, he spread it all over the college that Billy Barnes had robbed him of a sovereign. He told the story in many different forms, and so did such of the boys who resented the unfortunate Billy coming to the college.

Some of them questioned him, and he admitted that he had gone into the porter's lodge just before the money was missed.

He asserted that his object for going there was to inquire about Arthur Augustus.

Billy did not mind the suspicions a bit, and so he took no pains to assert his innocence.

Some of the Third Form boys called him a thief to his face, and he took no heed of that; but when one of the bigger boys made use of the same expression, Billy took him to the pump, and gave him five minutes of cold water, pumping with one hand and holding his head under with the other.

"There you are, mate!" exclaimed Billy. "If that don't cure you, jest you come to me, and I'll send you into the duck-pond."

After that Billy was not troubled, but many of the boys refused to speak to him.

However, that did not trouble him. All he appeared to care for was to retain D'Arcy's friendship, and there was not the slightest fear of his losing that.

The Terrible Three now went in for some rowing. Tom Merry was keen

it, but he found a little difficulty in getting Lowther and Manners to
a similar interest in it.
The fact of the matter was they found the work a trifle too strenuous
their liking, especially as Tom Merry frequently wanted them to get
at break of day, and the mornings were still cold.
"My little children," exclaimed Tom Merry, one day, "you are worse
a lot of dormice. Sloth is an abomination."
"Rats!"
"You are far more slothful than rats, Monty."
"Rats don't row."
"They are not such idiots," declared Manners.
"It isn't the beastly rowing that I mind," observed Lowther. "It is
ting up before it is properly light. Why can't you row in the daytime,
Merry?"
"Masters might object. You see, kid, a master won't let you off class
ake on rowing. If he did, there would be a terrible lot of rowing."
"It's rot! I can't think why some idiot doesn't invent a better system
getting a boat along. It's beastly old-fashioned and primitive. The
ient Britons used to row. So did the Chinese, a few thousand years
Come in, Taggy! Don't be nervous. You are getting stout. Why
you use Taggy for rowing purposes?"
"The dear man might do for ballast," said Tom Merry, as Taggles
ered their study with a letter in his hand.
"I don't want none of your imperance, Master Merry. It's a great pity
you can't learn to be'ave yourself."
"So it is, Taggy. I think I will come to you for a few lessons. Been
ving a nice little sleep?"
"No, I ain't."
"Unusual, that. What have you got there?"
"You mind your own business!"
"It is my business, Taggy, if that happens to be a letter for me."
"It is a letter for you, and, what's more, it is a very suspicious letter."
"Good old letter! What does the dear thing suspect? Does it suspect
you are an ass? Because, if so, it can't be a very sensible letter;
rwise it would be quite sure you are a jolly ass, without suspecting it."
"I have taken this letter to the Head."
"And I suppose he ordered you to bring it to me?"
"I know my dooties."
"Then it is a pity you don't do them more often."
"That 'ere is false. I want to know what is inside that envelope."
"I couldn't tell you, Taggy, but I would imagine that there is a letter
side it. Of course, if there should be a five-pound note as well, I shall
all the better pleased."
"Then p'r'aps you will pay the suvereign as has so-mysterious dis-
peared?"
"No, thank you, Taggy! I don't pay for vanishing sovereigns, unless
happen to be my own. Give me the letter!"
"I consider, under all the circumstances of the case, I have got the right
know what is inside it."
"Well, how can I tell you what is inside it till I know myself?"
"If I give you the letter, will you tell me?"
"That all depends. All the same, Taggy, you have got no choice in the
ter; you must give me the letter. The Head has ordered you to do so.
he dressed you down for taking the letter to him instead of bringing
to me. You have got into one row over that letter, and you ought not
be so silly as to run the risk of getting into another one."

"I shall please myself."

"In that case you are never likely to please anyone else."

"I'm going to see inside that letter, 'cos I have reason to believe th something in it concerning of me. It ain't in an eddicated hand."

"You ought to be a jolly good judge of that, Taggy. Give me letter!"

"Are you going to tell me who it's from?"

"That all depends on whom it is from."

"If it's about my suvereign, I insist on knowing."

"Chuck it over, Taggy!"

Taggles hesitated. He had taken it into his head that the letter in some way connected with the missing sovereign. Why he should imagined such a thing was a mystery; but then, Taggles' imagina very often were mysterious.

He threw the letter on the table, and then all his suspicions confirmed.

Tom Merry tore the letter open, and screwed up his lips as though a to whistle, but no sound came from them.

He put the mysterious letter in his pocket, and gazed at Taggles, as a master would have done had anything gone seriously wrong.

"When did that letter arrive, Taggy?"

"'Arf an hour ago, and——"

"Now, be careful, Taggles. Are you sure it was not thirty minutes ago?"

"Of course I ain't."

"Nor twenty-nine minutes?"

"It was——"

"Be careful, Taggles!"

"It was about 'arf an hour ago."

"Was it an hour ago?"

"It might have been."

"Did it come by the morning post?"

"No, it didn't."

"Did it come by the afternoon post?"

"Of course it did. How could it come any other road?"

"Make a note of that, Manners, my child, and you sign the note. can go, Taggles."

"Well, I'm blowed!" gasped Taggles. "He thinks hisself a master

"Did you hear me say that you could go, Taggles?"

"Did you hear me say I am going to know the contents of that lett

"Taggles!"

"What?"

"Don't answer me in that manner, boy."

"Who are you getting at?"

"Taggles!"

"Yus!"

"Vacate these premises!"

Whether Taggles would have gone or not is doubtful; but at moment he heard his bell, and so he shut the door hard.

CHAPTER 16.
The Challenge.

TOM MERRY took the letter from his pocket again.

"My only aunt!"

"Is she dead?" inquired Lowther.

"Rats! How could she be my only aunt if she were dead?"

"What's the matter with her?"

"Has she got an attack of measles?" inquired Manners.

"How should I know? But this letter takes the cake!"

"Does the old lady want to borrow a fiver?"

"Ass! She knows perfectly well that I would never have one to lend, but——"

"Perhaps she wants Tom Merry to knit her a pair of mittens."

"She hasn't written to me at all, ass!"

"Then what did you say she had for?"

"Never said anything of the sort. If I had said, 'My only hat!' I suppose you would have jumped to the conclusion that my only hat had written to me asking me to knit it a pair of mittens, or stating that it had got the measles. This letter is from the Glenside bounders, and the chap who wrote it needs some writing lessons; also a dictionary. His name is Kemp, and I'd say his nature is stupid."

"Has he found Taggy's 'suvereign'?"

"Rats! How could he find that? But it's like his cheek."

"What—not finding it?"

"You silly burbler, Monty! This is a challenge."

"To a duel?"

"Yes—with oars."

"What—rowing?"

"Well, I don't see what would be the good of oars if you jolly well didn't row with them. Of course, you might shove them on your mantelpiece as ornaments, the same as Taggy shoved his 'suvereign,' but they would not be remarkably pretty. Listen to this little lot."

Tom Merry commenced to read, and the original letter was as follows:

"Arthur James Kemp, Esquire, M.Q., J.G.M., and R.S.V.P., informs Tom Merry and his giddy crewe that he will on the fourteenth prox. of currant month wind and water permitting row them in Rhyl with four oars and cox outrigged boats. If the aforesaid Tom Merry is afraid of being beaten let him say so.—Yours et setera, ARTHUR JAMES KEMP, Esquire."

"My only hat! I'm not a walking dictionary," gasped Tom Merry; "but if I couldn't spell better than that, I'd eat my hat, and give up writing."

"Just look at the fist. A harvest spider and an inkpot would make a better show than that," exclaimed Lowther. "Of course, we will accept. Figgy will do for the fourth oar."

"But we must not speak to Figgy."

"No matter; we will jolly well make signs. Here, I'll answer that letter right away."

And this is what Tom Merry wrote:

"In answer to Master Kemp's letter, Tom Merry hereby accepts the challenge to row over a mile course, or any other distance, on the Rhyl, on the fourteenth. Tom Merry is at a loss to know whether currant month means December, as currants are chiefly used in that month. Should Master Kemp mean current month, it was unwise to put prox., because that means next month. Master Kemp appears to be rather short of t's and long of e's, and he does not make it clear whether the oars are to be outrigged as well as the coxswain. Tom Merry assumes that J.G.M. stands for Junior Grammar Murderer, in which case he considers Master Kemp is fully qualified for a senior degree. Tom Merry is not at all afraid of being beaten by Master Kemp."

"Good biz!" exclaimed Manners, perusing the precious epistle.

"Have I spelt it correctly?"

"Just glance your eye over it, Monty. It wouldn't do to make a mistal in the spelling after pointing out his."

"I'm not strong on spelling," observed Lowther dubiously.

"You would have to be jolly weak for Kemp to notice it," said To Merry. "I believe that's all right, only if I get nervous about my spellin it's all U. P."

The letter went. Then a discussion was held as to the best means making Figgins understand he was wanted to row in the great race.

"It's easy," declared Tom Merry. "All we have got to do is to—t make him understand."

"That's all, but he's so thick-headed."

"Suppose we send a messenger?" suggested Lowther.

"Rats! It would get all over the college."

"What of that?"

"Suppose we lose the race," observed Tom Merry. "I don't know wh this burbler Kemp is; but I know the other chaps are good rowers, and i would be quite like them to bring Sixth-Formers."

"You would hardly call Monty an expert rower," observed Manners gazing mournfully at his chum.

"Rats!" growled Lowther. "Taggy might call you one, but then Taggy isn't truthful."

"If the crabs you catch were only edible, Monty, think what glorious feeds we could have."

"Peace, children!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Neither of you can row."

"And what about yourself?"

"I am not discussing myself."

"Jolly good job. It would make you tired."

"Ring off! We have got to make that burbler Figgy comprehend our meaning. What is the best way to do it, Monty?"

"Seize him, and drag him down to the river; then force him into a boat, and if he won't row, jolly well bump him!"

"He might think we were going to make a giddy galley-slave of him. No; that's a rotten idea. You have a shot, Manners."

"Get an oar, take it into his study, and show him what we mean, by working it about."

Tom Merry became thoughtful. He saw a fearful lot of drawbacks to that arrangement. At the same time he could not think of a better plan, and he did not want to send a messenger.

"We will try it, kids, but I'm inclined to believe he will come to the conclusion that we are japing him. There are some oars in the gym. Suppose we try it at once."

"Right-ho!"

"Good biz! We mustn't let that rotter Kemp lower our colours. Figgy is the best man we can get, and he will work, if you make him."

Tom Merry sighed.

"He resembles you two burblers in that respect, except that, if you are the best men, we wouldn't have much jolly chance of winning with the worst."

"Rats! You don't know good rowing when you see it."

"I haven't seen any lately. But I know bad rowing, and I've seen a lot of that."

Manners smiled.

"I have often told you not to watch your own oar."

"Oh, dry up, asses! Come for the oar."

Figgins was alone in his study that evening. The fact is, he was fearfully [illegible] with some lines he had to show up on the morrow, and he was [illegible] them against time, and fearfully written they were. That he did [illegible] mind at all. Whether Mr. Ratcliff would mind was another matter.

Tom Merry, with an oar over his shoulder, marched into the study, and, as [illegible] turned to see if he had got the whole of that oar into the room, he caught [illegible] a crack over the head with the blade, and then upset the inkpot [illegible] his lines.

"Asses!" yelled Figgins, leaping to his feet, and rubbing the back of [illegible] head. "If you don't clear out of this, I'll—I'll——"

Figgins did not know what he would do. They were three to one.

Tom Merry touched his mouth, by way of intimating that his lips were [illegible].

"Burbling idiots! Will you clear?" yelled Figgins. "What's the good [illegible] making those silly signs at me? I don't understand one of the giddy [illegible]. I'm busy, you silly bounders."

Tom Merry seated himself on a chair, and, crossing his legs so as to [illegible] imaginary rowlocks, got the oar between them, and commenced to [illegible] with a vigour that was disastrous.

He swept Figgins & Co.'s ornaments off the mantelpiece, and as Figgins [illegible] forwards to catch his clock, he caught the oar instead.

It struck him on the side of the head, and sent him sprawling over the [illegible] scuttle.

Tom Merry took out his handkerchief, and wiped his eyes. His object [illegible] to express his sorrow, but the effect of this pantomime show was rather [illegible] by howls of laughter from Lowther and Manners.

Their orders were not to speak to Figgins. They had received no orders [illegible] to laugh at him; and even if they had, it would have been all the [illegible], for they would have found it quite impossible to obey such orders.

"Well, of all the burbling asses I ever came across!" gasped Figgins, [illegible] picking himself up, and gazing at the Terrible Three. "I believe they have [illegible] gone dotty. Here, stop that beastly rowing, Tom Merry. If you think you [illegible] are on the river, you are mistaken. You ought to be sent to a lunatic [illegible] asylum, and kept in a strait jacket for a year or two."

"What a silly ass he is not to understand my signs, Monty!" said Tom Merry.

"Off his rocker!"

"One of the burbling New House kids."

"All the lot of them are frabjious idiots!" declared Tom Merry. "I wonder if it would be talking to him if I talked what I want to say to you?"

"Should say so."

"So would Ratty," observed Manners.

Tom Merry looked perplexed.

"That's the worst of having to deal with kids who have got no intellect. I don't know how Ratty manages to teach them."

"He doesn't teach them so jolly much," declared Manners. "Make a few more signs, Tom Merry."

"Bothered if he shall!" roared Figgins, springing at him.

And then a struggle commenced. Figgins wrenched at the oar, and banged the blade of it through the window as Tom Merry let go, while the crash of glass and other noise was so considerable that the chums deemed it prudent to beat a retreat.

Figgins became thoughtful. The lock of his door was broken, and he had an idea that the Terrible Three would return to make some more signs.

"I'll smother them out," muttered Figgins, shutting down the register. There was a fire in the grate. They had used it for tea. He flung some

lard on that fire, then a little butter, and some lamp-oil. After that searched in the cupboard, and discovered a kipper-herring. That went so did a rasher of bacon, and the remains of a hambone.

Figgins did not appear to be satisfied with the smother even now. glanced round the room, and his eye lighted on an old feather pil They used it for flinging at each other. Figgins flung it on the fire, after that he was perfectly satisfied.

White and exceedingly pungent smoke came into the room.

"It does whiffle, too," muttered Figgins, going on with his lines. believe it will take away Fatty Wynn's appetite for supper. Still, I do my lines in peace."

Figgins grew dim. It was surprising that he was not choked.

"My only hat!"

Figgins looked up. It was Tom Merry, although he could scarcely him through the smoke.

"Hough—hough!"

"What's the matter?" inquired Lowther.

"Matter! Why, there's a kid on fire, and we mustn't tell him, beca we are not allowed to speak. Ha, ha, ha! My only hat! Talk ab smoking kippers after this!"

"Go away, you babbling idiots!" cried Figgins. "I'm writing li against time."

"He's writing them against smoke, too," murmured Manners.

"Hough—hough! It's the strongest-smelling smoke I ever samp It would blunt a hatchet, if you tried to cut it with the beastly thi If Ratty doesn't smell this little lot, it will be because he's got the fl Cave! Here he comes. I can hear his giddy door opening. Slip into t study, kids! It won't do for him to find us here."

"He's trying to locate it," said Manners.

Tom Merry tried to stop a fit of coughing.

"You wouldn't need a bloodhound to locate that little lot."

"It's too jolly awful for words."

"Smells like fried feathers."

"Badly fried at that."

"Boy," cried an angry voice, "are you mad?"

"Oh, good-evening, sir!"

"What are you doing?"

"Lines, sir."

"Surely the boy must be demented!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, taking p ticular care to remain in the passage, although he got more than required of the smoke there.

"Why are you doing lines?"

"Because you gave them to me, sir. I don't want to do them, but I working against time. They got overlooked in the rush of my other work

"Don't talk that nonsense to me. Where is all this—this abomina smoke coming from?"

"Grate, sir," answered Figgins, dashing on with his lines.

"Open the window immediately!"

Figgins obeyed, then went on with his lines.

"Did you make this fearful smother intentionally?"

"Well, I certainly did, sir. You see, I wanted to get those lines don and didn't want anyone to interrupt me, so I thought this little fog wou keep 'em out. It has. Masters can bear more than boys in the way smoke."

Mr. Ratcliff did not take this hint to go. He was very angry. Th

smelling smoke had permeated into his study. In fact, it was the of smoke that would permeate anywhere.

"Come out of that study immediately, Figgins! Do you hear me?"

Figgins must have done so, but he hesitated.

"Come here, boy!"

"If you please, sir——"

"Come out of that room, and don't you dare to argue with me! Silence! Come here! Now shut the door!"

"If you please, sir——"

"Silence! Go to your dormitory immediately, and don't leave it until I give you permission."

"But, sir—fire—register—and——"

"Silence! Obey my order!"

Poor Figgins went. Mr. Ratcliff looked threatening. He never allowed a boy to answer him; and in this case it was rather awkward, for Figgins wanted to explain that the register was down, and that the blaze was going up. The open window would be quite inadequate to carry off that emporium.

Mr. Ratcliff watched Figgins ascend the stairs; then, having opened a few other windows in the passage, he returned to his own study.

Thicker and thicker grew that smoke. If there were any microbes in the study, they must have certainly come to an untimely end.

Tom Merry and the others remained in the adjoining study. They were waiting for Fatty Wynn and Kerr to return, thinking that there would be some fun when they did.

"Jolly awful!" gasped Tom Merry. "Figgy must have set the place on fire, and there's a smell of burning fish."

"I should say it was a foul fish," observed Lowther. "I feel jolly certain it has feathers on it. I can smell them burning. I really think we had better get to our own study. We shall get choked if we stop here."

Tom Merry wanted to see what effect the pungent vapour would have on Fatty Wynn's appetite. At the same time he did not want to get choked. He had an asphyxiated feeling already.

"Right-ho! We'll scoot."

And they scooted.

CHAPTER 17.

Preparations for the Great Race.

THEY had scarcely entered their study when Arthur Augustus entered.

"Weally, there's a feahful smell of burning."

"So you've winded it, Gussy?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Weally, Mewwy, I don't see how anyone could help winding it. My respected welative, whose life Billy Barnes saved, is coming heah to-night, and I weally believe it will choke him. It's wotten!"

"Don't you think he will like it?"

"I weally don't know, because I have nevah met the old boy. At the same time, I don't see how he can like it, not if he's got anything like aviatowwatic notions."

Tom Merry remained thoughtful. He was not thinking of the smoke, which was on the increase, and was likely to continue so until the fire went out, considering that the register was shut down. Tom Merry was thinking of the boat race.

"What's the matter with Gussy?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I——"

"Looks pretty awful."
"Mannahs, I'm surpwised at youah wemark."
"Reminds you of a smoked bloater."
"I wesent being weferred to as a bloatah, Monty."
"Rats!"
"Well, he's not unlike one of them, either."
"Weally, Monty, I shall give you the most fwightful thwashing if——"
"But what's the matter with him?"
"Ask me what isn't the matter with him."
"Bai Jove——"
"Suppose we make use of him for Kemp's little wheeze. What do you say, Manners?"
"He might do, but my candid opinion is that he would do better for Guy Fawkes."
"Weally, Mannahs, your wemarks are most oppwobwious."
"He can't row much," observed Lowther.
"I will wow you any day, Monty. You can't wow for toffee."
Tom Merry looked serious.
"Ring off, asses! This is a serious matter. I think we will use Gussy."
"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I pwotest. I wefuse to be used like a doormat."
"Rats! We are not going to wipe our feet on you."
"I pwotest, and I wesent being made use of."
"Poor Gussy!" murmured Manners. "You are not ornamental, so that it is only fair to you that we should make you useful—if we can, although I rather doubt it."
"Weally, Mannahs! Not ornamental!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Your wemark is widiculous."
"Ornamental! Look at it!"
"I shall give you the most fwightful thwashing diwectly, Monty."
"It's not my fault that you are not ornamental."
"Youah wemark is widiculous in the extweme."
"Oh, ring off, Gussy!"
"I sha'n't wing off, Tom Mewwy. I pwotest——"
"Then do it silently, and listen to your uncle. I——"
"I won't be made use of. I pwotest——"
"Suppose we use him as an ornament?" suggested Lowther.
Manners slowly shook his head, and sighed.
"Couldn't be done, unless you used him as a gargoyle."
"Weally, Mannahs, your wemarks are wude and widiculous, and I wesent them extwemely."
"Listen to me——"
"I sha'n't listen to you, Tom Mewwy. I wefuse to wemain in youah company."
"Seize the rotter!" cried Tom Merry. "Hold him tight!"
"Oh, you howwid wottahs! You are teawing my clothes."
"Never mind that. Hold him tight! Sit on his head, like they do the cab horses. Will you listen to reason, ass?"
"You howwid boundah, Tom Mewwy. You haven't got any weason."
"We are going to have a race."
"Can't you have yuah wace without teawing my clothes?"
"Will you row in our boat?"
"Of course I'll wow in youah boat."
"Then why didn't you say so, ass, without giving us all this trouble?"
"Weally, Mewwy——"
"Oh, ring off! We are——"

"Look at my waistcoat!"

"Frightful thing!"

"Frightful?"

"Rather!"

"Wats to you! It's the latest thing in waistcoats, and——"

"Shove the beastly thing on Figgy's fire."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you have no taste at all. Billy Barnes has got a lot moah taste than you. I considah that waistcoat wathah fetching."

"It would fetch a mad bull, or frighten a cow. But never mind about your beastly waistcoat——"

"I pwotest. Beastly!"

"Oh, dry up!"

"I shan't dwy up. I'm not a bwook or a duck-pond, and——"

"You lads are making a terrible noise," said Mr. Brown, entering the study.

"Sowwy, sir, but——"

"It's a race, sir."

"Would it not be better, Merry, if you had your race in the Close?"

"It is a rowing race, sir."

"In boats."

"Wathah! These silly wottahs——"

"Those what?"

"Sowwy, sir. No diswespect intended. Let me explain the mattah to Bwown."

"Mr. Brown has not a fortnight to spare."

"I wesent youah wemark, Mannahs, and pwotest——"

"A race with——"

"It's a wace, sir, on——"

"Dry up, Gussy! Mr.——"

"I shan't dwy up, Tom Mewwy. I'm surpwised that you should use such vulgah language in a mastah's pwesence. You must be a silly wottah——"

"Don't you think I should understand the matter better if one of you were to speak at a time?" observed Mr. Brown.

"I quite agwee, sir. In fact, I always agwee with a mastah, because it would be diswespectful if you didn't agwee with him, and you might get lines, which would be wotten. Now, if Tom Mewwy will hold his silly wow, I will explain the whole mattah in a lucid mannah."

Tom Merry glanced at his chums, and looked comical. He did not see how Arthur Augustus could explain the whole matter, seeing that he knew next to nothing about it.

"Very well, Gussy, you explain it."

"It's a wace, sir—a wace in boats. In fact, it is a wowing-wace. It's a wace——"

"You have mentioned that before."

"Dwy up, Tom Mewwy! How can I explain when you keep intewwupting me?"

"Go hon!"

"It's a wace, sir, and they want me to show them how to wow."

"Rats!"

"Do you want to catch water-rats?" inquired Mr. Brown, looking quite serious.

"No, sir. Wats is an expwesh. Wathah a vulgah expwesh. But what can you expect fwom Tom Mewwy?"

"Mr. Brown does not require you to explain rats. He wants to know about the race."

"You don't give me time to explain the mattah fully, Tom Mewwy,

The wace takes place on the wivah, sir, and—and it is to be wowed myself with othahs."

"Who are the others?"

"I weally don't know, sir. I will leave Tom Mewwy to explain the w of the mattah."

"You had better go on, Gussy. You have only explained what Brown already knew."

"I shall not pwoceed, Tom Mewwy."

"Why not, my lad?" inquired Mr. Brown.

"Well, I weally don't know any moah, sir. I don't wefuse out of wespect, but as I don't know any moah, I pwefer Tom Mewwy to expl the west."

"You have taken five minutes explaining nothing."

"Dwy up, Tom Mewwy!"

"Well, go on with your explanation."

"I wefuse. I wefuse to dwy up, and I wefuse to go on."

"That is rather an awkward position, D'Arcy."

"Weally, sir, the posish. is not as cleah as it might be, but, undah circs., I call on Tom Mewwy to pwoceed."

Tom Merry grinned, and Mr. Brown looked as though he was going laugh. Past experience had taught him that the ways of boys are pecul but he loved boys, and liked their peculiarities, while he always took interest in what interested them.

"The Glenside fellows challenge us to row a four-oared race on fourteenth, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Here is the challenge, and have answered it."

"Dear me! This lad may be a good rower, but he is certainly not mu of a scholar. His spelling is atrocious, and—— However, you are going race them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you got a trainer?"

"No, sir."

"Can you row together?"

"Not much, sir."

"Would you like me to train you?"

"Oh, I say, sir, that's awfully good of you! It——"

"Very well, I will train you. Suppose we start to-morrow?"

"Splendid, sir!"

"Be in the Close at half-past five, and you can show me the way to t river. Now, my lads, there must be a little less noise to-night. I am ju going to see where this fearful smother is coming from."

"I call that grand!" cried Tom Merry. "Knew I'd like him directly saw him."

"You will need a lot of twaining."

"So will you, Gussy. Wouldn't be surprised if he kicks you out of t boat."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wesent——"

"Go to your kennel, kid! We——"

"What?"

"Scoot!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I——"

"Mizzle off, Gussy! We have got prep. for Mr. Brown. You can b we are going to do it! A master can't like getting up at half-past five t train us. We don't like prep., but as he's going to do what he doesn't lik to please us, we will jolly well do what we don't like to please him."

"He's a jolly good fellow!" declared Lowther.

"Slap-up!" exclaimed Manners.

"I weally believe you are wight, my childwen. Look heah, Tom Mewwy, we shall want a cox."

"Right-ho!"

"Have you selected one?"

"No, not yet. Figgy would do."

"Figgy wouldn't like it. You know my wespected welative who——"

"Rats! He's too old."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you don't suppose I am going to ask the old ass to steeah ouah boat?"

"You said so."

"Wats! I said Billy Barnes could, oah words to that effect. At least, that was what I was coming to."

"You take such a frightful long time coming to it."

"Your wemarks are wude, and I wesent them. Do you agwee to Billy Barnes?"

"Rather! Trot him along."

There was no necessity to do this, for at that moment Billy Barnes, dressed in some of Arthur Augustus's clothes, and with an eyeglass stuck in his eye, made his appearance.

CHAPTER 18.

D'Arcy's Unknown Relative.

"REALLY, deah boys—what-ho, not 'arf—I pwotest!" exclaimed Billy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only hat!"

"Cheer up, D'Arcy junior!"

"Tom Mewwy, I shall give you the most fwightful thwashing! I pwotest! And wats! I've been looking for you everywhere, Gussy. Never thought of coming here."

"Has my wespected welative come?"

"Right-ho, wats, and pwotests, he has so!"

"Where is he waiting for me?"

"He's done it for half an hour in the doctor's studday—wats, and wight-ho!"

"Weally?"

"Says you are an insolent young rascal to keep him waiting."

"What!" gasped Arthur Augustus, turning crimson, and spluttering a little.

"Weally, dontcherknow, he says he'll lay his stick across your back for keeping him waiting."

"I'wepostewous!"

"Jest what he said; and he turned so red about the gills that I thought he was going to have fits. I jolly near chucked the water-bottle over his noble noddle!"

"I weally wish you had. How could a welative of mine so forget himself? I pwotest!"

"The old boy said he had an appointment with you."

"Weally? So he had. It is quite twue, only I expected him to wait till I was weady."

"Wight-ho! But he said as he'd see you hanged if he'd wait any longer, and he's going to give the fiver he had got for you to Taggy. Wight-ho, not 'arf! Still, he landed me with a fiver, and you can have it."

"Weally, Billy Barnes, you don't compwehend. That fivah is your I'm surpwised that a welative of mine——"

"Won't wait."

"Don't intewwupt me, Tom Mewwy."

"Besides, he has waited."

"Well, his time is his own, and he weally should have waited."

"It's good for Taggy. He's netted the fiver."

"Weally, my welative should not have been so impulsive."

"Wats! Weally, he did wait a twifle, and he did go on, too—talk about the impudence of young jackanapes, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha! You've riled him, Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy?"

"You bet! He was riled a treat. You should have heard him going at me, and when I went he still went on to himself out loud. Then stormed up and down the room, and kicked his toes against the fend That did it. I think he's got corns, 'cos he stormed out of the place af that."

"Never mind, Gussy!"

"Cheer up!"

"Weally, I don't mind except that I do not like a wespected welative mine behaving like that. It is wude."

"Ha, ha, ha! Let's come and interview Taggy. Perhaps we can g your respected relative back."

"Wight-ho! I shall expwess my opinion to him. A welative of mine mu behave himself with pwopwiety. I shall wequest him not to come heah a behave like a boundah and a hooligan."

Tom Merry gasped a little.

"My hat! He will appreciate that."

"Wats! I don't care wethah he appweciates it or not. I won't allow welative of mine to behave like a boundah."

"What age is he, Billy?" inquired Manners.

"I didn't ask him, but I'd say he was about ninety or a hundred."

"Weally? I didn't know I had such an old welative. Well, I sha tweat him with the wespect that he deserves. But——"

"I was only thinking that a respected relative of ninety or a hundr might kick at being taught comportment by you, Gussy."

"If my welative doesn't know how to behave himself, he must be taught and I shall considah it my duty to teach him."

Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't know what you are gwinning at, Tom Mewwy, but——"

"It was the loudest grin I have ever heard," said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs, your wemarks are widiculous. My wespected welativ has annoyed me—he has, weally. A welative of mine is expected to behav himself."

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"I sha'n't dry up, Tom Mewwy! I considah that a welative of mine ha no wight to behave in this mannah."

"But look how you kept your respected relative waiting."

"I suppose the old boundah can wait."

"He appears to have succeeded in doing so this afternoon."

"Wats! He should have waited until I came."

"What relative is he, Gussy?"

"Weally, I believe he is a cousin once wemoved, and I wish the old boundah was removed once more if he can't behave himself!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Don't be rough on him. Give him a chance."

"I don't wish to be wough on a welative of mine, but I pwotest at hi

message. It isn't my fault if the old boundah kicks his corns against the fendah. He shouldn't be wude about it. And he ought to have waited till I came. Is he anything like me in personal appeawance, Billy?"

"Wight-ho, not 'arf, and I don't think! He's as shabby as I was before he took me in tow. He doesn't look worth twopence, but he pulled out enough banknotes to have have made a bonfire with."

"I believe he's vewwy wich, only I expect a welative of mine to dwess like a gentleman."

"He's a shaggy-headed old wuzzo!"

"Weally, Billy?"

"Sowwy! No diswespect. Fact, you can't help respecting an old josser who gives you five-pound notes. It's the largest sum of money I've ever had in my life. Blest if I know what I shall do with it!"

"Come on, Gussy—let's see if we can catch him!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "At any rate, it will be sport to see Taggy's joy at receiving your fiver."

"Weally, I don't quite see where that fun comes in," observed Arthur Augustus.

Taggles did not appear to be at all pleased. He looked cross, although that was nothing unusual at that time of night.

"A welative of mine has been here, Taggy, and——"

"No, he ain't."

"Weally?"

"I ain't seen no relative of yourn."

"Then my wespected welative must have forgotten to give you the fivah."

"What fiver?" demanded Taggy, starting up.

"Why, you see, I offended my wespected welative by keeping him waiting. He was going to give me a fivah. He gave one to Billy Barnes."

"He did so!" exclaimed Billy, producing it. "Wathah, and wats! Haw, haw, haw! Won't I have a time of it!"

"Is he going to give me one?" inquired Taggy eagerly.

"Wats! He said as he was. Wathah, and wight-ho! He said as he was going to give you the fivah as he would have given to his wemoved cousin if he hadn't kept him waiting. He came this way, too, towards your lodge."

"What sort of looking man was he?"

"Fuzzy grey hair and shabby clothes. Looked as if he wanted a brush-up, and——"

"Woo-hooh!" yelled Taggles, leaping to his feet. "An old party did come here with a bit of paper in his hand, and ast me if I was Taggles, the porter. I told him I was, and that if he didn't clear I'd knock him out of the place. I thought he had come begging."

Tom Merry grinned.

"My only hat! You have lost a fiver, Taggy."

"Fury! Why didn't he tell me?"

"Give it up. What did he say?"

"Something about having nearly as bad manners as some relative."

"Meaning you, Gussy."

"Weally? This is too wude on the part of my wespected welative. I protest."

"Hust your protests! I've been and lorst five pound!"

"Weally, Taggy, you should tweat my wespected welatives with moah wespect."

"Why didn't he tell me who he was?" hooted Taggles.

"P'raps he wanted to know what you thought of him first," suggested

Billy. "Haw, haw, haw! You were sold that time, Taggy. I got [illegible] fiver. Wight-ho! Go hon! Wathah!"

"Then jest you pay me the suvereign you stole."

"Go hon!"

"See here! Don't you think to fool me. I mean to have that suvereign"

"Wight-ho, wathah, and I don't think!"

"If you don't pay me that suvereign, I'll put you in prison. I wi[ll] straight."

"Weally! Yaas! Haw, haw, haw!"

"You young thief!"

"Wight-ho!"

"You admit as you have took it."

"Go hon, and wats to you!"

"You young gents are witnesses to his confession."

"Wats!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "He hasn't confessed anything at a[ll] A chap who could save my wespected welative couldn't steal; beside[s] Billy is a fwiend of mine, and a fwiend of mine couldn't possibly stea[l] I wathah considah that you are a wottah, Taggy, and that you haven't lo[st] a soveweign at all."

"I know as I have, and I've lorst five pound as well."

"Well, that's wathah unlucky, but it was youah fault foah not wespectin[g] my welative."

"He's downright respectable, too," declared Billy, grinning. "Wouldn't have given me this 'ere fiver if he hadn't been. Haw, haw, haw! I wish he would come every day. Wathah, and wats!"

Then Billy stuck his glass in his eye, and screwed up his face as he gazed at the incensed Taggles.

It was galling to the porter to think of his loss, and he had an idea that Billy was making fun of him.

Seizing one of his boots, which were drying in the fender, he hurled it at Billy's head; but that worthy ducked just in time, and the boot went through the window.

Then Billy bolted, and, getting possession of the boot, rushed towards the water-butt with it, while Taggles, who had gone out to recover his property, gave chase.

"Come back, you young varmint!" roared Taggles, losing one of his slippers, but maintaining the chase, although he got one of his feet wet.

Billy gained the water-butt, and dropped the boot into it, while Taggles uttered a howl of fury; but it was quite useless to give chase, and he knew that it was a matter he could not report, because it would have come to the master's knowledge that he had hurled a boot at a boy's head.

Meantime, the chums had left the lodge, under the impression that it would be too hot for them on Taggles' return. They decided on going to Figgins' study to see how Wynn and Kerr took the smoke.

Mr. Brown was a practical man, and he had at once discovered that the register was down. It had nothing to do with his department, but he put it up; and then, having closed the door, hoped that the powerfully smelling smoke would soon clear off.

He had scarcely left the study when Fatty Wynn and Kerr entered.

"My only hat!" gasped Fatty Wynn, starting back. "Are you there, Figgy?"

"Phew! If he is, he will be smothered."

"Isn't it horrid? There's a smell of cooking badly burnt, mingled with singed blankets. Just go and open the window, Kerr."

The window was open, only there was too much smoke for Wynn to [illegible] this.

"Rats! Open it yourself! Do you think I want to be poisoned?"

"It's too awful for words!" declared Wynn, shutting the door.

"You say it smells like cooking. Well, in that case you are bound to like it. Just go in, Fatty, and get rid of the smoke."

"All our food will be spoilt, and I had some fine sausages for supper. Even our bread will taste of that smell. It's rotten!"

"Who could have played the giddy trick?"

"The Shell bounders, without a doubt. I wouldn't mind the smoke so much, if it didn't spoil our provisions."

"P'raps it won't, and you can't be hungry after the tea you made."

"Rats! If a fellow makes a good dinner one day, I suppose he can be hungry the next week?"

"You haven't waited a week, Fatty."

"No, and you can bet I don't intend to do so."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Tom Merry, what do you mean by this rotten jape?"

Tom Merry gave himself some pats on the mouth; then he began dancing about in a manner that might have been intelligible to himself, but was utterly unintelligible to Fatty Wynn.

"What rotten, silly signs! How can I understand the silly ass?"

"I think he's trying to dance a hornpipe," said Kerr.

"Looks like some old spavined horse with the stringhalt."

"Reminds me more of a spavined ass," said Kerr.

"Ass! You have spoilt all our food. What does the burbling idiot mean now? Oh, here comes D'Arcy! Look here, Gussy, what does that dancing ducklet mean?"

"Weally, Fatty Wynn, I don't know."

"Should say the silly bounder had been to the tuckshop and had some dancing lessons from the old girl who keeps it. I say, Tom Merry, don't distort your face like that. It's bad enough in its natural state, but you are making it look positively awful."

"Rather!" exclaimed Kerr. "He must think he's a monkey at the Zoo."

Tom Merry ceased his signs, and looked most indignant.

"That's better. Don't you think so, Kerr?"

"Well, it's not much better. Come on, Fatty Wynn! Let's leave the silly burbler to talk to the other little boys. He would not be able to understand our conversation. We might buy him a bucket and spade, and send him down to the sands to dig, poor little fellow."

Then the pair entered their study, which was just becoming bearable.

CHAPTER 19.

How Mr. Ratcliff Listened to D'Arcy's Arguments.

"POSITIVELY rotten!" grumbled Tom Merry, seating himself despondently in his study. "Here I'm not allowed to talk to the kids, and they make fun of me when I try to express my meaning by signs."

"Shall I act as youah intahmediawy, Tom Mewwy?"

"You make such a jolly mess of the thing."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wesent that wemark."

"Rats!"

"I don't want to listen to youah vulgah expwessions. I shall go to my studday if you don't requiah my services, bai Jove!"

"Well, go and tell the bounder that he's an ass."

"I expect he knows that, Tom Mewwy. But I'm not talking of Figgy."

"Who are you talking of, then?"

"That's ungwammatical, and——"

"Dry up! How can a fellow bother about his grammar when he's in this fix?"

"You should always think of youah gwammah, Tom Mewwy. It's jolly vulgah to speak bad gwammah. An expwesh——"

"Oh, hang the expresh.! What do you want to do?"

"Weally, I don't want to do anything; but I am willing, under the circs., to go to Watty and wequest him to wemove his intahdict."

"My hat!"

"Weally——"

"You surely don't suppose he will do it?"

"If I put the mattah to him in a pwopah light——"

"You will find darkness o'erspread his noble brow."

"I don't care for his bwow."

"Do you care for his cane?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, he can't be cwoss with me for pleading for a boundah——"

"Well, go and plead, Gussy. Only you must not blame me if you fail."

"I should say you would be the pwopah person to blame me in that case. But undah the circs.——"

"Right-ho! Go and interview the dear man. Tell him I'm sorry, and don't clip your words; he doesn't like it. If you could go without your eyeglass, you would have more chance of success, for I'm positive he doesn't like that, either."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I shall do nothing of the sort. Mr. Wateliff has nothing to do with my dwess."

"Why don't you wear your eyeglass in your boots?" suggested Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs, your wemarks are most oppwobwious, and I wesent them. I shall put the mattah plainly to Mr. Watcliff, and he will at once see that I am wight, and that he is wong; then he will expwess his sowwow, and welieve you fwom the intahdict."

"He's mighty sanguine," observed Tom Merry.

But the good-natured Arthur Augustus went.

He tapped gently at Mr. Ratcliff's door, and received no audible reply; then he tapped again.

"Come in! Come in! Well, D'Arcy, do you wish to speak to me?"

"Yaas, sir."

"What is it? Shut the door."

"If you please, sir, I hope you won't think me diswespectful, because——"

"No, no; I don't think anything like that."

"Undah the circs. of the case——"

"I wish you would not clip your words in that stupid manner, D'Arcy. I have told you of that repeatedly."

"Sowwy, sir. It is a habit. I assuah you I intended no diswespect——"

"Well, what is it?"

"It's weally an impossible posish., sir——"

"There you are again. What is a posish.?"

"Weally, sir, it means position."

"Then why do you not say position?"

"It's an expwesh. of mine, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff flung his book on the table, and gasped. He knew perfectly well that D'Arcy was not doing it on purpose, otherwise he would have dealt drastically with him.

"Tell me in two words what you require."

"Weally, sir, that's imposs."

Mr. Ratcliff jerked himself round, and gazed at D'Arcy in a manner that should have frightened him, but it did not appear to have the slightest effect. He gazed at his master through his eyeglass with perfect calmness.

"Well, tell me as quickly as you can, and don't wander from your subject and use a hundred words where one would do."

"Weally, sir, I nevah do anything like that, and I always wespect——"

"Go on, boy! What is you want?"

"With all wespect, sir——"

"Yes, yes! Go on! What do you want?"

"I want to wow a wace, sir, and——"

"You want what?"

"Wow a wace."

"What is wowawace?"

"It's fwee words, sir. It is not wowawace, but wow a wace."

"Are you mad, boy?"

"Weally, sir, I pwotest——"

"You tell me it is not wowawace, but wowawace."

"Wace, sir."

"Well, what is wace?"

"Wowawace, sir."

"What is wowawace? First you say it is wace, and then you say it is wowawace. I never heard such a word, and you must not expect me to grant favours if you come here using slang. Besides, why don't you speak to Mr. Brown?"

"He has nothing to do with the mattah, sir, and he won't interfeah in youah pwovince. Then again——"

"Never mind about all that. Tell me what you mean by wowawace, and what you want it for."

"With a boat, sir. You sit in a boat, and pull with youah oahs, and then you wow a wace."

"Pshaw! Row a race, you mean."

"Yes, sir. That is what I said."

"You said nothing of the sort."

"With all wespect——"

"Well, you can row a race. Now you can go."

"But you haven't listened to my wequest, sir."

"What! Do you mean to say you have wasted all this time and have not told me what you want?"

"Weally, sir, I would not have had to ask your permish. to wow a wace, because——"

"Never mind about all that. What on earth do you want?"

"I was just going to explain, sir, when you intewwupted me. I say it with all wespect, because I always wespect a mastah."

"Listen to me, D'Arcy! I insist on your telling me what you want. You have already wasted ten minutes of my time."

"With all wespect, sir, I don't think it is as long as that."

"But we are no nearer to the request."

"The wequest is coming, sir."

"I wish it would come," groaned the unfortunate master.

"These are the pweliminawies."

"Well, never mind the preliminaries. Come to the point."

"Weally, sir, I am afwaid you won't gwant the wequest if I don't give you the pweliminawies."

"Well, go on—only do be quick."

Mr. Ratcliff heaved a sigh, and flung himself back in his chair. It is possible that he may have desired to know what it was that D'Arcy really wanted. At any rate, he appeared to have resigned himself to his fate.

Arthur Augustus rambled on for about five minutes. Mr. Ratcliff let him go, thinking he would come to the end of it sooner.

"Now, I considah it was jolly decent of Tom Mewwy to ask me to wow, sir," continued Arthur Augustus, rather pleased with his remarks so far, "and I considah that one good turn deserves another."

"Well, well. Proceed!"

"Thank you, sir! I am pwoceeding."

"I am glad to hear it, and only wish you would proceed a little quicker."

"Now, under the circs., which I will now wecapitulate foah youah guidance, sir——"

"You will do nothing of the sort, boy!" groaned Mr. Ratcliff. "You want to do Tom Merry a good turn. Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Wemove the intahdict, sir. You see, if you wefuse to allow Tom Mewwy to speak to Figgy & Co., it wendahs it extwemely awkward. My wequest is an expwesh. of wecipwocity."

"I shall not allow anything of the sort."

"Weally, sir, I assuah you that Tom Mewwy does not deserve——"

"That is for me to judge."

"Without diswespect, sir——"

"It is useless——"

"You see, sir——"

"Tom Merry must be punished."

"But he didn't do anything, sir."

"Don't talk that nonsense to me. Do you think I am blind?"

"No, sir; but if you will kindly listen to my wequest——"

"I have listened to it, and refuse it."

"But, sir, you have only heard the pweliminawies. I haven't finished the wequest, and——"

"You have been long enough to have made half a dozen requests. I quite understand what you desire to ask, and I refuse your request."

"I am sowwy, sir; but if you will allow me to explain the mattah——"

"There is nothing to explain."

"Without diswespect——"

"I cannot go over the ground again."

"We were not fighting, sir."

"Well, I do not know how you act when you are fighting. You were all rolling on the ground, and struggling like young hooligans, and——"

"Weally, sir——"

"Do you deny it?"

"It was a little wough-and-tumble."

"Your clothes were torn."

"I don't weally mind that, sir. I am wathah gwieved about the waistcoat, because it was a particularly fetching one, but the twousahs don't mattah at all."

"I cannot listen to you any more."

"Would you gwant me an intahview to-mowwow morning, sir?"

"Not about this matter. I refuse your request, and there is an end of the matter. Now, go!"

"Weally, sir, I assuah you that no diswespect——"

"Will you leave this room?"

There was no help for it. Mr. Ratcliff rose, and looked so severe that Arthur Augustus thought it advisable to go.

He went to Tom Merry's study, looking despondent.

"How did you get on?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Wotten!"

"Wouldn't he grant your request?"

"Wats! He wouldn't listen to me. Undah the circs.——"

"But what were you doing all this jolly time, if he wouldn't listen to you?"

"I was getting to the pweliminawies."

"Poor brute!"

"I'm not a bwute, Tom Mewwy, and I pwotest——"

"I was referring to your hearer. You have knocked a hole in half an hour, and if you were only getting to the preliminaries all that jolly time, I was rather pitying your hearer."

"I don't think Watty would like being called a pooah brute, Tom Mewwy."

"I was only sorry for him. But never mind, Gussy; you go and have another turn at him to-morrow."

"He won't let me. I made the wequest."

"Then it is all up. However, I dare say we shall be able to manage for the remainder of the time without speaking to the kids."

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Manners. "Only I would advise you not to start dancing at them, Tom Merry."

"Dancing at them?"

"That's what I said."

"Rats! Who was dancing?"

"You were. Looked just as though you were trying to perform the skirt dance, and were making a ghastly hash of it."

"Oh, dry up! You are as silly as they are, not to be able to understand a few signs."

"Weren't you trying to do a step dance?" inquired Manners, looking innocent.

"Ass! Of course not."

"Well, you succeeded, then. You looked like a blessed kangaroo on hot bricks."

"Rats!"

"The bell is winging. The discush. must end foah the pwesent," observed D'Arcy.

And it ended.

CHAPTER 20.

Practising for the Race.

THE following morning the chums found Mr. Brown awaiting them in the Close, although they were several minutes before their time. This seemed to worry D'Arcy.

"Sowwy, sir," he exclaimed. "No diswespect was intended, I assuah you."

"But why should there have been any disrespect, my lad?"

"Sowwy to have kept you waiting, sir. Bad foahm, and——"

"You are before your time. It is not yet half-past."

"I know that, sir, but we kept you waiting."

"Not at all. I was before my time."

"I know, sir; but it was not a mattah of diswespect, and——"

"Ring off, Gussy!"

"I shall not wing off, Tom Mewwy, and I'm surpwised that——"

"Well, never mind your surprise. You are wasting Mr. Brown's time."

"Wats!"

Mr. Brown walked on. He had an idea that there would be no practice that morning if he waited for D'Arcy to finish his observations.

Arrived at the river, he sent them out in the four-oared outrigger, and watched their rowing from the bank. Then Billy Barnes got mixed with his lines, and ran them into the mud.

After that, Mr. Brown took them out for tubbing practice, and they came to the conclusion that they had got a good coach.

"Have you wowed much, sir?" inquired Arthur Augustus.

"A good deal," answered Mr. Brown. "I used to be very fond of it."

"Evah been in a wace, sir?"

"Several."

"Nevah been in the 'Vahsity wace?"

"Yes; I was in the Oxford boat."

"Bai Jove! I knew you could wow."

"Well, I should scarcely have offered to coach you if I could not, my lad."

"I nevah thought of that. It stands to weason."

"That is what you often do," observed Manners.

"Dwy up, Mannahs. You couldn't weason, if you twied for weeks."

"And you reason for weeks, and weak reason it is."

"Did you win the wace, sir?"

"Yes. My boat won."

"Bai Jove! I think I shall wow in the Oxford boat, because I like Oxford to win."

"Very well," exclaimed Mr. Brown, "then we must work as hard as we can, and don't feather too low, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, sir. I'll think of that. You see, I considah it gives wathah a dashing appeawance to a fellah."

"If the water is lumpy you are apt to catch a crab, and that would be fatal in the race; besides, all oars must be feathered at precisely the same height, as you already know."

"Wathah, sir! We are giving you a feahful lot of twouble, and it's awfully good of you."

"Well, I naturally want to see you win. You have a very short time for practice. However, I shall see what can be done in the matter. You must work hard, and keep in perfect training. Not too many visits to the tuckshop, you know."

"Wight-ho, sir! I'll keep Tom Mewwy and the othah boundahs out of it."

"Very wise; and keep yourself out of it as well, D'Arcy."

"Weally, sir, it is vewwy seldom that I go to the tuckshop, except pwaps after dinnah, and tea."

"You could scarcely go more frequently. But we will have another spin to-morrow. I hope to see an improvement in the rowing each day. If you work hard, I shall hope to see a good race. Do you know what the other crew are like."

"No, sir," answered Tom Merry. "We don't even know Kemp, the fellow who challenged us. I wouldn't be surprised if they bring pretty big fellows."

"I think there should have been some stipulation as to that. You see, if they bring young men it would scarcely be a fair race."

"We have accepted their challenge without any stipulation as to distance or anything, sir. We are what you might call in their hands."

"I will run over next Saturday, and make a few inquiries. Perhaps

I shall have an opportunity of seeing them row, and then I shall be able to form an opinion as to your chances."

"I say, it's awfully good of you, sir."

"Ah, you forget that my credit is at stake! I hope to turn out a very good crew, and it stands to reason that I want to see that crew win."

"Tell you what it is, chaps," exclaimed Tom Merry, when they were alone. "Brown is a downright good fellow."

"Wathah!"

"What-ho, wight-ho, and wats! You bet he is!" exclaimed Billy Barnes. "Had me into his study, and crammed me with the next day's lesson. And, mind you, a master must be jolly patient to be able to teach me anything. Wathah, and yaas! But his road of teaching is surprising. He don't tell you too much at a time, and when you've learnt it, he works it in with something else. Say he teaches you that a cat has got four legs——"

"I weally think you would have known that, Billy."

"Wathah! Yaas, but suppose he was to tell me that there's perpetual snow on Mount Vesuvius—"

"Wats! He wouldn't tell you that, Billy."

"Some mountains have."

"Weally, that's not one of them, deah boy."

"Well, what I mean is, suppose he tells you chestnuts grow on a tree; then he goes on to tell you they stuff turkeys with chestnuts sometimes, and turkeys have two legs——"

"Weally, you wouldn't have them with four."

"You bet I would when I'm sitting down to one. But I mean his teaching is sort of connected. It's jest the reverse to your talk."

"I pwotest, Billy. You will find my conversation is always quite connected. Still, you go on learning, Billy, and pwaps my wespected welative will give you anothah fiver. He seems to be a decent old boundah, only I wish he would dwess pwoperly. I think I shall take him to my tailah, and teach him how a welative of mine ought to dwess."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not compwehend the meaning of that wibald laughtah, Tom Mewwy."

"Rats!"

"I pwotest at youah expwesh., Tom Mewwy. It is vulgah in the extweme. How do you expect me to teach Billy Barnes the pwopah expwesh. to make use of, when you twot out vulgah ones like that?"

"Ass!"

"Wats! You come along, Billy. I don't want you to be contaminated by these boundahs."

The following Saturday Mr. Brown went over to Glenside. He said nothing to the chums about it, and they were a little surprised when that evening they were all ordered into his study.

They had forgotten the promise, but he had not; in fact, he never did forget a promise when he made one.

"I have seen the crew row, my lads."

"Are they wottahs, sir?"

"Are they what?"

"Wubbish, sir. Fellahs that can't wow."

"On the other hand, they row very well. They are by no means perfect; at the same time, they are quite young men. I should say Kemp must be at least eighteen."

Tom Merry looked serious.

"It's just like them, sir. They are a bragging lot, and would be awfully riled if we whacked them."

"I don't consider it a fair challenge," said Mr. Brown. "All the same, you can only do your best, now that you have accepted it. You are coming on nicely, and by the day of the race I hope you will be a very fine crew. Against such a strong crew as they a short course would suit you better."

"Then you can depend on it they will choose a long one, sir."

"Wats! We won't let them. We will choose a short course, and——"

"We can't!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I said we would row them for a mile or any distance they liked to name, and you can bet they will name the distance that suits them the best."

"In that case, let them take the lead," said Mr. Brown. "If it is anything about a mile, don't over-exert yourselves at the start, and be sure you do not let them give you their back-wash, Barnes."

"Wight-ho, sir! They sha'n't do that, if I have to steer into the mud."

"Oh, you must not do that!" exclaimed Mr. Brown, smiling. "That would be far worse than the back-wash. We shall do our very utmost, and hope for the best; but I warn you not to be disappointed if you lose the race. It would be no disgrace against such a crew."

"You think they will win, sir?"

"I won't say that, Merry. I think they ought to win, and I don't consider that they should have challenged lads of your ages. What you have to guard against is going to pieces when you begin to feel fagged. Row steadily all the way, and have something in reserve for the last burst. Do you know that Dr. Holmes is taking a great interest in this race?"

"Didn't know he knew anything about it, sir."

"I was pleased at the manner in which you work, and I expressed my pleasure to him. He quite agrees with me that every opportunity should be given you for practice, and Mr. Ratcliff has kindly consented to take some of my duties, so that you may get a little extra practice."

"Weally! That's awfully good of you, sir."

"Good of Mr. Ratcliff, you mean."

"Weally, sir, I don't think he will like it. He won't care for us winning."

"Nonsense! Of course he will."

"You may be wight, sir; but with all due wespect, I think you are wong."

Mr. Brown was wrong, too. Mr. Ratcliff had consented because the Head had made the request, but he was angered with Mr. Brown about the matter. It seemed to him giving the Shell an advantage over his own boys. However, he had consented, and there was an end to the matter.

For the remaining days Tom Merry's crew worked splendidly, and Mr. Brown seemed to be perfectly satisfied with their progress. He was just as free with his praise as with his blame, and he took such extraordinary pains that the lads could scarcely help doing the same.

It was he who got the whole school a holiday on the eventful day, and the race that Tom Merry had expected to be a private affair became quite public. It was arranged that the race should take place at eleven o'clock, and Kemp and his crew arrived by ten o'clock.

They were young men, and seemed to be considerably disconcerted at the publicity of the affair, for it could scarcely redound to their credit beating such young boys.

Their boat had been sent down the previous night, and Mr. Brown had made all arrangements concerning the start. He had even hired a horse in order to gallop along the river bank, and watch the race from start to finish.

Tom Merry was stroke in the School House boat, and it was left to him to make arrangements with Kemp, who was stroke in the Glenside boat.

Arthur Augustus was still getting ready. Their colours were dark blue, but he could not quite decide on the exact shade of tie he would wear.

CHAPTER 21.
The Day of the Race.

"WHAT is the course to be?" inquired Tom Merry of Kemp, who was eyeing him with supreme contempt.

"Well, seeing you have made such a show of the little affair, we had better make a good long race of it. Do you think you will be able to row three miles?"

"Yes."

"All right. That will be up to the Anchor Inn. We have got a man there to watch us win. If you like you can send another."

"I will arrange that," said Mr. Brown.

"Right you are. You can't lose your way, Merry. It's up the river, you know. I don't expect you will see much of our boat five minutes after the start."

"Think it will sink?"

"Bosh! You are far more likely to sink."

"It was lucky for you you did not challenge our big fellows, wasn't it, Kemp?"

"Wanted to take down your bounce. Of course, it is practically a walk over for us."

"We are going to do our best."

"All right, kid. We will merely paddle, so as to make a sort of race of it. If you like we will challenge your best crew for a second race."

"Don't you think you had better win the first one for a start?"

"Ha, ha, ha! We shall win that all right, don't you fear."

"Shall we get down to the river?"

"Where is your fourth man?"

"He won't be long."

"Then you need a cox."

"I expect he's with our fourth man. Yes, here they come."

"Ha, ha, ha! Look at them, you fellows. My eye, isn't he superb! Ha, ha, ha! Can you row, you funny-looking kid?"

"Weally! I pwotest——"

"He pwotests! Ha, ha, ha! You won't mind my laughing at you, will you, youngster? I'm Mr. Kemp."

"Why, weally, Kemp, you are the most unkempt-looking bwute I have met foah a long time."

"Why, you insolent little rascal, I'll——"

"Come. There must be no quarrelling!" exclaimed Mr. Brown, stepping in front of Kemp.

"Who are you?"

"I am a master at this school."

"You are not my master."

"You must endeavour to behave yourself like a gentleman, young man."

"The wude hooligan couldn't do that if he twied, sir."

"That kid is not going to cheek me."

"Don't talk such nonsense, Kemp. You were insulting, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Don't let me have any more of your impertinence, otherwise I shall take means to stop it."

"What means, pray?"

"You appear to be a very impertinent and stupid young man," said Mr. Brown calmly. "It is a great pity that you cannot behave yourself like a gentleman. That I cannot alter, but I can stop your impertinence, and shall certainly do so. Go to the boats at once. Do you hear me?"

Kemp glanced at his crew. There was something about Mr. Brown's

manner that he did not like; at the same time, he had no intention of giving in too soon.

"I challenged these youngsters, and——"

"I know you did. I read your letter, and a more illiterate one could scarcely be imagined. It was misspelt. I should have thought a little boy of eight could have written a better letter."

"Would you really! Well——"

"Stop one moment. I have already informed you that I shall not submit to your impertinence. If you are impertinent again, I shall take you to my study and treat you like I should treat a naughty little boy of eight."

"You dare to—— I—I was not impertinent to you, sir."

"That is better, Kemp," said Mr. Brown quietly. He had gripped the bully by the arm, and he now released his hold. "You will probably comprehend that a master cannot allow impertinence from a boy, whether he belongs to his own school or not. Lead the way to the boats, my lads."

Kemp's face flushed with anger, and that anger was increased when he saw that the lads were grinning at him. He snarled at his crew as they entered the boathouse to prepare for the great race.

"We will row away from the little brutes," he muttered. "I wish we had challenged the Sixth Form. It was awfully stupid taking on these kids."

"But we wanted to take Tom Merry down. That fellow had got too much cheek."

"All right. We shall take him down right enough. They are bound to make an exhibition of themselves, only it's rotten winning against kids like that, and they have got the whole school as spectators, to say nothing of a lot from the village. Hang them!"

Mr. Brown had got his hired horse there, and he was giving a few last words of advice to his crew.

"Don't waste your breaths in talking, my lads!" exclaimed Mr. Brown, smiling at them. "I know you are a little partial to argument, and you will need all the strength you have. Don't forget to set a steady stroke at the start, Tom Merry. I will tell you when to make your final effort. You have a lot to go through. I know it from past experience, but when the race is over it is a great thing to be able to say to yourselves that you did your very utmost. Win or lose, do your very utmost. Good luck, my lads! Good luck! I wonder if you feel as anxious concerning this race as I do?"

"Wathah, sir."

"We won't bring disgrace on your coaching, sir, even if we don't win," said Tom Merry.

"Dr. Holmes is watching the finish. I shall be there. Row out."

Two skiffs were moored in the middle of the river, and towards these the boats were rowed. Kemp had won the toss, and he chose the right side; but there was not much advantage one way or the other.

"Are you ready?" cried the starter, and the two crews grasped their oars more firmly.

"Forward!"

Tom Merry's crew slid forwards. The dark blue oars swept above the water ready to plunge in.

"Go!"

And as the pistol-shot rang out, the two boats leapt away on their long course.

The Glenside colours were red, and some of their fellows who had come to see the race cheered them; but a great shout went up for blue, for their partisans far outnumbered the others.

Mr. Brown put his horse at a trot, and glanced approvingly at his crew.

Tom Merry had settled down to about twenty-nine strokes to the minute, and the dip of the oars was perfect. In and out of the water they flashed in perfect time.

Glenside were rowing at least thirty-two, and they drew rapidly away; but Tom Merry obeyed his orders. He did not quicken his stroke.

Mr. Brown was quick to notice some splashing with the Glensiders, and he smiled for he knew this splashing would increase as the race went on.

He also noticed that the boat did not draw away as fast as it should have done, considering the rate of striking. Then a voice caused Mr. Brown to turn, and he saw Kildare, the captain of the college, coming along the tow-path on a bicycle.

"I say, sir, you have turned out a grand crew!" exclaimed the young captain.

"Yes, Kildare. They will do me credit, win or lose."

"Scarcely a fair race, sir."

"No. It is mere lads against young men, but they are doing grandly, as you see."

"The Glensiders are drawing ahead pretty well."

"It is what I expected. I only hope Tom Merry will not lose his head and quicken his stroke too soon."

"Then you think there's a chance, sir?"

"Well, there is a chance, Kildare; but, as you will know, it is a faint one."

"Can your crew stay the course, sir?"

"Yes. I have taken them over it. I had an idea that Kemp would make a long course of it, because that would, naturally, suit him best. I took them three miles at pretty nearly top speed a few days ago."

"I say, they are rowing! I call their form about perfect."

"It's excellent, Kildare. Better than I expected. See how their boat leaps forward, and she never loses way. You notice the Glensiders' boat drags between the strokes, and they don't swing in perfect time. She is not nearly as steady as she should be; but, mind you, they are a very powerful crew. There's daylight between the boats now."

"What about the back-wash?"

"Barnes has full instructions. He is steering a remarkably good course."

Tom Merry did not lose his head; all the same, he did not feel that he was doing his best. It seemed to him a pity to let red draw ahead so far, and he believed it to be farther than it really was; but he was determined to follow Mr. Brown's instructions to the letter.

Billy Barnes did not speak. He swung backwards and forwards with his crew, and hoped for the best, although it seemed to him that the worst was inevitable.

"Wight-ho, and wats! They are splashing above a bit."

"Far ahead?" panted Tom Merry.

"Wats! I pwotest. Not Vewwy. Bai Jove!"

The temptation to quicken the stroke was very great, but Tom Merry resisted it, and as the race wore on he began to feel the strain. Billy, wisely, did not tell him that the leading boat was five or six lengths ahead, although such was really the case, and the worst of it was that they were drawing away.

But they were rowing with a very quick stroke, and they still had a long way to travel.

"They are splashing worse than ever, sir," said Kildare.

"Yes; and their boat is rolling. They are not getting sufficient pace out of her for the steam they are putting in."

"You think they will row themselves out?"

"I don't think they will last the course at that rate of striking. Ah, they are slowing down! Now, if Barnes will only keep silent, we may see an exciting race. What do you think of our crew now, Kildare?"

"Magnificent, sir! They are rowing splendidly! There isn't a splash, and their oars flash out of the water like one sheet of blue!"

"Good! You can't say that for the red. Now you see."

"You think blue are gaining, sir?"

"At any rate, they are not losing ground. Yes, Kildare, they are gaining, slowly, but they are certainly decreasing the lead."

"Upon my word, the youngsters deserve to win!"

"It will be a grand race! Tom Merry has not quickened his stroke, neither has he slackened it."

"They do you credit, sir. I never thought the kids would come on like that. I wish the Head could see them."

Some of St. Jim's fellows had gone ahead in a boat, and now they were waiting on the bank.

"Buck up, Tom Merry!" howled some of the excited youngsters.

"Pull as though you meant it!"

"Don't paddle! You are not a kiddy with bare feet!"

"They are walking away from you!"

"Quicken your stroke, ass!"

"I trust he will not listen to such nonsense," muttered Mr. Brown. "I am quite certain none of those boys know as much about rowing as Tom Merry does. No! That is good! He has not quickened yet."

"Reds have!"

"So much the better. Those bursts will fag them more than anything else. Blue is drawing up again. It is splendid!"

"Well rowed, Blue!" shouted Kildare. "Well rowed indeed!"

"Weally, that's decent!" panted Arthur Augustus.

He had not breath to say much more; which was, perhaps, a good thing for his crew.

"Weally, wats! I pwotest! Bai Jave, we are walking up, Tom Mewwy! Wight-ho! Not 'arf! They are splashing like a blessed old paddle-steamer!"

Billy Barnes was becoming excited. Tom Merry kept quite cool. He knew that an experienced rower like Mr. Brown had given him the correct advice, and he meant to stick to it.

On and on they went, and the St. Jim's boat was creeping up.

Occasionally the Reds would increase their lead with a burst; but that lead was gradually diminishing, and the bursts were taking it out of the panting crew.

"We are nearing the part where you have to quicken up, Tom Mewwy!" exclaimed Billy Barnes. "What-ho! Wats! I pwotest!"

Now Tom Merry quickened his stroke. But the rowing was still excellent. His crew scarcely felt the quickened speed.

"It's downright splendid!" exclaimed Kildare. "I tell you, sir, you have surprised me."

"I had good material to work with. Now you see them drawing up."

"Will they have time?"

"I think so. Whether they will have strength or not is another matter. We shall see. Now is their time! They must fight now as they never fought before! Blue—Blue! Well rowed, St. Jim's! Let her go, my lads!"

And let her go they did. In and out of the water the blue oars flashed, and the sunlight shone on the glistening spray. But swift though the

stroke was, the oars kept perfect time, and there was scarcely any splashing.

On flew the boat. The lads heard their master's cheering words. They thought of nothing now except that they must do their very utmost. Every bit of their strength went into their strokes, and the boat travelled on a perfectly level keel.

Well might Mr. Brown feel proud of his crew. He had spared no pains with them. But they were repaying him now, and there was not one among the throng of excited spectators who was as anxious as he.

And a haze came over those rowers' eyes. Their breath came hard and fast. Each lad felt it would be impossible to keep up that pace, and yet each one was determined to do it.

The boats were level. Red spurted, and gained a quarter of a length, then dropped back.

The Red boat darted onwards. Once more they were level.

Billy Barnes was too excited to utter a sound. They were just upon the umpire's boat, and Dr. Holmes was cheering.

Three more strokes, and the pistol-shot rang out.

The race was won, but who had won it neither crew knew.

The panting rowers lay upon their oars and watched the mast for the flag to be run up.

CHAPTER 22.

The End of the Great Race.

TOM MERRY did not speak. He was wondering whether he might have done just a trifle more. He knew that he could not have done much more; but just that trifle might have made all that difference, for it seemed to him that it was a dead heat.

"Have we won, Billy?" panted Tom Merry.

"Weally, and wats—blest if I jolly well know! Seems to me they were a bit ahead. Couldn't see."

"Then watch the flag."

"Why don't the asses wun it up?" panted Arthur Augustus. "Weally, they are too slow for wats! It's wotten wubbish to be so slow!"

There was really no loss of time, only it seemed slow to the anxious crews.

Now the bunting went up. It spread out in the morning breeze.

And a mighty cheer burst forth:

"Blue! Blue! Hurrah! Blu-hoo!"

St. Jim's had won the race!

Kildare went head-over-heels into the river. He was gazing towards the flag, and forgot all about his steering. He came out laughing, and Mr. Brown laughed, too, as he fished out his bicycle.

"Got wet, Kildare, that time."

"It's worth a dozen duckings, sir! My eyes, what a race! They are grand—positively grand! And what a take-down for the Glensiders! Ha, ha, ha! They will brag no more."

"Here come the winning crew! Just look at their faces! They have forgotten that they are tired. Help me to clear these youngsters out of the way, Kildare. I won't have my men standing about! Get them into the inn. I have hired a room for them—also for the other crew."

"They were out-rowed, sir."

"Yes. Our men were by far the better crew, although they lacked the strength."

"But not the finish. Here, come on, kids! You need a change and a rub down."

"Weally, Kildare, I just want to ask you if you considah my tie to be the pwopah shade of blue, because——"

"Off with you, and bother your tie!"

"Weally, Kildare——"

"I can't listen to you."

"I pwotest!"

"Then do it in the dressing-room," laughed Kildare, gripping him by the arm and running him in. "I am not going to listen to you for half an hour on such an important matter as the shade of your tie."

"Wats! I weally——"

"All right!"

"But you haven't listened to my wemarks."

"And am not going to do it. You can gas away while you are dressing."

"But, weally, Kildare, Tom Mewwy says that my tie looks like a blue-bag soaked in suds, and I considah the wemark widiculous. It took me half an hour and moah to select that tie, and I considah it wathah a fetching shade."

Arthur Augustus stuck his eyeglass in his eye and gazed at the young captain, then he obeyed his orders, and went on with his dressing, while Billy Barnes leapt about the room in wild glee.

"Cheer up, Gussy!" he cried, giving him a slap on the back that knocked the glass out of his eye.

"Oh, you silly wottah! Don't be so wough and wude."

"Wats, and wight-ho! Go hon! Haw, haw, haw! You've jolly well won the race, Gussy! You pulled a treat. You are a wattling good wower!"

"The othahs helped me."

"I wasn't watching the others much. You see, I wanted you to win."

"Weally, Billy, I couldn't win without them."

"Widiculous! You won all right, and that's all I care about."

"But you won as well, ass!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Any idiot can hold a couple of lines. Steering is nothing. Well done, Gussy! It was a close thing, too. Blest if I didn't think we had lost! I suppose there's no mistake about the matter?"

"Rather not!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We won all right, and it will be rather funny to hear what Kemp has got to say after all his bragging."

"Weally, I considah the less he says the bettah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "But, weally, Tom Mewwy, I would like your candid opinion of this tie."

"Rotten!"

"Weally?"

"Too horrid for words!" said Manners.

"I'm surpwised, Mannahs, at——"

"A tie like that is enough to surprise anyone," said Lowther.

"Wats!"

"If you were to go to the Zoo the monkeys would claim you for one of their party," observed Manners.

"Weally, youah taste is too widiculous for words! I wegard you as a lot of silly asses!"

"Well, hurry up!" exclaimed Tom Merry, grinning. "Let's come and see what Kemp's lot have to say for themselves. I'm jolly hungry, and could do with some pop. We ought to have had Fatty Wynn in our boat, and he would have been certain to provide some food."

"Rats!" exclaimed Manners. "He would have provided some weight as well. I found the rowing quite hard enough, without Fatty Wynn as ballast. Now, do hurry up, Gussy. Leave your rotten tie alone!"

"Weally, Mannahs, I considah——"

"Never mind your considerations. We haven't time to listen to them. I must have something to drink, even if it is only soapy water."

When they went down they found Mr. Brown awaiting them.

"I am highly pleased with your performance, my lads!" he exclaimed. "I can only say that you did better than I expected. It was a hard race, and I do not consider that it was right the Glenside boys should have sent such a crew to meet you. However, you won the race, and that is all that can be desired."

"It was awfully good of you to make us win, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I could scarcely have done that, Merry."

"Well, I mean, sir, we couldn't have won it without your coaching."

"Or the coaching of someone else. Every crew must be coached; but however good a coach may be, he cannot make his crew win a race unless he has the rowers. Here come your opponents."

Kemp's brows were knit in an angry frown; he took his beating badly. But Mr. Brown made excuses for his impertinence under the circumstances of his disappointment.

"It was a close race, Kemp," observed Mr. Brown.

"I will row the kids over any course they like to name."

"You wish to try your luck against them again?"

"We can beat them every time. I had a sprained arm."

"I am sorry for that."

"Of course, we were only paddling. It was a ridiculous race. It was like the youngsters' cheek rowing against us!"

"Weally, Kemp, you are a wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"You silly-looking snipe!"

"Weally, I nevah met such a howwid boundah in all my life!" declared D'Arcy.

"Why don't you learn to talk?"

"Wats! I wathah think you should learn to spell. You made a wegular mess of your beastly lettah!"

"You had better be careful what you say to me."

"Why, weally, I don't considah——"

"Oh, hold your silly row!"

"I wefuse to hold my wow! You are vulgah and wude in the extweme!"

"Let's go for him!" cried Billy Barnes. "We've whacked him at rowing—let's take him on at fighting!"

"Silence, Barnes!" exclaimed Mr. Brown. "It is a great pity, Kemp, that you take your defeat so badly. I should have thought you would have been the first to congratulate these lads on their magnificent performance."

"Be hanged! Ha, ha, ha! Magnificent performance! That's a good one! I don't call it so jolly magnificent!"

"And yet they beat you."

"Because I had a sprained arm. They could not have beaten us if we had rowed."

"They could not have beaten you had you rowed better than they did. You did nothing of the sort. You did not row nearly as well."

"What do you know about it?"

"I am only giving you my candid opinion."

"I am much obliged to you, but I don't require it. Of course, I knew you would be the first to crow over the rotten affair. It wasn't a race at all, and if you knew anything about rowing you would know that."

"Wats!" exclaimd D'Arcy, who could not have kept quiet if he had tried; and he did not try. "Why, Mr. Brown has wowed in the 'Varsity wace—in the winning boat. Weally, he ought to know moah about wowing than you do, the same as he ought to know moah about spelling, because he has weally had moah pwactice at both."

"We are ready to row you any day you like to name over the same or any other course. I will row you for fifty pounds!"

"Wonder where he would get the money from," growled Lowther.

"He wouldn't get it," said Manners.

"I shouldn't need it!" snarled Kemp.

"No, we should need it, after we had beaten you, and we should go on needing it all the remainder of our lives if we were so simple as to bet with you."

"You are a liar!"

"I hope you are not a fair sample of the Glensiders. If you are, I'd jolly well call you outsiders. You have been fairly beaten, and you know it. I don't suppose there is anyone here so credulous as to believe that your arm is sprained. The fact of the matter is your temper is sprained."

"I'd call it a compound fracture," said Tom Merry.

"Wats!" exclaimed Billy Barnes. "If his neck had been broken he couldn't have splashed more than he did. He was about as bad as the others. What you need, Kemp, is Mr. Brown to coach you, and then you would have some chance against us."

"Conceited little brutes! I suppose you will go all over the place telling people that you beat us, which would be a gross lie."

"Would it?"

"It was a ridiculous race. A man cannot row when his arm is dislocated."

"Jolly lucky it wasn't broken, Kemp."

"The pain of his fractured arm has made him turn quite green!"

"Wats!" exclaimed Billy, sticking his precious glass in his eye, and gazing at Kemp up and down. "The whacking he has received has made him turn green."

"Jolly pity his tongue is not dislocated as well as his arm," observed Tom Merry.

"You think yourself funny, I suppose, you cheeky kid?"

"Not nearly as funny as you are. Which arm was it, Kemp?"

"Ha, ha, ha! How can he answer a question like that?" exclaimed Manners. "You might as well ask him to spell dunce. They only teach rowing at Glenside, you know. The masters don't bother themselves about a little matter like spelling."

"It is a great pity that there should be any unpleasantness," said Mr. Brown. "I feel sure, Kemp, that if you consider the matter you will come to the conclusion that you are in the wrong."

"I shall do nothing of the sort! I am not going to submit to the impertinence of these youngsters, whether they have a master to protect them or not. I tell you plainly, if you do not stop their impertience I shall give them the thrashing that they deserve."

"It was you who commenced the impertinence."

"Impertinence—and to kids like that! You don't know what you are talking about."

"I do not know whether you treat your own masters in this impertinent manner, my lad; but if you do you should be severely punished."

"Go and drown yourself!"

"You need a little reflection, my lad, and then perhaps you will see how utterly ridiculous you are making yourself. You are a very poor sportsman, Kemp, for you cannot take a beating."

"Weally! He will jolly well have to if you give him one, sir!" exclaimed Billy. "It would do me good to see you welt him, and I believe it would do him good, too. At any rate, it couldn't to him any harm."

"Weally, Billy," exclaimed D'Arcy, "I don't like youah talking to the howwid boundah! I'm afwaid he will contaminate you."

"You hear that impertinence!" cried Kemp, striding towards Arthur Augustus; but Mr. Brown stepped in front of him.

"Stand aside!" roared the infuriated bully. "Do you hear me?"

"Naturally I hear you, Kemp, when you shout like that. You forget your position and mine."

"A twopenny-halfpenny schoolmaster! My father could buy you up!"

Tom Merry looked the personification of disgust.

"My only hat! What a cad the fellow is! I have come across a few in my time, but I have never yet met one equal to that beauty. There's one thing your father never could do, Kemp, even if he is a multi-millionaire, and that is make a gentleman of you."

"P'r'aps Gussy could work the trick," sugested Billy. "He's improved me a lot. Wathah! I was widiculously vulgah before he took me in tow. Rig the brute out in some of your old togs, Gussy, and stick an eyeglass in his eye."

"I'll stick my fist in your eye!" cried Kemp; and there is not the slightest doubt that he would have done it had not Mr. Brown been there; but there was a certain calmness about the young master that was convincing.

"I wish to invite you all to lunch, Kemp," said Mr. Brown.

"Do you think I want your lunch?"

"Possibly not; but at least you might refuse the invitation in a gentlemanly manner."

"He couldn't do so if he tried, sir," said Tom Merry. "It's all right when boys jape one another, but when an empty-headed lout insults a master it is rotten!"

"You call me an empty-headed lout?" roared Kemp.

"That is exactly what I called you. It is what I think you are, and I believe everyone who had heard you insulting Mr. Brown must think the same."

"Will you row me over the same course?"

Tom Merry drew himself up, and there was a very contemptuous expression in his eyes as he fixed them on Kemp.

"I will not."

"Why?"

"Because I look upon you as a contemptible cad!"

"Bai Jove!" cried D'Arcy. "You are perfectly wight, Tom Mewwy. It's not often that a Shell fellow is wight, but I wegard you as wight this time. I wouldn't wow the boundah again undah any considewation, and I considah that it is ouah duty under the circs., and considewing the mannah in which he has insulted Mr. Brown, to fwow the bwute into the wivah!"

"Come, lads!" exclaimed Mr. Brown. "I have a little surprise in store for you. It is quite useless to discuss this matter any more. As Kemp has refused my invitation, perhaps you would like to invite Figgins and his friends to the lunch?"

"Thank you, sir. We would!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You invite the kids, Gussy. We are not allowed to speak to them yet. Think what a jolly lot there will be to say when we do have an opportunity to speak!"

"My hat! There will be a row on that day!" exclaimed Manners.

CHAPTER 23.
A Bad Upset.

MR. BROWN led the way across country to a little glade, where cloths were spread on the grass for a picnic.

"Weally, sir, this is most kind!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "We are hungwy after the wace, and we thought——"

"Don't you try to think, Gussy," said Manners. "If——"

"Weally, Mannahs, I'm surpwised that you should intewwupt my remarks!"

"Not worth listening to."

"I pwotest! I considah that any wemarks that I make are most intewesting."

"No one else does."

"I pwotest!"

"Dry up!"

"I wefuse to dry up, and——"

"Oh, ring off! If you wait until you have made your remarks everything will get stale!"

"Not so stale as his remarks."

"I'm surpwised at your wemark, Figgy. Mr. Brown will considah youah conduct most wude."

"Ring off!"

"I wefuse to wing off!"

"He has bursts like this sometimes, sir," observed Tom Merry, "but he is quite harmless."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wefuse to be classed with a waving maniac, and if you wepeat the obsahvation I shall be compelled to give you the most fwightful thwashing."

"Rats! Here comes Taggy with some of the provender."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you should not wefer to food for human beings as pwovendah. Pwovendah is what they give to cattle."

"Bring a few thistles, Taggy. D'Arcy is hungry."

Mr. Brown had made arrangements for Taggles to wait on them. Taggles did not like it at all, except that he got some pickings. He had suggested that champagne would be required, with a view to such pickings, but Mr. Brown vetoed that, much to Taggles's disgust; and it was just the same when he suggested beer.

The good fare silenced Arthur Augustus. The race had made him extremely hungry, and the provisions were excellent.

Fatty Wynn was in his glory, while he made some remarks concerning Tom Merry's appetite, which was nothing to be compared to his own. Only he knew that Tom Merry was not allowed to speak to him.

"If you please, sir," exclaimed Fatty Wynn, winking at Figgins, "I am afraid this kid next to me will make himself ill if he eats so much and so quickly!"

"I am sorry to have to remark that there is a boy in the New House who would eat an ox, sir," observed Tom Merry. "He has consumed a few fowls already, and now he's going into jam tarts!"

"Be careful, Tom Merry!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "You will choke yourself directly. Try to eat like a human being, my child. You are not a boa-constrictor."

"Weally, Fatty Wynn," exclaimed D'Arcy, "your wemarks are most wude!"

"Your mouth is all over jam, Tom Merry; and you have got some jelly on your nose."

Then there was a roar of laughter, for Tom Merry wiped his mouth; but the worst of it was that mouth was closed, so far as Fatty Wynn was concerned.

Tom Merry's face turned red, and he tried to express his indignation by signs, although no one could possibly have understood what those signs really meant.

They were interrupted by Taggles.

"If you please, sir, I wish to ask your advice as an honourable gentleman and one of eddication."

"Good old Taggy!"

"Master Merry, I don't require your observations."

"Got enough of your own, Taggy."

"Taggles wishes to make a speech. Don't interrupt him."

"Fire ahead, Taggy!"

"Don't be nervous."

"Give him a drink of water."

"He prefers something stronger."

These were a few of the remarks that the unfortunate Taggles had to contend with, but he stuck to his guns.

"It's robbery, sir. Wicked, sinful robbery!"

"I am sorry to hear that, Taggles," said Mr. Brown, looking serious.

"I am sorry to suffer from it."

"Have you lost more money?"

"I have so, sir. Billy Barnes robbed me of my sovereign."

"Wight-ho and wats!" exclaimed Billy, sticking his glass in his eye, and gazing at the angry Taggles.

"You can hear him acknowledging the theft, sir."

"No such thing, Taggles! You have no right to accuse him."

"Well, sir, you are the only one as don't believe in his guilt, and I've accused him to scores. Every tradesman in the place believes as he's a thief, so do all the young gentlemen; only he don't care. How can you expect a hardened sinner as would rob a man of his hard-earned gold to care what other people thought of him?"

"It is shameful that you should make such an accusation!"

"But look at the shame of that young thief, sir!"

"I refuse to listen to you."

"I want to write a letter to a gent as wants to give me five pounds, sir. I thought you would write it for me, then you can sign my name; and I want you to tell him as I ain't the porter he saw. I've got his address here, and—— Well, I'm blowed!"

Taggles had dived his fingers into his waistcoat-pocket, and pulled out a slip of paper, also a sovereign.

"Why, here is my sovereign! Bust it! I remember now I put it into that pocket for safety."

"And you have accused an innocent lad!"

"Well, it wasn't him, sir. I made a slight mistake. You ain't guilty, Billy Barnes."

"Wight-ho! I knew that all along!" exclaimed Billy.

"And you have been spreading this report all over the college, Taggles!" cried Mr. Brown sternly.

"It was merely a mistake on my part, and it ain't done no harm."

"Don't dare to talk that nonsense to me. Here you have been spreading the report all over the college, and, according to your own showing, all over the village, and you tell me no harm is done."

"Billy Barnes don't care. In fact, I don't think as you could make him care for anything. He got a fiver out of the old party."

"I don't know what you are talking about. But that has nothing to do with the question. How dare you accuse one of the young gentlemen of theft?"

"You don't understand the ways of the boys in this 'ere school, sir, and——"

"Very well. Dr. Holmes does. No doubt if I report the whole matter to him he will be quite capable of dealing with it."

"Here, don't you go and do that, sir. The master would most probably give me the sack, and I ain't qualified for the old age pension yet."

"Then you admit that your conduct is shameful?"

"I was merely mistook, sir. There worn't no malice in the matter, and——"

This was all Taggles said. There was a rushing sound, and even before he could turn he was hurled right into the middle of the cloth.

His face smashed a jelly flat, and spurts of jelly flew in all directions, while a roar of laughter came from some bushes close by; and a big bull went charging onwards, kicking up its heels as it went.

Mr. Brown darted towards those bushes, and Kemp and his crew fled across the field.

Kemp separated from the rest, and he was a good runner, but he was not to be compared with the young master, who caught him before he was half-way across that field; and he seized him by the collar.

"You take your hands off me!" cried Kemp fiercely.

"You will come back with me," said Mr. Brown, forcing him towards the picnic party.

"I have no objection to go."

"It would be all the same if you had, my lad. You will come this way."

"Then take your hands off me."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"You are not my master."

"I never said that I was. All the same, you will obey my order when I command you to come back."

"I will come if you take your hands off me."

"You will come while I am holding you by the collar."

"I won't be treated like a child."

"If you behave like a child, Kemp, you must be treated like one. Oh, you can struggle as much as you like, but you will come all the same."

Thus Mr. Brown forced him towards the party, and he was considerably relieved to see that Taggles was now standing up, apparently not much the worse for his surprising experience.

"That's him, sir!" cried Taggles. "I seed him do it. Kicked me clean in the centre of the table, and he's broke my back."

"What!" gasped Mr. Brown. "You mean to tell me that you saw this young man kick you?"

"Yus, sir; and felt him, too. I've never been kicked in my life before like that. It was suthin' awful."

"I am astounded that you should make such a wicked assertion as that, Taggles!" said Mr. Brown sternly. "You do not appear to have the slightest regard for the truth."

"Well, I never! I saw him do it distinctly."

"Don't dare to tell me such an abominable falsehood."

"Because you didn't see him kick me, sir, it don't follow that he didn't do it."

"No one kicked you."

"Oh, I say, masters in St. Jim's are expected to be truthful!"

"It is a pity the porter does not follow their example in that respect."

"I am truthful, sir."

"You have not the slightest regard for the truth. You lads have not told him what happened?"

"No, sir," answered Tom Merry. "He declared that someone kicked him. He splashed his face into the jelly, and so couldn't see what had happened."

"A bull tossed you, Taggles," said Mr. Brown.

"Well, I never. I knew it was either that or a kick, and I made sure it was a kick."

"You said you saw this young man kick you."

"I said I felt him kick me, sir."

"You certainly said you saw him do it."

"I couldn't have said that, sir."

"But you did say it. Why couldn't you have said it?"

"Because it would not have been the truth."

Tom Merry's eyes opened wide.

"My only hat!" he murmured.

"It was Kemp who drove the bull this way."

"I wasn't near the brute," declared Kemp.

"I saw you driving it."

"How was I to know you were here?"

"You were driving it deliberately towards us, and when I came towards you you ran away like a young coward. I do not know, Kemp, whether you are ashamed of yourself, but I do know that you ought to be. Silence, boy, otherwise I shall shake you, and I may flog you as well."

"You have no right to insult me in this manner."

"You are a disgrace to your school, and if you go on in this way you will certainly be expelled. If you were my pupil I should certainly give you a good caning, in spite of your age."

"It wouldn't go well with a master who touched me."

"Silence, boy! You will listen to me!"

"Don't you dare to shake me, because I won't stand it. My father——"

"I have nothing to do with your father. I am dealing with you. You were invited to our little picnic, and you refused the invitation in a most insulting manner. It was rude and contemptible, for had you won the race you would have accepted the invitation."

"No I wouldn't."

"Don't answer me, boy."

"I'm a young man."

"You should behave as one, and then you would not be treated as a boy. The fact of the matter is that you were infuriated at being beaten after all your boastfulness. You were beaten by lads who row far better than you will ever learn to row, and to try to upset their lunch was a despicable thing to do. It was an act of vengeance, and a very silly and cowardly one. I can only look upon you with contempt."

"It has nothing to do with me how you regard me."

"Possibly not, but these lads must scorn you. They are honest lads, and would not be guilty of such a contemptible action as you have been."

"Little lambs, aren't they?"

"I never insinuated anything of the sort, but had you beaten them they would not have shown the silly spite you have shown.

"Now, apart from the childishness of your behaviour, I would point out to you——"

"I don't want you to point out anything to me."

"I dare say you do not. I do not wonder at your being ashamed of your contemptible conduct."

"I'm not."

"Then you ought to be, and I dare say I shall be able to make you feel shame. I was about to point out to you the danger of your action. It is a mercy that Taggles was not severely injured."

"I am, sir, and I'll have compensation. I'll sue his father, if he's got any money. If he's a rich tradesman, as I expect he is, I'll make him pay pretty stiff."

"It was worse than a foolish action, Kemp, for you might have caused these lads severe injury, or even death. I do not know whether you are deficient mentally, but I can scarcely conceive a boy of your age acting in such a rascally manner. It is not as though you were a thoughtless child. You are quite old enough to have known better; and if you do not know better, you must be taught better. Stand there, boy!"

"I'm not going to do anything of the sort. You have no right to give me orders. You have no power to do it."

"I have power to give you in custody for your action. It is not my intention to disgrace you in that manner. At the same time, I shall punish you, and unless you express contrition for your action, I shall take upon myself to cane you."

"I'd like to see any man touch me."

"You will do more than see it. You need not think to turn me from my purpose by your defiance. Stand where you are. If you attempt to move I shall bring you back by the collar."

"I have got a train to catch."

"You will return to your school when I give you permission, and not before. I shall seriously consider whether I shall not write a letter to your master stating all the facts of your gross misconduct. Had you perpetrated a practical joke, I should have said little about it; but this was an abominable action, and one that might have caused loss of life. I hope you did it in ignorance and stupidity; but I very much fear that you did not care for the consequences. You will now discover that you do care for the consequences. You should strive to improve yourself, for you are extremely ignorant for a boy of your age. You cannot even indite a dozen words correctly. Your education must have been lamentably neglected, or you are an extremely stupid young man. Your action to-day leads me to believe that you are really deficient in ability. That you cannot help, but you can help being vicious; and I believe that nothing short of corporal punishment will lead you to see the error of your ways. I shall give you the chance of apologising for your disgraceful behaviour. If you do so to my satisfaction, I may overlook your misconduct; but unless you do that, I shall take you back to St. Jim's School and severely cane you. Now, you know what to expect. That is all I have to say to you."

Mr. Brown sat down, and commenced to chat with the boys as though nothing had happened to upset the harmony.

Kemp waited for some moments, and then he strode away; but Mr. Brown brought him back by the collar and boxed his ears.

For a moment it looked as though Kemp was about to retaliate, but he thought better of it, and stood there, looking sullen and vicious. He did not attempt to leave again.

At last he spoke.

"I didn't mean to cause you kids any harm," he muttered.

"Are you sorry for your bad behaviour, boy?" demanded Mr. Brown.

Kemp muttered something, but Mr. Brown took no heed of what he said; indeed, it was inaudible.

"Yes. I'm sorry."

"You see how serious it might have been?"

"Yes."

"Well, bear in mind what I have said to you, and try to act like a sensible lad in future. You may go."

And Kemp went away muttering to himself.

CHAPTER 24.

D'Arcy and Tom Merry Go Into Town.

AS soon as the feast was finished, Mr. Brown returned to the college.

"What's the kid trying to do?" exclaimed Figgins, as Tom Merry strove to express his approval of the young master's action.

"Perhaps he imagines he is a laughing hyena, and is dancing and laughing for his food," suggested Kerr.

"Looks to me more like a performing jackass," said Fatty Wynn.

"Have you ever noticed what utter idiots the New House kids are?" inquired Tom Merry, addressing D'Arcy.

"Wathah! Almost as stupid as the Shell boundahs."

"What?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, theah are points about you, but you must know you are silly asses."

"Why, we look upon you as babbling idiots."

"Wats! I wefuse to be wegarded as a babling idiot. Yoah wemark is wude and widiculous in the extweme, and——"

"Oh, ring off! Perhaps the silly kid will understand my signs if I make them plainer to his silly little intellect."

Tom Merry shook his fist at Kemp's retreating form.

"The silly ass wants to fight the new master, I suppose," observed Figgins. "He is absurd enough for anything. What's he doing now?"

Tom Merry was bending down and touching the toe of his boot, by way of intimating that Kemp ought to be kicked.

"I think he wants to play leap-frog," observed Figgins, making a run at him, and trying to leap his back; but at that moment Tom Merry rose, and Figgins went sprawling over the tablecloth, smashing a fearful lot of crockery.

"Ass!" exclaimed Figgins, clutching a jam tart in his right hand and some butter in the left. When a person is falling he invariably clutches at the first thing that comes to hand, and Figgins had proved no exception to the rule. "Look what a beastly sticky mess you have made me in."

"I'll report you for this!" cried Taggles. "Jest you see if I don't, breaking all these 'ere crocks."

"I wish to remark that I consider the New House kids the stupidest creatures on the face of the earth, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "I consider that nothing would do a foolish child named Figgy more good than a severe caning—unless you gave him half a dozen of them."

"Ass!" growled Figgins, wiping his hands on the grass. "What did you want to get up for, just as I was jumping over your back?"

"A silly kid named Figgins ought to be kicked, Gussy! He is too stupid to go through life without being kicked."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I agwee with you, and——"

"Ring off, Gussy!"

"I sha'n't wing off, Figgy. You are wough, silly hooligans, and——"

"Take Tom Merry home. Hold him by the hand, in case he loses himself."

"I am not permitted to speak to a kid named Figgins," observed Tom Merry, still addressing Arthur Augustus. "Were I permitted to speak to him, I should tell him that he is the silliest ass that ever walked in shoe-leather."

"I have only known one donkey to walk in shoe-leather, Tom Merry, and that is yourself," observed Figgins, who had a great advantage, because he could say what he liked to Tom Merry, who could not answer him, except by proxy.

"Weally," exclaimed D'Arcy, gazing at the mess through his eyeglass, "you feilahs have made a wascally mess of ouah lunch. Clear it up, Taggy!"

"I sha'n't! Clear it up yourself!"

"I'm surpwised at——"

"So will the Head be surprised when I report your most disgraceful conduct."

"Wats! I nevah did it."

"You was all in it. You was to blame as much as the rest, and I shall consider it my duty to report the little lot of you, unless I get that fiver I was defrauded out of made good."

"Wats! If you choose to insult my wespected welative——"

"Hang your respective relative! He ought to be drowned!"

"Weally, Taggy, I considah you most wude to wefer to a welative of mine like that. I pwotest!"

"So will the Head when I report you."

"But you can't weport me for bweaking the cwockewy, because I nevah touched it."

"I don't care. The crocks is broke."

"I didn't bweak them."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"Weally, Taggy, youah sense of justice——"

"You are a pretty one to talk about justice, when your relative has done me out of five pounds."

"I'm weally not wesponsible for my wespected welative's actions."

"No. That's just it, and I've got to suffer."

"Weally, you ought to suffah. If you didn't tweat the old boundah with pwopah wespect——"

"You are treating him with respect, I don't think, calling him an old bounder."

"I meant no diswespect."

"P'r'aps that won't be his opinion when I tell him as you called him an old bounder, unless, of course, you make good the five-pound-note as he promised to give me, and didn't do it."

"I wefuse to be blackmailed, Taggy. You can go and eat coke!"

"All right, my young shaver——"

"I wefuse to be called a young shavah, Taggy. Your wemarks are most wude and widiculous. You weally want teaching bettah mannahs, and I pwopose that we thwow him into the wivah."

"Not a bad idea, that," observed Tom Merry. "If he's going to report us, we may as well give him something to report."

"Too far to carry him," said Figgins. "He's such a mighty weight."

"We might woll him to the wivah," suggested D'Arcy.

"Wight-ho!" cried Billy Barnes. "Let's make a start. Charge at his legs, and then I'll start the rolling. It will do the grass good."

Taggles did not like the look of things. He did not believe that the youngsters would really put their threat into operation. At the same time he did not want to run any risks, and he considered it quite likely that

they would commence the rolling, even if they stopped short at the water He changed his threatening manner entirely.

"Now, young gents, behave yourselves!"

"Wats! You ought to be punished for youah wudeness."

"Master D'Arcy, remember that you are a young gentleman, and that bad behaviour ain't conducive to gentility. What would your respected relative say if I was to tell him what you had threatened to do to a hard-working, honest man?"

"Wats!"

"He wouldn't say nothing of the sort."

"Weally, Taggy, I nevah said he would."

"Yes you did, Master D'Arcy. You said distinct as he would 'Rats!' and I don't believe he would. Now, under all the circumstances of the case, I sha'n't say nothing about what you have broke."

"But I haven't bwoken anything."

"You was all in it, I tell you."

"Wats!"

"I don't care about your rats, neither would the Head. He would ignore rats, or anything vulgar like that. Now, I shall merely say that the bull broke the crocks, and that will be quite truthful, else I shouldn't say it. The bull did break some of them, and you young gents broke the rest. I don't believe that the party as lent them will like it, mind."

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry, gazing at the wreckage. "He couldn't possibly like it if he tried; but the best thing you can do, Taggy, is to stick to the truth. It is a thing that you don't often do. At the same time, you will have to do so on this occasion, for we are going to tell exactly what happened. It would be rotten to try to deceive Mr. Brown after his kindness to us."

"Downwight wotten!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Theah's not so much bwoken, when you come to think of it."

"You don't need to think of it," said Tom Merry. "You have only to glance at the stuff, and you will then see that if there is not much broken, it is because not much crockery was there. All the same, we will let you off this time, Taggy, only don't do it again. Come on, you chaps! Look after Figgy, else he will go tumbling into the water, or something stupid."

"Might get one of his legs down a rabbit-hole," said Lowther.

"If the rabbit was anything under six feet from the surface it would be squashed, to a certainty," said Manners.

"Dry up, you rotters!" growled Figgins, not liking this reference to his long legs. "If you have got legs like some blessed dachshund, it is no reason why you should be jealous of mine."

"I wefuse to have my legs likened to a dog's," cried D'Arcy.

"Poor kid! You have only got two."

"Weally, Figgy, would you expect me to have fouah?"

"Certainly! Asses always have."

"Weally, Figgy——"

"Ring off! I haven't time to listen to your ridiculous remarks. Try them on Tom Merry. He is a simple little kid, and may be amused at your simplicity."

Then Figgins hurried away, for Tom Merry looked as though he were thinking of a rejoinder.

"I considah Figgy wants taking down," observed D'Arcy, gazing after him through his eyeglass. "He's a wude wottah!"

"Wait till I can speak to him," growled Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, he wequires moah than speaking to."

"Well, we japed him about his legs, and I'm inclined to think he got the best of it; but that's only because I couldn't talk to him. Let the kids go."

"I weally don't think they will ask our permish., deah boy. Suppose we come into the village?"

"Can't be done," grumbled Lowther. "I've got some lines."

"So have I," said Manners. "And there's prep. Besides, what about tea?"

"Weally, we can get tea in the village. Suppose you come, Tom Mewwy. Billy Barnes can see those little boundahs home, and help them with their pwep."

"Rats!" exclaimed Lowther. "He might be able to help you, but he jolly well could not help us. Come on, Billy! You will be safer with us than with those kidlets."

There was no stipulation as to what time the boys should be in, and Tom Merry knew that if they were in by eight it would be all right, although there might be a little difficulty on the morrow concerning unprepared lessons. However, the morrow seemed to be a long way off, and so he accompanied D'Arcy to the village.

D'Arcy spent about half an hour in a shop choosing some ties, and then they adjourned to the hotel for tea.

CHAPTER 25.
An Unexpected Meeting.

THE room was divided with partitions, and there were small tables between these partitions.

Tom Merry selected one in the centre of the room, and D'Arcy ordered tea. Jim the waiter knew them, also their tastes.

"Home-made sausages, young gentlemen? They are first-class. I had some to my dinner, you know."

"Why, weally, I believe we can't do better," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "A new loaf of bwead, and buttah, and plenty of tea."

"So you won the race, young gents?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm downright glad. To have heard Kemp and his party boasting this morning, you would have thought you hadn't a chance."

"So they came in here, Jim?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Yes, sir, and they are coming back to tea."

"My only hat! There is a chance of a row."

"The wottahs wouldn't dare to have a wow with us," observed D'Arcy.

"Don't you believe it, Gussy. Kemp will be only too anxious to get a little of his own back. You can bet he will pitch on to us, and the worst of it is that we are in a minority."

"We shall have to give him the most fwightful thwashing."

"I think you had best leave me to deal with him, young gents," said Jim. "You see, he's rather too big for you to tackle. I'll see that he behaves himself, if you leave me to deal with him."

"Waiter!" came an angry voice from the next partition.

"Coming, sir."

"Tell those boys not to make so much noise! How dare they disturb me when I am reading?"

"Why, weally, you have no wight to wead in an eating-house," said D'Arcy, gazing over the partition.

"You insolent young rascal! How dare you speak to me like that?"

"Wats!"

"What is that you say, boy?"

"Wubbish! Go and dwown yourself! You are weally too widiculous."

"Why, you saucy young fop——"

"Weally, I wesent such an expwesh."

The gentleman rose, and stepped round to that table; then he eyed Arthur Augustus up and down.

"What do you mean by sticking that ridiculous glass in your eye, boy?"

"Weally, your wemarks are most wude, and——"

"Is your name D'Arcy?"

"Cowwect; but I wesent your wemarks."

"Can't you talk like a human being, boy?"

"Weally, I pwotest at your howwid wudeness."

"Absurd young idiot!"

"Weally——"

"Looks like a dressed-up ape."

"Bai Jove! You howwid old boundah! If you were young, I would give you the most fwightful thwashing——"

"Do you know who I am, you insolent young rascal?"

"Wascal! Insolent! Weally, why, I should say you are some howwid cats'-meat man out foah a holiday."

"I am your relative, Robert D'Arcy."

"Wats! A cousin of mine couldn't possibly be such a howwid old boundah. Your dwess is wascally."

"You are a perfect idiot, boy! I wonder at your masters allowing you to use that absurd eyeglass, and dress like that. Look at your waistcoat!"

"It's wathah flashy."

"It's hideous!"

"Weally, this is too much. I wespect my welations——"

"Pshaw! Who wants your respect?"

"Weally! You are an old man, and——"

"No, I'm not, you young jackanapes."

"Oh, I say! My wespected welative—if this old boundah is weally my welative—must be waving mad. Have you evah been in a lunatic asylum, Cousin Wobert?"

"No, I haven't, and——"

"Well, I weally advise you not to get neah one, else they will lock you up under the impwesh. that you are a waving lunatic."

Mr. Robert D'Arcy gazed at his hopeful relative in silence. He was a good-looking man, with kind eyes, but his speech certainly did not appear to be very amiable.

"Is this boy your friend?" he demanded.

"Wathah! He's a Shell boundah, but he can't help that. I say, are you weally my wespected welative?"

"I am Robert D'Arcy."

"I am surpwised."

"So am I."

"You don't look a bit like a welative of mine."

"I am thankful to hear it."

"Weally! I wespect my welatives, but your behaviour is wotten. It is, weally. If you come to the coll. I'll teach you how to dwess as a gentleman, then if you follow my mode of speech you may be able to pass as one."

Tom Merry gasped.

"My only hat!" he muttered

"What's your name?"

"Tom Merry, sir."

"Why do you let that young fop make such an idiot of himself?"

"Weally, Cousin Wobert——"

"Robert is my name, boy."

"That's what I said."

"No, you did not. You said Wobert. Can't you pronounce the letter 'r'?"

"Of course I can! And I am weally surpwised that you should ask such a widiculous question. Youah wemarks are weally too wude, and I weally cannot wespect a welation who talks to me like that!"

"Bosh! Have you ordered anything to eat?"

"Yaas."

"Well, you will have tea with me; and mind you behave yourself."

"Weally, Cousin Wobert——"

"Oh, don't tell me! I know what boys are, the young rascals! I expect they will put salt in my tea, and shove the muffins for me to sit on."

The strange old gentleman seemed to say this to himself, only he muttered it in a voice that was quite audible to the pair.

The tea consisted of everything they had in the house, and a good many things that had been sent for. It was a most sumptuous spread, and Cousin Robert did ample justice to it.

He was a big, strongly-built man, and he appeared to have an abnormal appetite.

They were still engaged on their meal when Kemp and his crew came in, and Kemp no sooner caught sight of Tom Merry than he strode up to the table.

"So I have caught you at last, you young hound!" he cried fiercely.

"You needn't have had any difficulty in doing that, Kemp," retorted Tom Merry. "I haven't been hiding from you."

"You young liar!"

"Weally, Kemp, you are the most wascally boundah I evah came acwoss!"

"What are you doing, boy?" demanded Cousin Robert, giving Kemp a shove in the chest as he sprang towards Arthur Augustus.

"You wretched old pauper!" cried Kemp. "I'll knock your head off your shoulders if you dare to lay a hand on me!"

"How can I help my poverty?" demanded Robert D'Arcy, looking comical.

"Well, don't you touch me. I don't know where these boys picked you up, but I expect it was out of the other rubbish in the street."

"Weally, I won't stand this!" cried Arthur Augustus, springing to his feet. "This gentleman is a wespected welative of mine."

"Hang you, and your relatives, too!"

"Weally, Kemp, you wequire Mr. Bwown to teach you; you do weally. I shall have to ask him to box youah ears again."

"I will knock your stupid head off your shoulders!"

"You will do nothing of the sort!" cried Robert D'Arcy. "And I tell you this, young man: If you don't behave yourself I'll lay my stick across

your back. It seems to me modern boys are getting spoilt. But I sha'n't spoil you, my lad, and so I tell you."

"You say you will lay your stick across my shoulders?"

"That is exactly what I said."

"Then do it, you shabby old brute! Do it, and——"

Robert D'Arcy rose, took down his stick, then gripped Kemp by the collar, and he did it.

Kemp's yells testified that. He did it most thoroughly.

Kemp struggled and fought, but he was helpless in Robert D'Arcy's powerful grip. The old gentleman was fearfully muscular, and now he considered that Kemp deserved a flogging. He got it, too; and when it was over he was weeping copiously and howling with pain.

"Now, just behave yourself, my lad," exclaimed Robert D'Arcy, "otherwise I'll give you another flogging!"

"I'll summon you! I'll put you in prison for this!" hooted Kemp.

"Weally! A wespected welative of mine could not go to pwison," observed Arthur Augustus. "It is a widiculous thing to imagine."

"He has assaulted me, and——"

"Well, he gave you a fwightful thwashing, and you must know that it served you wight."

"You young liar! He certainly assaulted me with his stick; but if he had been a young man I would have given him the soundest hiding he had ever had in his life!"

Robert D'Arcy merely glanced at Tom Merry, who was smiling contemptuously, and then went on with his tea, an example that his young guests followed.

Kemp declared he was going for the police. He left the room, and his crew ordered their tea to be served up; but they chose a table at the other end of the room.

"I am glad you beat them," said Robert D'Arcy. "I detest boasting."

"Wathah! It's wotten!"

"Pshaw! Don't use that slang at me, my boy. I'm sure I don't know what your masters can be about, allowing you to talk like you do."

"Weally, Cousin Wobert, you'ah wemarks are beastly wude, you know. I have told you that I wespect you as a welative, but I expect wecipwocity. I expect you to wespect me."

"Oh, bring some more muffins, waiter! Respect you, indeed! How do you suppose I am going to do that?"

"Weally, I shall be able to teach you how to wespect a fellah, and if you expwess your wegwet for your wude wemarks I shall be willing undah the circs. to ovahlook the mattah on this occasion, seeing that we are welated."

"Will you really! Well, I am not going to express my regret at all. Now, get on with your tea, and don't you dare to play any of your practical jokes on me."

They had no intention of playing any jokes on the strange old gentleman; but he seemed to have come to the conclusion that the jokes were inevitable, and it was obvious that he was on the look-out for them.

They had just finished the meal when Kemp came back with the local constable, who was known to the youngsters, and apparently to Mr. Robert D'Arcy, for he saluted that gentleman in a most deferential manner.

"Hallo, Flump!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Are you in search of prisoners?"

"I am. An assault has been committed within the meaning of the Act, and it's my dooty to inquire into the matter."

"I give that old man in custody!" cried Kemp. "He has severely injured me."

"I must see the wound."

"Go and hang yourself! I tell you he has assaulted me!"

"Yus, that's what you tell me; but an assault don't come within the meaning of the Act unless you can show a wound."

"Do you take me for a fool?"

"It ain't my dooty to tell you what I take you for, young fellow. My dooty is to arrest wrongful doers."

"Then arrest that old man!"

"I ain't heard the evidence."

"He struck me with his stick."

"A stick ain't a weapon. You can't draw blood with a stick, not unless you use its point. I couldn't arrest any gentleman for assaulting you unless I saw the wound. It don't come within the meaning of the Act."

"Then you mean to tell me that a man may brain me with a stick, and you can't arrest him?"

"There must be a wound. If he had killed you I would be able to arrest him, 'cos I would be bound to know that there must be a wound somewheres, even if it was an internal one. An assault like that would come within the meaning of the Act, but not another assault. All you can do is to summon the gentleman, and then most likely the magistrate will tell you that you thoroughly deserved the flogging you got."

"No man has a right to strike me."

"May be. But it ain't an arrestable assault."

"Why not, you dunderhead?"

Mr. Flump really did not know, so he said:

"Because it don't come within the meaning of the Act."

"Hang the Act! I should say it was like you, and hadn't got any meaning. Are you going to take that villain in custody?"

"I am not."

"Why not?"

"Because the gentleman don't come within the meaning of the Act."

"My only hat!" murmured Tom Merry, and Mr. D'Arcy again looked comical as he glanced at him.

"I tell you plainly you will get yourself into trouble, constable, if you don't take that man into custody."

"And I tell you plainly that I should get myself into trouble if I did arrest him."

"My father is a very wealthy gentleman, and——"

"Did he come into his wealth sudden-like?" inquired Flump.

"No, he did not; and——"

"Well, that's all right; but I would like his name and address, 'cos there's been a lot of burglaries lately, and it's suspicious when a man comes sudden-like into wealth, 'cos——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"What are you guffawing at, you silly little brute?" snarled Kemp.

"I was laughing at you, Kemp—and Flump. He's suspicious—within the meaning of the Act."

"Shall I turn the young fellow out of the place, sir?" inquired Flump, addressing Mr. Robert D'Arcy.

"No. He is quite harmless. And if I have any more of his impertinence I'll give him another flogging. Go and sit down, boy, and try to behave yourself like a gentleman."

"You insolent old ruffian!" howled Kemp. "If you don't take care I'll put my fist in your eye, old as you are!"

Mr. Robert D'Arcy made no reply, but he seized Kemp by the collar again and gave him a second flogging; and once more he brought forth tears and howls.

"Now I give him in custody!" hooted Kemp, when he had somewhat recovered from the pain.

"What for?" inquired Flump.

"Assaulting me."

"Have you got a wound?"

"You senseless idiot, you know he assaulted me!"

"I only know you tell me so. You must have witnesses—within the meaning of the Act."

"You are a witness to the assault."

"I don't come within the meaning of the Act as a witness."

"Don't talk that rot to me! You don't want to take him in custody."

This was perfectly true. The fact is, Flump had been most liberally treated by the old gentleman. He not only did not want to take him in custody, but had not the slightest intention of doing so.

"You are bound to take him! You witnessed the assault."

"That's what we call corporal punishment," declared Flump. "It comes under the head of slight punishment."

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I don't think Kemp found the punishment so remarkably slight. Did you, Kemp?"

"You are a disgrace to the police force, fellow!" declared Kemp, turning on Flump. "I shall go straight to the police-station and report you."

"Very good, young fellow. And if you ain't particularly careful I shall run you in for creating a disturbance."

"Weally, Flump," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "I don't think he could help making the noise. I weally think under the circs. you might let him off this time."

"Well, young gent, I'm always willing to oblige. But we can't have

young hooligans coming into this township and behaving theirselves disgraceful. There ain't a doubt that he has created a disturbance within the meaning of the Act."

"What an utter idiot he is!" mumbled Robert D'Arcy.

"So he is, sir!" exclaimed Flump, imagining the old gentleman had referred to Kemp, and not to himself. "Shall I remove him, sir?"

"No. Let the young rascal be. I do not suppose he will insult me again. If he does, I shall give him another flogging."

"And quite right, too, sir. I'm a great believer in corporal punishment."

Then Flump took his departure, and shortly afterwards the little party broke up.

CHAPTER 26.

Tom Merry's Great Surprise.

THE following morning Tom Merry received two letters.

"Wonder who they are from!" he exclaimed, carefully examining the envelopes.

"Hadn't you better open them and see?" suggested Lowther.

"That brilliant idea never occurred to him," observed Manners.

"Dry up, you silly bounders!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It's funny I should get two letters. I'll try this one first. My hat! Listen to this little lot:

"Mr. Kemp informs that little cad Tom Merry that he will shortly give him the soundest thrashing he has ever had in his life. Mr. Kemp further mentions that Tom Merry is a miserable, sneaking little coward, and that he did not win the race fairly. If the little thief likes to row again, Mr. Kemp will deign to meet him any day or time."

"Not bad, that!" exclaimed Tom Merry, picking up a pen.

And he wrote across the letter:

"Glad to see you are improving in your spelling. No doubt you got a little boy to help you. The letter is a great improvement on the last. Copy it out a hundred times, and perhaps you will then learn to write a little. I am not going to row against you again, and you know the reason.—Tom Merry."

Then he wrote across the envelope:

"Return to Kemp," and put the Glenside address, crossing his own off.

"Well, that's soon disposed of. Now, for the other letter."

Tom Merry opened it.

"My only hat!"

"Another insulting letter?"

"It isn't a letter at all, and it isn't insulting—at least, if it is, I would

like to be so insulted every jolly day of my life. It's a five-pound note enclosed in an envelope."

"Jolly good, that!"

"Who's it from?"

"Haven't the slightest idea. It's a strange handwriting to me."

"I suppose it is a good note?"

"I don't know. It looks to me like a good one. You see, I don't handle many hundreds of five-pound banknotes. I might be able to tell a good sovereign, but I don't believe I could tell a good note."

"Who could have sent it?"

Tom Merry thought. Then he examined the postmark.

"It was posted here. Let's come and question D'Arcy."

"Here he comes!"

"Can you tell a good five-pound note, D'Arcy?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Wathah! Why?"

"How can you tell them?"

"Take it to the bank, and ask the question. That is weally the pwopah way to tell."

"Is that a good one?"

"Did you get this to-day?"

"Yes."

"Wats! I've got one, too!"

"Jolly strange, that! Who sent yours?"

"The same person who sent youahs."

"How do you know that?"

"Well, look at the two w'itings. Both in the same hand. It's wathah widiculous that the sendah didn't give his name."

"I don't mind that much. But look here, Gussy, I believe it is your respected relative. I think he took a fancy to me."

"Wats! He couldn't possibly have done that, Tom Mewwy. You can depend on it he took a fancy to me."

"Don't see how he could, considering the manner you spoke to him before you realised who he was."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I am sure he did! I could see a sort of lovable expwesh. in his eyes as he looked at me. I wathah fancy he is a sensible old boundah—in fact, he must be if he's a D'Arcy! We are all clevah sort of boundahs!"

"He japed you a bit about your clothes, too."

"That's only because my wespected welative doesn't understand the pwoper fashions. I expect he has lived abwoad all his life, and they don't dwess in the latest fashion in the Fiji Islands."

"Well, it's jolly decent of him sending this money. It comes in handy towards the end of the term, and it will give me a lot over for the holidays. Downright decent, I call it."

"You ought to be gwateful to me for giving the old boundah such a good impwesh."

"Rats! You couldn't possibly have done that, considering the way you dressed him down."

"I wish he would dwess himself up a bit. It makes you wathah ashamed of wespected welatives when they won't dwess pwoperly. Still, I suppose he doesn't know any better, and he looks wathah too old to be taught."

"He's a jolly good fellow. Bother his dress. That's got nothing to do with us. I expect he thought we would refuse the money."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, he need not have thought that with me! I wouldn't wefuse the money of any wespected welative. You see, if they have got too much, it's only wight they should give it away. I nevah have too much."

"Well, there goes the bell, and if you are not in time for class you will get more than you want this journey."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"No time to listen to that little lot. Come on, you chaps!"

"I'm extwemely pleased with my wespected welative's action," observed D'Arcy, as he hurried away.

The following Saturday afternoon Tom Merry was walking across the Close with Manners and Lowther when they saw a most excited object rushing towards them.

That object wore spectacles, and a notebook was in his hand, for the object was a real boy, and not the ghostly monk, or anything like that.

It was merely Skimpole, and as he was making notes in his book, he did not notice where he was coming. He landed on Tom Merry's left shoulder, and sat on the ground, as the result of the impact.

His eyes appeared to be bulging from behind his glasses, but he finished his note, and then he panted, being very much out of breath:

"Awful calamity! Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, thrashing temporary new master in gym.! Note.—Evidence given after legal warning by one Taggles!"

Tom Merry gazed at the fallen detective.

"Rats!"

"Murderous assault on master!"

Skimpole was reading from his notes, and improving them.

"Headline.—Master of St. Jim's in pool of blood! Lashed to death by captain of college!"

"He's dotty!"

"Off his rocker!"

"Come on, chaps! There's no hurry, but we'll jolly well run."

They did, and they saw exactly what Taggles had seen, and what Skimpole had seen. But the two latter saw it through the window, and they saw only a part. The Terrible Three saw it through the door, and they saw all.

It was merely a fencing bout, and as the Shell chums rushed in excitedly, Kildare lowered his stick.

"Thanks, sir," panted Kildare, for the work had been very warm; "you have taught me a lot!"

"Come, Kildare!" exclaimed Mr. Brown, smiling. "Don't be too bashful. I know you are not fishing for compliments."

"Hope not, sir. I'd like to see you with the man who taught me fencing. I'm not at all vindictive either way; only I think that bout would be splendid."

"I'm afraid my other work with the Shell will take me all my time. Now, suppose we give them a lesson, Kildare? Of course, we know how fond of lessons they are. I will take on Tom Merry, and you can take Manners. Then we will change to Lowther. Have you got any pressing engagements, my lads?"

"Nothing up to that, sir," answered Tom Merry. "We were discussing what we should do, when a giddy detective told us St. Jim's captain was thrashing the new master."

"The detective reversed the order of things," laughed Kildare.

"Well, look here, boys," exclaimed Mr. Brown, "I have only come here till Mr. Railton returns, but I want to see round about. Now, suppose we have half an hour's fencing practice, then we will all come for a walk into the country. Kildare has agreed to a walk, and we would like your company, supposing, of course, you have nothing better to do?"

"Right-ho! I'm on that!" declared Tom Merry.

And his chums were of the same opinion. They only hoped that Figgins & Co. and Blake & Co. would meet them.

Tom Merry knew that he had met a master in the art of fencing, and, what was more to the point, all the time they were at it, Mr. Brown kept giving him instructions.

Then the walk with the master and the captain was something to be remembered. There was only one topic of conversation, it is true, and that was sport. It mattered not what game they spoke about, Mr. Brown knew as much about it as Kildare, and perhaps a little more. Then they put up at a little village shop and had tea; and when the chums returned they all voted Mr. Brown a jolly good fellow, as he was.

One evening D'Arcy was coming out of his study. He was most carefully dressed, and he had got on a tall hat, while there was a flower in his coat.

D'Arcy was going to dine with his relative, who was stopping at an hotel. It was the relative whose life Barnes had saved. Barnes was going also, only D'Arcy had returned for a pair of lavender gloves, which he had forgotten were in his coat-pocket. He was now putting on those gloves.

Suddenly there was a rush behind him, and the Terrible Three came along the passage at breakneck pace. They did not see D'Arcy until they were upon him, and then it was too late to stop in time. Tom Merry charged at D'Arcy's back, and sent him sprawling face forwards to the floor, while Manners and Lowther dropped on the top of them.

The unfortunate D'Arcy's hat was smashed flat, and he knocked his nose badly against the floor.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What did you want to get in my way like that for, Gussy?"

"Oh, you wough wascals!" yelled D'Arcy. "You've bwoken my hat, and you've bwoken my nose!"

"What a silly ass you must have been to get in my way!"

"Tom Mewwy!" exclaimed D'Arcy, rising slowly. "I wefuse to be called a silly ass! How do you suppose I am going to dine with my welative like this? You've bwoken my flower!"

"Hard cheese!"

"You are weally wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I decline to be laughed at by boundahs like you! It's weally too wascally coming along the passage in that widiculous manner! It's wotten!"

"Accident, dear boy!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We didn't see your noble figure!"

"Oh, dwy up!"

"We can't stop to listen to your apology, Gussy! Of course, you were a silly ass to get in our way, when you might have seen we were in a jolly hurry! Sorry for your topper!"

"I pwotest——"

"Well, keep on protesting, and get out of our way next time we are in a hurry!"

"Weally——"

But the Terrible Three went on their wild career, and D'Arcy kept his worthy relative waiting while he got himself up to perfection again.

It so happened that Figgins was working that evening. He was translating some French. Kerr was reading, and Wynn was having a little snack of something to eat.

Suddenly their door was flung open, and Figgins' inkpot was upset over his translation, while he went sprawling on the table.

"Figgy, my lively kiddy," cried Tom Merry, "how are you? Look up, and gaze at your uncle! You've got some ink over your face, but what matter?"

"You silly ass, look what a jolly slop you've made! Besides, you are not allowed to speak to the three respectable inhabitants of this study!"

"My child, we are!"

"Has Ratty pardoned you?"

"Rats! Our time is up, my bounder! It's one blessed month, and it seems like half a dozen of them! Chuck that stuff away!"

Tom Merry sent the translation into the fireplace, and patted Figgins softly and patronisingly on the top of the head.

"Come to your uncle's study, my nimble ninny! You others, too! Fatty, we've got a feed that will make you lick your lips and move your jaw! We've provided a supper after your own heart!"

"But look at my French translation!"

"Oh, bother your French translation! No one would ever read it!"

"I don't suppose they would if they couldn't read French."

"Rats! They would be bound to read French better than you can! Besides, who cares whether you have got the penknife of your aunt's sister, or whether you have only the shoe-string of your grandmother, and Fatty's feeding-bottle?"

"Rats! I'm not translating anything like that!"

"Well, come and translate our giddy supper! Hurry up, my child, or Blake & Co. will smell it, and wolf it up in our absence!"

"We'll come, right enough; but I wish you hadn't spoilt my translation! I shall have to begin it all over again, and I had got nearly half a page done."

"You are no good at translating French, Figgy. You might be able to spin a pegtop, or suck a sugar-plum, but when it comes to anything like translation, you silly New House kids would have to come to Shell fellows for assistance."

"Rats!"

"Right-ho! I am sorry to have to speak plainly to you. Just translate yourselves to our study."

So they all went together, and the Terrible Three were silent now no longer.

CHAPTER 27.
The Cricket Match.

THE Shell study was crowded, and most of the boys were talking against each other.

"Do hold your horrid row, Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy! Howwid wow!"

"That's what I said, ass!"

"I wefuse to be wefewwed to as an ass, and I wefuse to hold my wow, and I pwotest against it being wefewwed to as a howwid wow!"

"How can I speak when you burbling idiots are all howling against each other?"

"No one wants you to speak, Tom Mewwy."

"Then they will jolly well get what they don't want. Now this is the case——"

"You had bettah let me explain the mattah, Tom Mewwy——"

"Dry up!"

"I wefuse to dwy up!"

"Well, go on talking."

"I wefuse to go on talking, and considah youah——"

"I wonder what the ass will do next. He refuses to dry up, and he refuses to go on talking. But the thing is this. We have challenged the Glensiders to play our eleven, and they have accepted. That's all right——"

"Of course it's all wight. We shall beat them."

"They are playing Kemp, and he is not in the junior team."

"Wats! We don't mind that. We shall beat them."

"It's not that exactly, but we refused to race them again, because he made such a howler of himself. Then how can we play cricket with the bounder?"

"Wats! We didn't know he was coming. If he comes we can't wefuse to let him play. They would say we are afwaid of them."

"What's your opinion, Figgy?"

"What's the good of asking Figgy's opinion when you have got mine? I'm weally surpwised at you, Tom Mewwy."

"Ass! Hold your row!"

"We must play them," said Figgins. "We couldn't get out of it now if we wanted to do it. You whacked the asses at rowing, so there's no reason why we shouldn't whack them at cricket. Then you have got to recollect that it is a holiday, and it would look rather funny to get a holiday, and not play the match."

"Right-ho! Then that's settled, and——"

"I have a pwoposish to make——"

"We don't want to hear it, Gussy. The matter is settled."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you are too impulsive. Now, the wemark that——"

"We don't want to hear it."

"How can you tell you don't want to hear it when you don't know what it is?"

"It doesn't matter what it is. If you don't hold your silly row we will bump you."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I'm surpwised——"

"Then be surprised by yourself!" exclaimed Tom Merry, bolting from the place.

The match was to be played on the following day, and Tom Merry, being captain of the junior eleven, had plenty of matters to arrange. He left the provisions to Fatty Wynn, knowing that he was by far the most competent to look after them.

The ground was in grand order, and the weather promised to be brilliant. Tom Merry's only concern was that Kemp was one of the players. He had an idea that there would be trouble.

There was a good deal of excitement on the eventful morning, St. Jim's fellows being very anxious for their side to win.

Kemp captained his team, and he was by far the biggest boy amongst them. He did not offer to shake hands with Tom Merry, and that worthy treated him with extreme coolness. Kemp won the toss, and the two men he sent in knocked up fifteen in the first two overs to Fatty Wynn and Jack Blake's bowling.

It was a fast wicket, there having been no rain for some time, and those two batsmen appeared to be settling down comfortably. Twenty went up on the board. Wynn had one more ball to complete his over. He sent down a slow, and it was not on the wicket. It looked remarkably tempting, and the batsman stepped out and slogged with all his strength. Then into the air it went, and, rushing forwards, Blake caught it.

Kemp went in next, and, although he played Wynn's bowling cautiously, he got several boundary hits off Blake.

He was losing some of his caution with Wynn, also, and his partner was playing an excellent game.

Fifty went up, and matters looked so serious that Tom Merry decided on trying his luck. He took the ball from Blake, and Kemp had to face him. The first two balls were dead on the wicket, but Kemp blocked them neatly. Next came one to the off-stump, and he cut it, but it was stopped by point, and sent back too quickly for a run.

Again Tom Merry ran forward, and sent down a splendid ball. It was dead on the middle stump, and remarkably swift, while its pitch was perfect. The next moment Kemp's bails flew off, and his middle stump was knocked out of the ground, while deafening cheers rang out.

Kemp was regarded as a very formidable opponent, and now that he was disposed of the St. Jim's fellows became a little more hopeful.

But the next man was a sticker, and should really have gone in first. He did not score very fast, but he played an excellent game.

In vain Tom Merry changed his bowlers. He could not effect a parting; and the sticker's partner was knocking up runs at an alarming rate. Seventy went up on the board before Wynn clean bowled the sticker's partner.

Even then matters did not mend much. The runs mounted up quickly, and before the batsmen were separated the three figures had gone up.

At last Tom Merry took the ball again, and in his third over he had the good fortune to bowl the sticker; but it was not before a hundred and fifty had gone up; and before all were disposed of they had knocked up two hundred and fifteen.

Now, Tom Merry considered this a formidable score to face, especially as the wicket showed signs of breaking up. However, this did not spoil his appetite for lunch, which was served before his side went to the wicket.

"Weally, Fatty Wynn," murmured Arthur Augustus. "You won't be able to wun if you eat like that. You should westain youah appetite."

"Rats! I don't want to faint for want of food."

"Under the circs. of the amount you have wolfed, I wegard such a contingency as quite impossible."

"I can run much faster when I have had a good feed."

"Then you ought to be able to go like a steam-engine after this little lot, Fatty!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "But never you mind. You fire ahead."

"Just what I am going to do. I am not going to leave too much for Taggles. It might make him ill, and that would be a pity."

"He will need three weeks' sleep after that little lot, like some old boa-constrictor," said Manners.

"People with great ability require to eat a lot," declared Fatty Wynn, helping himself to more. "The Shell fellows could live on next to nothing, because they have no brains to nourish."

"Rats! Get on with your grub!"

"I can eat and talk at the same time."

"So I have noticed. But you will have to stop directly, because it is nearly time. Shove him in first, Tom Merry. He will need plenty of exercise after a meal like that."

Wynn did not mind the chaff, perhaps because he was so used to it. He had only just finished when Tom Merry sent Blake and Figgins to the wicket.

Kemp took the ball, and motioned to his men to close in.

"No ball!" cried the umpire.

"What?" demanded Kemp, turning on him, and looking savage.

"No ball is what I said. Are you deaf?"

"No, I'm not. Would you like me to bowl three yards from the wicket?"

"I would like you to behave yourself as a gentleman—if you can. You will not dispute my decision again."

Kemp wisely remained silent. He sent the ball down as hard as he could, and it caught Blake on the pad, then crashed into his wicket.

"How's that, umpire?" grinned Kemp.

"Out!"

Tom Merry had thought of sending Herries in next, but he changed his mind, and went in himself. He had an idea that Kemp was a formidable bowler, but he feared his men might become nervous—a thing that Tom Merry did not suffer from.

Down came the ball again, and once more it was to leg. Tom Merry stepped in front of his wicket and slogged, and cheers burst forth as he scored a boundary. The two next balls were dead on the wicket, and Tom Merry did not dare to trifle with them; then Kemp sent in a wide, which Tom Merry let severely alone.

The next ball Tom Merry snicked for three, and after that Kemp became more cautious, while the St. Jim's fellows became far more hopeful. But their hopes were short-lived, for Kemp's last ball proved too much for Figgins, and his wicket rattled down.

Wynn was the next man in, and he improved the score by thirteen before he was disposed of. Then came Manners, and he and Tom Merry stuck.

Manners played a really good game, and he added thirty-two before he was disposed of.

Kemp would have been wise to put another man on now; but he had done well so far, and he was determined to do better. Tom Merry and D'Arcy got together, and they stuck. Tom Merry was scoring in grand style.

The three figures went up, but those two had a formidable task before them if they were to have any chance of pulling the match out of the fire. Tom Merry had kept his weakest men for the last, and knew that he could not rely on very much from them. D'Arcy, however, was playing a grand game, and the score was advancing at a rate that quite satisfied Tom Merry.

A hundred and eighty went up, and then Arthur Augustus was cleverly caught.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "That was a gwand catch! I wathah fancy we've got a chance yet!"

But his hopes were destined to be dashed to the ground, for the next man in was bowled second ball.

When the last man went in they required twenty runs to tie, and Tom Merry had little hope of getting them.

Kemp took the ball, and again Tom Merry got him to the boundary. Every run that was scored now evoked shouts of applause. The score crept up until St. Jim's needed only three to tie.

Kemp was bowling to Tom Merry now, and not a run had been scored off that over. It was the last ball, and Kemp sent it down at lightning speed. It was a trifle to leg. Tom Merry squared his shoulders, then sent the ball flying.

"Come on!" shouted his excited partner; and, tired though Tom Merry was, he flew across.

"An easy four!" bawled his partner.

It was not an easy four, but they got four for it, and with it won the match.

The Glensiders were once more beaten by St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 28.
After the Match.

"BWAVO, Tom Mewwy!" roared D'Arcy. "Well played indeed! I say, I'm weally glad we have beaten the wottahs!"

"You can bet you are not gladder than I am," laughed Tom Merry. "I made certain that we were going to lose, too."

"We had a wotten start!"

"But a jolly good finish!" exclaimed Figgins. "I expect Kemp will make all sorts of excuses, but the fact remains that he was beaten."

"I am surpwised at Kemp," said D'Arcy. "Why, he was inclined to dispute the umpire's decision."

"He would dispute any decision that was against him," said Tom Merry. "Look here, I'm not going to have any argument with the fellow. He makes me savage."

"It's an awkward posish, Tom Mewwy. You see, we shall have to ask him to tea."

"Suppose you do it."

"Weally, you are the captain of the eleven."

"Yes, but then you are such a fine speaker."

"I must say I wathah pwide myself on my tact."

"Well, use a little of it now with Kemp. He's coming up to us."

Arthur Augustus adjusted his glass, and gazed at the Glenside captain.

"I'm wathah sowwy for you, Kemp," exclaimed D'Arcy.

"What do you mean, you foolish kid?"

"Weally, Kemp, I am surpwised at your wemark."

"Go and hang yourself."

"I wefuse to hang myself. I must say that the posish. is an awkward one, because you are such a howwid boundah."

"My hat, listen to the tact!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Undah the circs., I have come to the conclusion that you can't weally help it, Kemp. You have a howwid tempah, but you should twy to contwol it; and you should not get angwy when you lose. You see, you can't always win, and you are not at all likely ever to win when you play against us. But the exact posish. is this. We are willing to invite you to tea."

"Who wants your tea. If we require any food we can buy it."

"Weally? I do not suppose you could not, only when a gentleman weceives an invitation to tea, he invawiably accept or declines it with thanks. You see, Kemp, it is the wule of polite society, and if you stay long enough at Glenside I expect you will be able to learn bettah mannahs. Your wudeness is weally wotten!"

"If you dare to talk to me like that I will knock your silly head off your shoulders!"

"I pwotest at your wudeness."

"Go and drown yourself!"

"I wefuse even to drown myself, although I considah it pwefewable to hanging myself. But I weally have not the slightest intention of doing eithah just to oblige you. I'm afwaid you are too vulgah to compwehend the twue posish."

"You are the most empty-headed young idiot I ever came across."

"Weally, Kemp, you need not be wude. Of course, you are a howwid boundah, but seeing it is youah nature, why, you ought not to be blamed for it. You have wefused our invitation to tea, which I considah wathah silly. But it stands to weason that the wemaindah of your eleven need not follow your wetched wudeness. We shall be vewwy pleased for them to take tea with us, and I feel sure that if they would pwefer not doing so they won't wefuse the invitation in such a wude mannah as you have done."

As a matter of fact, they accepted the invitation, much to Kemp's rage.

He offered to pay for tea at the hotel, but they refused to allow anything of the sort, and Kemp strode away in an abominable temper, while his team had a really good time of it.

Kemp had nothing of the sort, for when he presented himself at the hotel, Jim the waiter simply refused to let him in; and the reason was that Arthur Augustus's relative was there.

The old gentleman was an excellent customer, and Jim was determined not to have him annoyed.

Kemp had to get his tea at a small confectioner's, and then he had simply nothing to do until his train went; while he was further annoyed by seeing his men come on the platform laughing and joking with the St. Jim's fellows in the most friendly manner possible.

"They are not at all a bad sort," declared Tom Merry, as they made their way back to the college."

"Wathah not," exclaimed D'Arcy; "and I considah that Kemp has impwoved since I gave him that talking to."

"Just as if you could improve him," said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs, I'm surpwised at youah wemark."

"You couldn't improve a monkey, and Kemp is far worse than any ape!"

"I'm not denying that. I'm only saying I have improved him."

"Rats! He called you all sorts of things."

"Bai Jove, but considah all the things he would have called me if I hadn't impwoved him."

"Well, he may be truthful sometimes."

"Weally, Mannahs, I don't understand youah meaning."

"Why, no doubt when he called you a silly little ass he was truthful, and——"

"Bai Jove, if he had called me that I should have had to give him the most fwightful thwashing!"

"Never mind, Gussy, you can't help being a silly little ass. It only shows that Kemp is a fellow of some discernment."

"I wefuse to be called anything of the sort."

"Well, come along, and——"

"I wefuse to come along at——"

"Then stay where you are."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"You must do one of the two."

"I pwotest——"

"Look here, Gussy!" exclaimed Manners. "Go leaping up the branches of that tree, and then the people will no longer think that you are an ass. They will take you for an intelligent monkey."

"Weally, Mannahs, I shall have to give you the most fwightful thwashing directly."

"Let him off this time, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "Remember, he is delicate, poor kid."

"Vewwy well, Tom Mewwy. In considewation of your intercesh., I shall not thwash him this time. I wathah think that, having impwoved Kemp, I shall now commence to impwove my wespected welative."

"Rats! He doesn't want improving!" cried Tom Merry. "A man who gives fellows fivers anonymously is good enough for anything. It was downright decent of the old boy, and I'm beastly grateful. I shall let him know that the next time I meet him."

"He won't like you wefewwing to it, Tom Mewwy. He wants you to think that it came fwom someone else. I am wathah sowwy Taggy didn't get his fiver, but then he ought not to have been wude to the old boundah."

"You weren't very polite before you knew who he was."

"But, don't you see, Tom Mewwy, he was wude to me. Talked about us making a wow."

"Well, we were making a row."

"That is no mattah! A stwangah has no wight to tell me that I am making a wow."

"What about me?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you are no one."

"No one!"

"Those were my words, and they were wemarkably wise ones."

"They were rotten words."

"Weally——"

"Stupidest remark I ever listened to. You had better get Taggles to improve you."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I am surpwised at your wemarks, and if there is a wecuwwence I shall have to give you the most fwightful thwashing!"

"But, Gussy, you must know that you are an ass."

"What!"

"An unintelligent donkey."

"Bai Jove, I may be able to impwove Billy Barnes, and my wespected welative, but I don't weally believe I will evah be able to impwove the Shell boundahs."

"How are you going to improve your respected relative, Gussy?" inquired Tom Merry, looking serious.

"Well, I weally scarcely know where to begin. But I think I shall take him to my tailah's and dwess him pwoperly. He will look all wight if he is dwessed pwoperly."

"Shall you give him a flaring waistcoat?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I shall dwess him in the latest fashion."

"And shove an eyeglass in his eye."

"I think that would be an impwovement."

"There's one thing you have got to recollect."

"Weally?"

"Yes. You appear to overlook it altogether in making your arrangements concerning your respected relative's dress."

"I weally don't know what you mean."

"Suppose he objects to be dressed up like an organ-grinder's monkey."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wesent your wemarks. I shall dwess him like myself."

"Well, that's what I said."

"No such thing."

"You could not have been listening."

"Weally, I heard evewy word."

"Then you heard me say that you were going to dress him like yourself."

"I pwotest. You are wong. You never said that I was going to dwess him like myself."

"I said words to the same effect."

"You weally did not. You said he would object to my dwessing him like an organ-grinder's monkey."

"Well, isn't that the same thing."

"Bai Jove, I pwotest against being wefewwed to as an organ-gwindah's monkey."

"Never mind, Gussy. You can't help it."

"I don't want to help it."

"It would be no good trying. Now, when you have quite finished japing me, perhaps you will try to talk a little common-sense."

When they got back to the college they found Billy Barnes in the centre

of a crowd of youngsters, and all those youngsters were trying to tell him how sorry they were at having suspected him of the theft.

They were all trying also to speak at once, and it would have been quite impossible for Billy to have understood their words.

Mr. Brown had spread the report that Taggles had found his sovereign in his own pocket, and Taggles had a rough time of it. Nearly every boy went to him to congratulate him on his success, and they all took care to go at intervals, so that after the first five minutes Taggles was almost driven out of his mind.

Then they tackled Billy, but he viewed them through his eyeglass, and he looked funny with one side of his face screwed up, while he brought out a few of D'Arcy's expressions, and mingled them with his own.

The best of it was that Billy did not care. He knew he was perfectly honest, and being branded as a thief did not trouble him much.

"What's up, Billy?" inquired Tom Merry, pushing his way through the throng.

"Weally! Bai Jove! Wight-ho and not 'arf! These silly wottahs are twying to tell me I'm not a thief, but as I knew that all along it makes no odds."

"So they have discovered that they are a pack of silly kids?"

"Should say they wouldn't have any difficulty in discovering that. I knew that directly they accused me."

"You are forgiven, my children!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Your uncle forgives you. Run away and play, and let there be no noise. Poor little kids, you ought to have some fun sometimes. Come on, Billy."

"Wight-ho, and wats!" exclaimed Billy, grinning, as he followed the Terrible Three to their study.

CHAPTER 29.
Breaking Up.

THERE was an extraordinary bustle at St. Jim's. The end of the term had arrived, and so had an odd man to help Taggles with the boxes. Taggles considered that this odd man, whose name was Simon, ought to do all the lifting part of the business, while he himself did the superintending.

Simon was a hard worker, and he was on the look-out for tips, although he would have been much more likely to receive liberal emolument had it been the beginning of the term instead of the end of it, for money was scarce with most of the boys.

They were, however, in an extraordinary state of merriment, and the noise they made was deafening.

"Bring down mine next, Simon!" howled one of the excited youngsters. "I've got a train to catch."

"Dry up! I've got three trains to catch."

"Rats! Are you going to catch them all at once?"

"Leave the excited kids alone, Simon, and bring down my box!" cried Tom Merry.

"Right you are, young gents!" exclaimed the obliging Simon. "I will bring them all down in reg'lar rotation."

"Well, bring mine down first," said Tom Merry.

And Simon promised. He also promised to bring down half a dozen other boxes first, although how he was to do it, considering that he had not the slightest idea which boy was which, or which box belonged to him, was a complete mystery.

And watching the noisy scene was Mr. Robert D'Arcy. There was a rumour that some stranger had sent presents of food and money to all the people round about, and that some who were ill had had all their doctor's bills paid.

No one seemed to know the munificent donor, although Tom Merry and his chums made a pretty shrewd guess.

Simon brought down box after box, and Taggles told him where to place them; but he took particular care not to place them himself. Some of them were heavy.

"Here, Simon is too slow for snails!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I'll gally well get my own box down. Here goes!"

Tom Merry dashed up the stairs, and presently he made his appearance on the landing above with a box on his shoulder that looked a good deal too heavy for him.

At that critical moment Simon came rushing along with a big box on his shoulder and a small one in his hand, and he caught the edge of Tom Merry's box.

The result was disastrous. The box went over the banisters, and, pitching on its corner in the hall beneath, flew open, while clothes of all descriptions were scattered around Mr. Robert D'Arcy, who very nearly received the box as well.

"How dare you throw your box down like that!" roared the old gentleman, flourishing his stick in a manner that reminded Tom Merry of Kemp.

"Sorry, sir! Quite an accident."

"Well, next time you want to have an accident like that, just you take care that I am not standing beneath."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, gazing at the wreckage. "Why, it's my box!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Sorry! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I'm surpwised!"

"You are not the only one in the family who is surprised!" growled Mr. Robert D'Arcy.

"Weally, Cousin Wobert, I considah him a wude boundah."

"What an idiot the boy is! I have a good mind to lay my stick across his back!"

This was merely what the old gentleman thought, but as he said it aloud, Arthur Augustus got the benefit of the brilliant thought.

"I pwotest at your widiculous wemarks. I must say that you are a good-hearted old chap, but your wemarks are weally wude. Then you dwess like a D'Arcy. We are all supposed to dwess in accordance with

ation, and I would weally like to see you dwess bettah, Cousin Wobert. I mean no diswespect, but it is your duty to considah your posish., and to dwess much bettah. It would be bettah if you were to come to my tailor, and then you will be able to dwess in the latest fashion. You will look much bettah when you are dwessed like me."

For some moments the old gentleman gazed at his swell relative in mute amazement at his effrontery, then he burst into roars of laughter.

"Throw that rubbish where it is," he said.

"Wubbish! Weally——"

"Throw it on the fire."

"Bai Jove! My best waistcoat is there, and——"

"He's got a dozen best waistcoats, sir, and each one is more beautiful than the other."

"Well, look here, you young rascals. I have got a waggonette outside, and if you like I can take a dozen of you. We can have lunch together, and I can join the train at one of the stations down the line. Bring your luggage, Arthur, and try not to make an idiot of yourself."

"Weally, Cousin Wobert——"

"Never mind about that."

"I wespect you——"

"I don't want you to do anything of the sort. You have hinted that my clothes are not respectable, so how can you respect me?"

"Why, weally——"

"I am not going to stand here all day listening to your jargon."

"Weally——"

"Come along, Tom Merry, and bring the other eleven. I can't take more, and expect I shall find that quite enough. I don't know how I could have been such an old fool as to make the offer."

"Perhaps for the same reason, sir, that you sent me that five-pound note."

"Phew! Will you come along?"

"And for the same reason that you have done so much good in this place."

"Don't talk nonsense, boy. You know nothing about the matter. And look you here, Tom Merry. If you dare to talk about anything like that to my relatives across your shoulder. Where is that young rascal, Billy Bunter? Of course, he must come. I am going to adopt that boy. It's a thing to do, but I shall make him spend his holidays with me. He likes it, but I can't help that. He will have to obey my orders."

"Right-ho, and wats! You bet."

"Why, the boy is becoming as big an idiot as Arthur!"

"Weally, Cousin Wobert, I am impwoving him!"

"Then give it up, and try to improve yourself. And look here, you young rascals. You are to behave yourselves. I won't have the waggonette overturned, or anything like that. And if you use peashooters, it must be at the male no——"

Mr. Robert D'Arcy appeared to have had experience with the ways of boys; but beyond noise, he had no trouble with them that day.

He had made all arrangements, and at about twelve o'clock they pulled up at a small country hotel, where a grand feast had been prepared for them.

To have seen the old gentleman laughing and joking with the noisy youngsters, no one would have thought him half his age, and they had a grand time of it.

Then when the meal was finished Robert D'Arcy seated himself in an easy-chair and lighted a cigar.

Arthur Augustus rose to make a speech, and after a little interruption he broke away.

What he said no one seemed to trouble about much, and he said a good bit of it two or three times over, because of the interruptions received.

"I weally hope, Cousin Wobert, that my wemarks have made an impwess'n Bai Jove!"

They had made a great impression, for the old gentleman was fast asleep, and the roars of laughter that burst forth caused him to start so violently that he dropped his cigar.

"I shall weally have to wepeat my speech!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Rats!"

"You will do nothing of the sort!"

"We'll bump you if you make the attempt!"

"Weally, I wathah fancy——"

"You are not going to repeat that giddy speech."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Dry up!"

"I wefuse to dwy up. I want to impwove my wespected welative."

"He doesn't need any improvement."

"He's jolly well perfect!"

"For he's a jolly good fellow!" Let him have it, kids!"

And they shouted out the old song, and the noise they made was astonishing.

And after that they went their various ways, having first made arrangements concerning meetings in the holidays.

THE END.