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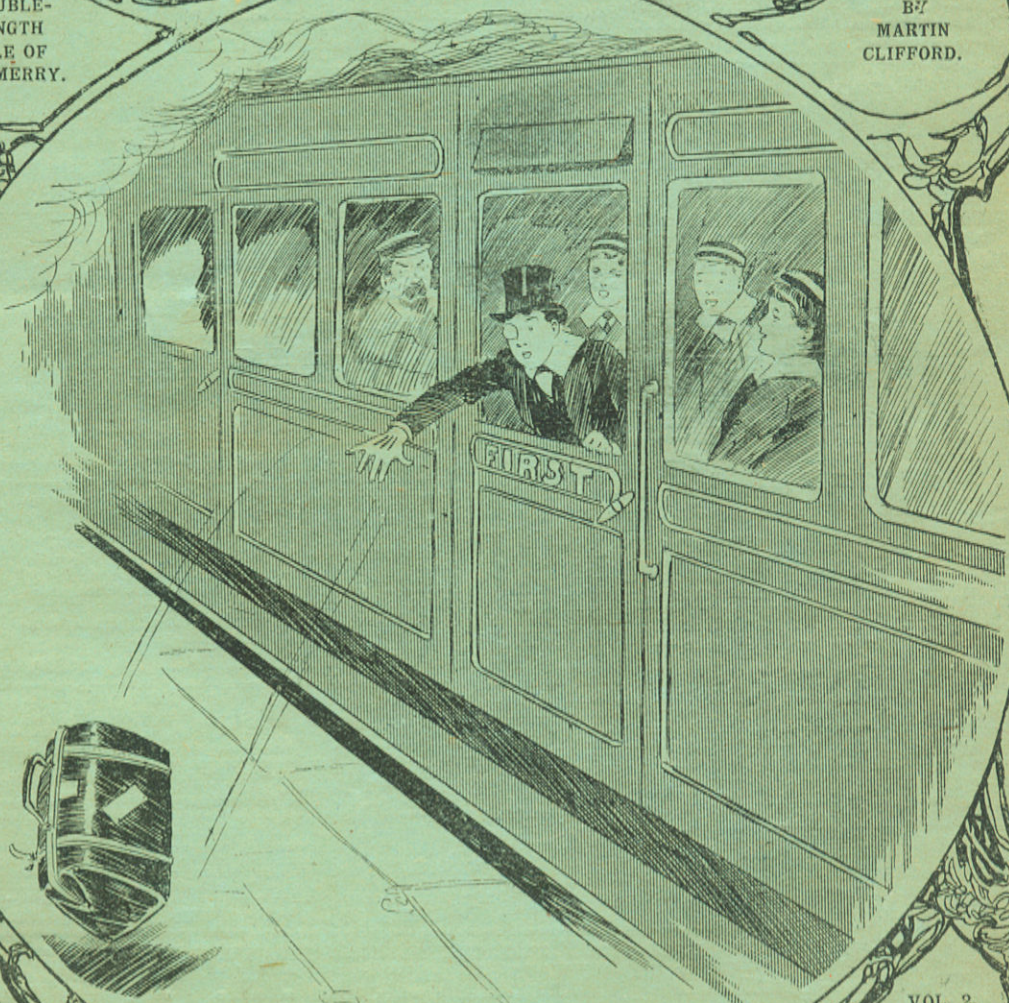
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NEW SERIES

THE HEAD'S SURPRISE.

DOUBLE-LENGTH
TALE OF
TOM MERRY.

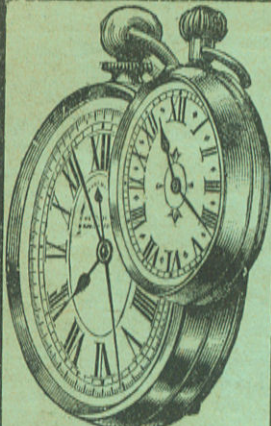
By
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.



NO. 27.

VOL. 2.

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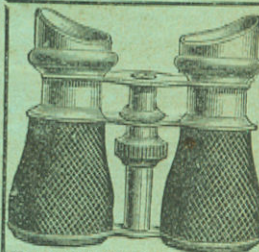
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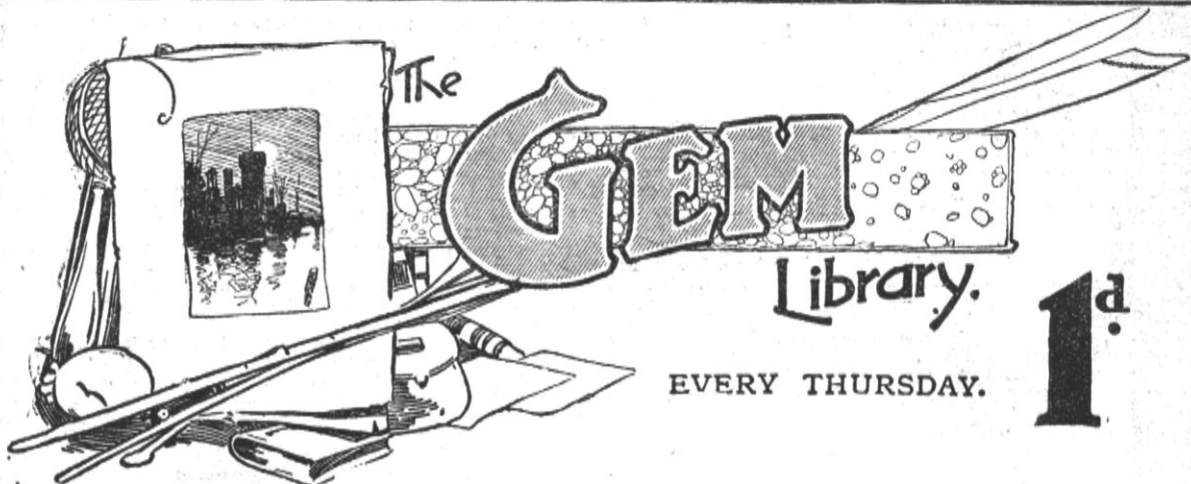


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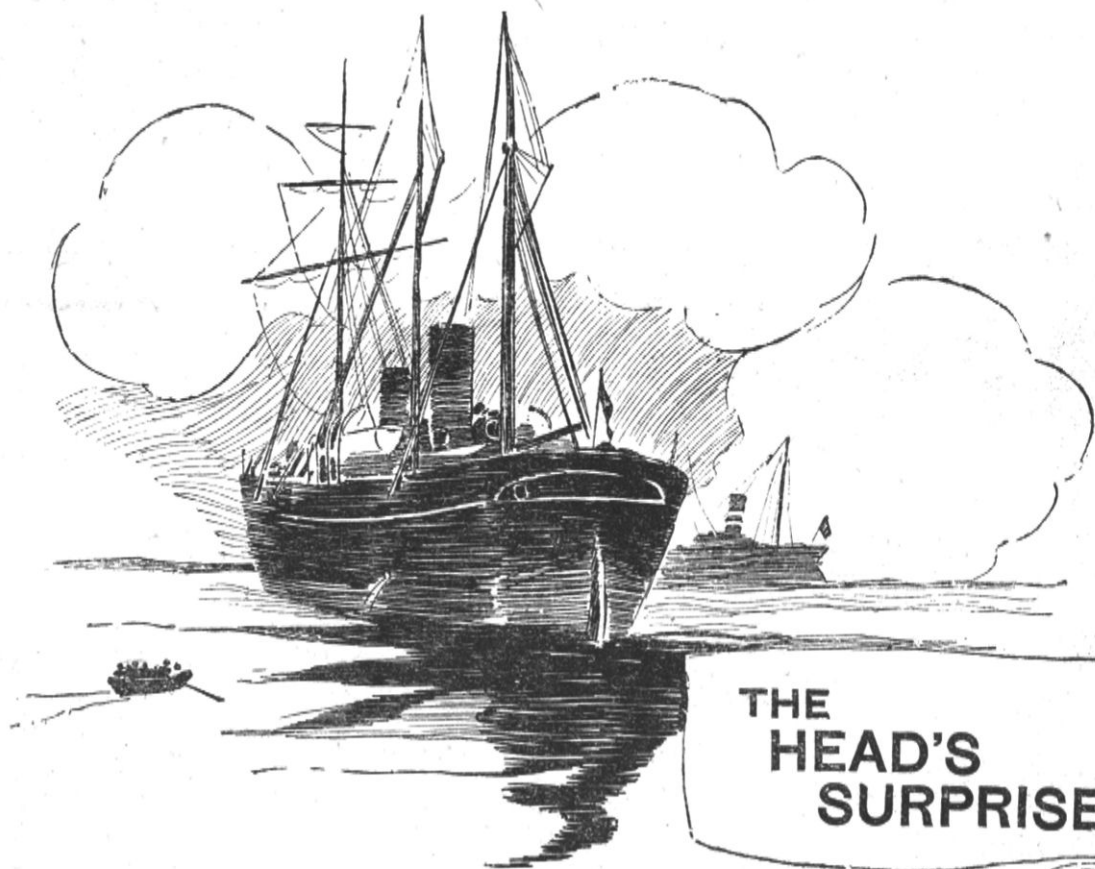
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**THE
HEAD'S
SURPRISE.**

A Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

D'Arcy Proposes to Celebrate the Occasion.

"Do you know, deah boys, I've been thinkin'—"
It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, who made that remark, at the tea-table in Study No. 6 in the School House. It was a simple remark enough, and yet its effect upon Blake, Herries, and Digby was staggering.

Jack Blake started to his feet, sending his chair backwards with a crash into the fire-grate. Digby dropped the tea-cup he had just drained, and it fell in a dozen fragments in the saucer. Herries laid down his knife and fork, and stared across the table at D'Arcy with wide-open eyes.

Arthur Augustus seemed rather surprised at the effect of his statement. He put up his eyeglass, and surveyed his chums one after another.

"Weally, deah boys—"

ANOTHER DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.
No. 27 (New Series)

"You've been thinking!" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How?" demanded Herries.

"What with?" asked Digby.

"With my bwain, of course," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I weally wish you fellows would not start wottin' diwectly I open my mouth. You have intewwupted the thread of my ideahs, and thown me into quite a fluttah."

"Well, you shouldn't spring a statement like that on us suddenly," said Jack Blake, recovering himself, and setting his chair upright. "You've thrown us into a flutter, and there's Dig's ten-cup done in, too."

"I wegard Dig as an ass."

"I was startled," said Digby. "But look here, Gussy, I'm not going to take that statement on your bare word. It's too surprising."

"Weally, Digby—"

"Of course, things happen sometimes that have never happened before," said Blake. "Still, in a case like this—"

"I wefuse to listen to your wot, Blake. I have been thinkin' sewiously, and I am goin' to tell you the weseult—"

"Pass the jam."

"Bothah the jam. I have been thinkin'—"

"Yes, but you can tell us the result of that new and startling experience while we're getting on with the grub," said Blake.

"Pass the jam."

"Oh, wats!" Arthur Augustus passed the jam, however, and resumed the thread of his discourse. "I have been thinkin' about—"

"Pass the butter."

"Bothah the buttah!"

"Bother it as much as you like, only pass it along. Don't be greedy."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave Blake a look that ought to have withered him up on the spot.

"Gweedy! Weally, Blake—"

"Well, pass the butter."

"I have no objection to passin' the buttah, but I do not like bein' incessantly intewwupted by fwivolous wemarks. There is the beastly buttah, and if you intewwupt me again, I shall wefuse to wesome my wemarks."

"Now, don't be cruel, Gussy—"

"I wefuse to be intewwupted. I have a gweat and bwiliant ideah, and if it is not weceived in this study with due wespert," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity—"there are othahs."

"Other ideahs, do you mean?" asked Blake.

"No, I don't; I mean other studies. I am gweatly inclined to go along and take my ideah stwaight to Tom Mewwy, who would be certain to jump at it at once."

"Or to jump on you for bothering him—"

"Weally, Blake, that is impos, for I should uttally wefuse to be jumped on. Howevah, to wesome. I have been thinkin' that as the end of the term is appwoachin—in fact, as it has almost awwived—it would be the pwopah thing to do to give a farewell suppah."

"By Jove!" said Blake.

"I wegard it as a weally good ideah," said D'Arcy. "A farewell suppah in the Fourth Form dormitory, to all the juniahs of the Lowah School."

"Ripping!"

"I am glad to see that you have sufficient intelligence to appreciate my wippin' ideah at its weal value," said D'Arcy loftily. "I think it's bwiliant. I'm not a conceited sort of chap, but I know a good ideah when I see one, and I have no hesitation in sayin' that this is a weally wippin' ideah."

"Good!" said Blake. "But have you come into a fortune?"

"Certainly not."

"Then where is the tin coming from?"

"Oh, that is a twivial detail," said Arthur Augustus. "I suppose the expense will be considerable, but that need not trouble us now. A farewell suppah is quite the thing, you know. We couldn't give a farewell tea to more than eight or nine chaps, as we have no woom here; but in the dormitory it is different. There is woom in the Fourth Form dormitory for all the juniahs of St. Jim's to have a wippin' feed."

"But the tin—"

"Oh, there are ways and means of waisin' the tin. We can all wite to our governahs, explainin' that we want some cash for a vewy important purpose. I am pwetty certain of gettin' a fivah from my governah, and I shall willingly contwibute the whole of it. Then there are a lot of things we have here, which we can't take home for the holidays, and which we may not need next term. We can sell them to one another, and waise a lot of money that way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally do not see anythin' in my pwoposition to cackle at, deah boys, to say nothin' of the fact that cacklin' at a fellow's wemarks is wathah bad form."

"When you get into the House of Lords, Gussy, you ought to get a post in the financial department of the Government," said Blake seriously. "You would make a ripping Chancellor

of the Exchequer. That's a jolly good scheme of yours for raising money. Suppose I sell my bat to Dig for five bob—"

"And I sell my rod to Blake for five bob," said Digby.

"That will be ten shillings," said Herries. "Half a sovereign raised already, you see."

"Yaas, wathah! The pwocceeds of both sales to be sub-scribed towards the fund—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"My dear ass, we might as well subscribe the cash without bothering about making the sales first of all."

D'Arcy rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Bai Jove, so you might, you know! Well, there is no objection to your doin' that, deah boys. We can waise the money, anyway, somehow—that is a twivial point. If you think the ideah is a good one—"

"Oh, it's good enough."

"Then we will waise the cash and cawwy it out. At the end of the term we ought to make fwienids with all our enemies, and part on good terms, you know. I intend to be vewy kind even to Weilly, though he has nevah tweeked me with pwopah wespect. I shall be patient with Skimpole when he bores me with Socialism and airships and things. I shall even westwain my tempah when Monty Lowthah makes his feahful puns and idiotic jokes. We shall all be sepawated for a vewy long time, and I want to part on good terms with ewewybody."

"So you will, if you stand a whacking farewell supper."

"My ideah is to stand it the last night before bweakin' up," explained D'Arcy. "It will cast a final wewmantic glow, as it were, over the close of the term. We haven't much time to make pwepawations, eithah."

"We shall have to get up a subscription," Jack Blake remarked thoughtfully. "Let me see; there will be roughly a hundred fellows, and suppose that the supper can be stood at a half crown a head—you can get a jolly good supper like that, by taking quantities—that's two hundred and fifty shillings."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Twelve pound ten," said Digby.

"Exactly. Now, we shall have to raise twelve pound ten by subscription. Some of the fellows, especially in the lowest Forms, won't be able to raise a half crown, or anything like it."

"And a jolly good many in the Fourth and the Shell, too," said Herries. "Money is tight at the end of the term."

"Therefore—"

"I shall be pwetty certain to have a fivah fwom my governah—"

"Therefore," repeated Blake, "the subscription must be made larger than half a crown, to cover deficiencies. Those who can pay will have to pay for those who can't. That's the secret of finance."

"But then those who won't pay will pretend they can't, and get paid for."

"Well, you have to risk that. Only a rotten cad would do that, and if a fellow's a cad it can't be helped. We'll fix the subscription at five bob—"

"Better still, make it an unfixed sum—everybody contwibutes according to his ability."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, that's a good plan, too," Blake finished his cup of tea, and rose. "D'Arcy's suggestion can be worked up into a good scheme—"

"I wefuse to allow you to put it like that, Blake. The scheme is mine."

"It will want thinking out—"

"I have thought it out."

"Now look here, Gussy—"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. This is my scheme, and I am goin' to wope in all the honah and glory," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I am goin' to go wound collectin' the beastly subscriptions."

Blake laughed.

"My dear Gussy—"

"I am quite wewolved on that point. I have before experienced the wottenness of havin' my ideahs collahed by othahs, aftah bein' weceived in the first place with dewision."

"Now, Gussy, talk sense," said Blake patiently. "On the face of it, it's necessary to leave it in my hands—"

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort."

"You haven't the sense to—"

"I wegard that wemark as wude."

"You see, you need an organising brain for this sort of thing—"

"My bwain is as organising as anybody else's."

"Very well," said Blake, after a pause. "We'll make Gussy collector, as the first suggestion came from him. Of course, he will make a bungle of it—"

"I shall wefuse to make a bungle of it."

"And then we will come to the rescue and help him out," said Blake generously.

"We will," said Herries and Digby.

"I shall not wequire anybody to come to the wescue and help me out," said Arthur Augustus obstinately. "I have a



"You young scoundrels!"
shouted the red-faced man,
shaking his fist after the boat.
"This is a trick, you young
rascals!"

little book here to entah all the subscriptions in, and I may as well start now with you fellows. How much are you goin' to contwibute, Blake, deah boy?"

Blake turned out his pockets.

"Ninencepence."

"Weally, Blake——"

"End of the term, you know. And that leaves me stony."

"Well, I suppose I had bettah take the ninepence," said D'Arcy, collecting it. "I shall entah your name at the head of the list, you know. But ninepence is a wotten small sum to start a twelve pound ten subscription with."

"Don't blame me," said Blake. "This affair is in your hands, not mine, and it's for you to devise some remedy if the subscriptions fall short."

"Weally, Blake."

"I wash my hands of it," said Blake, with a lofty gesture.

"There's the ninepence. Make the best of it."

"Pewwaps you are wight. Now, Dig, how much are you worth for this vevy laudable object?"

"Fourencepence!"

"Eh?"

"End of the term, you know," said Digby blandly. "Last fourencepence, too, and now I sha'n't be able to stamp my letter home unless someone lends me a stamp."

"Fourencepence isn't much——"

"That's your affair."

"Weally, Dig——"

"Don't bother me with details of a scheme which is wholly in your hands," said Digby. "Don't make a bungle of it, that's all. See that the full sum is raised. You can use any methods you like."

"How much is your contwibution, Hewwies?"

Horries laid a French penny on the table. D'Arcy looked at it, and then adjusted his eyeglass and looked at it again.

"I pwesume you are jokin', Hewwies?"

"Nothing of the sort," said Horries.

"I wufuse to take a foworeign coin which cannot be passed."

"You could pass it on a blind man."

"That would be a wotten thing to do, Hewwies; and, besides, I am not likely to have any business dealin's with a blind man in gettin' up this feed."

"Well, you can take it or leave it!" said Horries. "End of the term, you know. That's all I've got."

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"I call on the other fellows to witness that I've tendered my subscription. That's all that concerns me."

Arthur Augustus picked up the coin.

"Well, I wegard this study's contwibution as wathah wotten," he said. "I am goin' to start myself with five shillin's, and weally upon the whole I think I had bettah put that at the head of the list. It would be more appropwiate, and the sum looks bettah than Blake's wotten ninepence."

And D'Arcy made the entries carefully, and the subscribers initialled them, and the swell of the School House closed the book with a snap.

"I hope you chaps will have some wemittances before bweakin' up," he remarked, "if only for the cweedit of the study. I am goin' out to collect subscriptions now."

And Arthur Augustus picked up a silk hat and quitted Study No. 6, leaving his chums grinning.

CHAPTER 2.

Something "On."

"It looks to me as if there were something on," Tom Merry remarked.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the chums of the Shell at St. Jim's, were sitting on the stone balustrade of the School House steps, sunning themselves. Afternoon lessons were over, but the summer sun was still blazing.

Two figures had just passed before the view of the chums of the Shell—those of Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, and Mr. Railton, the housemaster of the School House. They were walking in the quadrangle deep in conversation, and quite oblivious of the glances of the juniors.

"Looks like it!" said Manners. "Somebody's been up to something, I suppose. It isn't us this time. We've been remarkably good lately—so far as they know, at all events."

"Perhaps it's something to do with the end of the term," Lowther suggested, rather hazily. "They may be getting up something or other for us."

"Getting up what?"
 "Well, we had a magic lantern show once, at the end of the term, and—"

"H'm! Might be something of that sort, certainly. But did you see what the doctor had in his hand?"

"A paper of some sort."
 "Exactly. And I caught something on it—and it was the diagram of a ship."

"A ship!"
 "Yes, and a diagram; kind of thing you go by, you know, when you're selecting your cabin at a steamship company's office."

"My hat! What can he want with the plan of a steamship?"

"That's what I was thinking."
 "I dare say it's simple enough," said Manners. "Perhaps Dr. Holmes is going abroad for his holiday, and is asking Mr. Railton's advice about the ship."

"Only I happen to know that he's going to Devonshire as usual," said Tom Merry. "So do you, if you thought for a moment."

"Well, then, perhaps Mr. Railton's going—"
 "Then what is there in that for them to chow-chow about so seriously?"

"Well, what's your idea, anyway?"
 "There's something on."

"Perhaps the Head is getting up a little surprise for us, to keep him in our minds during the vac," said Lowther, with a grin, "a general distribution of chocolate, or something of that sort."

"Hallo, here comes Gussy—and he looks as if he had something to impart, too," said Tom Merry, as the swell of the School House came out of the doorway. "I say, Gussy, my son, is there anything on?"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 The chums of the Shell straightened up at once, and looked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with great interest. This confirmation of Tom Merry's theory that something was "on," came rather unexpectedly.

"There is something on, is there?" exclaimed Manners.
 "Yaas, wathah!"

"And you know something about it?"
 "I should wathah say so!"

"I expect he's gassing," said Lowther incredulously. "I don't see how Gussy could know anything about it, if there was anything on."

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed Monty Lowther with a disdainful glance.

"Weally, Lowthah, I wegard your wemark as dispawagin' and widdleous! I know all about the mattah, as a mattah of fact!"

"How do you know?"
 "We've just been talkin' it ovah in the study."
 "Then the other kids know, too?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a kid."
 "The other asses, then—they all know?"
 "I decline to be called an ass."

"Look here, do Blake and Herries and Dig know what's on?" exclaimed Tom Merry, getting exasperated.
 "Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I'm blessed if I understand it," said Manners. "I don't see how those kids could have got on to the thing, whatever it is."

"I shall be vewy pleased to expl'n—"
 "Honour bright, Gussy—you know what's on?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "Then explain what it is."
 "With pleasuah, deah boy! There's to be a farewell suppah given to all the membahs of the Lowah Forms at St. Jim's, to celebratw the close of the term and the beginnin' of the midsummah holidays!"

The Terrible Three gazed at Arthur Augustus, and at each other, in blank amazement. That Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton could be so earnestly discussing such a project as that of giving a farewell supper to the juniors of St. Jim's seemed to them absolutely incredible. Yet D'Arcy spoke positively.

"You are sure, D'Arcy?" asked Tom Merry, at last.
 "Yaas, wathah!"

"But how do you know?"
 "Well, I wathah ought to know, as the ideah owiginated with me."

"With you!"
 "Certainly, deah boy!"
 "And it has been taken up?"

"Yaas, and it's goin' to be cawwied out, too."
 "Blessed if I can understand it," murmured Monty Lowther.

"There's a misunderstanding somewhere."
 "Nothin' of the sort, Lowthah. There is no misunderstandingin'. There is to be a big farewell suppah to all the juniahs

of St. Jim's, and it is to be given in the Fourth Form dormitow in the School House."

"To all the Fourth?"
 "Yaas, and the Shell as well, and the Remove and the Third."

"What about the New House?"
 "The New House fellows will be included, of course. The feed is given to evewy membah of the Lowah Forms at the coll."

"And who stands the expense?"
 "We stand it ourselves, by subscription."

"Oh, I see! The Head doesn't pay for it?"
 D'Arcy stared.

"The Head! Why should the Head pay for it?"
 "Well, under the circumstances he might."

"I see nothin' in the circs to justify the ideah that the Head might pay for it. The Head won't know anythin' about it."
 Tom Merry jumped.

"The Head won't—what?"
 "He won't know anythin' about it. The feed will be given in the Fourth Form dormitow in the School House aftah lights out. If the Head knew anythin' about it he would put it down at once, wathah!"

The Terrible Three stared at Arthur Augustus.
 "I weally fail to see the cause of your surprize," said Arthur Augustus. "The New House fellows will have to get into the dormitow by a wope up to the window, or a wope laddah, you know, and it would hardly do to let the Head know anythin' about that, you know."

"Look here, Gussy, if you're not off your rocker—"
 "I am certainly not off my weckah."

"Then what do you mean by saying that the Head's giving a farewell feed that he doesn't know anything about?"
 It was D'Arcy's turn to stare.

"I weally fail to compwehend the dwift of your wemarks, Tom Mewwy. Who said the Head was givin' a farewell feed?"
 "Why, you did!" howled the Terrible Three, with one voice.

"I certainly said nothin' of the sort."
 "You did! You distinctly said—"

"I distinctly said that—"
 "That the Head—"

"That we—"
 "The Head—"

"We—"
 "Look here!" shouted Tom Merry. "Shut up a minute, and explain—"

"How's he to explain if he shuts up?" asked Monty Lowther.
 "You shut up, too, old chap, with your rotten conundrums. Look here, D'Arcy, we asked you if you knew what was on—"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "And you said you did—"

"And so I do, deah boy—"
 "And you said it was a farewell feed to the juniors of the school—"

"So it is, bai Jove!"
 "And the Head—"

"The Head's got nothin' to do with it. It is my ideah, and we've talked it ovah in the study and made all necessary awwangements. I am collectin' the subscriptions."

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.
 "Oh, I see. It's a misunderstanding."

"It looks to me more like stupidity," said D'Arcy. "I explained distinctly enough for any ass to understand that—"

"We asked you what was on, because we've just seen the Head and Mr. Railton chawing over something as serious as a funeral."
 "Oh, I see."

"And you started telling us about some silly wheeze of your own, as if there was anything interesting in that!"
 "Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"What I want to know is, what have the Head and Mr. Railton got on their little chests?"

"I weally do not know, Tom Mewwy, and I take vewy little intewest in the mattah. All my attention at present is given to this new ideah, which is a weally wippin' one. We are goin' to give a farewell feed in the Fourth Form dormitow to all the juniahs of St. Jim's, and we are twyin' to waise twelve pounds ten to covah the expenses."

"How much have you got as yet?"
 "Six shillin' and a penny, and a Fwench penny ovah," said Arthur Augustus, referring to his notebook. "That is the subscription from Study No. 6 alone."

"Rather an odd amount, isn't it?"
 "Each chap contwibutes accordin' to his means and his genewosity," explained the swell of the School House. "If you are rich, you shove in a pound if you like, if you are poor, you put up a penny."

Tom Merry winked at his chums.
 "I see. I wish I wew rich, for the sake of the subscription. But I am afraid I am poor."

"So am I," said Lowther. "End of the term, you know. Money goes."

"Same here," remarked Manners, with a sad shake of the head, "I can spare a penny exactly, and no more—but I won't make it a smaller sum than that. Gussy is welcome to my last penny."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Do you want us to sign anything?" asked Tom Merry. "I'll sign anything you like, Gussy, for the good of the cause. Here's my penny."

"If you weally can't spare any more."

"That's my last penny," said Manners.

"Vewy well. Small contwibutions are weceived thankfully, and largah ones in pwoportion. That is thweepence, any way. Not vewy much towards twelve pounds ten, but I suppose ewvy little helps."

D'Arcy entered the three pennies, and the Terrible Three initialled the entries. The swell of the School House put the book into his pocket, and shut up his silver pencil.

"Thank you, deah boys. But I weally hope that some of the fellows are in a wathah less stony state, or the subscription looks like bein' a failure."

And the School House swell walked on with a thoughtful brow. The Terrible Three grinned at one another.

"I told him it was my last penny," said Manners, in a reflective way. "Nothing like telling the exact truth, is there? It was my last penny. I have some shillings and half-crowns, and a half-sovereign, but that was my last penny."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked back as he heard the chums of the Shell shout with laughter, and wondered what they were laughing at.

CHAPTER 3.

Skimpole is Disappointed

"SKIMPOLE! I say, Skimpole!"

Skimpole, of the Shell, was crossing the quadrangle, with his straw hat on the back of his head, his hands in the pockets of his baggy trousers, and a far-away expression upon his spectacled countenance. He did not hear Arthur Augustus call, and walked right on, communing with himself. Skimpole, the brainy man of the School House, was given to communing with himself, and sometimes he inflicted the results of his ruminations upon his House fellows. It was never possible to guess whether Skimpole was meditating upon Socialism, Determinism, Schopenhauerism, or Darwinism, but it was certain to be something ending in "ism."

"Skimpole, deah boy."

Still Skimpole did not hear. D'Arcy quickened his pace to overtake the brainy member of the Shell.

"Skimpole, deah boy!"

Skimpole was muttering aloud.

"Toiling millions—submerged tenth—dawn of freedom. Ha—"

"I say, Skimpole, deah boy."

The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's heard at last. He turned an inquiring eye upon Arthur Augustus.

"Did you speak, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You have interrupted my meditations. I will tell you what I was meditating upon."

"Pway don't twouble."

"It is no trouble at all, and it may enlighten you, as a representative of the bloated, blighting aristocracy. I have of late neglected my duties."

"Haven't you done your pwerp?"

Skimpole made a disdainful gesture.

"I should hardly be likely to allude in such terms to the mere matter of forgetting to do my preparation."

"What is it then? Have you been late for class?"

"Probably, I do not remember. I say I have neglected my duties. I have allowed my time to be taken up in planning an airship."

"Yaas, I've heard about that wot."

"It was not rot," explained Skimpole. "It was a wonderful and epoch-making discovery, a discovery unprecedented in the annals of aerostatics."

"Bai Jove!"

"Such things come easily to a fellow of my brain capacity. But while allowing myself to be led away by the interest of this great discovery, I have neglected the great cause of Socialism."

"Have you weally?"

"I have. I had perfected my machine, except for a few details—I had finished it, as a matter of fact, except with regard to the method of raising it from the ground and propelling it through the air. Except for these points, my airship was a complete success. But I shall cease my work in this direction: I make a sacrifice of my airship on the altar of Socialism."

"That is weally generous of you, Skimpole."

"I intend to be generous. I devote myself to the cause. I have not yet finished my great book on Socialism. Two hundred and seventy-five chapters remain to be written. It is a work o months"

"And I expect it would take longah than that to wead them."

"I shall resume my labours. I was thinking out the plan of the two hundred and thirty-ninth chapter when you interrupted me."

"Bai Jove!"

"It is a great trouble to be interrupted in the midst of mighty meditations by puerile remarks from persons of weak intellect."

"Weally, Skimpole—"

"I am speaking in a general sense. I mean—"

"Nevah mind what you mean. I want to speak to you—"

"But I want to tell you—"

"And I want to tell you—"

"Please allow me to speak, D'Arcy. This egotism, in a lad of your years, is unseemly. I have always despised a fellow who will go on talking and not give anybody else a chance. Now, as I was saying—"

"Weally, Skimpole—"

"The only method I can think of for publishing my book is by subscription—"

"Bai Jove, I was just going to speak to you about a subscription—"

"Were you really? You are getting up a subscription for publishing my book on Socialism? Really, D'Arcy, I take this verry kindly."

"You are quite mis—"

"It shows that the great truths of the glorious cause are beginning to percolate through even the thickest skulls."

"Weally, Skimpole, you ass—"

"If a chap of your mental calibre sees the light at last, what will more sensible fellows do? I see the results of my labours, the reward of my efforts close at hand," said Skimpole, raising his voice, as if he were addressing an imaginary audience, and waving his hand. "The glorious result of my labours is at hand. St. Jim's will be converted to Socialism by my efforts! Do I take credit to myself for this? I say, do I take credit to myself, my friends? I do not: the credit is due—"

"Weally, Skimpole, you are quite mistaken—"

"Very well, then, we will say that some credit is due to me," said Skimpole. "I will accept your assurance, D'Arcy, that some credit is due to me."

"I did not—"

"The sum of two hundred pounds will be sufficient to publish the book, and after that the conversion of the whole country to Socialism will be only a matter of months, perhaps of weeks," said Skimpole. "If I am elected first President of the British Republic, I shall not refuse. My natural modesty would lead me to refuse, but my duty towards—"

"You uttah ass."

"Really, D'Arcy, I fail to understand you. You must surely be in sympathy with my aims, when you are raising a subscription to cover the cost of publishing my great and epoch-making book."

"I am waising a subscription—"

"Very good. Two hundred pounds—"

"Of twelve pounds ten—"

Skimpole stared.

"Twelve pounds ten! Are you jesting?"

"Certainly not. I—"

"But twelve pounds ten would be inadequate for the smallest edition, my dear fellow. Two hundred pounds—"

"Twelve pounds ten will be enough for the purpose I have in view, you shwiekin' idiot," said D'Arcy.

"That of publishing my book—"

"Wats!"

"What! That is not your object?"

"Certainly not."

"You led me to suppose—"

"Nothin' of the sort. You supposed that silly wot because you are a howlin' idiot," explained D'Arcy. "There was no other weason."

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"I am waisin' a subscription to give a dormitowey feed to wind up the midsummah term, and celebrate the occasion before we separate for the August holidays," D'Arcy resumed, "I am bookin' subscriptions now."

"Oh!" said Skimpole.

"Ewvy fellow contwibutes accordin' to his means," said the School House swell. "How much are you puttin' up, Skimpole?"

"Is it possible, D'Arcy, that you have interrupted my valuable reflections for the purpose of talking to me about a dormitory feed?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Dear me! And you can feed quietly in the dormitory, and roll in easy comfort upon your velvet chairs, while the toiling millions are—"

"You uttah ass, there are no velvet chairs in the Fourth Form dormitowey. What are you talkin' about?"

"I was speaking metaphorically. I mean—"

"Am I to put down your name?"

"My name! Oh, certainly; you can put down my name if you like. I have no objection to attending this feed, and may be able to speak some words in season?"

"Well, how much?"

"Eh?"

"How much is your subscription?"

"My subscription! Do you mean money?"

"Well, what do you think I mean? If I'm to put your name down I must put your subscription down with it. How much, dear boy?"

"Oh, I understand. I am sorry I have no money."

"You uttah ass, you might have said that at the start. You ought to subsewibe somethin'."

"I gave my last sixpence to a tramp at the gates. He claimed my compassion as a human brother, and I had no alternative, as a sincere Socialist, but to help him. I gave him my last coin. I would have given him yours."

"Would you? I should have given you a feahful thwashin' if you had," said Arthur Augustus. "Are you quite sure that you are goin' to subsewibe nothin' to this grand and bwiliant ideah?"

"I lam sorry that my state of impecuniosity renders it impossible," said Skimpole. "If you wish, however, you may put my name down for five shillings."

"Yas; but if you—"

"And you can lend me the five shillings."

"Oh, I see," said D'Arcy dubiously.

"I will repay you from the profits on my book when it is published."

"Will you?" said Arthur Augustus, with a wincing look.

"I suppose you are bein' funnay, Skimpole."

"Certainly not. The profits on my book will be—"

"Then you are a shwickin' ass. Good-bye."

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Oh, wing off!"

And the swell of the School House walked away in search of more promising subscribers, leaving Skimpole to his meditations.

CHAPTER 4

A Generous Subscription!

FIGGINS, Kerr, and Wynn, of the New House—commonly known as Figgins & Co.—came off the junior cricke ground with their faces glowing. Figgins had a ball under his arm, and Kerr was slinging a cricket ball into the air and catching it again at every few paces. Fatty Wynn was breathing hard.

Figgins & Co. had been at practice at the nets, and were feeling very satisfied with themselves. Figgins was a mighty batsman, and there were few bowlers in the Lower Forms at St. Jim's who could make an impression upon his wicket when he was in form.

"Pretty nearly the last practice we shall get this term," said Figgins. "I can't say I don't like holidays, but I'm sorry to be leaving the school and you chaps for so long, too."

"Same here," said Kerr. "I wish we could fix it up to spend the August together; but I suppose it can't be done."

"Come along to the tuckshop," said Fatty Wynn, with a melancholy expression. "We can have another feed or two together, anyway."

Figgins grinned. "Well, of course that's a great comfort," he remarked. "I shall miss Fatty more than anything else."

"Will you really, Figgy?"

"Yes. It's so entertaining to see you eat, and—"

"Oh, really, Figgins!"

"Let's get along to the shop, anyway," said Figgins. "Mrs. Taggles has some new cream puffs, so I hear. Hallo, here's Taggy! Taggy, how do you do? Quite well?"

Taggles, the school porter of St. Jim's, grunted. As Figgins had seen him half a dozen times that day, his anxious inquiries seemed rather uncalled for.

"Sorry it's the end of the term, I suppose, Taggy?" said Figgins. "You will miss us during August, won't you?"

"Yes, I shall, Master Figgins," said Taggles; "and a jolly good miss, too, that's what I say. A honest man will be able to have some peace and quietness, without being worried by rampaging young varmintes."

"We shall miss you, Taggles. We shall miss the beautiful blush you wear at the end of your nose, and the delicious aroma of gin and bitters that you spread wherever you go. Are you going, Taggles?"

Taggles was gone. Figgins & Co. chuckled and walked on towards the tuckshop. Tom Merry came scudding across the quadrangle, and almost ran into them.

"Hallo, where are you running to?" exclaimed Figgins, getting into his way, and throwing his arms round the hurrying junior. "Just saved you in time. Help me to save him, kids!"

The Co. promptly helped. Kerr took a grip round Tom

Merry's neck from behind, and Fatty Wynn stooped and ierked his ankles off the ground with a good Rugger tackle.

Tom Merry struggled.

"Let me go, you duffers!"

"Just saved you in time," said Figgins severely. "By Jove, he looks hot and excited. Better bathe his face in the fountain."

"Lemme go!"

"We must look after your health, Tom Merry. A nice bathe in cold water—"

"Don't be an ass, Figgy. I'm on a message for Mr. Railton."

"Oh, that alters the case."

Figgins & Co. set Tom Merry on his feet. The school House junior gasped for breath, and set his collar straight.

"Where are you taking your giddy message?" asked Figgins. "You were bolting directly towards our house."

"That's where I'm going. Mr. Railton's message is to your housemaster."

Figgins whistled.

"Oho! Mr. Railton doesn't often have much to say to old Ratty. Is anything on?"

"I believe so. I can't catch on to what it is, but there's something in the wind," said Tom Merry. "The Head has been chow-chowing with Mr. Railton, both of them as solemn as a couple of boiled owls; and now all of a sudden Mr. Railton has sent me to ask Mr. Ratcliff to step over to the School House, to the Head's study."

"Sort of consultation, I suppose," said Figgins. "What can it mean, I wonder? Somebody going to be expelled?"

"I don't think it's that. Railton didn't look like it. But I must be off. Ta-ta!"

"Bye-bye."

Tom Merry scudded off to the New House, and disappeared within its portals. Figgins & Co. looked at one another.

"Something on," said Figgins. "I wonder what it is, I—"

"Bai Jove, is that you, Figgins? I've been lookin' for you, dear boy."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came up beaming, with a notebook in one hand and a pencil in the other.

"Well, you've found me now," said Figgins. "Do you want anything, or is it simply your wish to gaze upon my countenance and die?"

"Oh, don't wot, Figgins! I want to speak to you chaps about a subscription—"

"A subscription! A testimonial, do you mean, for somebody?"

"Rot!" said Kerr. "I don't believe in testimonials."

"I don't, either," said Figgins. "Sorry, Gussy, but you'll have to go further."

"I should say so!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn emphatically. "With money so short at the end of the term, too. You can start that next September, Gussy."

"It's not a wotten testimonial."

"What is it, then?"

"A subscription for a feed."

"Oh!"

"Now you're talking," said Fatty Wynn heartily. "Why couldn't you say so at first? Let's have the particulars."

"We are thinkin' of standin' a farewell feed in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House on the last night of the term."

"Ripping good idea!"

"I am glad it meets with your approval, Wynn. It's to celebrate the occasion, and to alleviate the sorrow of partin', you know."

"That sounds rather contradictory," remarked Figgins. "But go on. It's not a bad idea. Who stands the feed?"

"Everybody. There's a general subscription, and all who have anything to give, give, and all who haven't, don't."

"Jolly simple, at any rate. Let's look at the subscription list."

"I haven't got many names down yet. Most of the fellows seem to be wathah short of money as it's the end of the term. Some of them, I am afraid, are wathah mean. There's the beastly list."

Figgins read out the list with a grin. "J. Blake, 9d.; Herries, 1d. (French); A. Digby, 4d.; T. Merry, 1d.; H. Manners, 1d.; M. Lowther, 1d."

"Fat lot!" said Fatty Wynn, with a sniff.

"I'm goin' to put my name in at the top for five bob."

"That will make six and sevenpence, for seven subscribers," said Kerr. "How much are you trying to raise?"

"Twelve pound ten."

"Then it doesn't look very promising."

"There's more pwomisin' than payin', I'm afraid," said D'Arcy ruefully. "I've had pwomises from several fellows, but cash seems to be wathah scarce. I suppose you fellows will be able to contwibute somethin' decent?"

Figgins winked at the Co.

"We'll beat the Shelf subscriptions, anyway," he said. "We'll put Tom Merry and his lot in the shady shade."



"How much is your contribution to the spread, Hewwies?" said D'Arcy. Herries laid a French penny on the table. D'Arcy looked at it, and then adjusted his eyeglass, and looked at it again. "I pwesume you are joking, Hewwies?" he said.

"Good!" said D'Arcy, beaming. "I'll w'ite your names down. There you are—Figgins, Kerr, Wynn. Now, how much?"

"Oh, double Tom Merry's subscription, for me," said Figgins, with an air of magnificence.

"Eh?"

"Same for me," said Kerr. "Double what Tom Merry puts up."

"Same here," said Fatty Wynn generously. "I'll double Merry's subscription, too. Here you are, Gussy."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Oh, don't thank us, Gussy. We're backing you up like this because it's a really good idea."

"I wasn't goin' to thank you. I was goin' to remark that double a penny is only twopence, and—"

"Did you work that out in your head?" asked Kerr, with interest.

"Oh, pway don't wot! It's all vewy well to talk about subscwibin' double what Tom Mewwy has put up."

"We mean it," said Figgins seriously. "We feel called upon, in a case like this, to show that the New House can be depended upon to rally round in a good cause."

"If you call subscwibin' twopence apiece wallyin' wound, I can only say—"

"Don't say anything, Gussy. We don't want thanks. Take the tin, and don't say a word. There you are."

"I wegard this—"

"Tell Tom Merry we've subscribed twice as much as he has. Come on, you chaps, and let's get some cream puffs."

"But weally, Figgins—"

"Sorry I can't stop now, Gussy. I hope the subscription list will be a howling success. Come on, kids!"

Figgins & Co. entered the tuckshop, kept within the precincts of St. Jim's by Dame Taggles. D'Arcy gazed after them.

"Bai Jove, I wegard this as absolutely wotten!" he murmured. "Double Tom Mewwy's subscription! The wottahs!"

And D'Arcy snapped the book shut.

CHAPTER 5. A House Row!

TOM MERRY tapped at the door of Mr. Ratcliff's study in the New House. An acid voice bade him enter, and he opened the door.

Mr. Ratcliff, a tall, thin gentleman with a sour face, house-master of the New House, looked grimly at the School House junior. He had had his rubs with Tom Merry, and he did not

like the frank, sunny-faced youngster. He did not like anything frank or sunny, as a matter of fact.

"What do you want, Merry?"

"If you please, sir, Mr. Railton says will you step over to the School House to Dr. Holmes's study, on an important matter?"

Mr. Ratcliff rose gingerly.

"H'm! I suppose so."

"I was to say that the Head wished it," said Tom Merry.

"Very well."

Mr. Ratcliff did not take the trouble to thank Tom Merry for bringing the message. In his opinion politeness was wasted upon a boy. Tom might have been a paid messenger for all the courtesy he received from Mr. Ratcliff.

"You may go, Merry."

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry left the study, and put on his cap again. The housemaster, who was curious to know why the Head wished to see him, left the room at once, and walked away with his quick, nervous, irritable steps. There was a murmur in the passage as Tom Merry sauntered on, the housemaster having passed him before he was a dozen paces from the study door.

"School House waster!"

Tom Merry looked round. Pratt and French and Jimson were looking at him from a side-passage, with threatening gestures.

The feud between School House and New House seldom slept. To see Tom Merry, the leader of the junior section of the School House, sauntering so calmly along a New House passage exasperated the rival juniors. They looked at Tom Merry, who smiled sweetly in return, and glanced after Mr. Ratcliff. Was the housemaster too near for a rush upon the School House boy to be prudent?

Tom Merry kissed his hand to the New House juniors, and walked on. Pratt snapped his teeth.

"Go for him!" he muttered.

French shook his head.

"Ratty's too near."

"He wouldn't hear us."

"Rats! He can hear a pin drop when you don't want him to. He's got the ears of a fox."

"Look here, we could collar the young rotter and bump him into a class-room before Ratty had time to look round. Then—"

"Good egg," said Jimson. "I don't see why we shouldn't risk it. Fancy that School House waster strolling around in our House as cool as a cucumber."

"Come on, then!"

The three juniors made a sudden, silent rush. Tom Merry,

being quite secure from the fact that he was following in the housemaster's footsteps, had not looked back again. He heard the stealthy footfalls, however, and half turned—and then the grip of the enemy was upon him.

"Quick!" panted Trench. "Into the class-room!"
Tom Merry had been passing a class-room door. Pratt jerked at the handle in a twinkling, and French and Jimson bumped Tom Merry towards the door.

Had all gone well, Tom Merry and his captors would have been through the class-room doorway and out of sight in a second or so; and, Mr. Ratcliff, if he had looked round at the noise, would have seen nothing. But all did not go well. It happened that the class-room door was locked, and it did not open to Pratt's frantic jerk.

But there was no stopping French or Jimson. They brought Tom Merry towards the door with a terrific bump, and as it did not open, Tom bumped right on to it, with a crash that could have been heard all over the New House.

"Oh!"
Tom Merry gasped, and collapsed on the floor, all the breath driven out of him by the shock. French fell over him, and sprawled on the linoleum; and Jimson knocked his head against the door and gave a howl. Pratt was still struggling blindly with the handle of the door.

Mr. Ratcliff turned round. He fixed his eyes upon the struggling group of gasping juniors, and a dark frown overspread his brow.

"Boys!"
Mr. Ratcliff's voice was not loud, but it had an acid, penetrating quality that made it clearly audible and more impressive—to those under his authority—than a loud and angrier voice.

French staggered to his feet. He looked daggers at Pratt.
"You ass!" he murmured. "Why didn't you get the door open?"

"It's locked!"
"You ought to have opened it, anyway."

"I couldn't—"

"B-r-r-r—"

"Boys!"

"Yes, sir," said Jimson, rubbing his head. "Did you speak, sir?"

"Yes, I did speak, Jimson. What is the meaning of this disgraceful disturbance?"

"Which, sir?"

"Don't pretend to misunderstand me, Jimson. What is the meaning of this? Why have you attacked Merry? Merry, get up."

"Certainly, sir," gasped Tom Merry, scrambling to his feet, and breathing very quickly. "It's all right, sir; I'm not hurt. It was only a joke."

"Silence!"

"But, sir—"

"Hold your tongue!"

Tom Merry gritted his teeth and was silent. He knew what was coming, and all the dislike he had always felt for Mr. Ratcliff surged up in his breast into almost hatred at that moment.

Mr. Railton took a good-humoured view of the House rivalry at St. Jim's, and on an occasion like this he would have been judiciously deaf and blind. Not so Mr. Ratcliff. If he could make several people unhappy and uncomfortable from a sense of duty he was just in his element.

"What is the cause of this attack upon Merry?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh, nothing, sir," said French, biting his lip. "It wasn't really an attack, sir. Merry knows we didn't mean anything but fun."

"Of course," said Tom Merry. "And I don't mind a bit—"

"Hold your tongue, Merry!"

"Very well, sir."

"Whether Merry objects to this or not, I object to having the passage of my House turned into a bear-garden," said Mr. Ratcliff. "You seem to have made an unprovoked attack upon Merry. Have you anything to say for yourselves?"

"It was only in fun, sir."

"That is no excuse. Jimson and French, as you belong to a higher form, you will take two hundred lines each."

"Ye-es, sir," said Jimson and French dismally.

"You will take one hundred, Pratt."

"Ye-es, sir."

"And if anything of this kind occurs again I shall deal with you severely."

And Mr. Ratcliff marched on with rustling gown, leaving a savage bitterness behind him which a master of proper feeling would never have excited in the breasts of his pupils.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry," muttered Tom Merry. "The beast knows it was only fun, and he pretends to take it seriously just to rag us."

"It's all your fault, you School House rotter," said French. "What do you mean by marching about our House as if you owned it?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, draw it mild! It's the fault of your rotten housemaster."

"You let our housemaster alone," said Pratt, with all the loyalty of a New House fellow. He might detest Mr. Ratcliff himself, but he wasn't going to have him run down by a School House chap. "Let him alone, anyway. Get out!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, travel along!"

And Tom Merry travelled along.

CHAPTER 6.

The Doctor's Idea

"A H, I am glad you have come, Mr. Ratcliff," said Dr. Holmes. "Pray be seated. I have a rather important matter to discuss with you and Mr. Railton."

Mr. Ratcliff entered the Head's study wondering what was wanted. Mr. Railton was there, and both the gentlemen were looking very thoughtful. On the table was spread out the plan of a huge steamship, and several letters with official-looking headings lay upon it.

Mr. Ratcliff glanced at them as he sat down. That there was something in the wind he knew, but he could not guess what it was.

"Mr. Railton and I have hit upon a somewhat novel idea," said the Head. "We wish to have your opinion, Mr. Ratcliff, and to consult you generally."

"Certainly, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff spoke quietly, but there was bitterness in his heart. Whenever the Head wished for counsel upon any point, Mr. Railton was always the man he turned to. It was probable that in the course of time Mr. Railton would succeed the doctor as Head of the school. Mr. Ratcliff always felt that he was in a secondary place, and that gave a keener edge to his dislike of the other housemaster. Mr. Railton knew very well how he felt, but the good old doctor was quite unaware of it.

"The August holidays are on the point of beginning," said Dr. Holmes, "St. Jim's is going to break up. The idea has been suggested to me of planning a cruise for the summer holidays, to include practically the whole school."

Mr. Ratcliff started.

The idea was a novel one, with a vengeance.

"A cruise—for the whole school!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. I daresay you know that the idea of a school afloat has been tried on a small scale, I believe successfully. For an establishment of the size of St. Jim's, and of the standing of this college, the matter is of course more difficult. Yet I think the idea is worth trying."

The Head paused a moment. It was evident that he had thought out the plan very carefully, and that he believed it to be an excellent one.

"My idea is this," he resumed. "The idea can be tried at first during the holidays. Such of the boys as choose to come, or whose parents decide that they shall come, will form the party. I have no doubt that there will be many willing and able to share in the cruise. Mr. Railton thinks so."

"Certainly," said the School House master. "I am sure of it."

"The expense will of course be great, but the charges made will cover it—just cover it, and no more. During the holidays the idea will be tried, and it will be seen how the idea of a school afloat can be made to answer. If quite successful, there is no reason why a part, at least, of St. Jim's should not begin the next term afloat."

Mr. Ratcliff stared.

"It is a novel idea," he said.

"Yes, but consider its advantages. Given a large vessel

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of sufficient accommodation, such as that of which I have a plan here, any number of passengers can be taken. The saloon will be turned into a school-room. Classes can proceed the same as if the boys were at home at St. Jim's. They will have the great advantage of fresh sea air and healthy exercise. Cricket will have to be given up for the time, except upon a limited scale, but other sports can take its place."

"I should see to that," said Mr. Railton.

"Whether Michaelmas term shall commence afloat or ashore can, however, be left undecided for the present," said Dr. Holmes. "There is no reason at all why the school should not try the idea during the vacation."

Mr. Ratcliff nodded.

"Certainly, sir."

"You are in favour of the idea, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Well, it comes as a great surprise to me, sir," said the New House master slowly, "but I do not see why it should not be a success."

"Mr. Railton thinks so."

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Railton, "I regard the scheme as an excellent one, for the holidays at any rate. Whether it is continued during term-time can be settled later. I have no doubt that a large proportion of the boys will be glad to come."

"I think so too."

"But the arrangements?" said Mr. Ratcliff. "What ship are you thinking of? You are not intending to purchase one surely?"

The doctor shook his head.

"I intend to charter one. I have the plan of it here, and the offer of it has been made to me at a reasonable figure. Look at this plan." The New House master glanced at it. "The name of the ship is the Condor," resumed the Head. "As you see, it is a large vessel—five hundred feet in length. There will, I think, be ample accommodation for the number we shall require. This vessel is at our disposal, and is lying now at Southampton."

"Then you have decided?"

"Practically, yes, but I wished to have your opinion before finally doing so," said the Head, "for, as it happens, it will be impossible for me to accompany the cruise, at least at first. If I can join the Condor later I shall do so. Meanwhile the boys will be in the charge of Mr. Railton and yourself."

Mr. Ratcliff nodded. There was a gleam in his little, narrow eyes. He was senior housemaster at St. Jim's, and consequently expected to be in authority when the Head was no longer there.

"The division of the boys into New House and School House," continued the doctor, "will not be interfered with. I believe that most of the boys would resent this distinction being removed."

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Railton.

"They have their little rivalries and feuds," said the Head with a smile, "which sometimes cause disturbance, but are upon the whole, I am convinced, productive of more good than harm. A spirit of emulation is good for lads. This distinction will not be removed. The New House boys will occupy one part of the ship, the School House boys another."

"Very good."

"In fact, there will be no change at all, except that the school will be afloat instead of ashore."

"I understand."

"I wish to you take charge of your House, as at present," said Dr. Holmes, "Mr. Railton will be in authority over the School House section, the same as heretofore."

"And in case of a clash—"

"There will surely be nothing of the kind."

"Probably not, yet opinions might differ upon some point, even amongst the most reasonable of men."

"I suppose so."

"In that case—"

"In that case, you two gentlemen would, of course consult, and come by discussion to some working arrangement."

"Exactly," said Mr. Ratcliff, "I have not the slightest doubt that this will be perfectly easy, yet in case of a remote contingency, I think it should be understood that the final authority rests with the senior housemaster."

The Head paused. This had not occurred to his mind so far, but it was undoubtedly a matter that would have to be settled. His natural inclination would have been to give authority to Mr. Railton. But it could scarcely be done.

Mr. Railton was a much younger man than the other housemaster, and he had not been long at St. Jim's. In both senses Mr. Ratcliff was the senior. Without a marked slight to the New House master, it was impossible to give Mr. Railton the upper hand. Authority, in the absence of the Head, would naturally rest with the senior housemaster, and on board the ship, where the two parties would be thrown so much in contact, some such regulation was needed.

Mr. Railton kept his eyes on the carpet. The Head was in a difficult position, and there was but one decision that he could properly make.

"Yes—or—quite so," said the Head slowly. "As I have said, I hope that no friction of any kind can possibly arise."

"I am sure it will not," said Mr. Ratcliff suavely. "Yet in case—"

"Of course the senior housemaster in that case takes the head," said Dr. Holmes, "both, however, will be answerable to me as they are here at St. Jim's."

"Quite so."

"Then I may take it that this prospect of a voyage is agreeable to you, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Very agreeable indeed, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff, with unusual animation, "I shall look forward to it with pleasure."

"I am glad to hear you say so."

"I presume an announcement will be made to the school?"

"Yes. I wish both Houses to be assembled in the great hall this evening, and then I will speak to them."

"Good. I will see to it, sir. At what hour?"

"Before junior supper, I think—say at eight o'clock."

"Very good."

After a little further discussion the New House master took his leave. He left Mr. Railton still in consultation with the Head.

But the little eyes of Horace Ratcliff were glittering with a new satisfaction as he walked out of the School House.

At St. Jim's, senior housemaster as he was, he had never been able to take the upper hand, much as he wished to do so.

The two houses were quite separate, and each master reigned supreme in his own sphere, and in case of any clash, there was always the Head to judge and set matters right.

On board the Condor it would be different. There the two Houses, and the two housemasters, would be thrown into constant contact, and disputes would probably arise—or could easily be made to arise. The Head would not be there to judge or pacify. There would be an unbounded scope for the exercise of Mr. Ratcliff's new authority.

And the housemaster's thin lips set, and his eyes gleamed, at the thought. His feelings towards the younger, healthier, more good-natured and good-hearted master of the School House had always been harsh. He disliked Mr. Railton, and on several occasions when he had ventured to interfere in the School House, he had been severely snubbed. But his time was coming now.

"Senior housemaster," he murmured. "Final decision in cases of dispute." He smiled. "There will probably be differences—and I really think that Mr. Railton will regret it if he opposes me. I really think he would have done better to conciliate me during the time he has been at this school."

And Mr. Ratcliff, smiling sourly, walked on with a light step. He did not like the sea, and he did not like any disturbance of his set habits, and he thought the Head's new scheme was absurd, in spite of his polite assent to it. But he liked the prospect before him—the prospect of crushing a rival, of mercilessly taking the upper hand over one whom he disliked, though without cause. And so his sour face wrinkled into a smile as he walked back to his own House.

He passed the Terrible Three in the quadrangle, but, deep in his pleasant reflections, he did not notice them. They stared after him.

"Did you notice?" said Monty Lowther.

"Yes, he was grinning."

"What he would call a smile, I suppose," said Manners, "kind of twisting up of his features as if he had been sucking a sour lemon. I know what that smile means, too. Some poor rotter is going to have a flogging."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, I believe he never smiles except when somebody is going to have a hot time," he remarked, "I wonder who is catching it now?"

CHAPTER 7.

Arthur Augustus Gives It Up!

REILLY, of the Fourth, came out of his study, and almost ran into Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was coming along the passage with a notebook in one hand and a pencil in the other. Reilly was member for Belfast in St. Jim's junior parliament, an institution which had afforded much fun to the juniors. There was always a certain amount of friction between the Belfast boy and the swell of the School House. The reason was that Reilly, according to Arthur Augustus, never really treated the latter with proper respect. But D'Arcy waived all such considerations now. He could not allow personal prejudices to interfere with getting his subscription-list filled.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Reilly, stopping, "where are you running to?"

D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye.

"I was not wunning anywhere," he replied, with dignity, "I was walking along at a leisurely pace, Weilly. It was you who nearly ran into me. As it happens, I was comin' to your study to see you."

"Oh, were you," said Reilly, apparently not particularly gratified by the information. "You were going to my study?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you can go there. I'm going out."

"Pway stop a moment, Weilly. It's wathah an important mattah."

"Anything to do with the junior parliament?" asked Reilly, stopping. "Are you chaps going to grant Home Rule?"

"It's nothin' to do with that, deah boy. It's a subscription."

"Oh, what for?"

"A farewell feed to be given in the Fourth Form dormitewy to celebrate the bweakin' up for the midsummah holidays. I am twyin' to waise twelve pound ten by subscription. How much shall I put you down for?"

"Let's look at the list," said Reilly.

"There you are, deah boy."

Reilly took the list of subscriptions and glanced over it, and grinned.

"You see, Weilly, everybody contwibutes accordin' to his means," explained D'Arcy.

"Or accordin' to his meanness."

"Ha, ha! Yaas, that is wathah funnny."

"These chaps are getting at you," said Reilly, tapping the subscription-list with his forefinger. "They are only rotting." D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass tighter into his eye and gave the boy from Belfast a crushing stare.

"What did you say, Weilly?" he asked, in freezing tones.

"I said that these chaps are only rotting you."

"Weally Weilly—"

"They're not taking it seriously," grinned Reilly. "You must be a simple chump not to see that, Gussy."

"I wufuse to be called a chump."

"Well, you are one, you know. Sorry I spoke now. It would have been funny to see you go on collecting pennies."

"You wibald wottah!"

"I don't mind making a contribution, as far as that goes," said Reilly, feeling in his pockets. "There's nothing mean about me."

D'Arcy resumed his serenity of aspect.

"In that case, Weilly, I will ovahlook your wemarks. I was about to administrah a feahful thwashin', but if you make a genevous subscription—"

"Faith, that's what I mean to do."

"How much?"

"Let me see; I should like to make it five pounds."

"Oh, that would be wippin'."

"But I had better contribute accordin' to my means."

"Oh yaas, wathah!"

"So I shall have to make it a farthing."

"A—a what?"

"A farthing."

Reilly extracted a coin of that denomination from his waistcoat pocket, and solemnly extended it to the swell of the School House. D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon it and surveyed it as if it were some curious specimen submitted for his inspection.

"I suppose you are jokin'," he remarked.

"Sure and it's serious I am."

"You have the feahful cheek to oflah me a farthin'," said D'Arcy, his wrath rising. "You oflah me—me—a farthin'!"

"Certainly; here it is. I can afford it."

"You uttah wottah!" said D'Arcy, closing his book with a snap. "I am extremely wulduant to pwoceed to violence, but you leave me no alternative."

"You won't take it?"

"I uttahly wufuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"Then I'll keep it," said Reilly, calmly restoring the coin to his pocket. "Mind, I've offered it freely with all my heart, and you have refused it. If you can't raise the twelve pounds ten now don't blame me."

"You wottah!"

"Let me pass, Gussy!"

"I uttahly wufuse to let you pass until you have apologised for your extwemely dispawagin' wemarks," said D'Arcy, blocking up the passage. "Unless you tendah an apology I shall, undah the cires., have no alternative but to administrah a feahful thwashin'."

"Oh, run away and play!"

"I wufuse to wun away and play. I wufuse to let you pass, I wufuse—"

"Bunk!"

"I decline to bunk. I am goin'—ow, you wottah!"

Reilly took hold of Arthur Augustus by the shoulders and swung him round. But the swell of St. Jim's was not to be so handled with impunity. His eyeglass dropped to the end of its cord, his notebook and pencil flew in different directions. He hurled himself upon Reilly, and the impact sent the boy from Belfast staggering against the wall, D'Arcy clinging to him like a cat.

"Oh!" gasped Reilly.

"You wottah!" gasped D'Arcy. "You uttah wottah! I will give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Faith, and I—"

"What's the row here?" exclaimed Blake, coming out of No. 6 and looking along the passage. "Hallo, is that you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy.

Reilly had recovered himself, and by twisting his leg in D'Arcy's, he caused the School House swell to reel, and promptly throwing his weight forward he brought Arthur Augustus with a bump to the floor.

D'Arcy gasped, and gasped again, and strove in vain to rise, as Reilly sat on his chest and pinned him down.

"You wottah! You extwemely wotten wottah!"

Blake came along the passage laughing.

"What on earth are you doing now, Gussy?" he exclaimed.

"I'm givin' Weilly a feahful thwashin'."

Blake roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! It looks to me more as if you were getting one."

"Nothin' of the sort. I slipped, that is all. Merely a twifin' accident. I am goin' to give Weilly a'though lickin'."

"Sure, and I'm waitin'."

"Let me get up, you wottah! You are soilin' my clothes howwibly, and wumpin' my beastly collah. I shall only thwash you all the more."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy made a great effort and rolled Reilly off. But the Irish junior clung to him, and they rolled over like a couple of cats on the linoleum.

"What the dickens is the matter here?" exclaimed Kildare, of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, coming along the passage with a cane in his hand. "What do you mean by making this fearful uproar?"

"It's all right, Kildare."

"It doesn't sound all right, Blake. What the dickens—"

"It's only D'Arcy and Reilly giving each other a fearful thrashing."

Kildare laughed.

"Then I may as well wade in and help them both."

And the big Sixth Former did wade in. He made rapid play with the cane, distributing his attentions impartially between both combatants. D'Arcy and Reilly yelled in good earnest, and soon separated.

"Faith, and it's hurting me ye are!" roared Reilly.

"Weally, Kildare. I wegard this as absolutely bwutal—ow—it is wathah wotten of you—ow-ow—I considah you a wuffian—ow-ow-ow-ow-wow!"

D'Arcy cut along the passage in one direction, Reilly in the other. Kildare kept the cane busy as long as they were within reach, and then stopped, too much overcome with laughter to pursue either of them. Blake was leaning against the wall gasping with merriment. The senior looked at him.

"I think you ought to have a little too, Blake," he remarked meditatively.

Blake became grave at once.

"Oh, not at all, Kildare. I was only a looker on, honour bright."

Kildare shook his head warningly and walked away. Blake, grinning, returned to Study 6. A few minutes later the door of the study was opened somewhat violently, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in.

There was a gloom upon the brow of the swell of the School House. He looked at Blake with a lofty expression of dignity, and fumbled in his pockets. Jack Blake watched him curiously. D'Arcy extracted a sixpence and threepence from his pocket, and jingled the coins down upon the table before Blake. The latter stared at them.

"Hallo, what's up Gussy?"

"That's your subscription."

"My subscription!" ejaculated Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Have you raised the twelve pound ten without my ninepence to help then?"

"I have not waised the twelve pound ten."

"Then what do you mean by returnin' my subscription, ass?"

"I wufuse to be called an ass."

"Well, what do you mean?" bawled Blake.

"I am not deaf."

"You—you—you—"

"Pway don't be wude, Blake. I should be sowwy to have to thwash you, as I am wathah exhausted aftah thwashin' Weilly. I am weturnin' your subscription, because the thing is off."

"The subscription's off?"

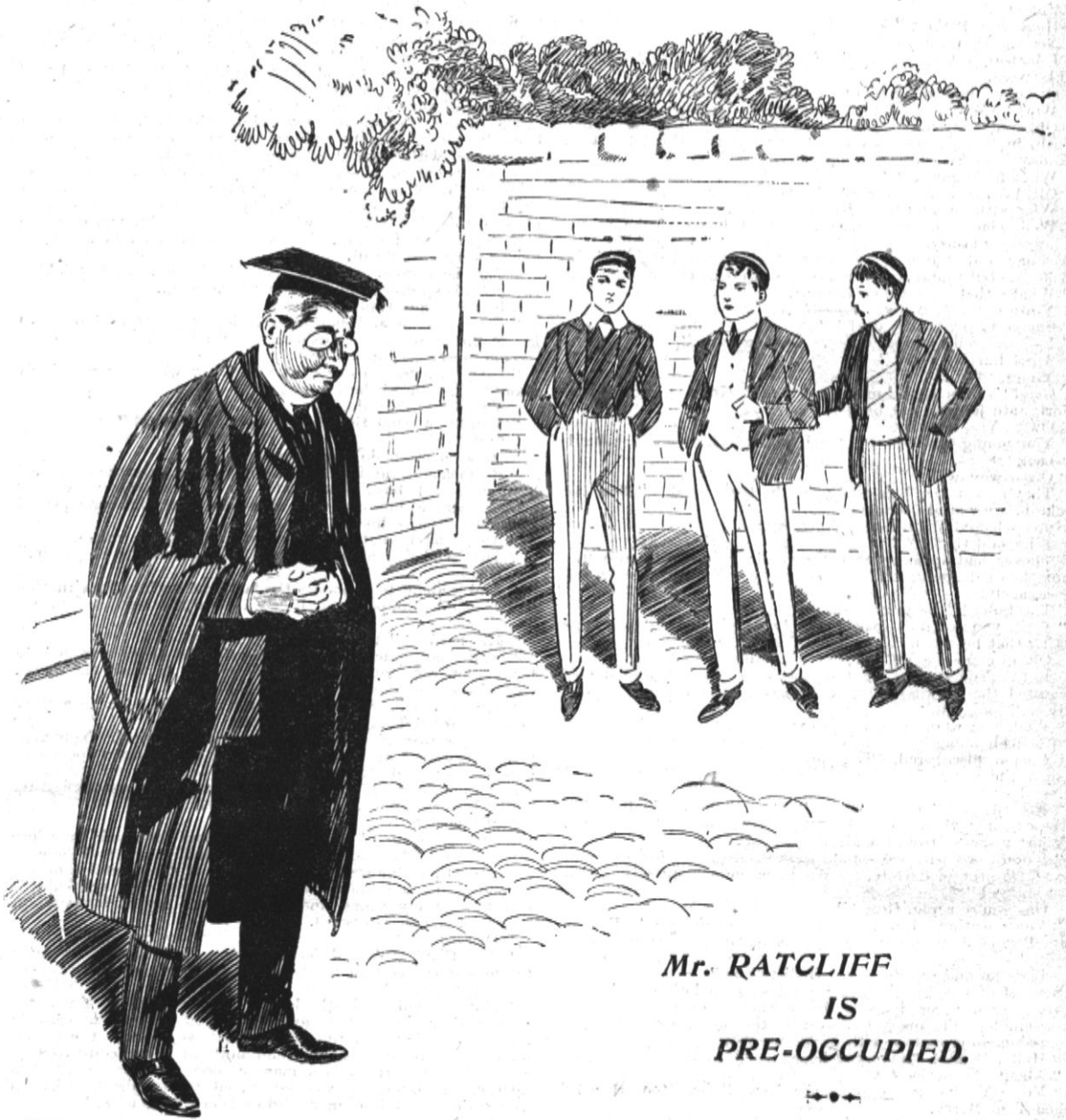
"Yaas, wathah! I am givin' up the idea," said D'Arcy, with great dignity. "I do not considah that I have had a pwopah backin' in this study."

Blake grinned.

"Well, you see, you would run the thing your own way without assistance."

"If I had been pwopahly backed up the thing would have been a howlin' success. I attribude the failure to the lack of patwiotism in this study. I am weturnin' the subscriptions. There are not many to weturn. Not a word, deah boy. I have quite made up my mind."

And Arthur Augustus walked away before Blake could speak again, leaving the ninepence on the table.



Mr. RATCLIFF
IS
PRE-OCCUPIED.

Mr. Ratcliff passed the Terrible Three in the quadrangle, but, deep in his pleasant reflections, he did not notice them. They stared after him. "Did you notice?" said Monty Lowther. "Yes, he was grinning," replied Tom Merry. "Some poor rotter is going to have a flogging!"

CHAPTER 8.
The Notice.

"HAVE you seen the notice?" Tom Merry was coming downstairs when Gore of the Shell met him with that query. Gore was looking excited, and so were several other fellows near. Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, what notice?"

"It's on the board in the hall."

"Anything unusual?"

"Rather! Something to do with breaking up for the holidays, I expect, though I don't see what the Head wants to talk to us to-night specially for."

"What 's it then?"

"A general meeting," said Mellish of the Fourth, generally known as the 'cad of the Fourth.' "Something's on. Old Ratty was over here a while back, chow-chowing with the Head and Railton. The doctor and Railton have been chow-chowing

on and off for a long time. I said all along there was something on."

"I didn't hear you," remarked Walsh.

"I daresay you didn't; you don't hear everything," said Mellish.

"Well, I don't hear so many things as you do, I know," retorted Walsh. "I'm not so jolly fond of keyholes."

And there was a giggle, and Mellish turned red. Tom Merry walked on to the notice-board in the hall, curious to see what the excitement was about. Half the School House, seniors as well as juniors, seemed to be gathered there. There was a buzz of comment and conjecture. Kildare and Darrel and Rushden of the Sixth looked as interested as any of the juniors.

The notice was in the Head's writing. It was concise enough. "All Forms will assemble in the lecture hall at eight o'clock precisely."

The notice was signed by the Head.

"Bai Jove! I wondah what's up?" Arthur Augustus remarked, as he stopped and looked at the board. "Have you any ideah, Tom Mewwy?"

"Not at all."
 "Have you, Blake?"
 "Not the slightest."
 "I daresay it is some surprise for the holidays," said D'Arcy meditatively.

"Or some chap going to be expelled," said Mellish.
 "Wats! Why should they be expellin' anybody now?"
 "Oh, somebody may have been found out, you know," said Mellish, in his unpleasant way. "Perhaps the Head has got to know about Seston's little games."

"What little games?"
 "Oh, I know what I know! Perhaps it's Knox!"
 "What's the matter with Knox?"
 "Well, you know as well as I do that Knox of the Sixth smokes in his study, although he's a prefect, and—ow!"

A finger and thumb closed upon Mellish's ear from behind, and he twisted round to see Knox, the prefect, glaring at him.
 "What's that, you young hound?"
 "N-n-n-nothing, Knox. I—"

"Smoke in my study, do I?"
 "I—I was only joking, Knox. Ow! my ear."
 "Am I hurting you?"
 "Y-e-es. Ow!"

"Good! Does that hurt, too?" said Knox, pinching the unfortunate junior's ear harder.
 "Ow! Yes. Ow!"
 "You young rascal! I'll teach you to chatter lies behind my back!"

"Ow-w-wow-wow!"
 "They're not lies," said a voice in the crowd. "You do smoke in your study, Knox."
 Knox released Mellish and glared round.
 "Who said that?"

Whoever had spoken did not seem in a hurry to own up. Knox scowled round and walked away. Mellish rubbed his ear savagely.
 "The bully!" he muttered.
 "Well, you couldn't expect him to be pleased at your suggesting that he was to be expelled," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, of course you stand up for a bully, Tom Merry!"
 "Rot! You had no right to speak as you did, and if you suggested that I was going to be expelled, I know I should jolly well lam you."
 "Well, you were very nearly expelled once, weren't you?" said Mellish savagely. "I—oh—what are you doing?"

He soon discovered. Tom Merry was knocking his head against the wall. The cad of the Fourth jiggled loose and scuttled away.
 "It's all rot!" said Blake. "It can't be anybody going to be expelled, there would have been some sort of a row first. It's just a speech from the Head."

"I don't see why we should have to turn up for an extra speech!" grumbled Gore. "We have enough already, goodness knows!"
 "Oh, you're a pig, Gore!"
 "Yaas, wathah, I wegard Goah as a fealful pig! By the way, I wondah if this notice applies to the New House, deah boys!"

"Let's go and see Figgins. He'll tell us."
 Several of the School House juniors crossed the quadrangle to discover whether the New House was included in the notice to assemble. Figgins & Co. were in the quad, and they were discussing some matter with great interest.

"Hallo, Figgy! Have you heard—"
 "About the notice?"
 "Yes. You've got one in the New House, too, then?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather," said Figgins. "So it applies to the School House as well. I was thinking of coming to ask you."
 "The whole school, then, at eight o'clock," said Blake thoughtfully. "Well, it's a quarter to eight now, and so we shall soon see what it's about."
 "Yaas, wathah!"

"How's the subscription getting on, Gussy?" asked Figgins. D'Arcy brought his eyeglass to bear upon the chief of the New House juniors.

"The subscription is not gettin' on at all, Figgins," he replied frigidly. "The subscription is off. The cash is bein' woturned to the subswibers."
 "Giving up the idea?"
 "Yaas, as I have not been pwopahly backed up. If you like to call in at Study No. 6 you can have your twopences back."

"Oh, send them to us in registered letters," said Kerr. "that will be all right."
 "I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort."
 "I'm rather sorry," remarked Fatty Wynn. "That idea of a farewell feed was a good one, and it ought to be carried out. We ought to be able to raise twelve pound ten among over a hundred chaps."

"Yaas, wathah! If I had been backed up—"
 "We might form a committee, and work it," said Figgins.

"Bai Jove, that's all wight. I should be perfectly willin' to become chairman of the honouvable committee!"
 "The committee might not be willing, though."
 "Weally, Figgins—"
 "Well, I'm going to get a good place in the lecture hall," said Tom Merry. "First come first served, you know."
 "Good idea: I'm coming, too."

The juniors began to crowd into the hall. Each Form knew its place, and the seniors, the Fifth and Sixth, walked into them with stately dignity. Among the juniors there was something of a scramble for front places. The chums of Study No. 6 were in the first row, the Terrible Three and Figgins & Co in the second. Skimpole drifted in and found a place beside Tom Merry, who, good-naturedly, squeezed up and made room for him. The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's looked very thoughtful.

"This is a great occasion, Merry," he remarked, blinking through his spectacles at the hero of the Shell.
 "Is it?" said Tom Merry.
 "Yes; a great and glorious occasion, and one that will live in the annals of St. Jim's as long as the school lasts."

Tom Merry stared at him.
 "Do you mean to say that you know what the meeting's about, Skimpole?" he exclaimed.
 "Yes, I certainly do."
 "You know what the Head's speech is about?"

"Certainly."
 "How on earth do you know?"
 "By means of my training as an amateur detective," replied Skimpole. "I have learned to draw inferences, to deduce acts. There is but one way to account for this unexpected assembly of the school."

"And what is that?" demanded half a dozen voices.
 "The Head has, undoubtedly, been converted to Socialism."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "And is about to announce the fact, and explain the situation to us," said Skimpole calmly. "I have the best of evidence—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You may laugh. A sincere reformer is accustomed to being met with ribald laughter. It is a fact all the same. One of the fundamental bases of—"

"My only hat, Skimmy! What put that idea into your head?" asked Tom Merry, laughing.
 "I have worked it out satisfactorily to myself. You may remember that I am engaged in writing a book upon Socialism, a book that is destined to shake the fabric of society to its foundations, and lead to the almost immediate nationalisation of the land, the mines, and the railways."

"My hat!"
 "The notes out of which I am building this book were lost some time back, and Mr. Linton found them, and handed them to Dr. Holmes. In his ignorance of the mental capacity of one he should know better, he thought that the subject was beyond my years, and even beyond my understanding, which, of course, is absurd."

"Of course!"
 "The Head took a different view. He returned my notes to me. It is true that he characterised them as nonsense—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he had evidently looked at them. Now, my notes contained an absolutely clear statement of the most undeniable truths. It is, therefore, certain that any man of common intelligence, reading them, could not fail to be converted to Socialism. The Head is a man of more than common intelligence. Therefore he was converted to Socialism. That is as certain as anything in Euclid or Sherlock Holmes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I have not the slightest doubt, therefore, that we are about to hear an address on Socialism—"
 "Bai Jove, Skimpole, you fealful ass—"
 "You will see. When—"
 "Silence!"

There was a hush in the lecture hall. Dr. Holmes, rustling in cap and gown, had entered, accompanied by Mr. Railton. There was a general hush of expectation.

CHAPTER 9.

A Surprise at the School.

DR. HOLMES coughed a little as he looked upon the crowded room, the familiar cough the boys of St. Jim's knew so well. He looked a very imposing figure in his gown, standing there on the dais in the electric light. The buzzing ceased. Even Skimpole left off talking.

"I have called you together, my boys, to tell you of a decision I have come to, one affecting you all."
 Skimpole cast a glance at Tom Merry of great triumph.
 "You hear that?" he whispered, as the Head paused.
 "Yes; cheese it!"

"It's as I told you——"

"Silence there," said little Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, who was standing near, and Skimpole subsided.

"We are about to break up the school for the midsummer vacation," said the Head. "The plan I have formed is one which, I think, will keep a large number of us from separating as usual during the holidays."

"Bai Jove," murmured D'Arcy, "he's goin' to invite us all to spend the vac with him in Devonshire. That's wippin'!"

"Shut up, ass!" grunted Blake.

"I wufuse to be called an ass——"

"Silence, there!"

"Certainly, sir. I was only wemarkin'——"

"Silence, instantly!"

"Oh, vewy well!"

"I have chartered," said Dr. Holmes, "a steamship—a well-known vessel of which some of you have doubtless heard, named the Condor—a short time ago a passenger vessel in the service of the Southampton Steamship Company——"

There was a faint buzz.

"This vessel I destine to be the home, for some time, of a large number of the boys of St. Jim's. It is my intention to try the experiment—which has been tried before with success—of a school afloat."

A gasp from the crowded audience followed the words.

Skimpole looked disgusted.

"Dear me, I have been mistaken in Dr. Holmes," he murmured. "He does not possess the intelligence I have given him credit for."

"You utter ass!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Such of the boys of St. Jim's as desire to come, and can obtain the full approval of their parents, will embark upon the Condor," said Dr. Holmes, "and the cruise will last during the August vacation. This matter has been discussed by me and the governors of the school. It is proposed that Michaelmas term, at the end of the summer holidays, shall commence afloat, but this is not yet decided upon."

There was a buzz again.

"This is what I wished to tell you," said Dr. Holmes. "You will reflect upon the matter. Such of you as wish to pass your holidays on the Condor will send in their names to-morrow morning, and will write to their parents asking permission and approval. I have already had letters sent to all the parents of the boys here, on this subject, which will be received by them to-morrow morning. I have thought out this idea for your good. I hope that a sufficient number will take advantage of it to render the scheme practicable."

The doctor ceased.

For some moments the lecture hall was silent. The novelty of the thing held the boys dumb.

Then a still small voice was heard from the ranks of the Fourth Form.

"Bwavo!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

D'Arcy's little chirp was the signal for a ringing cheer.

The juniors simply jumped at the idea. The novelty, the sense of adventure, combined to carry them away.

"Hurrah!"

It was a mighty shout.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The rafters of the old hall rang with it.

The doctor smiled slightly.

He had hoped that the idea would "catch on" with the boys of St. Jim's, but he had hardly expected such an enthusiastic reception.

"Hurrah!"

Silence was restored at last. The boys hushed as the Head was seen to raise a hand and move his lips.

"It appears that you like the idea, my boys——"

"Hurrah!"

"I am glad of it. I hope most of you will elect to accompany your housemasters. I, unfortunately, shall not be with you. The ship will be in the charge of a capable captain and crew; and you yourselves under the orders of Mr. Railton and Mr. Ratcliff, as at present. Separate quarters in the vessel will be assigned to the New House and School House."

"Bravo!"

"Before embarking you will be allowed to visit the ship on a tour of inspection with any of your friends and relations who care to come. I shall myself be there to see the Condor launched on her voyage. The vessel is at present lying at Southampton, in readiness for us."

And the doctor ceased.

There was a fresh round of cheering, and in the midst of it the Head retired with the masters. The assembly broke up, excitedly discussing the startling news.

"Well, I thought something was on," Tom Merry remarked.

"I hardly expected anything of this sort, though."

"Yaas, wathah! It has come as a surprise to the whole school."

"By Jove!" said Figgins. "It's a ripping idea! I shall

get permission to come easily enough. It's a good wheeze to take a cruise all together for the midsummer holidays."

"Yes, rather."

"I was thinking of taking a party down to Huckleberry fleath," Tom Merry remarked. "This beats the country hollow, though."

"And I had decided to take you all down to my governah's, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "But this is weally more wippin'."

"Wonder what the ship will be like?"

"Oh, the Head would see to it that we have comfy quarters."

"I hope he will pay proper attention to provisioning the ship," said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "It would be pretty awful to find ourselves out of sight of land and the grub running short."

"Fearful!" said Jack Blake. "Still, so long as the bread lasted, we could melt you down into dripping, and manage on that. You'd make about a ton——"

"Look here, Blake——"

"I shall certainly come on this cruise," said Skimpole. "I did not enjoy my last holidays at home. My father was very angry and rude when I turned his greenhouse into a shelter for the unemployed, and I felt that I was misunderstood."

"Bai Jove!"

"I shall find scope for my propaganda on board the ship, I expect. Of course, under a proper state of society a ship would be run on democratic lines. In time of difficulty the whole crew should be summoned to council, and the captain should submit his opinion, and have it ratified by the majority. I hope the captain of the Condor will be a reasonable man. I shall try to make him see things from my point of view."

"You'll have all your work cut out to make him see things from that point of view," grinned Lowther. "He's more likely to knock your silly head off."

"Really, Lowther——"

"I say, you chaps, we've got to have a think over this," said Tom Merry. "Come into the club-room for a jaw."

And Tom Merry & Co. separated themselves from the excited crowd, and withdrew to the disused study that was used as a club-room by the Merry Hobby Club. The Terrible Three, Study No. 6, and Figgins & Co. entered, and the hero of the Shell lighted a candle.

CHAPTER 10.

Tom Merry's Suggestion.

"GENTLEMEN——" began Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!" said Manners and Lowther.

Blake locked the door to keep intruders out, and then turned round and looked at Tom Merry in the candle-light.

"Hold on a minute!" he exclaimed.

"What's the matter?"

"We've come here for a jaw over the situation; not to hear anybody make a speech. Speeches are barred."

"Gentlemen——"

"Blake is wight, bai Jove! I call upon Tom Mewwy to shut up."

"Very well," said Tom Merry. "I withdraw the word. I am sorry I addressed Blake and D'Arcy as gentlemen, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Let's come to business," said Lowther. "Gussy can talk after the meeting's over and we're gone. Tom Merry has an idea——"

"Whose?" asked Blake.

"My own," said Tom Merry warmly—"and a jolly good one, too! Gentlemen——"

"Speeches are barred."

"Why are speeches like football boots?" demanded Monty Lowther suddenly, springing the conundrum, as it were, like a bombshell upon the assembly.

"Oh, shut up!"

"Cheese it!"

"None of your rotten conundrums here."

"This isn't a Christmas party."

"Yaas, wathah! I call upon Lowthah to withdraw."

"Why are speeches like football boots?"

"Shut up!"

"Ring off."

"I tell you——"

"Why are speeches like football boots?"

"You shrieking ass——"

"Yaas, wathah! You shwieking ass——"

"Why are speeches like football boots?"

"You screaming duffer——"

"Oh, give him his head!" exclaimed Figgins. "He'll never shut up. We give it up, Lowther. Tell us the answer—— quick, before we brain you with the chairman's hammer!"

"Do you all give it up?"

"Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!"
 "Because they are barred," said Lowther.
 "Eh?"
 "What?"
 "Because they are barred."
 "What are barred?"
 "Speeches—and so are football boots. See?"
 "Yes, I see a shrieking ass who ought to be in Colney Hatch."
 "Rotten!"
 "Vewy wotten indeed. I sincerely hope Lowthah will not come on the voyage of the Condah. I don't see how we could stand his jokes shut up in the nawwow space of a beastly ship, you know."
 "That's a jolly good conundrum——"
 "Oh, wotten! Bai Jove, you know, a weally good conundrum has just occurred to me. Why is Lowther's head like an empty scent bottle?"
 "Oh, ring off."
 "I wufuse to wing off. Why is Lowthah's head like an empty scent bottle?"
 "Gentlemen——"
 "No speeches, Tom Merry."
 "Look here——"
 "Why is Lowthah's beastly head like an empty scent bottle, you know?"
 "Give it up."
 "Because there's no sense in it," said Arthur Augustus, with much satisfaction. "Ha, ha, ha! I wegard that as vewy funnny."
 "What is funny?"
 "Don't you see? Scents—sense, you know. There is no sense in it——"
 "You should say there are no scents in it."
 "I weally wufuse to be cowected by you, Mannahs."
 "Ass!"
 "Wottah!"
 "Gentlemen——"
 "Oh, ring off, all of you!" shouted Figgins. "We didn't come here to waste our valuable time listening to a lot of cackle from a set of School House chumps."
 "Certainly not," said Kerr. "You got us here on the pretence that you had something sensible to say, though we really ought to have known you better."
 "I thought there was a feed or something," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm jolly hungry. I've noticed that I always get jolly hungry about this time of the year. Is there a feed coming on, Tom Merry?"
 "No, there isn't."
 "Then we may as well go. Come on, Figgins!"
 "Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "I haven't made my proposal yet. To-morrow's a half-holiday—the last one of the term."
 "Everybody knows that——"
 "But everybody doesn't know what to do to-morrow," retorted Tom Merry. "You can cut if you like. Manners and Lowther are coming with me, anyway."
 "Oh, we'll give you a hearing. What's the wheeze?"
 "If it's the ideah of a——"
 "Shut up, D'Arcy!"
 "If it's the ideah of a farewell——"
 "Shut up!"
 "I wufuse to shut up. If it's the ideah of a farewell feed, I wufuse to allow Tom Mewvy to claim it. That is my ideah."
 "It's not," said Tom Merry.
 "It is. I call Blake and Hewwies and Dig to witness——"
 "I mean it's not that I am going to propose."
 "Oh, I see. In that case I am satisfied."
 "Then leave off talking for goodness sake!" said Figgins.
 "Go on, Tom Merry, and come to the point before bedtime if possible."
 "To-morrow is a half-holiday——"
 "We have had that already."
 "To-morrow is a half-holiday," repeated Tom Merry obstinately. "And my idea is for us to make up a party and slide off——"
 "Slide off where?"
 "To Southampton."
 "Southampton!"
 "Yes; and inspect the Condor."
 The meeting fell into silence for a moment. Tom Merry's proposal was a decidedly unexpected one.
 "We haven't got permission to go," Digby remarked.
 "That will make it all the more fun. We shall have to dodge away. Of course, it's not forbidden. If it were we couldn't go. It's not."
 "But it's not permitted."
 "That needn't make any difference to us. After all, the Head said that we could inspect the ship before we went aboard. We're the heads of the Lower School——"
 "Hear, hear!"
 "So it's only right and proper that we should be first, and inspect the steamer before the other fellows come messing round," said Tom Merry. "I think we ought to satisfy our-

selves that it's all right before we allow the scheme to proceed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Hear, hear!"
 "Lowther and Manners and I are going, at all events. We thought you chaps would like to come into the wheeze. That's all."

"So we would," exclaimed Blake. "The idea is a surprisingly good one for you, Merry. I wonder how you came by it."
 "It is a good idea," said Figgins. "We'll certainly come along and keep you out of mischief."

"You'll come along and be kept out of mischief——"
 "Oh, rats!"

"Wats to you, Figgins. You wemembah how you were continually gettin' into twouble at the Fwanco-Bwitish Exhibish. I had to look aftah you——"

"Cheese it, Gussy!"
 "I wufuse to cheese it. I had to——"
 "Well, if we're all going, we must be ready immediately after morning school to-morrow," said Tom Merry. "And——"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Tom Mewvy."
 "I know I am, Gussy. We must be ready immediately after morning lessons, and we must keep this dark. I need not say if it gets out we shall be stopped."

"You say lots of things you need not say," Blake remarked.
 "It seems to be a sort of mania with you."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah——"
 "The meeting is now dissolved," said Tom Merry, tapping on the table. "The honourable gentlemen can now bunk."
 And the honourable gentlemen accordingly "bunked."

CHAPTER 11.

Tom Merry & Co. Take a Little Run.

THE sole topic of conversation in study and dormitory that night was the coming cruise of the Condor. It possessed inexhaustible interest, and on the following morning the School House and the New House alike were still discussing it with great animation. Many of the fellows looked forward to the trip to Southampton and the tour of inspection of the ship; but ten juniors were looking forward to a much sooner inspection. That afternoon Tom Merry & Co. intended to take the train to Southampton.

Most of the fellows wanted to go on the cruise, as was soon evident. There were some whose arrangements were definitely made for the holidays, and these could not come. Others there were who had to go home for various reasons. But it was certain that a large proportion of the boys of St. Jim's would join the "school afloat."

Morning lessons were conducted through an intermittent buzz of comment, conjecture, and surmise. But at the end of the term the masters were lenient. Only in the Fifth Form, which had the misfortune to have Mr. Ratcliff for a form-master, did impositions fall thickly. But the victims comforted themselves with the reflection that, the breaking-up being so near at hand, they would be able to dodge most of the lines.

When morning school was over, and the mid-day dinner disposed of, the boys had the rest of the day to themselves till evening call-over. Then, one by one, Tom Merry & Co. slipped quietly away, and met in the road outside the school gates.

Tom Merry had fixed the rendezvous outside the walls in order to avoid attracting attention. If the idea had spread abroad, it was probable that a crowd would follow, which would, more likely than not, result in pursuit, and the whole party being brought back at Wayland Junction, where they would have to wait for their train.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of course, was last to arrive. The swell of St. Jim's had done himself down, as Blake expressed it, very beautifully for the occasion. If anything about him equalled the glossiness of his silk hat and the immaculate whiteness of his shirt, it was the crease in his trousers, or perhaps the set of his necktie. The rainbow hues of his waistcoat contrasted nicely with his gold watch-chain.

"Late, as usual," grunted Lowther, as Arthur Augustus came up, with a pair of lavender kid gloves in his hand.

"I am extremely sowvy——"
 "Well, let's be off."

"You are intewwuptin' me, Lowthah. I am vewy sowvy, but I had to dwess decently on an occasion like this."

"We've got a quarter of an hour to catch the local to Wayland," Tom Merry remarked. "Sharp's the word!"

"Come on, then!"

The party set off down the lane towards the village. Tom Merry set the pace, and the others kept to it, and they arrived at Rylcombe Station in good time to catch the local train which was to convey them to Wayland Junction.

D'Arcy settled back comfortably in a seat and began to put on his gloves. Fatty Wynn was fishing in his pockets.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Figgins, as the train moved out of the station. "Have you got the cramp, or the jimjams, or what?"



D'ARCY'S THUNDERBOLT!—"Do you know, deah boys, I've been thinkin'?" said Arthur Augustus.

"I'm trying to get a beastly parcel out of my beastly pocket," gasped Fatty Wynn, red with his exertions. "It went in all right, so it's bound to come out."

"Can I help you, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, who never failed to be the pink of politeness, though he had had his rubs with Fatty Wynn.

"Yes, you can. Hold this."

Fatty had already got out one parcel. He handed it to Arthur Augustus, who took the brown-papered parcel in his neatly gloved hand, and then commenced to wrench at his pocket with both hands.

"Coming out?" asked Tom Merry.

"I think so," gasped the fat junior. "It's bound to come in time."

"What is it?"

"A boiled steak-pudding. Mrs. Taggles gave it to me just before I started. It went into the confounded pocket easily enough."

"It will come out in wathah a mess, I expect," said Arthur Augustus, shifting a little further off from Fatty Wynn—not an easy task in the crowded carriage. "Pway be careful what you do with the howwid thing when you get it out, Wynn. I'm thinkin' of my twousahs."

"Blow your trousers!"

"Go it, Fatty!" exclaimed Monty Lowther encouragingly. "Why don't you give him a hand, Figgy? Thumb him on the back, Kerr."

"Lemme alone! It's just coming!"

"Hurrah!"

"Here it comes—oh!"

It came. Fatty Wynn gave a final wrench that brought the recalcitrant steak pudding out of the pocket, and as it came out it burst its paper wrapping and flew in pieces through the carriage.

Herries gave a shout as a fragment of steak caught him in the eye, and Digby yelped from the impact of a piece of crust on his ear. D'Arcy gave a howl of anguish. A spurt of rich gravy came like a stream from a squirt over his waistcoat. That waistcoat had been a thing of beauty and a joy for ever a minute ago. Now!

"Oh!" gasped D'Arcy. "Oh, you wotten ass!"

"Sorry," gasped Fatty Wynn. "All the gravy wasted now."

"My waistcoat—"

"My gravy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Don't you regard this as funny, D'Arcy?"

"No, I certainly do not! I regard Fatty Wynn as an absolute beast. My waistcoat is spoilt. There is a lot of fat on your own twousahs—"

"Eh, what?" exclaimed Tom Merry, becoming serious at once.

He was wearing a pair of light trousers, and the trail of the steak pudding was over them with a vengeance. Tom Merry looked at the greasy smudges on the nice grey cloth, and then looked at Fatty Wynn.

"Utterly spoiled!" said Fatty Wynn disconsolately.

"Oh, never mind," said Tom Merry with an effort. "I daresay I can get them cleaned."

"Get what cleaned?"

"My trousers."

"Who's talking about your trousers?" said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "Confound your trousers! I'm thinking of the steak pie."

"There's only one thing to be done," said D'Arcy. "I shall have to throw this waistcoat out of the beastly window, and go about with my jacket buttoned up for the rest of the day. Fortunately, it is fashionable to wear the jacket buttoned."

"You'd better do the same with your trucks, Tom Merry," grinned Blake—"and go about with—"

"Take your wotten parcel, Fatty Wynn. Bai Jove, what filthy stuff is in that beastly parcel?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly, glaring at a greasy stain on his beautiful glove. "You have stained my glove now."

"Ham sandwiches."

"You howwid gorgin' cannibal. Why didn't you tell me the parcel contained grub before you gave it to me?"

"You might have scoffed it!"

The insinuation was too much for D'Arcy. That he, the elegant swell of the School House, might have "scoffed" the greasy contents of that warm and greasy parcel, was a charge too exasperating to be borne. D'Arcy hurled himself forward, and there would have been a deadly combat the next moment, but Tom Merry caught the indignant swell of St. Jim's by the shoulders in time. He jerked him back, and D'Arcy sat down on his knees.

"Welease me, Tom Mewwy—"

"Hold on, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to hold on. I insist upon givin' Fatty Wynn a fearful thwashin' on the spot."

"Rats! Keep the peace."

"I absolutely decline to keep the beastly peace."

"Any fellow creating a disorderly scene in the carriage is liable to a penalty of forty bob, without the option of a fine—"

"Pway don't wot! I insist—"

"Shove him under the seat!" said Figgins. "That's the only way to keep him quiet. Now, then, all together."

"I wefuse to be shoved under the seat. You wotwals, you will absolutely wuin my beastly clothes. Pway don't be a set of beastly wuffians—you are spoiling the nap of my beastly hat—I will keep the peace if you like!"

"Mind you do, then. It's your last chance."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Order! This is where you cheese it."

"You'd better get that waistcoat off if you're going to Gussy," said Herries. "We shall be in Wayland soon, and there may be ladies on the platform."

"Bai Jove, you're wight!"

D'Arcy whipped off jacket and waistcoat, and was about to fling the latter from the open window when Blake caught his arm.

"Have you taken the watch out?"

"Bai Jove, no, I nevah thought of that!"

D'Arcy cleared his valuables out of the greased waistcoat, and then hurled it upon the embankment beside the line. The train rushed on. The swell of St. Jim's carefully buttoned up the lower buttons of his jacket, which was of the lounge variety, very slimly waisted. It did not set so trimly without the waistcoat under it, and D'Arcy noted it, and looked daggers at Fatty Wynn. But the fat junior of the New House did not observe that. He was eating the ham sandwiches.

CHAPTER 12.

Arthur Augustus is Too Obliging.

"WAYLAND! Changer 'f'r m'n line!"

"Bai Jove, deah boys! I wondah what that chap is sayin'?"

"Wayland! Change here for main line," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Come on! We have ten minutes to wait for the Southampton train. It's coming from London—"

"Time to have a look in at the refreshment-rooms," said Fatty Wynn.

"I wondah if there would be time for me to go woud and buy a waistcoat?" said D'Arcy thoughtfully, as he stepped out of the train.

"No," said Jack Blake promptly.

"I ought to have one. This jacket does not set pwopably without one. I don't want people in Southampton to think me a sloven, you know."

"The people in Southampton may be thinking of other things."

"Yaas, but weally—"

"You couldn't wear a waistcoat you'd buy in Wayland," said Tom Merry hastily. "They are all fearful things, years behind date, and not more than three colours in any of them."

"Bai Jove, I forgot that! Upon the whole, I'll leave it till I get to Southampton. I have heard that that is a vewy fine city, and I have no doubt I shall be able to get a weally decent waistcoat there, deah boys."

"Then we'd better carry out my idea of looking in at the refreshment-rooms," said Fatty Wynn. "We've got a long journey before us, and the express stops at only one or two places."

"Well, perhaps some grub wouldn't be out of the way," agreed Blake. "We can take it into the train with us."

"A lunch-basket is the thing."

"Good! A lunch-basket it shall be, and we'll all stand our whack."

"It had better be a good-sized one, too," said Fatty Wynn. "Don't forget there are ten of us, and we shall get hungrier as we get nearer the sea."

"Come on! We can leave our coats and things on this seat. They'll be safe enough. We've no time to waste."

"My bulldog would have guarded them," said Herries. "I wish I'd brought Towser."

"Oh, crown Towser!"

The juniors crowded into the refreshment-room. Several of them had had remittances that morning, and D'Arcy had received the expected fiver from his governor. They were in funds, therefore, and able to purchase right and left, which they accordingly did.

The lunch-basket was obtained, and packed with purchases. Fatty Wynn saw to the quality and quantity of the contents, especially the quantity.

There was a scream of a train-whistle, and Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

"The express!"

He hastily settled the account, and the juniors dashed out of the refreshment-room and across the platform. They caught up their coats, and rushed for the train. It had come swooping in, and stopped, and already was preparing to leave.

Tom Merry caught the handle of the nearest door. It was that of a second-class carriage, and the juniors were travelling with second-class tickets.

But the door did not open. A red-faced man in a mercantile cap looked out of the window.

"No room!" he jerked out.

"Bosh!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "The carriage is empty. Let go the door!"

Without waiting for the passenger to refuse, as he was evidently going to do, Tom Merry and Figgins united their strength and wrenched the door open.

The red-faced man gave an ugly grunt.

The door flew open, and the juniors poured into the carriage. D'Arcy was the last, and he trod on the red-faced man's feet in coming in. He looked round in vain for a seat.

The carriage was designed for ten occupants, and six of the juniors had taken up the unoccupied side, three of them the other beside the red-faced man. Next to the latter was a seat to spare, but it was occupied by a small strapped leather bag. The initials B. T. were painted on the bag in rough lettering.

"Would you mind wemovin' your bag to the wack, sir?" asked Arthur Augustus, with great politeness.

"You can't have that seat."

"But the bag can vewy well go up on the luggage-wack."

"It can't."

"If you wefuse to put it there, will you give me your kind permish to place it there myself?" asked D'Arcy, with unshaken courtesy.

"Look here," said the red-faced man, "that seat belongs to a friend of mine what's getting in here, and that bag's his'n."

"Oh, I see," said D'Arcy. "You should weally have explained that before. I should be extremewly sowwy to have the wudeness to take anothah gentleman's seat."

The red-faced man grunted.

"Get into another carriage."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Not at all. I don't mind standing."

"But I mind your standing. There's no room. I don't like a crowded carriage."

"Change into another then," said Tom Merry.

"You young rascals—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins. "For two pins we'd sling you out and your friend's bag after you."

The red-faced man murmured something below his breath. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy let down the window to its fullest extent, and looked up and down the platform. The last passengers were scrambling into the train, and the guards were slamming the doors.

"Bai Jove! Your friend will lose the twain, I'm afraid!" said D'Arcy. "Are you sure it was at this station he was comin'?"

"Yes, hang you!"

"Then he'll lose the twain."

"Oh, hang it!"

"It is wathah wuff on him, as he will lose his bag, too."

Suppose you hand the bag out to a portah, and ask him to give it to your friend when he turns up?"

"Mind your own business."

"Weally, my dear sir, I only wished to be obligin'."

D'Arcy was quite in earnest. The other juniors were grinning. They fully believed that the bag belonged to the red-faced man, and that he had told an untruth in saying that it belonged to a friend, hoping thereby to cause one of the juniors to leave the carriage.

But D'Arcy did not expect it. The swell of the School House would not have told a lie to save his life, and he was slow to suspect deceit in others. He was really concerned about the red-faced man's friend and that friend's bag.

Bang! Bang! The last doors were closing, and the guard was waving his flag. The engine snorted.

"Bai Jove! Your friend's lost the twain!"

The red-faced man grunted.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took a last look along the platform, and then hurriedly seized the bag and hurled it from the carriage window. It banged on the platform, and the next instant the train steamed out of the station.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus turned to the red-faced man with a beaming smile. The passenger sat apparently petrified.

"Just in time, bai Jove, sir!" said D'Arcy. "I am sowwy your friend has lost the twain, but he has saved the bag, at all events."

The red-faced man spluttered.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus looked round.

"I weally fail to see any cause for this mewwiment," he remarked. "It was only an act of politeness to throw the bag out for this gentleman's friend. It was bad enough to lose the twain, without losing the bag, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, my deah fellows——"

"You young scoundrel!" roared the red-faced man, finding words at last.

Arthur Augustus gave a jump.

"Eh?"

"You young villain! What do you mean by throwing my bag out of the train?"

"Your bag?"

"Yes, you young——"

"I am afraid there is a misunderstandin'. It was your friend's bag I thwew out of the twain, so that he should not lose——"

"You—you—you—it was my bag you—you—now it is lost. I shall have to telegraph along the line for it from Southampton, you—you—you——"

D'Arcy adjusted his monocle, and stared at the red-faced man with great dignity.

"It seems that you have deceived me," he said. "It was your own bag, was it?"

"Of course it was, you young fool!"

"I wefuse to be chwacterwised as a young fool. And I would wathah be a young fool, anyway, than an old wascal."

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins.

"You told an untwuth when you said it was not your bag. It is entirely your own fault. I cannot say I am sowwy in the least. I am only sowwy that a man old enough to know better should descend to a mean untwuth."

And D'Arcy sat down on the vacant seat where the missing bag had been.

The red-faced man seemed to be on the verge of apoplexy for some minutes. D'Arcy would certainly have received some rough handling if he had been alone; but Tom Merry & Co. were so evidently ready to make things warm for the red-faced man if he gave rein to his temper that he found it more prudent to restrain himself. He sat and glowered at the juniors, and muttered indignantly to himself at intervals as the train swept on.

CHAPTER 13.

At Southampton.

"HERE we are!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors of St. Jim's poured out of the carriage. There was a brisk keenness in the air from the sea, and a deafening crowd of passengers and porters with luggage.

The juniors gazed about them with great interest, and the red-faced man, with a final muttered word, passed them and disappeared in the crowd.

"Yes, here we are," said Figgins; "but the question is, where's the Condor?"

"We're not likely to find it on the platform," Monty Lowther remarked judicially. "Let's get out of the station."

"If Lowther is going to be funny——"

"Oh, come on," said Tom Merry. "The afternoon is getting on, and we haven't any time to waste. We've got to find the

ship and explore it, and catch the train home, and there's only one home train that stops at Wayland, too."

"How do you know that, Tom Mewwy?"

"Looked it out in the time-table."

"Bai Jove! You know that was wathah clewah! I should nevah have thought of that."

"The things you wouldn't have thought of, Gussy, would fill the Encyclopædia Britannica. Come on!"

The juniors pushed their way through the crowd. They were not encumbered by any luggage except their coats and one or two small bags, and D'Arcy's gold-headed cane.

They made their way out of the great station and looked about them again.

"We had bettah go down to the piah, deah boys, and then——"

"Good!" said Figgins. "Let's get to the pier. It was rather thoughtless of the Head not to tell us exactly where the Condor was."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There are a jolly lot of ships here, mostly steamers, and I'm blessed if I can tell one from another," said Tom Merry. "However, we were born with tongues in our heads, and we can ask somebody."

"That's so."

The adventurers made their way to the pier. The place was crowded, and looked wonderfully busy and lively in the sunny afternoon.

"We'll ask this chap," said Tom Merry, with a glance towards the pier keeper. "My hat! Do you see whom he's talking to?"

The keeper was speaking to the red-faced man, the juniors' companion in the carriage on the way down. The red-faced gentleman caught sight of them at the same time, and scowled. He had not forgotten the loss of his bag. He finished speaking to the pier keeper and turned away, and the little crowd of juniors came up.

"Excuse me," said Tom Merry, politely; "can you tell me which vessel here is the Condor?"

The man glanced down at them.

"She's five hundred feet long," said D'Arcy, by way of imparting further information.

The man grinned.

"She's out there, sir."

He threw up his bronzed hand with a wide gesture towards the harbour.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, I thought she was there, but where is she—and which is she?"

The keeper pointed.

"You see that craft with the black funnels?"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove, that looks wathah a wotten little cwaff," said D'Arcy, adjusting his eyeglass; "I don't think I shall go for a cruise in that."

"Beyond that," said the man, calmly, "there's a big steamer."

"I see it," said Tom Merry.

"And to the left there's another, a smaller one, you can see the red funnels."

"I see it."

"That's the Condor."

"Oh," said D'Arcy.

"Thank you very much," said Tom Merry, looking towards the red funnels. "But how the deuce are we to get to her?"

The man stared.

"You can't get to her. She's not taking in passengers now. She's empty, except for a few hands."

"Yaas, but we're goin' to look ovah her, you see"

"You can't."

"Quite a mistake, deah boy. We shall have to get to her, somehow."

"You see," explained Tom Merry; "We're a part of a party that's going on a pleasure cruise in the Condor, and we've come down ahead to have a look at her."

"Oh! Then you ought to have spoken to the gentleman who was here just now——"

"That wed-faced person?"

"Yes. He is going on board the Condor, and he might have taken you along with him."

"Bai Jove! What does that wottah want aboard our cwaff?" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I stwongly object to his feahful cheek in goin' aboard."

Tom Merry thanked the man for his information, and the juniors moved off. They had had a vague mental picture of the Condor moored to a landing-stage, whence they would step aboard and carry out their project of exploration. It non-plussed them a little to find that the vessel was anchored some distance out in the harbour. But Tom Merry was quite equal to the occasion.

"We can't step over that distance," he remarked; "and we can't swim it. We can get a boat, though."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There's that red-faced bounder talking to a boatman, too. I suppose he's got some business on board—something to do with the cargo, perhaps. I knew he had something to do with t e sea from his cap," remarked Digby.

"He's rowing the boatman, too," Herries remarked.

There was no doubt about that. A big, stolid boatman was looking at the red-faced man without moving a muscle as the latter grumbled and swore. The man in the seaman's cap seemed to be seeking to drive a hard bargain for a passage in the boat, and the boatman was not to be moved. Doubtless he saw the juniors and guessed from their expressions that they wanted a boat, and so became independent, as he had other customers at hand.

"I will give you a shilling," said the red-faced man, as the juniors came up within hearing.

The boatman shook his head.

"I'll be burned before I'll give you a stiver more."

Another stolid shake of the head.

"Hang you! I'll find another boat."

This time the boatman nodded. He seemed to have spoken hardly a word during the dispute, wagging his head in assent or dissent to save the trouble of talking. The red-faced man stamped away, and Tom Merry and Co. came towards the boatman. He touched his cap with a cheerful grin.

"We want to be taken out to the Condor," said Tom Merry.

"You know her?"

The man nodded.

"Can you take the lot of us?"

The boatman ran his eye over the juniors, and counted ten.

"Tanner each," he said briefly.

"Good enough."

The stalwart longshoreman picked up his oars. The red-faced gentleman came stamping back.

"Look here, you thief, how much do you want?"

"Sorry, sir—engaged," said the boatman.

"Nonsense! Lies! How much do you want?"

The boatman shook his head. Tom Merry & Co. scrambled into the boat, and the man prepared to push off. The red-faced man shook his fist.

"Will you take me out to the Condor?"

"I haven't room now, sir."

Tom Merry looked round.

"You can come if you like," he said. "We'll make room for you."

It was an effort of politeness, but Tom Merry was always polite. The red-faced man growled and grunted, but apparently made up his mind to accept the offer, for he came down the pier steps. But the boatman perhaps did not care to overload his boat, or he had had enough of the red-faced man and his mode of address. He pushed off, and a surge of water went up over the red-faced man's boots.

He gave a howl of rage.

"Come back for me, you scoundrel."

"I say, can't you take him in?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Couldn't get back now, sir," said the boatman, bending to his oars. "And the boat's too full already."

"Look here—"

"You young scoundrels," shouted the red-faced man, shaking his fist after the boat. "This is a trick! You young rascals! You young—"

His voice died away.

"Bai Jove, we don't want a wude wottah like that in the boat," said D'Arcy. "Pway don't take any furthah notice of him, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry nodded.

The boatman pulled on stolidly. Shore and buildings faded back into a line on the water. The red-faced man disappeared. The boat pulled past vessel after vessel in the great harbour, and the juniors looked at them with immense interest. Ere long they, too, were to sail the deep ocean, and to see the strange sights of a wider world than the one they had hitherto known. The boatman jerked his head.

"There's the Condor, young gentlemen."

The ship loomed up on them, as it were, suddenly. Their eyes dwelt on the vast slope of her sides, the huge funnels. Even Arthur Augustus was impressed.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "What a wippin' cwaft!"

"Magnificent!" said Tom Merry.

"I should have pweferred somethin' more wakish-lookin'," observed D'Arcy, thoughtfully. "There is somethin' vewy ordinawy about an ordinawy ship. I should weally pwefer to sail in a wakish-lookin' cwaft."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We're getting close now," said Tom Merry. "They'll have to let down something to help us aboard."

"The ladder's down, sir," said the boatman, pulling gently.

"Good."

A red, weather-beaten face looked down from the gangway upon the boat-load of juniors.

"Hullo, there!"

"Hullo, deah boy!" responded D'Arcy.

"What do you want?"

"We want to come aboard."

"Now then, off you go. None of your larks here."

"Make fast," whispered Tom Merry. "It's not a lark," he went on; "we've got to come aboard on important business."

"Who are you?"

"Distinguished visitors."

The man above grinned a little.

"Well, you've got enough cheek," he remarked. "I happen to be mate of this craft, so you can go further on. Children and dogs are not admitted here."

D'Arcy fixed his monocle upon the weatherbeaten man.

"Weally, my dear sir, I wegard that remark as distinctly oppwobwious," he exclaimed. "We are not children, and—"

"Oh, sail on."

"We wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. We—"

"We've got to come aboard, on important business," said Tom Merry. "We're a party in advance of the passengers."

"Eh?"

"We belong to the school that is going to use this ship."

"Oh, I see. We hadn't noticed that you were coming," said the mate, looking down at the juniors searchingly. "I suppose it's all right. Captain Bolsover and Mr. Thropp, the chief mate, are away."

"Never mind; it's the ship we want to see."

"You can come aboard then."

"You can lay by and wait for us," said Tom Merry to the boatman.

"Ay, ay, sir."

And the juniors of St. Jim's were soon aboard the steamer.

CHAPTER 14.

The 'Condor!'

THE Condor was evidently not in order for sailing. The fires were out on board, and there were only a few hands to be seen. The second mate came towards the juniors, with a rather puzzled expression upon his face.

When they looked at him more closely, the chums could see that he had a rather good-looking, pleasant face, with little twinkling blue eyes, and a deep-bronze complexion. He was a somewhat young man, with a powerful frame and massive limbs.

"I don't know much about this," he remarked. "I suppose it's all right, and you can look over the ship. I suppose that's what you want?"

"That's it," said Tom Merry.

"Well, there's no harm in it that I know of. I suppose you had your headmaster's permission to come here."

Tom Merry laughed.

"We came away in such a hurry that we hadn't time to ask it," he replied.

"And he wouldn't have given it if you had, I suppose, sir?"

"Well, he wouldn't have minded us exploring the ship, but he might have thought the journey to Southampton too long," explained Tom Merry. "It's very kind of you to offer to show us over the ship, Mr.—"

"Green's my name. But I haven't offered—"

"Well, you can offer now, Mr. Green. It comes to the same thing."

Mr. Green laughed.

"Ay, ay. I don't mind if I do, come to that. I'll show you over the craft with pleasure."

"Thank you very much."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard this as vewy kind and polite of our fwiend Mr. Gween. I say, Mr. Gween, I suppose you have been at sea a long time, haven't you?"

"Forty years, man and boy," said Mr. Green solemnly.

"Bai Jove, I shouldn't have thought you ovah thirty now," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with an amazed look at Mr. Green's bronzed, youthful face.

"We keep young on the sea, sir."

"Yaas, I suppose so. Bai Jove, forty years. But I say, have you evah sailed on any wakish-lookin' cwaft?"

"On any what?"

"Wakish-lookin' cwaft."

"He means rakish-looking craft," grinned Figgins. "He's been reading pirate stories and they've got into his head."

"Oh, I see. Ay, ay. I've sailed on some rakish-looking craft in my time," said Mr. Green. "When I was a pirate—"

"Bai Jove! When what?"

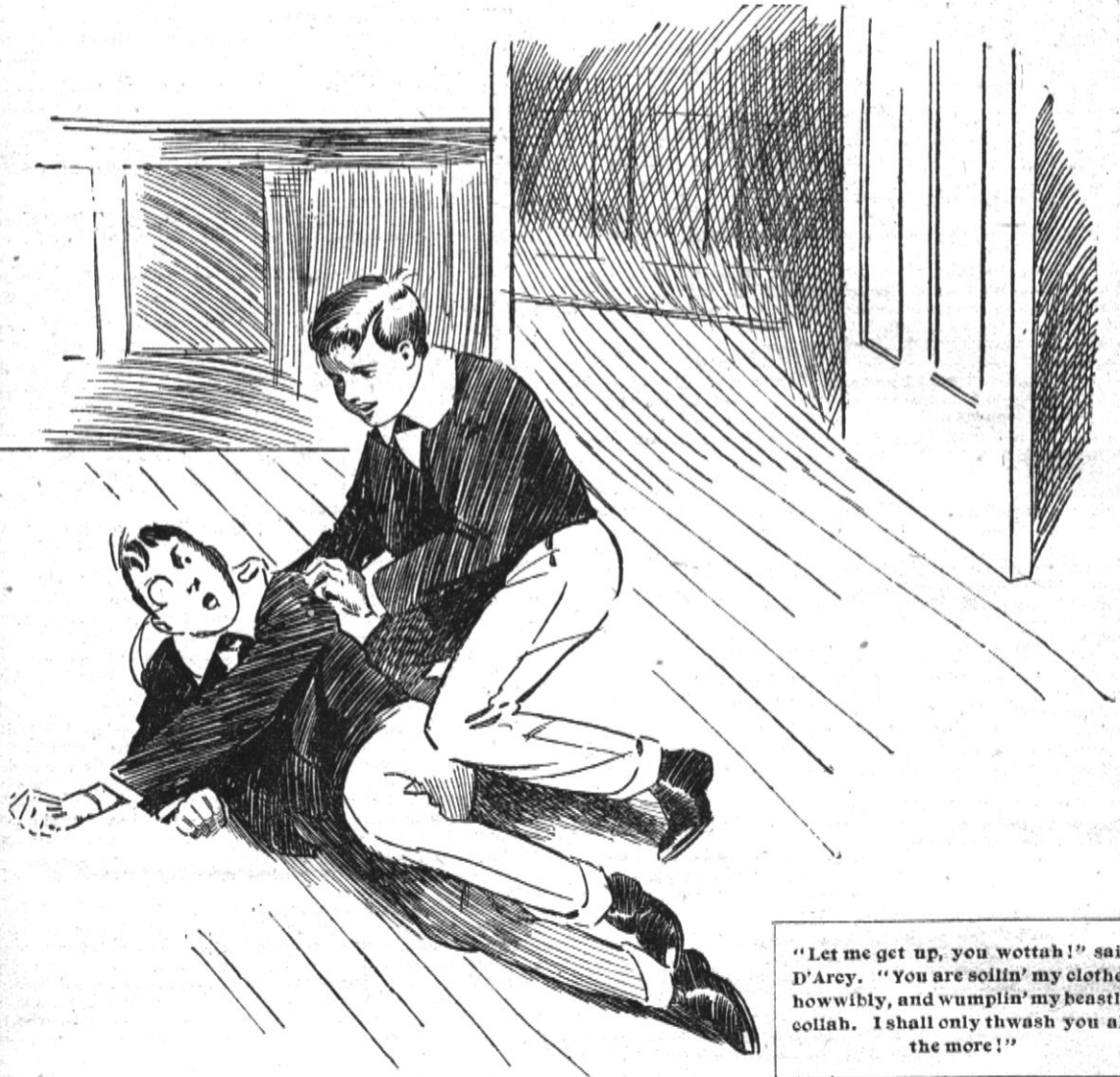
"When I was a pirate—"

"Have you weally been a pivate, Mr. Gween?"

"I was brought up to it," said Mr. Green. "I'm only a common-place mate of a steamer now, but I was brought up as a real, first-class pirate. It was at that time that I sailed in rakish craft. I had fine times as a rakish pirate."

"Yaas, I suppose so. I have often thought it would be wippin' to be a pivate, except that they steal things for a livin'. It would be wathah wotten to be dishonest."

"That is why I gave up the trade," said Mr. Green. "When



"Let me get up, you wottah!" said D'Arcy. "You are sollin' my clothes howwibly, and wumplin' my beastly collah. I shall only thwash you all the more!"

my grandmother died, she took my hand in hers, and made me swear to give up piracy and always wear a clean collar."

And Mr. Green, apparently overcome by the touching reminiscence, turned away.

"Bai Jove, did she weally?" said D'Arcy unsuspectingly. "That was wippin' of the old lady, especially the part about the clean collah."

There were several distinct giggles. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon his companions with a reproving glance.

"I weally think this mewmiment is ill-timed," he said. "It does not show good feelin' to gwin and giggle at a touchin' reminiscence like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Green was coughing. He turned away, and began to show the juniors over the great ship. The afternoon sun was linking behind the distant roofs.

"These are the funnels," said Mr. Green. "Of course you know a funnel when you see it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They are used for several purposes, among others for refrigerating the meat on long voyages."

"Bai Jove."

"For what?" asked Figgins.

"Refrigerating the meat on long voyages," said Mr. Green.

But I should have thought that the heat would have had the opposite effect," said Arthur Augustus; "to say hing of the smoke."

"It is the smoke that does it."

"The smoke?"

"Ay, ay. The smoke turns a small fan, which works a lever connection with a dynamo, which generates a current of electricity which works the refrigerator."

"Bai Jove, that is weally remarkable."

"I shall show you a great many remarkable things on this ship."

"I think you will," murmured Jack Blake, "if we believe them."

"Did you speak, sir?"

"Oh, no. Go on."

"This is the main hatchway. It is so called because it is here that the hens are set on long voyages, to hatch the eggs."

"Bai Jove!"

"This is the upper deck. I suppose you know why it is called a deck?"

"Because it is one, I suppose," said Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's because this is the part of the ship that is decked out for visitors on important occasions," said Mr. Green.

"Bai Jove!"

"Here is the bridge. This is where the captain stands at midnight and steers the course by the stars."

"Bai Jove."

"And that is the chart-house on the bridge, as I dare say you know—"

"Can we look into it?"

"No; I am afraid you would disturb the dying patients—"

"The what?"

"It is used as a hospital while we are in harbour," explained Mr. Green. "Several of the crew who are dying from the effects of sea-sickness have been laid there to pass their last moments in peace and quietness."

"Bai Jove!"

"Can we go on the bridge?" asked Manners. "I should like to, as the captain isn't here—"

"It is impossible."

"How is it impos, Mr. Gween?"

"A strong current of electricity is turned on at the ladder, which would have the effect of immediately electrocuting any person who trespassed on the bridge."

"Bai Jove!"

"Let's go below," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I say, Mr. Gween, that's fearfully dangewous, you know. Suppose we hadn't met you on board, and had gone on the bwidje—"

"The result would have been instantly fatal."

"Howwible. I weally think it is weckless of Captain Bolsovah to allow cunwents of electwicity to wandah about the ship in that way."

"We have to take some precaution against land-lubbers getting where they've no business," said Mr. Green. "There have been young idiots on board this ship who would go anywhere if they weren't stopped."

"Have there weally?"

"Ay, ay."

D'Arcy wondered what his companions were giggling at again. Mr. Green, whose face was perfectly solemn, led the way below. The juniors looked with great admiration into the immense saloon. It had been freshly painted, and though not quite completed, it was a splendid sight.

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy. "I think we can be quite comfy here, deah boys."

"Yes, rather," said Blake. "I suppose this will be turned into a class-room. I'd like to see the sleeping-berths, too."

"The Head says we are to have diffent parts of the ship accordin' to our houses," said D'Arcy. "I think I pwefer the blunt end of the ship, you know."

Mr. Green stared.

"The what?" he asked.

"The blunt end. The New House wottahs can have the sharp end."

"That's utter rot," said Figgins. "The——"

"I wufuse to have my wemarks chawactewised as uttah wot, Figgins."

"They are rot, all the same. You know perfectly well that the aft end of the ship is always reserved for better-class passengers, and so it stands to reason that it must be for the New House."

"Clear as Euclid," said Kerr.

"Yes, rather," remarked Patty Wynn. "The blunt end is for the New House of course."

"I wufuse to admit anythin' of the sort," said D'Arcy. "As the cock-house at St. Jim's, we natuwallly take the best——"

"As the what?"

"The cock-house at St. Jim's——"

"Are you looking for a thick ear Gussy?"

"I wogard that question as widiculous."

"Well, you're going the right way to find one," said Figgins. "We all know which house at St. Jim's is the cock-house."

"Yaas, wathah—ours. I weally considah, Figgins, that you are an uttah ass. If it were not that we are the guests of Mr. Gween, I should be inclined to administah a feahful thwashin' to you on the spot."

"Cheese it," exclaimed Blake. "Now——"

"I wufuse to cheese it. I say——"

"Oh, shut up, all of you," said Tom Merry. "You can't waste Mr. Green's time while you wrangle like this. Let's get on with the washing."

"Ay, ay," said Mr. Green.

"Yaas, you are quite wight, Tom Mewwy. We owe an apology to Mr. Gween for wastin' his valuable time in this weckless way," said D'Arcy. "Mr. Gween, I hope you will accept my sincere apology for any seemin' wudeness. I was expawered for the moment by that howlin' ass, Figgins."

"Ay, ay," said Mr. Green, grinning. "This way, young gentlemen."

"But I say, my fwend, in which part of the beastly ship is there most accommodation—the sharp end or the blunt end?"

"Ha, ha! Aft, of course."

"Good. That settles it, bai Jove."

"Settlea what?" demanded Figgins.

"Why, there are more School House chaps than New House chaps, so we shall have to have the blunt end," said D'Arcy triumphantly.

"Rot!"

"That's right," said Lowther, with a nod. "There's no getting out of that, Figgins. You'll have the fore part for a dead cert."

Figgins grunted.

"Well, come to think of it, our place is in advance," he remarked. "The New House always leads."

"Right-ho," said Kerr.

"I wogard that statement as bosh. I considah——"

"Oh, ring off, and come on. We're wasting time," said Digby.

"This was the library, gentlemen," said Mr. Green. "The books have been taken out now, along with the other fittings."

"And that room?"

"That's the lounge?"

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy, looking into the lounge room of the steamer, a very extensive apartment with a glass dome. "This would make a vewy comfy juniah common-woom."

"Yes, we're likely to get it, too," said Blake. "I suppose it will be a class-room. I suppose that's the dining-room there, Mr. Green?"

"Ay, ay."

"A fine big room too," said Tom Merry. "Pretty nearly as big as the dining-hall in the School House at St. Jim's."

"There is a second-class dining-room, too——"

"Ah, that will be for the New House, of course," Lowther remarked.

"Will it?" said Figgins.

"It's smaller than this," said Mr. Green.

"There you are!" exclaimed Blake, with a grin. "You take the smaller size in everything, you New House boudners, except when it comes to swelled heads."

"Look here, Blake——"

"This is the smoking-room."

"They won't admit us here," grinned Lowther. "I suppose this will be the masters' room, kids. I say, who's that shouting?"

There was a sound of a rough voice calling on deck. Mr. Green gave a slight start.

"I think that must be Mr. Thropp," he remarked. "We'd better go up. Come up this way—this is the grand staircase to the boat deck."

The staircase was a wide and large one, such as is only found on the best-appointed passenger steamers. In the well of it was the lift, which at once attracted D'Arcy's attention. He adjusted his eyeglass and peered through the grille.

"I say, that's a beastly lift, isn't it?" he exclaimed.

"Ay, ay."

"Isn't it workin'?"

"Not at present."

"Bai Jove, that's a pity. I find it wathah exhaustin' walkin' upstairs, you know. I suppose it can't be set workin'?"

Tom Merry gave the swell of St. Jim's a shove from behind.

"Get on, Gussy."

"I wufuse to get on——"

Mr. Green hurried away as the voice was heard again. The juniors followed more slowly. There was a curious expression on Tom Merry's face.

"I say, I think I know that voice," he remarked. "I've heard it before."

"Seems familiar," said Figgins.

"Come on, and let's see."

The juniors hurried on deck. The rough voice was louder now, and it was addressing Mr. Green in language more forcible than polite. The eyes of the St. Jim's juniors turned upon the speaker, and they knew him again at a glance. Mr. Thropp, the chief mate of the Condor, was the red-faced man who had been their fellow-passenger in the Southampton express.

CHAPTER 15.

The Discomfiture of Mr. Thropp.

MR. THROPP turned his eyes upon Tom Merry & Co. at the same moment, and the brick-red hue of his face became a trifle redder. He strode towards them.

"So you're here."

Tom Merry looked at him calmly. There was evidently going to be a row, but the hero of the Shell did not shrink from it. He was not afraid of Mr. Thropp with all his bluster.

"Yes, we are here," he said quietly.

"What are you doing here, you young scoundrels?"

Tom Merry flushed red.

"You cannot expect an answer if you address us like that," he said.

"Yaas, wathah! I wogard this wed-faced wottah as a perfect beast, you chaps. What he weally wants is a feahful thwashin'." Mr. Thropp turned purple.

"Do you know that I am chief mate of this steamer?" he bawled.

"Are you weally?"

"I am."

"I dare say you are," said Tom Merry. "That does not give you the right to act as a bully and a brute, however."

"Quite wight."

"Do you know I could have you arrested for trespassing on this ship?"

"I know you could do nothing of the sort," retorted Tom Merry. "We came to look at the ship, as we had a perfect right to do, as we are to sail in her next week."

"Where do you come from?"

"From St. Jim's."

"Ah, you belong to the parcel of brats we are to take about, I suppose."

Tom Merry snapped his teeth.

"We belong to St. Jim's. This vessel has been chartered by our headmaster for a summer cruise. If you don't mend your manners, Mr. Thropp, I think it's very likely that you won't stay long aboard the Condor."

Mr. Thropp gasped for breath.

It was true that prudence should have made him willing to meet the boys from St. Jim's on good terms, but he was an ill-tempered man, and the incident in the train had ruffled him too deeply for him to have recovered yet.

"You—you cheeky young villain!"

"Hold your tongue!" said Tom Merry sharply.

"You—you tell me, the chief mate of this vessel, to hold my tongue!"

"I would tell you so if you were captain. No one has a right to address me like that. We are ready to go ashore. Stop your abuse, then, and shut up."

"I'll—I'll have you thrown into the harbour," spluttered the chief mate.

"Rot!"

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

Mr. Thropp glared. Those expressive remarks were jerked at him, as it were, by the juniors, and they exasperated him beyond bounds. He was used to making people shrink from his savage voice, and he forgot that the juniors of St. Jim's were not deck hands at his mercy.

He turned to several grinning seamen who were looking on. Their faces became grave at once as his savage glance swept round.

"Fling these young scoundrels into their boat!" he vociferated.

The men looked at one another. There were three or four of them, and ten of the sturdy juniors, so the task would not have been an easy one. But Tom Merry & Co. did not want trouble with the hands.

"We will go without that," said Tom Merry quietly. "Come on, you chaps."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Mr. Thwopp as a beast."

"Come on, Gussy."

The juniors walked calmly to the side. Mr. Thropp glared round, and his glance settled upon Green, who was looking very annoyed and uncomfortable.

"What do you mean by allowing these boys aboard here, Green?" he bawled.

"I saw no harm in it, sir."

"No harm in it! No harm in having a rabble of brats nosing about the ship! Are you a confounded fool, Jack Green?"

"I hope not, sir."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned round. He put up his eyeglass, shook off Blake's hand from his arm, and fixed a withering look upon Mr. Thropp.

"Pway undahstand," he said, "that——"

"Come on," said Blake.

"I cannot come on till I have spoken to Mr. Thwopp. It is imposs. for me to allow his wemarks to pass. He has wferred to us as a wabble of bwats."

"Get off this ship!"

"I shall get off this ship with a gweat deal of pleasure, Mr. Thwopp, if only to get out of the sound of your unpleasantly waucous voice," said Arthur Augustus. "But before I go I wish you to distinctly undahstand——"

"We're all in, Gussy. Come on!"

"I wrefuse to come on till I have spoken my mind to Mr. Thwopp: You will pway undahstand, Mr. Thwopp, that I uttaly wrefuse to be chwactewised as a wabble of bwats—I mean that my friends and I uttaly wrefuse to be chwactewised as a wabble of bwats."

"Are you going?" roared Mr. Thropp, exasperated to a pitch of fury by the remarks of the swell of St. Jim's, and the irrepressible giggles of the ship's hands.

"Yaas, I am goin', but I shall finish my wemarks first. I wegard you as an extremely unplessant and ungentlemanly beast. What you weally want is a feahful thwashin'. When I come aboard the Condah for good I shall make it a point to teach you mannahs in some way, or else I shall have to wrequest the captain to discharge you. That is all."

And D'Arcy skipped into the boat just as Mr. Thropp, losing all patience, rushed at him to fling him there. The chief mate took his fist from the top of the ladder.

"Let me get near you!" he bawled.

D'Arcy looked up at him frigidly.

"You are at perfect liberty to get as near as you like," he replied. "You can come down into the boat, but I warn you that if you do I shall thwash you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Green.

Thropp turned upon him savagely.

"What are you hee-hawing about, Green?"

"I wasn't aware that I was hee-hawing, sir."

"Well, shut up that row."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"I shall report you to the captain for this."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"As for you, you young rascal——"

"I wrefuse to be alluded to as a wascal. I wefuse——"

"Oh, shove off!" said Tom Merry.

"I wrefuse to allow you to be impertinent to me, Mr. Thwopp, and I shall certainly wrequest the captain to discharge you."

Mr. Thropp did not reply. His feelings were too deep for words. He ran down the wooden steps to get hold of the swell of St. Jim's. The boatman—perhaps intentionally—pushed off at the same instant, and Mr. Thropp instead of stepping into the boat, stepped into a widening gap of water.

There was a splash, and a gasping yell, and the red face went right under the surging waters. It came up the next moment, spluttering.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "I wondah what that chap jumped into the watah for?"

"Help—ow—h—help—gerrooooh!"

"Where's that boathook?"

"Here you are!"

Tom Merry hooked the boathook into the red-faced man's collar, and jerked him towards the boat. Mr. Thropp gave a gasp as he received a dig in the neck, but that of course could not be helped.

"Oh! Ow! Gerrooooh!"

"Have you got the wottah, Tom Mewwy?"

"I've got him."

"I should be sowwy for him to be dwowned, though he is such a feahful pig. Don't dwag him into the boat; he will splash us and spoil our clothes."

"Get hold!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Don't let him come in here, Tom Mewwy——"

But there was no help for it. Mr. Thropp was dragged spluttering and gasping and dripping with water into the boat.

He sat up in a pool, and gasped, and glared at the juniors. His cap was floating away, and he glared through a tangled mass of wet hair.

"You young scoundrels!"

"I wegard that as wathah ungwateful when we have saved your beastly life," said Arthur Augustus. "Don't be a wotten cad, you know."

"You young——"

"Oh, shut up," said Tom Merry, "and get out of our boat! Bring her closer, my man."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said the boatman.

The dripping mate clambered out of the boat. The latter pushed off again and pulled away. The dripping figure disappeared, and Mr. Green waved his hand cordially to the juniors, and they waved their caps back to him.

CHAPTER 16.

The Return.

It came on to rain slightly as the juniors stepped ashore.

Tom Merry paid the boatman, and the chums hurriedly donned their coats, such of them as had been thoughtful enough to bring coats. Arthur Augustus uttered an exclamation.

"Bai Jove, where's my coat?"

"Blessed if I know," grunted Figgins.

"Where's my coat?"

"Look in your waistcoat pocket," suggested Lowther.

"I am not weawin' a waistcoat, as you know vewy well, Lowthah; and, in any case, your suggestion is uttaly wiculous. I say, boatman!"

"Ay, ay!"

"Have I left a beastly coat in that boat?"

"No, sir."

"Then I must have left it on board the Condah, deah boys."

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry. "Come on without it."

"I am sowwy, Tom Mewwy, but it is imposs. for me to pwoceed without my coat. You see that it is wainin'——"

"Get under shelter, then," growled Manners.

"I must have my coat. It was a valuable coat."

"Well, they won't steal it. It can stay there until we go on our cruise," said Tom Merry. "Come on, Gussy, and don't be an ass! We've got only half an hour before our train goes, and there's not time to pull to the Condor again and back. Besides, that pig Thropp wouldn't let us go aboard."

"I should insist upon goin' aboard."

"Now look here, Gussy——"

ANSWERS

"I weally wish you would not argue so much, Tom Mewwy. It is impos. for me to pwocced without my coat."

"Oh, kill him somebody," said Kerr. "Let's get into the station."

"I wofuse—"

"Will you take my arm, Gussy?" asked Blake sweetly.

"Undah the circs, Blake, I must wofuse to take your arm. It is necessary to return to the steamah for my beastly coat."

"Take my arm, Gussy."

"I decline to do so."

"Then I will take yours."

"Pway welcase me."

"Take his other arm, Herries."

"Right-ho!" said Herries heartily. "I've got it."

"Welcase me at once, Hewwies, or it is extwemely pwobable that I shall lose my tempah and stwike you."

"I'll risk it," grinned Herries. "Come along."

"I wofuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"Kick him, Tom Merry."

"Certainly."

"Hold on, Tom Mewwy. I wofuse to be kicked. Upon the whole I will come along."

"Then come; and shut up," grunted Blake.

And the juniors made their way to the railway station. Under the shelter of the platform, they heard the rain pattering without regarding it. Their visit to the Condor had been a success upon the whole, in spite of the unpleasant incident in connection with Mr. Thropp.

"We'll make that rotter sing smaller when we're aboard the Condor for good," Monty Lowther remarked. "We'll put him through it, and educate him."

"Yaas, wathah! I wogard him as an absolute beast, you know. I weally hope that he will take care of my coat."

"I say, doesn't this seaside air make you jolly hungry," Fatty Wynn remarked. "Do you fellows notice it?"

"We notice it about you."

"Well, I don't deny that I've got a healthy appetite," said Fatty Wynn.

"You wouldn't find many to believe you if you did," remarked Figgins. "I verily believe you could eat anything—"

"Except your fig puddings," said Wynn.

"Oh, leave my fig puddings alone," said Figgins crossly.

"Rather! I wouldn't touch 'em with a bargepole," said Fatty cheerfully. "Don't I remember the last time you made a fig pudding."

"Oh, choese it," said Kerr; "you make me feel ill."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

"What I was going to say is," went on Fatty Wynn, "that there's a jolly big refreshment place here, and that we have plenty of time for a really good feed."

"Trust Fatty to think of that!"

"Well, someone has to think of these things. It's rather important, too, considering that we have a long railway journey before us. What price another lunch-basket for the train?"

"That's an important question, what price?" Tom Merry remarked. "Funds are running low, and it looks to me as if there won't be anything left for that farewell feed in the dormitory."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Tom Merry.

"I had given up the ideah of that, Tom Mewwy."

"Yes; but I hadn't."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"However, we'd better have a feed before we start," said Tom Merry. "Come along, and let's see what we can get."

The pull on the salt water had helped to give a keenness to the appetites of the juniors. They were all hungry, and they soon found a feast to their liking. They did it ample justice—especially Fatty Wynn. The idea of the lunch-basket was not adopted, but several bundles of sandwiches were obtained, and Fatty Wynn stowed away several pork-pies in his pockets, and took a big paper bag of jam tarts under his arm when he quitted the place.

"We've got a long way to go," he remarked. "There's only one thing I feel anxious about in connection with the Condor, and that is, that the Head may not have foreseen how hungry the sea air will make us, and may not have made adequate arrangements about the provisions."

"Which would be twible."

"Here comes the train."

The train was grunting along the platform. There was a rush of passengers, and the juniors of St. Jim's secured a carriage to themselves. They tumbled into it, and Fatty Wynn laid his bag of tarts on the seat, and then stood in the window to show everybody concerned that the carriage was full.

"No room," he said blandly to every applicant for admission; and, as a matter of fact, every seat was taken.

"Bat Jove, I am feelin' wathah-exhausted," Arthur Augustus remarked, as he sank down heavily upon a seat. "It will be dark before we get to St. Jim's, I'm afraid. I shall not be sowwy to get to bed."

"You will be sorry to get something else that's waiting for us," grinned Blake.

"I weally hope Mr. Waitton will not attach any undue importance to our havin' been absent from callin'-ovah."

"I rather think he will."

"Well, if he is angry, I suppose it's no good weasonin' with him. We shall have to gwin and bear it."

"Hallo, we're off!"

"Yaas, wathah. The twain's startin'."

"Got the carriage to ourselves," said Fatty Wynn, turning from the window with a grin of satisfaction upon his plump face. "We're entitled to it, as we fill all the seats. Where are my tarts?"

"Haven't seen them," said Figgins.

"I say, where are they?"

"Perhaps you've eaten them in a moment of absent-mindedness," suggested Lowther. "How many were there?"

"Seven in a bag."

"You might have swallowed them, bag and all, without thinking."

"Oh, don't be an ass. Have you put them anywhere?" asked Fatty Wynn, looking anxiously about the carriage.

"No, honour bright. Where did you put them?"

"I laid them on the seat—my hat! Oh, that young villain D'Arcy's sitting on them."

Arthur Augustus gave a jump.

"Eh! What?"

"Get up!" roared Fatty Wynn. "You're sitting on my tarts."

Arthur Augustus jumped up as if the bag of tarts had suddenly changed into a bag of red-hot iron.

There was a yell of laughter in the carriage.

The beautifully creased trousers of the swell of the School House were plastered with jam and crust. The paper bag had burst open as D'Arcy plumped his weight upon it, and the School House swell had sat fairly in the tarts.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn was the only one who did not laugh. He was furious.

"Look at my tarts!" he roared. "My jam tarts! He's sat in them! My jam tarts!"

"You howwid wottah!" gasped D'Arcy, squirming round so as to get a look at himself behind. "You beastly, howwible wastah; you've jammed my twousahs all ovah."

"Blow your trousers! My tarts—"

"Blow your tarts! My twousahs—"

"They're spoiled."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake. "They're both spoiled."

"The clumsy ass!"

"The howwid, gorgin' wottah!"

The tarts were squashed and pulpy. D'Arcy's trousers were in a terrible mess with the jam. He tried to scrape it off, the other juniors being too doubled up with laughter to offer him any assistance.

"Lend me a hand, Tom Mewwy. I weally think you might do somethin' beside sit there cacklin', Blake. You wottahs! You fat wottah!"

"You clumsy ass; why don't you look where you're sitting?"

"You shwicked' idiot; why couldn't you put your filthy tarts on the beastly wack, instead of on the seat."

"You ass!"

"You duffah!"

"Here, stop them," gasped Figgins, as the equally exasperated juniors flew at one another, "Stop them! Hold on!"

Tom Merry dragged Fatty Wynn back. Figgins gave D'Arcy a shove on the chest, which made him stagger back and sit down suddenly. He sat down upon the knees of Jack Blake, who gave a roar.

"Get off; you sticky duffer!"

D'Arcy scrambled off his knees. Jack Blake gazed at the jammy stickiness adhering to the knees of his trousers, and rose to his feet wrathfully.

"I am awfully sowwy, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "It was the fault of that beast Figgins. He shoved me over in an extwemely wude mannah."

"You dangerous lunatic—"

"I wofuse to be called a dangewous lunatic."

"Sit down," said Blake, and he gave D'Arcy a twist that sat him upon the knees of the giggling Figgins. "There's some for you, Figgy."

Figgins ceased giggling suddenly.

"Ow! Get off! You're making me jammy!"

"I weally cannot say I am sowwy, Figgins," said D'Arcy, in no hurry to move. "You see, undah the circ—"

"Get off."

Figgins pushed the swell of the School House off. The jam was getting wiped off by this time, and Figgins had not suffered so much as Blake; but he was pretty sticky.

"You utter image," he said. "How am I to get this off?"

"It's all the fault of Fatty Wynn. Why did he want to cavp provisions wound with him enough for a siege of Ladysr when he had eaten enough for a dozen navvies in the welfament woom?"

"Rot!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly. "We didn't have time for a really good feed. You fellows all saw what I had—a beefsteak pie, a few pork pies, a cold rabbit, and some odds and ends and an apple pudding and a bunch of bananas. There wasn't anything else except the custard and prunes, and the chocolate, and the biscuits I had with the coffee."

"No wonder you wanted a bag of tarts in the train," said Tom Merry sympathetically. "Feeling peckish now, I suppose?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I do feel a slightly empty feeling," said Fatty Wynn. "I think I had better have a sandwich."

And Fatty Wynn had a sandwich, which was followed by half-a-dozen more, while D'Arcy, Figgins, and Blake scraped off the jam. The scraping kept them pretty busily occupied for a time; but it did not all come off. Arthur Augustus looked daggers at Fatty Wynn every now and then. In the down journey his waistcoat had been spoiled. In the up journey his trousers had been ruined. No wonder he looked at Fatty Wynn as if he could eat him. Fatty Wynn looked at the sandwiches and pork-pies as if he could eat them—and he did.

"Wayland!" exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly. The train roared to a standstill. The juniors of St. Jim's poured out of the carriage. The rain had ceased, and it was getting dark.

The fast train swept onward towards distant London, and the juniors crossed to the platform whence the local started for Rylcombe. Arthur Augustus gave a sudden start.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter now?"

"I've left my beastly cane in the cawwiage."

"Silly ass!"

"I refuse to be called a silly ass! I have left my——"

"Too late now!"

"Wot! The twain must be stopped. That cane was a present from my governah, and it would be disrespectful to him to lose it. I say, you portah fellow—stop that twain!"

"Hey?" said the porter.

"Stop that twain—that beastly express for London! Put up a signal or somethin'." I've left my cane in the cawwiage!"

The porter stared at him blankly.

"Do you hear?" roared D'Arcy. "Telegraph aftah the beastly thing, or somethin', and make the wotten twain come back. Don't you understand? I've left my cane in the cawwiage!"

The porter tapped his forehead significantly and turned away. D'Arcy gazed after him in astonishment.

"The fellow's uttahly stupid!" he exclaimed. "He doesn't seem to undahstand."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is wathah unfeelin' of you to laugh, Tom Mewwy, and you, too, Blake, at such a sevious moment as this."

"Oh, come along, Gussy. I know you'll be the death of me some day!" gasped Tom Merry. "Come along. We'll leave information at the station about the cane, and it will be looked after for you."

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that!"

The juniors had ample time to catch the local. They were somewhat fatigued, and during the short run from Wayland to Rylcombe some of them dozed.

"Rylcombe!"

Tom Merry started up.

"Here we are, kids! Look alive!"

"Wight you are, Tom Mewwy! Pway look wound, all of you, and see that I don't leave anythin' behind this time."

They bundled out of the train. D'Arcy was bareheaded, as he had put his hat on the rack while he leaned his head against Tom Merry's shoulder and dozed. In the excitement of the moment he did not notice it, however, and the train buzzed out of the station before someone called his attention to it.

"Where's your hat, Gussy?"

The swell of St. Jim's uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Bai Jove!"

"Where is it?"

"I've left it in the beastly twain, on the wack."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegah it as wathah unfeelin'——"

"Take hold of him, somebody, or he'll leave part of himself strewed about the station next," said Blake. "I suppose you haven't left your boots or socks lying about anywhere, have you, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Lucky it's left off raining. We shall have to hoof it to the school."

"I don't see how I am goin' without a hat."

"Borrow a cap of one of the porters!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Well, I'm off!" said Tom Merry, and he led the way out of the station. "You can leave word about your hat, Gussy."

"I suppose there's nothin' else to be done."

"And be quick. We've missed calling-over, but we shall be in before bed-time if we buck up."

The juniors did buck up. They made a quick walk down

the lane to St. Jim's, and rang up Taggles with mighty peals on the bell. The school porter came grunting sulkily to let them in. "Which Mr. Railton is waitin' for you," was his only remark, "and likewise Mr. Ratcliff."

"After the feast the reckoning," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Good-bye, Figgins."

"So long."

The New House juniors went towards their own house. Tom Merry & Co. walked meekly into the School House, and encountered Mr. Railton in the hall. The housemaster looked at them grimly.

"You were absent from calling-over?" he said.

"We are sorry, sir——"

"Extwemely sowwy; but undah the circs——"

"Where have you been?"

"We thought that, as we are to cruise on board the Condor, sir, we ought to go and have a look at her," explained Tom Merry.

"You have been to Southampton?" ejaculated the housemaster.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I am glad to see that you are not afraid to tell the truth as to your escapade," said Mr. Railton. "I cannot overlook this, all the same. You will all of you come into my study to-morrow morning."

"Yes, sir."

"Weally, Mr. Wailton——"

"You may go."

"But weally——"

They dragged D'Arcy away. The junior Forms were just going to bed, and the returned prodigals joined them.

"Well, after all, we've had a jolly good time," said Tom Merry. "We can face the music. It was a ripping little run!"

And Arthur Augustus remarked:

"Yaas, wathah!"

THE END.

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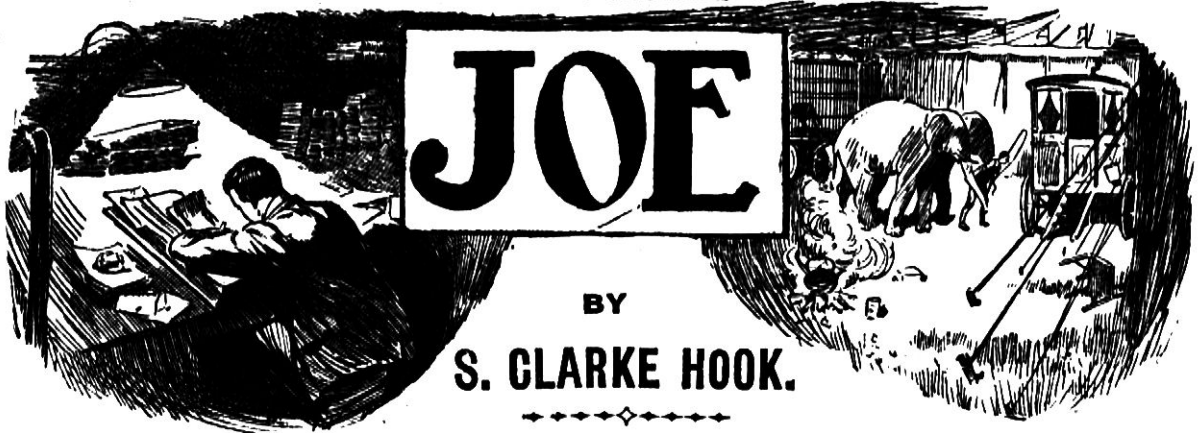
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Joe throws up office work, and while tramping along a country lane meets Jim, who is running away from Muerte, a bullying circus proprietor. Joe and Jim chum up and join Muerte's rival, Ruabino. From motives of revenge, Muerte bribes Luigi, Ruabino's former lion-tamer, to let loose his one-time charges. Not content with this, Luigi, with Giles, his villainous accomplice, knocks Rubby into the river, from which he is rescued by Joe. Muerte swears he will follow Ruabino's circus and ruin him. This he endeavours to do by dashing his traction-engine into Rubby's caravans, which are, however, saved by Joe's presence of mind. One day Joe's guardian, Silas Read, who treated Joe with great cruelty before he joined Ruabino, turns up at the circus and claims his ward.

Ruabino refuses to give him up, but with the help of Giles, Read kidnaps Joe, and bears him away in a motor-car, after having brutally lashed him. Joe is taken to a lonely house, where he, however, continues to defy Read.

(Now go on with the story.)

Joe Turns the Tables on His Guardian.

"Here's my whip!" exclaimed Giles, producing one with a heavy lash, and using it freely on Joe. "Oh, you can yell as much as you like, young shaver. No one will hear you here. You've got to be taught the proper way to speak to your uncle, and there ain't a better man than me to do it, though I say it myself. You can get to your room, sir, and I will attend to this young shaver."

Read whispered something to his accomplice, and then left the room, while Giles locked the door, and placed the key in his pocket.

Joe now looked round the room, which was furnished as a bed-room, though the furniture was so old and worn as to be practically valueless.

There was a large mahogany bedstead in it, and Giles pulled the bedclothes into some sort of order; then, going to a wardrobe that appeared to be rotting to pieces with age, he brought out a bottle of rum, a glass, and a jug of water.

"Now, you see, young shaver," he exclaimed. "I am just a-going to have a drop of this, then I'm a-going to turn in. It's not often as I do indulge; still, on this 'ere horripicious occasion, as they say, I'm a-going to."

"Give me a drink of water!" moaned Joe. "I am parched with thirst."

"You ain't a-going to have a drink of water. It was through you as I was treated shameful, now you will have to suffer for it. If you behave yourself to-night it ain't impossible that I shall give you some bread and water in the morning. Too much drink ain't good for man nor boy, and that's jest why I take so little."

Giles looked as though he took a very considerable quantity, and on the present occasion he half filled a tumbler, and gulped down the raw spirit.

"There!" he exclaimed, taking a sip of water after it. "What I say is a drain is beat for all, only some men don't know when to stop. Now, I ain't one of those. A man as drinks ain't no good to hisself nor anyone else."

"You might give me a drink of water, Giles."

"Not one drop. You don't want no water. It ain't good for boys. Teaches 'em to drink suthin' stronger. You will

have a glass of water for your breakfast, if you behave yourself, and if you don't, you won't have nothink to drink till you do behave. I think I'll get these boots off, too, afore I turn in."

Joe felt that it would be useless to plead to the ruffian, and so he lay on the floor watching him.

"See here, boy," he growled, "I've told you as I set my face agin drink, and so I do, but on an occasion like this 'ere, a little more won't do me any harm."

He had a little more; or, at least, what he called a little more, and after that he seemed to require more still. Once he actually got into bed, but he soon got out again and helped himself to more of the spirit, and thus he went on until he had actually drained the bottle.

Then the ruffian staggered to the bed, and, tumbling on it, fell asleep with his feet on the pillow, and his head half hanging out of bed.

Directly Joe saw that the man was making himself drunk, he commenced to wrench at his bonds, and almost as soon as Giles was asleep, Joe had freed his hands. Giles had not taken very great care in binding his wrists, and the task of freeing them was not as difficult as Joe had anticipated.

He knew that even if the ruffian awoke he would be so intoxicated as to be of very little service to his accomplice. Joe quickly freed his legs, and then he drained the water-jug, and felt greatly refreshed by the cool draught.

Stepping to the bedside, Joe felt in the sleeper's pocket, and he got the key of the door, which he noiselessly unlocked.

For a moment the lad hesitated, then all the wrongs his inhuman uncle had done to him flashed through his brain, and a fierce light, such as was seldom to be seen in Joe's steadfast eyes, came to them now.

Giles was snoring loudly, and nothing was likely to waken him. Joe glanced at the door, which was of great strength, and as it opened into the room, it would be almost impossible for a man to burst it; certainly one as drunk as he knew Giles must be, would be unable to do so. But Joe meant running no risks that he could avoid.

Stepping softly to the window, he opened it as noiselessly as possible, then he slung Giles' boots out of it, thinking that if he put them on he might be able to kick out one of the panels, although even then he would have been unable to get through the narrow opening.

Now Joe searched about the room, and in a cupboard amongst some old lumber he found a coil of rope.

Picking up the whip which the ruffian had used on him, Joe left the room, locking the door on the outside, and putting the key in his pocket.

He was now in almost complete darkness, and he was hesitating whether to go back for the lamp, when he saw a chink of light beneath one of the other doors, and towards this he made his way.

It was at the end of the passage, but guided by the narrow chink of light, Joe had no difficulty in finding his way to the door, at which he remained listening intently.

Now, there is no doubt that what he should have done would have been to leave the house and make his escape; but Joe had received so many wrongs at the hands of the miscreant inside that room that he felt he must punish him with his own hands.

"He shall have a lesson!" murmured Joe. "If it costs me my life he shall."

Then inch by inch he softly opened the door.

This apartment was much better furnished. On a small table was an empty wine bottle with a glass at its side.

Silas Read lay on the bed in a deep sleep, and Joe never doubted that he had been drinking heavily, although he knew from past experience that he would not be actually drunk.

Inch by inch Joe crept towards the sleeper, stopping as the old boards creaked, although Read was sleeping far too deeply for such a slight sound to have awakened him.

Like Giles, he had only taken off his boots. He was lying on his back, and Joe gradually pushed the cord beneath the miscreant's ankles, stopping when he moved in his sleep.

Now Joe made the rope into a noose, and left it undrawn, for he had his arm to secure.

Cutting the cord, Joe made another noose, and passed it over Read's wrist, then he fastened the other end to the top of the bed, drawing the rope as tightly as he dared.

Now Joe drew the noose round Read's ankles taut, and before the miscreant was fully awake Joe had knotted the end of the cord to the foot-rail.

"You young demon!" yelled Read, struggling in vain to get free, and making frantic attempts to unfasten the noose around his wrist, it being utterly impossible for him to free his legs, unless he broke the cord, and it was far too strong for such a thing as that to happen.

Joe coolly went to the head of the bed, and drew up the cord which was round the infuriated man's wrist, until his hand touched the bed-rail, and there he made it fast in such a manner that he felt absolutely confident he would never be able to free it without help. There was, of course, the risk of Giles smashing in his door and coming to the rescue, but Joe was so enraged and indignant at the shameful treatment that he had received, that he was determined to risk this.

"What did I tell you, Silas Read?" he said, picking up the whip, and fixing his eyes on the wretch. "Did I not tell you that one day I would punish you? You say that the law is on your side—a thing I do not believe—but we will assume it is, and then I say the law is not competent to punish you for your crimes against me. I am not only referring to to-night's vile work, but to the work of years. You know what that work has been, so do I; or, at least, in part. I know you have rendered my life so miserable that I have longed for death. Well, can you wonder now if I am revengeful? It was well that you left your lamp burning. I suppose you were too drunk to put it out, but you are sober now. I will show you some of your work, before I punish you for it. See here, you creature! See how you have treated your dead brother's son, you cowardly miscreant!"

Joe stripped himself to the waist, then, standing in the light of the lamp, revealed his back to the cowardly ruffian.

It was in a terrible state, but no sign of pity came into Read's eyes; all the same, there was an expression of fear, for he knew that if the lad escaped and revealed his back to anyone else, he might get severely punished for such brutal treatment.

"I may have struck you harder than I intended," said Read; "but you must admit that you deserved very severe punishment."

"So you are frightened of the consequences!" exclaimed Joe. "You thought I was badly injured! You have no cause to fear, Silas Read. I shall not let anyone see your vile work—or, at least, anyone who would send you to prison for it. But I am going to punish you for it. I am going to thrash you till you howl for mercy, and that's a thing I have never yet done to you; and you must admit that you deserve very severe punishment."

"Joseph! Remember who I am! I am your lawful guardian—your uncle, and—"

"I remember quite well who you are, but I also remember what you are!"

"Stop, boy, before it is too late! Remember that I am not the sort of man to forgive an insult."

"Why should I forgive your many insults?"

"You are a boy, and I am a man, and—"

"Quite so. Were I a man and you a boy, I should hope death would have cut me down before I committed such vile deeds as you have committed on me. When I was a child, you flogged me till I lost consciousness. I am not going to flog you till you lose consciousness, but I am going to flog you very severely. If you can say one word to convince me that my action is wrong, I will leave you as you are, and make my escape."

"I am sorry if I have been too harsh with you."

"It is so ridiculous!" exclaimed Joe. "You are sorry now, because you are somewhat in my power; but you would do the same again, and glory in it. You see, I know you, Silas Read."

"Stop! You shall go free! You forget that were I to raise my voice, Giles would come here!"

"You kicked me, and lashed me till your stick broke, and then you gagged me, and stuffed me under a seat! Well, I will forgive all that, after I have punished you for it."

"It is not for you to take the law into your own hands, boy!"

"Perhaps not; but as that happens to be the only way in which I can punish you, I shall do so. Stay! First I will lock the door! I quite realise that if Giles enters this room, I shall get far worse than I intend to give you, but I intend to run that risk. Now yell your loudest, and I promise you that you shall have good cause to howl."

Then Joe lashed the miscreant, and he shrieked to Giles for help. Heavy blows sounded on that ruffian's door, but Joe took no heed of that. The whip cracked round the writhing wretch's body, and his yells of pain echoed through the dreary building.

Now heavy blows sounded on Giles's door, but Joe was determined to risk his escape. He meant to deal punishment to Silas Read, and there could not be a doubt that the scamp was getting it.

Now a heavy crash sounded from the other room, and a few moments later blows sounded on the door.

"I think you have had enough, Silas Read," said Joe calmly, though he was somewhat breathless with his exertions. "At any rate, I am certain that it is time for me to go. I hope you have enjoyed this little interview, you cur, and that the thrashing I have given you has done you good. It is quite impossible that it can have done you any harm, because you are already as bad as you could possibly be. Take care, you scoundrel! If you threaten me again, I shall use the lash again. Now, you howling cur, get your friend to help you, if you can. I must say that he is a fitting friend for such a creature as you."

Joe stepped towards the table, and extinguished the lamp, and he had scarcely done so when the door was burst open.

Joe caught a glimpse of a dark form passing between him and the window, and the temptation was too great for him.

With all his strength he lashed at Giles, and then darted from the room, as the ruffian's yell of pain burst forth. But now Joe's difficulties commenced. He was in almost absolute darkness, and had not the slightest idea which way to turn to escape from the building.

"Free me!" cried Read. "Set me at liberty! There will be murder in this house to-night! Quick, you silly scoundrel! How dare you let that boy escape? I am bound hand and foot!"

"Right, sir!" growled Giles. "I'll soon set you at liberty, and then we will catch the boy! Where's yer cords? Oh, here they are! I've got a knife, and I'll slash 'em so, and—"

"Perdition! You have cut me, you silly scoundrel!"

"Well, that's 'cos my knife was rather sharp," declared Giles. "All the same, your feet is at liberty, and we will soon have your hands the same road. Let's feel where— Oh, here you are! Well, that's all right. The boy—"

"Fury!" howled Read. "You have cut my hand now!"

"Well, you see, I can't see in the dark; but you wanted to get loose, and seeing that I have set you at liberty, I don't think as you have got the right to miscall me."

Read was at liberty in a very few moments, and in the meantime Joe was groping his way along the passage in the hope of finding the stairs; but unfortunately for him, he turned the wrong way.

He certainly reached a flight of stairs, but they led to the upper floor, and now he saw Read and Giles coming along the passage with a lamp.

Both of them were without their boots, and Joe knew that if he could only get out of the house, he would easily be able to distance them.

His only course was to dart up the staircase, which he hoped would lead to the upper floor. In this he was disappointed. There was a turn in the staircase, and when he reached the top, he found his way barred by a small door.

Giles, who was almost upon him, was coming up the narrow stairs first, and Read followed close behind him, carrying the lamp.

Joe felt that escape was impossible; but he turned, and leapt at Giles, who was hurled backwards on Read, and they all three fell to the bottom of the stairs with bumps and a final heavy bang.

Joe was on the top, but, unfortunately for him, his uncle was a very active man, and he was so infuriated now that he was determined his nephew should not escape.

Although Read had bumped his head badly, he was up in a second. The lamp was smashed, but it was flaring up in a manner that may have added to his celerity.

Had the lamp gone out, Joe might have been able to dodge past his uncle; as it was, such a thing was quite out of the question, for the passage was narrow, and as Giles was now struggling to his feet, Joe darted up the stairs again; but neither Giles nor Read cared to follow him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Joe. "Come up, you miserable cowards, and I'll knock you down again! You don't look as though you liked your fall, Giles. Come along, you great hulking brute. Surely you are not afraid of a lad my age!"

Make him come up, Silas Read. I feel sure that you are too great a coward to do so. Mind that burning lamp does not set fire to the place. Ha, ha, ha! You have made a beastly mess of things, and look here, you silly old idiots, I'm going to force this door—if I can!"

Joe was in a small passage, and, taking a run, he hurled himself against the door with all his strength.

It was only fastened with a lock, and that gave way, while now he found himself in a little turret, which led on to the flat roof of the building.

The night was rather dark, but there was sufficient light to enable him to see his way about the roof, and he hoped to be able to dodge down the steps again if the two men followed him on the roof.

It was surrounded by a parapet, and Joe made his way to the further end, and took up his position by a stack of chimneys.

"Now, you young demon," cried Read, making his appearance at the turret, followed by Giles, "we have you in our power, and the sooner you surrender the better it will be for you!"

"I never have yet taken your advice, you rascal," retorted Joe, "and I am not at all likely to do it now. Why don't you come to chase me? Are you afraid of me, or don't you like running about in your socks? Ha, ha, ha! I hope you enjoyed your fall. It's lucky you fell on your stupid head, because that was a nice soft place to fall on."

"You will be punished all the more for your impertinence!" cried Read, drawing a revolver. "I am armed with a pistol, and unless you surrender, I shall fire at you!"

"Not you!" exclaimed Joe. "You wouldn't dare to fire! You would be afraid of the hangman! It is a marvel that such creatures as you escape him so long. Come along, Giles, you had better try to catch me. Silas Read appears to be afraid."

"Escape is quite impossible," declared Read. "One of us will remain at this door while the other catches you!"

"Yes! You will let Giles try to catch me!" sneered Joe. "You are much too great a coward to take part with him. You know perfectly well that I would hurt you if you did catch me. Oh, you are a contemptible creature, Silas Read! You are the meanest-spirited rascal I ever met in my life! I would rather have a great ruffian like Giles to deal with than you! How did you enjoy the thrashing I gave you? I made you smart, did I not? It is to be hoped it has done you some good, but I fear nothing could do that."

Joe hoped by taunting the two scoundrels to make them give chase; then he would have an opportunity of dodging past them; but they appeared to fathom his intention, and both remained near the turret, talking together in lowered voices.

"Listen to me, Joseph!" cried Read, at last. "I am fully determined to catch you, and could do so with the greatest of ease by wounding you in the leg. There is no place near this, and it would be quite impossible for anyone to hear the shot; but I don't want to break your leg, although I will surely do so if you do not surrender. The longer you keep me waiting, the worse it will be for you. If you choose to surrender now, I will consider letting you off the punishment you deserve."

"You are not at all likely to let me off, as you call it, Silas Read. You are too furious at the thrashing I gave you to do anything like that. No, if you catch me, I know from past experience what to expect."

"You little demon!" cried Read. "You do not know at all what to expect, for I will lash you within an inch of your life for what you have done!"

"Now you are showing your true character in your fury, you miscreant; but, you see, I knew it already, and was not at all likely to trust to the mercy of a reptile like you, who has no mercy. No, you silly rascal, I shall trust to myself, and if I get the chance of knocking you down the stairs again, I will do so. It was rather amusing to see you romping down those stairs, banging your stupid head on each step, but not nearly so amusing as it was to hear you howling for mercy when I flogged you. That is the first time I have given you a thrashing, Silas Read, but not the first time that you have deserved it, nor will it be the last time you will receive one from me."

These words so enraged Silas Read that he ordered Giles to give chase; but, unfortunately for Giles, he had no boots on, and though the roof was loaded, there were a good many joins in it, and he found the ridges extremely painful to tread on, nor could he pick his way in the darkness.

"Ha, ha, ha! It is as good as a play to watch you hobbling along!" cried Joe. "Mind you don't hurt your feet! You are rather drunk still, but the short sleep has sobered you somewhat. Ha, ha, ha! What have you done now?"

Giles had trodden on something sharp, and it caused him to raise his foot in the air and howl.

"Why don't you catch him?" snarled Read.

"Bust it! I've trod on a nail or summat!" hooted Giles.

"Ha, ha, ha! Tread on another one with the other foot, you silly scoundrel!" cried Joe. "A little pain will do you good, and you may as well make the feet match. No, you don't!"

Joe darted away as Giles made a rush at him; and, needless to say, he took particular care not to get too near to Read, who waited at the turret for him.

It is very doubtful if Giles could have caught him even if he had had his boots on; in his bare feet he had very little chance, and every now and then he trod on something that caused him to howl.

To make matters worse from his point of view, some large drops of rain now commenced to fall, and presently a vivid flash of lightning illumined the scene. The roof soon became slippery with the wet, and as Giles dodged to catch the fugitive, the ruffian fell heavily to the roof.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Joe. "You have hurt yourself again, haven't you, Giles? A clumsier man I never met! That is the second time you have fallen to-night, but I dare say you remember the first time, and there is not a doubt that Silas Read has not forgotten it. Don't you think you had better come and help the blundering idiot, Silas Read? It is no good standing there like the stupid beast you are, snarling at your accomplice. If I were Giles, and you snarled at me like that, I would give you a clump over the head, and kick you down the stairs. You had better do so, Giles. He richly deserves it; in fact, there are few things you could do to a thieving wretch like him that he would not deserve!"

"You demon!" howled Silas Read. "I'll have your life for this! I declare I will!"

There was another flash of lightning at that moment, and Joe saw the pistol levelled at his head; but he intended to chance this. His impression was that Read would not dare to go the length of firing at him, and even if he did so Joe preferred risking he shots to being captured.

"You can please yourself about that, you long-nosed, stupid-looking rascal!" retorted Joe. "All the same, you will have to wound me pretty severely if you want to catch me. Now, Giles, hurry up! Don't you see your amiable master is waiting for you?"

"He ain't my master, you rat!"

"Ah, that's what you think, but he knows he is, and he orders you about like a slave. You are compelled to obey him, otherwise he would give you a thrashing."

"I'd like to see him try it on!"

"Don't you see the young brute is only trying to enrage you?" snarled Read. "Why don't you catch him?"

"See you here, Silas Read, I ain't a-going to catch him, for the simple reason as I can't; and, what's more, I ain't a-going to try no more. Here I've been chasing over this thundering roof in my socks, cutting my feet to pieces, and getting 'em soaked, and all the thanks I get for it is to be grumbled at."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Joe. "Your accomplice is quarrelling with you now, you long-nosed miscreant. When thieves fall out, etc. Look here, Giles. I don't like to make a compact with you, but if you will knock that brutal beast down, and let me escape, I'll pledge my word to hand you five sovereigns. You must knock him down first with a blow in his face, just to show me you are on my side."

"You are talking like the young fool that you are!" sneered Silas Read, not feeling at all sure that Giles would not accept such a tempting offer. "You appear to forget that I am armed with a revolver, and that Giles has nearly as good cause to hate you as I have. Look here, Giles. Just go and fetch your boots and mine, and bring up a hammer and nails, and we will nail the door up, then we shall soon catch the little brute, and you shall have all the money that is in his possession. I expect it belongs to me, and is part of what he stole when he ran away."

"One can quite imagine that such a scoundrel as you are would be a liar," retorted Joe, as Giles hurried away to find the boots. "You never had any money, and if you had I would rather starve than take it. I suppose you think that it will be an easy matter for Giles to find his boots, but I assure you it will be nothing of the sort."

"You little demon! I will catch you at any cost, and then my time will come. You shall suffer for this you little brute. Ah, I'll make you remember it to your dying day! You know how I have flogged you in the past, but that is nothing to the suffering I will give you. I'll make you long for death, you demon, and you will be glad when it comes—say, five years hence. Now you know what to expect."

"Do you think words of yours will terrify me, Silas Read, after all your vile cruelty to me?" cried Joe. "I was very young when my dear father died, but do you think that I forget you struck me on that very night when you should have been the one to comfort the child in his grief, and that you struck me for what you called snivelling? I strive not to bear you malice and hatred for your vile deeds, but how could I forgive them, knowing full well that you would re-

them? I know that it is useless to speak to such a wretch as you. I know that you have no feelings, and would deny your deeds with oaths to back your denial; but you and I know that when you found me at my father's grave—and my mother's grave—you kicked me from it, because I had gone there in my grief without your permission. Listen to me, Silas Read. You threaten me with five years' misery and death. Well, seeing all you have made me suffer, I believe that you will fulfil your threat if it should be in your power to do so; but when death comes, who will face it with a clearer conscience—you or I? Who will feel the greater terror then? It is a thing we both must face sooner or later, and it matters little in the last hour on earth. Well, when your hour arrives, perhaps my words may come back to you. Then all the torture that you can deal me will be as nothing to the agony of remorse that you must suffer in that last hour."

"Well, I'm blowed!" gasped a voice, that caused Silas Read to swing swiftly round. Giles was standing at his back, though he had approached so noiselessly that Read had not heard him.

"Have you got the boots?" snarled Read.

"I've got yourn, mate, but I can't find mine."

It was the first time that Giles had ever addressed his accomplice and employer in such a familiar strain, but Silas Read took no notice of the familiarity, because he knew that even such a scoundrel as Giles was impressed by Joe's words. And yet the lad had said nothing but what was in his heart. He had not striven for effect, and therefore, perhaps, his simple words were more effective.

"Come, Giles!" exclaimed Read. "We can easily catch him. Never mind about your boots!"

"I don't, mate," growled Giles. "But I mind about my feet, and I ain't romping over them wet leads again in my stockinged feet if I know it. There's rucks in the leads, and I ain't a blessed Zulu as can walk over cobbles and red-hot glass and that, without hurting his feet; besides, I'm as wet as new fished hoysters, or fresh caught sponges."

"Are you frightened of the boy?"

"No, mate; I'm frightened of my feet."

"Fool! Five pounds when you catch him—when we catch him, if you like—and all the money you find in his possession."

"Well, I'm on to that, and I don't care a thump if the boy breaks his neck; but I do care if I break my toes. Now, here's the hammer and the nails. Suppose you nail up that door, mate? I ain't much good at carpentering. Haw, haw, haw! Well, I'm blowed! Suppose that boy was to repeat in court what he has said to-night?"

Giles' words were drowned by a terrific crash of thunder, which came almost simultaneously with the lightning. The storm was quite close now, and each time the lightning played the whole of the surrounding country was lit up.

By the convulsive start that Silas Read made, Joe knew that the miscreant feared the storm.

"Oh, you arrant coward!" cried Joe. "You fear the lightning. Well, perhaps you have good cause to do so, and I tell you that were I in your place, I should fear not only the storm, but every breath of wind that blew. I should fear to stay alone in my room in the darkness—and even in the daylight. Such wickedness as yours must surely make a man a coward, if he should have any intellect at all, and I know that you have some."

"Liar!" cried Silas Read. "Death ends it all, and you know it!"

He had scarcely uttered the impious and ridiculous words—words that he knew in his heart were false, when once more the lightning flashed through the dark heavens. For an instant it lasted, and in that instant Silas Read saw his brother's son standing fearlessly in the storm that had burst over them with such tropical suddenness and fury, and the lad showed no signs of fear. Read sprang into the turret, as though that frail structure could shelter him from the fury of the storm.

"Now, Silas Read," cried Joe, "who is the coward, you or I? Listen to me! I am speaking the truth. Rather than fall into your hands I will leap from this height, and take my chance of the fall!"

Silas Read was dumb. He remembered how this lad's father had spoken to him long years ago, and how deeply those words had affected him. He knew that the lad had inherited his father's ability—an ability that should have made the sire something more than a freshold farmer, and would undoubtedly have done so, had he not inherited that small estate.

He knew that it is the boy who, left to his own resources, yet rises in this world, that is the real man, and the one who merits most respect, let his calling be what it may. And

Read had no doubt that Joe would thus rise, a knave that made him hate the lad the worse. But he did want the lad to risk his life by taking such a perilous

leap, for he himself would certainly be held responsible for his nephew's death.

"You talk like a young fool!" he said. "To leap from such a height is certain death; but you will not stop me from catching you by your silly threats. I will nail up the door, Giles, and then we shall easily get him."

"I don't want to go tramping over the roof in bare feet again," growled Giles. "All the same, I ain't missing five quid, so here goes!"

Read had driven several nails in the door, and as it opened on to the roof, it would now be impossible for Joe to burst it open again.

As the two ruffians came at him, Joe sprang upon the parapet, and ran round it in a most reckless manner.

Another flash of lightning revealed a large fir-tree comparatively close to the house, and as Silas Read sprang forward to seize him, Joe took the terrible leap.

Downward he sped, and then his body tore its way through the branches of the tree. He clutched at them, but his grasp was torn away, and he fell into the long grass.

The branches of the tree had broken his fall considerably, but he was so shaken by it that some minutes elapsed before he was able to move, and even then he could only crawl away on his hands and knees, while his right leg gave him great pain.

The grounds round the house were overgrown with dense bushes, and creeping amongst these, he remained listening.

Now, between the crashes of thunder he could hear the ruffians dealing heavy blows on the turret door, and when these blows ceased, Joe crept onwards among bushes so dense that it was with the greatest difficulty he could force his way through them.

Once or twice he tried to use his leg, but the pain was so great that he was compelled to desist.

About ten minutes elapsed, and then Joe heard the gruff voices of his pursuers, and he knew that if they once caught sight of him he must be captured.

Creeping into a clump of bushes, he determined to remain there until the search was relinquished, or he was caught, as flight in his present condition would be out of the question.

The voices grew closer, and presently he saw the light of a lantern. It seemed to him that the miscreants were coming directly towards him, and he feared they must be tracking his footprints; but when he caught their words he knew that such was not the case.

"He can't have got far," said Silas Read. "I know that he was seriously injured by the fall, for when the lightning played I saw him crawling away on his hands and knees. Hurry up, man!"

"Bust it! That's all very well, mate, but I'm walking in stockinged feet, and it ain't too pleasant. Drat that boy! I'll pay him for hiding my boots!"

"If you walk quickly it won't hurt you as much."

"It couldn't hurt me much more. Thunder! I've run a thorn in my foot now!"

"Do come on! You must remember the five pounds!"

"So I do, mate, and I also remember this 'ere thorn. I am getting drenched to the skin, too."

"So am I; but what of that, so long as we catch the boy? Very likely he will have a large sum of money on him."

"There ain't much chance of that. Where should he get it from?"

"He said he had money. Besides, he robbed me of hundreds before he ran away."

Silas Read knew that this was utterly false, but he wanted to urge Giles on, not relishing the idea of attacking Joe alone, had though he was.

"Bust it! I've got to get this 'ere thorn out of my foot!" growled Giles. "I don't suppose for a moment that the boy has got anything like a hundred on him, else you would not have promised it to me so easy. No, mate, you know thundering well that he ain't robbed you of that amount. He said he hadn't."

"You surely don't believe what that young scamp says?"

"I never believe what anyone says, mate; but I would a sight rather take his word than your'n. When he spoke to you like he did, I'd say he was telling the whole truth, and nothink but the truth, and I must say he put it remarkable well for such a youngster—almost like them parsons, and I could see as you didn't like it. It ain't rose you in my estimation, neither!"

"Have you got that thorn out?" snarled Silas Read, thinking it advisable to turn the conversation.

"No, I ain't; and I'm wet through sitting on this 'ere grass."

"You appear to take dainty care of yourself. A little rain won't hurt you."

"This 'ere thorn does, bust it! Oh, won't I pay that lad when I catch him! To think the young varmint should go and hide my boots. I'll break his neck."

"Well, you can do what you like to him so long as you come on and catch him."

Giles growled out something which Joe did not catch, and then he heard the pair moving amongst the bushes.

They continued their search for upwards of an hour, and several times they came so close to the lad that he gave up hope; but at last, to his relief, they abandoned the search.

Joe was wet and hungry, and he also suffered great pain; but at last he fell asleep, and when he awoke day had dawned, while the storm had cleared away.

His one thought was to get as far from the place as possible before the ruffians recommenced their search, which he felt confident they would do.

At first when he attempted to walk his leg caused him intense pain, but as he persevered, this diminished, until he was able to get along at a fairly good pace.

A high brick wall surrounded the grounds, but he got over this by climbing into the branches of a tree which grew close to it.

He now found himself in the open country, although he had not the remotest idea where he was.

How he was to find his way back to Rubby's circus he had not the slightest idea, but so long as he got away from this place he had little fear, as he had plenty of money in his pocket.

He walked on for many a mile across private fields, and at last he came upon a lane.

He turned to the right on chance, and after limping on for about ten miles, he reached a small village.

There was one inn in the place, and, entering this, he ordered some cold roast beef, which the landlord informed him would cost sixpence a plate; but when Joe placed a sovereign on the table by way of payment, that landlord looked very suspicious, and took the coin outside to discuss the matter with one of his customers.

Joe had finished his meal, and was still waiting for his change when a constable entered the little bar-parlour.

"Now then, young shaver," exclaimed the man of law, eying him suspiciously, "what might you be doing here?"

"Having something to eat, and waiting for my change out of a sovereign."

"Yes, I know all about that 'ere!"

"Then why did you ask?"

"All right, my young shaver," exclaimed the constable, clapping handcuffs on him. "You will have to come along with me."

"You shall answer for this insolence!" cried Joe. "I have done nothing, and—"

"What you say I may use in evidence against you."

"Now, look here, constable," cried Joe, "you will get yourself into serious trouble over this affair! You have dared to manacle me, and now threaten to take me into the village, and yet you have not told me for what I am arrested."

"Burglary!" answered the constable. "The landlord has given you in custody for burglary."

"No, I ain't, Bill!" growled the landlord.

"Well, it's the same thing!"

"Nothing of the sort!"

I'm taking no responsibility in the matter. You told me there was a lad wanted for a daring burglary, and as this one answered the description you gave, I let you know he was here; but you ain't going to shift your responsibility on to my shoulders—not if I know it. The lad has treated me fair enough, and I only did my duty in giving you information that he was here."

"Well, there's no responsibility in the matter. I arrest you, boy, on suspicion of being a burglar, and anything you say I may use in evidence against you."

"I maintain that you have no right to put these handcuffs on me!" said Joe. "If you suspect me of a crime that I have certainly never committed, you should have asked me to come to the police-

station with you, and I would have done so. I have not the slightest doubt that I could have cleared myself at once."

"Well, all the talking in the world won't alter the facts of the case. You are coming with me to the police-station, and you will be brought before the magistrates this morning. If you can convince them that you are innocent, there's an end of the matter, as far as I am concerned."

"You refuse to take these handcuffs off?"

"I do!"

"All right, there is nothing more to be said; but I shall have something to say to the magistrates, and it won't redound to your credit!"

"Now, don't you get using that language at me, young shaver! Jest you come along!"

The constable caught Joe by the sleeve, and walked him from the place, and thus they marched side by side along the country lane until they reached the town.

It was then that Joe felt the full shame of his situation, for people crowded round him, and the children jeered.

He was not the sort of lad to trouble himself much concerning the opinions of others; but to be arrested on such a charge naturally filled him with the greatest shame, and he felt thankful when they entered the police-station, and he was hidden from the gaze of the crowd.

An inspector was seated at a desk, and Joe was led up in front of him, while the constable still retained hold of his sleeve.

"What is the charge, officer?" demanded the inspector, eyeing Joe keenly.

"Burglary at the Warren, sir."

"Have you cautioned the prisoner?"

"Yes, sir."

"You understand that anything you say may be used in evidence against you?"

"Yes," answered Joe.

"You can please yourself about answering my questions. I shall take down your answers, also any statement you chose to make."

"I intend to give you full information," said Joe. "I have nothing to conceal, so far as any charge against me for robbery is concerned."

Then Joe gave a full account of what had happened, and the inspector looked sceptical, especially when Joe showed the money he had in his possession, and said that he had earned some of it at Rubby's circus, and that five pounds of it had been given him as a present.

"The Court will be sitting at ten o'clock," said the inspector. "You will be taken before the magistrates at about eleven. Meantime, you will, of course, be detained."

"I protest against these handcuffs having been placed on my wrists."

"You can mention your complaint to the magistrates. Remove him to the cells, officer! You can also remove the manacles."

Joe was taken to a cell, where he was searched; but nothing of an incriminating character was found upon him. Then he was left for what appeared to him quite two hours, when the door of his cell was opened, and he was led into court.

Three magistrates were on the bench. One of them was a benevolent-looking old gentleman, but Joe did not like the appearance of the other two; and he felt that he would have a hard task in making them believe his story.

The inspector stated the facts of the case in a very clear manner.

It transpired that shortly after midnight the Warren, an old mansion in that neighbourhood, had been broken into, and a lot of valuable jewellery stolen; that the butler had heard a noise, and on going out had seen a lad making his escape; that he gave chase, but was unable to catch the burglar, who was a mere lad. Then he called the butler to identify Joe, and that worthy declared that he believed him to be the same lad, though he could not positively swear to it.

(Another long instalment, Thursday, Order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance.)

How do you do?



WHOM TO WRITE TO: The Editor, "GEM" Library, 23-9, Bouverie Street, Fleet Street, London, who will be pleased to hear from you.


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The EDITOR.

P.S.—Give this copy of "The Gem" to your chum.

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