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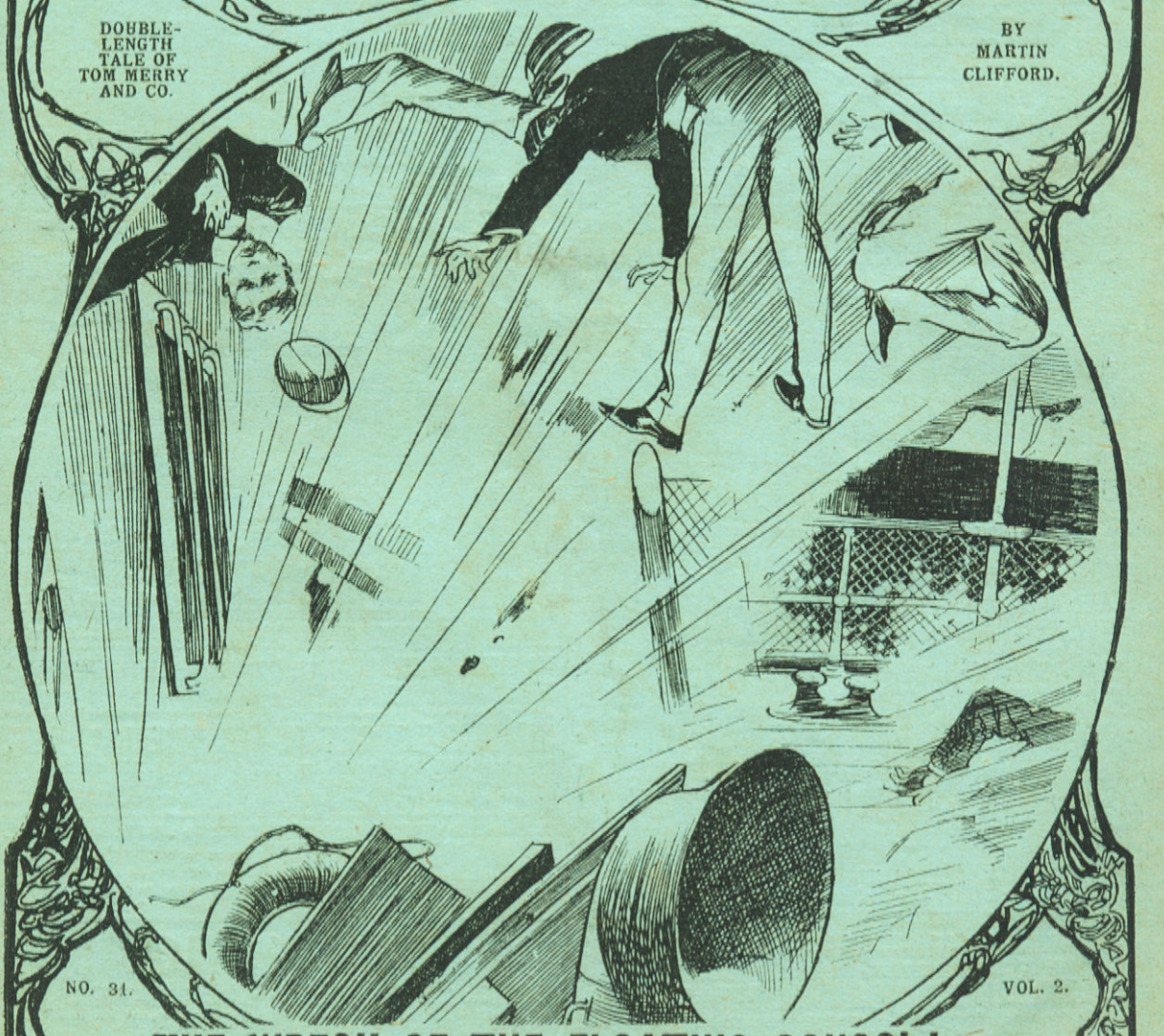
BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.



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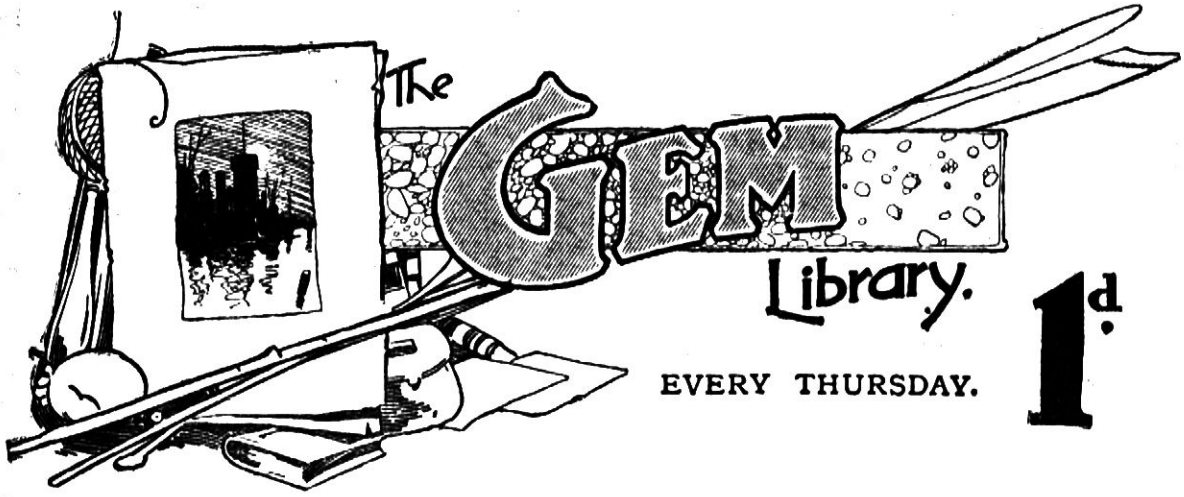

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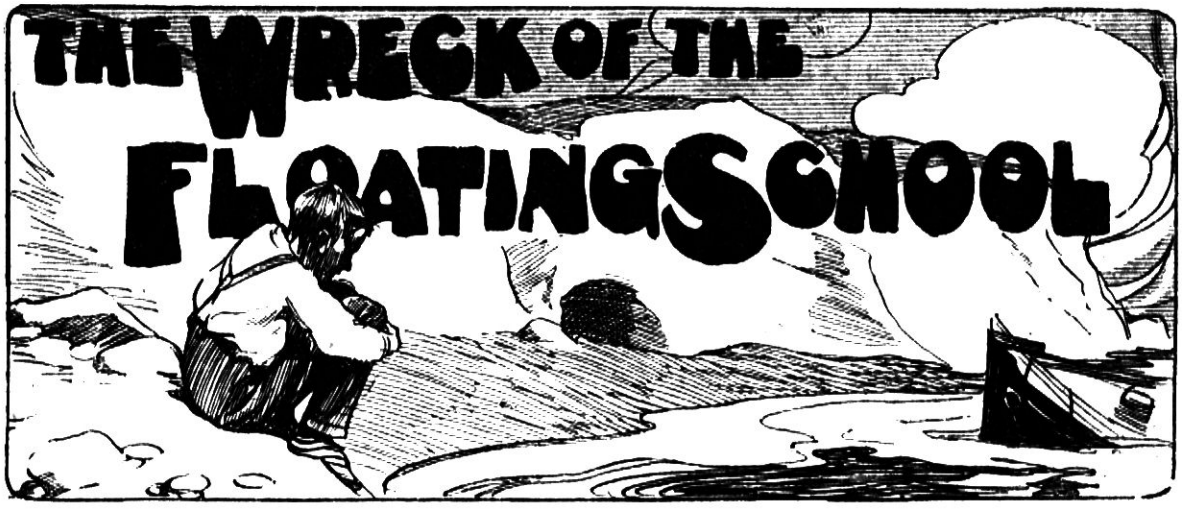


The Further Adventures of Tom Merry & Co. Afloat.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.
Cricket on Deck.

"PLAY!"

"Bowl him out, Figgy!"

"Look out, Merry!"

Tom Merry smiled as he grasped the cane handle of his bat. He was looking out.

The wickets were set up on the deck of the Condor, the great steamer upon which the boys of St. Jim's were spending their mid-summer vacation.

There wasn't much room for cricket, as a matter of fact; but, as Jack Blake remarked, as they couldn't do without the cricket, they would have to do without the room.

A crowd of juniors were crammed back against the rails, or perched upon whatever coign of vantage they could find, to watch the game, and as much space as possible was left for the fieldsmen. Netting had been rigged up wherever practicable to keep as many balls as possible from going overboard.

Mr. Ratcliff, the senior master on board, was below in his cabin. He did not look with approving eye on any athletic sport, but he had not actually forbidden deck-cricket. Mr. Railton had lent the juniors every assistance, at the same time cautioning them to be circumspect.

Of course, the juniors of St. Jim's intended to be circumspect. But it was quite probable that in the excitement of the game they would forget all about their circumspection.

It was a House match, between School House and New House, and the School House was batting first. Tom Merry and Jack Blake opened the innings for the School House, and Tom had the honour of first receiving Figgy's bowling.

Figgins was a bowler of renown among the St. Jim's juniors. There were very few batsmen in the lower Forms who could stand against his bowling. But Tom Merry was one of the few.

"Go it, Figgy!"

And Figgins did go it.

He took a little run on the deck, and turned himself into a sort of catherine-wheel, and the ball came down like a four-point-seven shell.

Clack!

The ball was stopped, and on the ordinary crease it would have stopped as dead as a doornail. But on the deck of the steamer it was another matter.

The ball went skimming along the deck in an unexpected direction, and there was a howl of anguish from a junior who was seated on a deck-chair, nursing his bat across his knees while he waited for his turn at the wicket.

"Ow! Bai Jove! Ow!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dropped his bat with a clump, and stood up on one leg, and clasped the ankle of the other with both hands.

"Ow! You uttah ass! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "What are you up to, D'Arcy? The batting side has no right to field that ball!"

"I wasn't fieldin' the wotten ball!" gasped D'Arcy. "I——"

"The ball was fielding him," grinned Monty Lowther.

"Where's that giddy ball?" exclaimed Kerr, dashing past, and shouldering Arthur Augustus aside. "Where's it got to?"

For Tom Merry and Blake were crossing the pitch rapidly and scoring runs. D'Arcy turned half round as Kerr shoved him, and sat down violently on the deck. Kerr fielded the ball, and was about to send it in when the injured junior bore down upon him.

"Get aside!" exclaimed Kerr. "You're in the way!"

"I wefuse to get aside. You have tweated me with gwoss diswespect!"

"Obstructing the field!" bawled Figgins. "I protest against those runs! Where's the umpire?"

"Get aside, Gussy!" howled Lowther.

"I wefuse!"

Monty Lowther jerked the swell of St. Jim's out of the way, and Kerr dashed in with the ball. Blake scudded back to the wicket, and Tom Merry clumped his bat on the crease. Kerr wrathfully tossed the ball to Figgins.

"It's all right!" grinned Figgins. "They haven't run since you fielded the ball. Look here, Tom Merry, I protest against that dangerous maniac being allowed on the field!"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a dangewous maniac!"

"If you obstruct the field again, I shall order you off!" said Tom Merry severely. "What do you mean by getting in the way of a fieldsman?"

"He tweated me with diswespect!"

"Oh, rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Tom Mewwy——"

"Play!"

"Go it, Figgy! Get him out this time!"

D'Arcy sat down in the deck-chair with a wrathful face, and nursed his ankle instead of his bat. Figgins bowled, and Tom Merry swiped the ball away, and it went into the net and clumped back on deck, and bounced away. There was a rush of the fieldsmen after the elusive leather, and Merry and Blake ran, and ran again. And again; but the third run was a run too many.

For Fatty Wynn, of the New House, had the ball in his hand, and it crashed right into Blake's wicket ere his bat could reach the crease.

"How's that?" bawled the New House juniors in one voice.

"Out!"

"Rotten!" said Blake, and he carried out his bat. "Now then, Gussy, you're next man in!"

"I am afwaid I am too injahed to be able to play, Blake," said the swell of the School House, with great dignity.

"Next man in!" shouted Tom Merry. "Where's that ass D'Arcy?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"He says he's too injured to play."

"All right; give his bat to Reilly!"

D'Arcy jumped up, and grasped his bat.

"I wefuse to give my bat to Weilly! Upon second thoughts, I think I shall be able to play vewy well!"

"Buck up, then!" grinned Blake.

And Arthur Augustus marched with great dignity to the vacant wicket. He was greeted with a cheer.

"Good old Gussy!"

"Where's your eyeglass?"

"Play up, Piccadilly!"

D'Arcy jammed his glass into his eye, and planted himself at the wicket as if he were going to defend it from the charge of a regiment of Heavy Dragoons. He could not understand why the onlookers began to laugh, and Figgins to shout.

"Get out of the way, ass!"

Arthur Augustus turned round in a leisurely way, and fixed his monocle upon the red and excited face of the New House junior captain.

"Did you addwess me, Figgins?"

"Yes, ass!"

"If you persist in applyin' that oppwobwious epithet to me, Figgins, I shall have no alternative but to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Will you get out of the way?"

"Certainly not! I wefuse to get out of the way! I am standin' here to defend my beastly wicket!"

"You shrieking ass, I'm bowling to Tom Merry! Stand aside!"

"Oh, I compwehend! Why didn't you explain before?" said D'Arcy, quite composedly. "I was thinkin' I was goin' to have the beastly bowlin', you know!"

Tom Merry was laughing almost too much to hold his bat straight. However, he stood on guard as Figgins prepared to deliver the ball, the School House swell having obligingly got out of the way.

Captain Bolsover was looking on with interest from the bridge of the steamer. Mr. Thropp, the sharp-tempered chief mate, was standing at the door of the chart-house, looking on also, with a sour expression. He would not have stood there if he had known what was going to happen.

Down went the ball, and smack went the bat, and the leather flew—too fast for the eye to follow it.

"Come on!" cried Tom Merry.

The School House batsmen started running.

The fieldsmen were looking round for the ball. Where was it? A yell from the bridge told them.

Mr. Thropp was suddenly seen to double up, as if he meant to fold himself up like a pocket-knife.

"Oh!"

He gave a gasp like escaping steam, and the captain turned round to look at him.

"What's the matter, Mr. Thropp?"

"Matter!" yelled the unfortunate mate. "Ow! I've been winded, sir; that's what's the matter! Ow! Ow! O-o-o-oh!"

"What the——"

Kerr ran up the steps of the bridge.

"Please, sir, will you return us our ball?"

"Your ball!" exclaimed the captain. "I—oh, I understand! Ha, ha! You must not send the ball over the bridge again, my lad."

"Certainly not, sir. It was quite an accident."

"Give him his ball, Mr. Thropp."

The chief mate glared.

"I've been winded!"

"Pooh! Quite an accident. You must not mind a trifle like that," said the good-natured captain; "I shouldn't myself. Here's your ball, my lad!"

He tossed the leather back to Kerr, who caught it, and with a hasty word of thanks, darted away. Mr. Thropp disappeared into the chart-house with both hands clasped to his chest. He would willingly have thrown the ball into the sea, and Kerr after it.

Meanwhile, D'Arcy and Tom Merry were scoring runs. Arthur Augustus, blind to the fact that the ball was coming in, started on a fourth run.

"No!" shouted Tom Merry. "Get back!"

D'Arcy hesitated—and was lost!

The crash of his wicket followed the next moment.

"How's that?" panted Kerr.

"Out!"

"Weally, you know, that's wathah wotten!" said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "I wasn't lookin', you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at!"

"You're out! Next man in!"

Manners, of the Shell, was the next man in. The over finished without further scoring, and then Kerr bowled from the other end against Tom Merry, who had changed ends with the odd run, and so had the bowling.

That over was uneventful, the leather falling back from the nets, and the fieldsmen allowing no chances of a run. With the last ball Manners was caught out by Pratt for a duck's egg.

Digby took his place. Now the batting woke up again. The School House score was at 20 when Dig fell, and Herries came in. Tom Merry had the bowling, and was making the fur fly.

Figgins gripped the ball with a look of great determination.

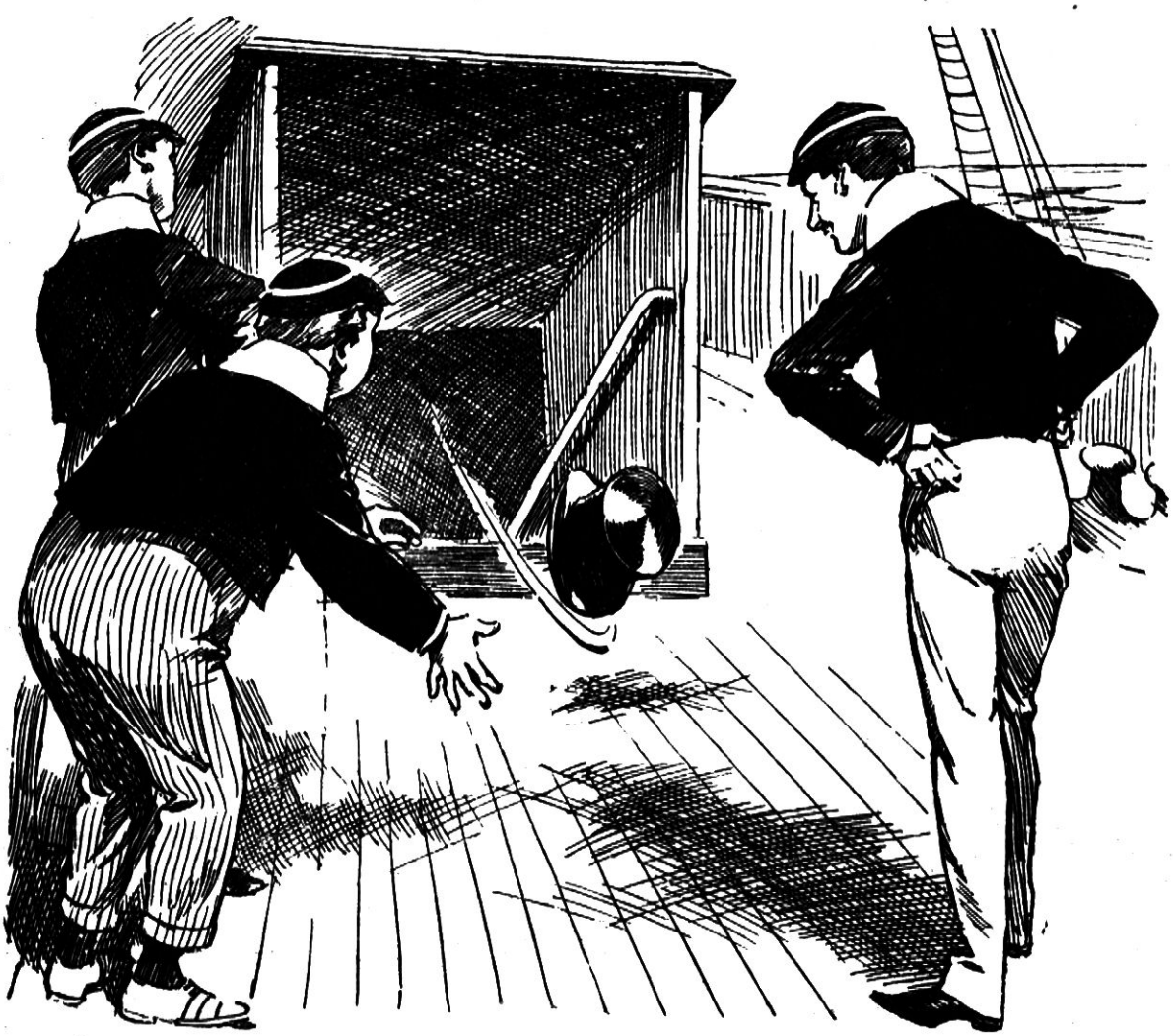
"Go it, Figgy!" muttered Kerr. "We don't want Tom Merry playing Hayward, you know—first in, and not out!"

"Right-ho!" grunted Figgins. "Something is going to happen this time!"

Something did happen. But it was not Figgins who was responsible for it. He sent down the ball, a regular twister, but Tom Merry was equal to the occasion. He let himself go at that ball, and sent it whizzing with a mighty swipe.

At the same moment a silk-hat rose to view from the staircase amidships. The head of Mr. Ratcliff, the senior master, and his sour face and thin features, followed the silk-hat.

There was a gasp of warning from a dozen throats. Mr.



The silk topper sailed away in the air, and the head disappeared below the level of the deck. The sound of a bump was heard on the stair.

Ratcliff was just in the line of fire, so to speak. But the warning came too late. The ball was whizzing through the air, and Mr. Ratcliff's silk hat rose to meet it as if on purpose.

Biff!

The hat went one way, and the head another. The silk topper sailed away in the air, and the head disappeared below the level of the deck. The sound of a bump was heard on the stair.

The juniors stood petrified for a moment.

"My only hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "We've done it now!"

CHAPTER 2.

The School on the Headland.

THE silk-hat, knocked completely out of shape by the impact of the cricket-ball, fell to the deck. The head of Mr. Ratcliff, bare now, rose to view a second time, and his face was pale with rage.

His little green-grey eyes glittered round as if in search of a victim.

"Who threw that ball?"

The juniors were silent. They had had many a rub with Mr. Ratcliff since the Condor started on her holiday voyage, and had seen him in a fury more than once, but they had never seen him quite so furious as this.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came quickly forward.

"It was an accident, Mr. Ratcliff," he said hastily. "Merry was batting——"

"So it was Merry!"

"Yes; but I assure you——"

The senior master interrupted the Sixth-Former rudely.

"That will do, Kildare!"

Kildare turned red, and stepped back. Mr. Ratcliff turned towards Tom Merry

"So it was you, Merry?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, facing the infuriated master calmly, though with a beating heart "I am sorry, sir. I was batting, and I did not know you were coming on deck, and so——"

"Don't tell untruths!"

Tom Merry's face went scarlet.

"I am not telling untruths," he exclaimed angrily, "and you have no right to accuse me of doing so."

"Be silent, Merry," said Mr. Railton, the master of the School House. "You must not speak like that to Mr. Ratcliff."

"He calls me a liar, and——"

"Silence! Mr. Ratcliff, I assure you that I saw the whole matter, that it was an accident. It was impossible for Merry to know that you were coming up at the precise moment that he batted."

Mr. Ratcliff hesitated.

There was no love lost between the two housemasters, and Mr. Ratcliff, who had the authority of senior master, would gladly have disregarded Mr. Railton entirely. But he knew that that gentleman was not to be lightly regarded. The senior master had already strained his authority to breaking point, and had provoked resistance. In a contest between

the two, Mr. Railton would have been backed up by everyone on board. And so the senior master swallowed his wrath, and climbed down as gracefully as he could.

"Very well, Mr. Railton, if you assure me of that——"

"I do assure you."

"Then I must overlook the circumstance. But remember," went on the senior master harshly, looking round—"remember that this play is forbidden on the deck in future. There is to be no more cricket."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed a score of dismayed voices.

"Remember my orders, that is all!" said Mr. Ratcliff; and, taking his damaged hat from French, who had picked it up, he went below.

He left dark faces on the deck behind him.

"The rotter!" growled Monty Lowther. "Just like him to come up and spoil our game."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard him as a feahful wottah, deah boys!"

"The beast!"

"The cad!"

"Bai Jove, suppose we take no notice of the wottah, and go on playin'!" suggested Arthur Augustus.

Some of the juniors were in the mood for it. But there was Mr. Railton to be reckoned with. Although junior master, he had ten times the authority and influence of his senior.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry, putting his bat under his arm. "I'm done!"

"So am I," said Figgins.

"Weally, deah boys——"

"Get the nets down!" said Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir."

"Never mind," murmured Blake. "If we can't play any more cricket, there's footer. The football season's just going to begin, and we can begin with it. Football at sea will be rather a novelty."

The disappointed cricketers put away stumps and bats and balls. It was a glorious September afternoon, and the sunshine lay in a sheet of golden light on the waters of the North Sea. The steamer was throbbing on northward, and on her port could be seen the shores of England. A great headland rose to view against the sky, and on the headland an old grey building with a tower could be seen, and many of the St. Jim's lads looked at it with curiosity.

"It looks like a castle or somethin'," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, gazing at the headland over the steamer's rail. "I'll have a look at it through my telescope if you'll fetch it up from below, Blake."

"You'll have to wait a long time if you wait till then," said Jack Blake, who had seated himself in D'Arcy's deck-chair, to rest after his arduous labours as a cricketer.

"Weally, Blake, I don't think you ought to be so feahfully lazy. I weally wish you'd wun down and fetch my telescope."

"Why can't you fetch it yourself?"

"It makes me so exhausted goin' up and down the beastly stairs, you know."

"Well, don't you think it would make me exhausted too, you ass?"

"I weally haven't thought about it, Blake, and I wish you would not call me an ass. Will you fetch up my telescope, Dig?"

"I don't think," said Digby.

"Will you fetch up my telescope, Hewwies?"

"Rats!" said Herries.

"Really, Hewwies——"

"I can tell you what that building is, if you like," said Mellish, of the Fourth, who always knew everything. "I just heard Mr. Lathom tell Kildare. It's a school."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I weally think you must be mistaken, Mellish. It looks to me more like an ancient Norman castle."

"Rats! It's not a bit like a Norman castle," said Digby.

"I suppose I ought to know, Dig, as I am descended from a Norman wace," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

"Oh, yes, you ought!" agreed Digby. "But apparently you don't."

"Weally, Digby——"

"It's a school," said Mellish. "It's an old building—an abbey or something, that's turned into a school like St. Jim's. It's called Headland Abbey. I heard Mr. Lathom say so, and he said he was a master there before he came to St. Jim's."

"Mr. Lathom is pwobably mistaken. It is a Norman castle."

"You utter ass!"

"If you are lookin' for a feahful thwashin', Mellish, you have only to wepeat that oppwobwious wemark!" said Arthur Augustus politely. But Mellish put his hands in his pockets and walked away whistling.

"Bai Jove, we are gettin' neawah to the headland!" D'Arcy remarked. "I should like to have a look at that Norman castle. Will you wun down and fetch up my telescope, Tom Mewwy?"

"Some other evening, Gussy!"

"I want to examine that wuined Norman castle."

"Norman grandmother! It's an old abbey."

"You are undah a misappwehension, deah boy. It is a wuined welic of the Norman Conquest. My ancestahs came over with William the Conquewah."

"You shricking ass, did you ever see a Norman castle without a keep?"

"I weally do not wemembah; but I object very stwongly to bein' called a shwiekin' ass, Tom Mewwy. I say, Mannahs, why don't you take a photog.waph of that Norman castle? You are always wottin' about with that wotten camewa of yours."

"By Jove, I may as well take it!" said Manners. "It's not a castle, but it will make a good picture. 'Headland Abbey College, seen from the sea.' Good!"

"If you're goin' down for your camewah, Mannahs, you might look into my cabin and bwing up my telescope."

"But I'm not going down for it," said Manners coolly. "I've got it here."

"Well, as I made the suggestion, I think you might go down and fetch——"

"No fear!"

"I say, Lowthah, will you go and fetch——"

"Rats, old chap, and many of 'em!" said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, I wegard you as a set of feahfully inconsidewate boundahs!" said D'Arcy. "You know how exhaustin' I find goin' up and down stairs. Howevah, I suppose I must go."

And Arthur Augustus descended to the main deck, where the berths of the juniors were situated. He entered his cabin, and ran against a youth in spectacles who was just coming out. The spectacled youth was carrying D'Arcy's lantern in his hand, and in the shock he dropped it, and there was a crash of breaking glass.

"Dear me!" murmured the spectacled youth. "You startled me, D'Arcy. I am afraid that your lantern is broken, and it is most annoying, for I wanted it very particularly."

CHAPTER 3.

Skimpole's Experiment.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY seized the spectacled junior by the collar, and jammed him against the bulkhead.

"Skimpole, you uttah wottah! What do you mean by burglin' my cabin like this?"

Skimpole, the brainy man and the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's, blinked at Arthur Augustus through his spectacles.

"You are quite mistaken, D'Arcy. I was not burgling your cabin. I was simply borrowing your lantern."

"Yaas, without askin' my permish."

"I thought that you would probably refuse your permission," explained Skimpole. "Otherwise I should certainly have asked you."

"And now you have bwoken it."

"No, I must say that that is your fault, for running into me. Please let go, D'Arcy, or I shall be compelled to proceed to violence. As a sincere Socialist I am opposed to violence in every shape and form, especially when it is directed against myself; but if you——"

"You uttah ass!"

"Can you lend me a candle? The lantern is unfortunately no use now," said Skimpole. "I should be very much obliged if you could lend me a candle."

D'Arcy jerked the amateur Socialist round to the door, and gave him a lift with his knee that sent Skimpole staggering into the passage.

"That's all I'm going to lend you, you wottah!" said the School House swell wrathfully. "And if I find you wummagin' about my cabin again, I shall give you a feahful thwashin'."

"I want a candle——"

"Oh, pway get off!"

"You do not understand, D'Arcy. I am making an important experiment——"

"Go and make it, then."

"I require a candle——"

"You uttah ass, what can you wequire a candle for in bwoad daylight?" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, in astonishment.

"You see, I am conducting the experiment in the lower hold," explained Skimpole.

"We are not allowed down there, you duffah!"

"A sincere Socialist is not likely to pay any attention to arbitrary rules of that kind," said Skimpole. "I regard myself as having a right to go where I please. I have been down as far as the orlop deck."

"Bai Jove, I wish you had stayed there, you feahful boah! Pway cut off!"

"I have discovered a powder——"

"Eh?"

"I have discovered a keg of a curious-looking powder in the store-room——"

"What the dickens were you doin' in the store-woom?"

"Making investigations. The steward is rather unreasonable on those points, and seems to be as particular about his quarters as the captain is about the bridge. Of course, I take no notice of his nonsense——"

"When he is not there, I pwesume?" said D'Arcy witheringly.

"Exactly, when he is not there," assented Skimpole. "It was not in the steward's quarters that I discovered this powder, however. It is a coarse-grained powder, and has a slight smell, and I am curious to analyse it and discover its constituents. Although I have never studied chemistry, I have no doubt that with my unusual brain-power I shall be able to——"

"To make a silly ass of yourself as usual," said D'Arcy. "I am not goin' to give you a candle. As a mattah of fact, I haven't one. Pway cut off."

"I want to make the experiment at once, as somebody may discover me in the lower hold, and make a fuss."

"Then go and make it."

"I require a lamp, or, at least, a candle. Will you lend me a box of matches?"

D'Arcy jerked out a box of matches, and threw them to the amateur Socialist, catching him fairly on the nose with them.

"There you are, deah boy."

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"Now, cut off, you ass. I came here to get my telescope, to get a view of an ancient Norman castle, not to jaw to a silly ass."

And Arthur Augustus put his telescope under his arm, and went on deck again. Skimpole blinked after him.

"It is very annoying that D'Arcy's lamp is broken," he murmured. "I shall have to use a candle now. I dare say I shall find a candle in Kildare's cabin."

To make sure, he looked, and he did find one. He picked up the candlestick and scuttled off with it, and in a couple of minutes was in the lower hold again. It was a part of the ship to which the boys were not supposed to be admitted, but Skimpole had found his way there in the course of his investigations.

He had opened the end of the keg to see what it contained, and the dark powder within excited his curiosity.

He had spread some of it on top of a chest, so that it formed a kind of train to the keg, and now he placed the candlestick with the lighted candle in it on the box close to the powder.

"I wonder what it is?" murmured Skimpole. "I am really curious to find out. Dear me, the motion of the ship makes the candle flicker very much. The light is very bad, and I really ought to have a lamp for my experiment."

Skimpole paused for some moments in thought, and then retraced his steps. Two or three coal-trimmers looked at him curiously in the passage on the lower deck. The junior hurried up to the main deck. He had remembered that Mr. Railton had an electric glow-lamp, which was exactly the thing he required.

To an amateur Socialist, asking permission was an unnecessary formula. Skimpole walked into Mr. Railton's cabin on the shelter deck, and looked round for the electric lamp. It was not there, and Skimpole was still looking for it when Mr. Railton came in. The School House master regarded the junior in amazement.

"Skimpole!"

His voice made the junior jump.

"Yes, sir."

"What are you doing in my cabin?"

"I—I—I——"

"Answer me at once!"

"I—I was looking for a lamp, sir."

"A lamp! How dare you look for a lamp in my cabin?"

"I wanted one to use, sir," said Skimpole innocently. "I am conducting an important experiment, sir, and I——"

"You should not have entered my cabin without permission. If this occurs again, I shall cane you!"

"Yes, sir. I am sorry, sir. May I have the lamp, sir?"

Mr. Railton smiled grimly.

"Every part of the ship to which the juniors are allowed access, Skimpole, is open to the daylight."

"Yes, sir; but——"

"I must conclude that you have been exploring some place where the boys are not allowed to go."

"You see, sir——"

"In a word, Skimpole, where were you going if you had found the lamp?"

"To the lower hold, sir," said Skimpole reluctantly.

"Now, Skimpole, listen to me. You are not to go to the lower hold on any pretext whatever. You understand?"

"But, sir——"

"If I find that you have disobeyed me, I shall cane you severely. I shall cane you in any case," added Mr. Railton, "unless you promise me not to go below the lower deck."

"Really, sir——"

"Come, now," said Mr. Railton, taking down a cane.

"Under the circumstances, sir, I promise; but——"

"Very good. You may go."

"If you please, sir——"

"You may go, Skimpole."

And Skimpole disconsolately went. As a sincere Socialist, as he would have put it, he could not break his word. He went on deck with a gloomy brow, and joined the group of juniors who surrounded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his telescope.

CHAPTER 4.
The Explosion.

"BAI Jove, deah boys, I can make out the Norman castle awfully plainly now," D'Arcy remarked.

"It's not a Norman castle."

"Oh, pway don't be obstinate about it, Blake. I'm lookin' at the beastly place thwough a telescope, and you're not, so I ought to know."

D'Arcy had the telescope resting on the rail, and had tied the end there with a piece of string, to keep it from rolling along as the steamer moved. The smaller end he had to his eye, and he had fallen on one knee to get the level.

The September afternoon was a fine one, but there was a swell off the Norfolk headland, and it made the steamer roll a little. The telescope in D'Arcy's hand shifted every second or two, and this rather interrupted the view.

"Bai Jove, it's awfully plain, you know," said D'Arcy. "I can see somethin' that looks like a bwown cloth, and there's a man holdin' a wope."

"Where?"

"In the Norman castle."

"You duffer, you've got the thing turned on that fishing-smack!" roared Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove, so I have!"

D'Arcy shifted the telescope again, and this time obtained a view of the old grey building on the headland. It bore about as much resemblance to a Norman castle as to the fishing-smack; but D'Arcy did not change his opinion.

"Bai Jove, it's a wippin' old castle," he remarked. "I should like to explore the wuins."

"They're not ruins," said Tom Merry. "Don't I keep on telling you that they're the buildings of Headland Abbey School?"

"Yaas; but I think you must be mistaken."

"Let's have a look," said Blake, getting up from the deck chair, and calmly pushing D'Arcy away and taking his place at the telescope.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Oh, don't jaw! Yes, it an old abbey right enough, and there's a flagstaff, too, and, by Jove, I can see somebody on the tower with a telescope. He's looking at us."

"Bai Jove, weally!"

"One of the boys, I suppose," said Tom Merry—"that is, if they're back from the vac yet. They may be."

"Looks like a boy."

"Pway let me look," said Arthur Augustus. "I can tell you at once, Blake. Pway wetire, and allow me to look thwough my telescope."

"Oh, rats! What's the good of your looking through a telescope when you make out an old Saxon abbey to be a Norman castle?"

"I fetched up that telescope to——"

"Well, you fetched it up, and I'm looking through it," said Blake. "That's an equal division of labour. What are you grumbling at?"

"I am not gwumblin', but I weally insist upon lookin' thwough my telescope."

"Oh, don't bother!" said Blake. "Yes, by Jove, it's a boy at a telescope, and now he's waving his hand. He can see me looking at him."

And Jack Blake waved his hand excitedly in response to the signal of the unknown boy on the abbey tower, and there was a yell from Arthur Augustus. Blake had unconsciously waved his hand in D'Arcy's face, and smitten the School House swell on the nose with it. D'Arcy staggered back, fell over the deck-chair, and rolled on the deck.

"Hallo, what's that?" exclaimed Blake, looking round. "I knocked my hand against something."

"It was Gussy's chivvy, that's all!" grinned Tom Merry.

"By Jove! What a curious thing that Gussy is always putting his chivvy in the way of something!"

The swell of the School House sat up on the deck and rubbed his nose.

"You uttah ass!" he gasped. "You have caused me extweme pain in my nose, as well as thwowin' me into a fluttah! You soweamin' idiot!"

"Well, you will keep on getting into the way. I've hurt my knuckles."

"I am not usually given to suspish., Blake, but I cannot help suspectin' that you did that on purpose. I shall wequire an apology if our fwiendship is to wemain on its pwesent footin'."

"I can make out his face now," said Blake, who had his eye again to the end of the telescope. "He's got red hair."

"I am waiting for my apology, Blake."

"Well, wait, then. Nobody's raised any objection to your waiting, that I know of."

"Undah the circs——"

"He's got freckles."

"I insist——"

"I shall know that chap if I meet him again. He's got red hair and freckles, and a lot of both," said Blake.

"You are not listenin' to me, Blake."

"Go hon!"

"I insist upon——"

"He's shut up his telescope now," said Blake. "May as well shut up this. If Gussy would only shut up, too——"

"I wefuse to shut up. I absolutely wefuse to be tweated with diswegard. Undah the circs., I have no alternative but to punch your nose."

"Punch Tom Merry's nose instead. I sha'n't mind."

Even this good nature on the part of Blake did not placate the incensed swell of St. Jim's. He carefully removed his gloves. Blake watched him curiously.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

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

"Good. Then we may as well start now," said Blake cheerfully; and he hit out right and left. D'Arcy jumped back, but the blows were not aimed at him, but at his hat—the last silk topper of the four he had brought to sea with him. The hat went flying, and skimmed along the deck in the wind.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "You uttah beast! Where's my hat?"

"On the ball there!" roared Monty Lowther.

And kicks from all sides sent the hat forward in its wild career. Arthur Augustus, forgetting all about the thrashing he had intended to inflict upon Blake, dashed after it. Reilly, of the Fourth, was rushing to stop it from going overboard, and that he did, by making a long jump, and coming down with both feet on the hat.

"Faith, and I've got it intirely!" shouted Reilly.

Arthur Augustus came up panting. Reilly picked up the hat—the mere wreck of what had been a handsome topper. D'Arcy gazed at it speechlessly.

"Faith, and I've stopped it for you!" said Reilly.

The swell of the School House found his voice at last.

"You—you—you cwass idiot!"

"Faith, and that's foine thanks for stoppin' yer hat!" said Reilly indignantly. "Sure, the next time ye can stop ye're hat yerself!"

D'Arcy gazed at Reilly, and gazed at the wrecked hat. It was his last topper, and it was ruined. Human flesh and blood could not stand it. The swell of St. Jim's hurled himself at Reilly.

In another moment somebody would have been receiving a licking. But in that moment came a sudden and terrible interruption.

There was a terrific explosion below, a deafening roar that sounded like thunder through the length and breadth of the steamer, and in the shock that ran through the vessel everyone on deck was thrown off his feet.

CHAPTER 5.
Aground!

"WHAT the——"

"Who the——"

"How the——"

"Bai Jove!"

"Crumbs!"

"My only aunt!"

These, and various other ejaculations, broke from the boys as the steamer trembled with the terrible concussion below. Jack Blake sat up on the deck, and Tom Merry sat up, too, and a grunt from underneath him apprised him that he was sitting on Monty Lowther. D'Arcy and Reilly had rolled to the side, and bumped into Skimpole, who had fallen over them.

Captain Bolsover was grasping the rail of the bridge, his weatherbeaten face the picture of amazement. Mr. Railton ran to the bridge-ladder

"Captain Bolsover, what is it?"

The captain stared at him without replying for a moment. His hand was on the bridge-telegraph.

"Is it the engines?"

"The engines, sir! Certainly not!"

"Then what is it?"

"I don't know!"

"The ship's sinking!" yelled Mellish. "We're going down!"

And there was a general exclamation of alarm.

The Condor had given a heavy lurch to starboard, and it was plain to everyone that there was a leak below, and a considerable one, through which the water was pouring in.

Captain Bolsover changed colour for a moment. What had happened he had not the faintest idea. But he knew that his ship was in danger, and he had signalled instantly to the engine-room.

The steam steering-gear acted instantly, and the engines throbbed on without a pause, showing that there was nothing wrong with them.

Whatever was the cause of the explosion, it was nothing to do with the gear of the ship.

The Condor's head swung round towards the coast, and she tore on through the water towards the headland which, a few minutes before, the juniors had been examining through the telescope, without any expectation of setting foot there.

Mr. Railton's voice rang out as a confused murmur of alarm rose on deck.

"Keep calm, my lads! We are in no danger!"

"I don't know about that," whimpered Mellish. "The ship's sinking."

"Rats!" said Blake, though he was a little pale himself. "There are enough boats to take us all, at the worst!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Skimpole, you uttah ass, will you get off my legs?"

"Dear me, am I sitting on your legs, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, you ass! Pway get off!"

"Certainly! I must have fallen on you."

"You shwiekin' ass, I think you must have!" growled D'Arcy, as he extricated himself, and dusted down his clothes. "What's become of my hat?"

"Pass the word for D'Arcy's hat," said Monty Lowther, who would have had his little joke if the sea had been closing in on the deck of the steamer. "D'Arcy particularly wants to be drowned in a silk topper."

"Oh, weally, Lowthah——"

"By Jove, the Condor's heeling over!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the steamer gave another lurch. "There's a hole in her somewhere! I can hear the water coming in!"

"Bai Jove, you know, somethin' must have exploded somewheah!"

"Gussy has hit it," said Lowther gravely. "The cause of the explosion was that something exploded somewhere."

"Oh, pway don't wot, Lowthah! We are all in dangah of a watewy gwave, and I can't find my hat."

The steamer was racing shoreward under full pressure. That there was a hole in the hull deep below the water-line was certain. The Condor was heeling over to one side, and for the time it seemed to be a question whether she would reach the low, sandy beach that was now becoming clear to the view.

The boys stood pale and spellbound. Most of them were intently watching the beach, growing nearer and nearer. Others looked at the captain, standing like a statue on the bridge, iron-nerved, unshaken. Some of the smaller boys were whimpering a little, but most took their cue from Mr. Railton, who was perfectly calm.

Coal-trimmers and stewards were crowding on deck. Every man who was not wanted below came hurrying up, and Mr. Railton rapped out sharp orders to the prefects to see that all the boys were above decks. A deadly pale face appeared above the stairs amidships, and Mr. Ratcliff came

"Hallo! What's this tailor's dummy doing in my place?" exclaimed a burly, thick-set fellow, coming up suddenly behind D'Arcy. "Get out!"

into view. A wash of water into the room where he happened to be had apprised him of the danger, and he dashed up to the deck fully persuaded that the ship was going down like a plummet.

"The boats!" he gasped—"the—the boats! We are sinking!"

"Calm yourself, Mr. Ratcliff," said the School House master quietly.

Mr. Ratcliff looked at him wildly.

"We are sinking!"

"Calm yourself! The boys——"

"Where are the boats? Why are not the boats lowered?"

Without waiting for a reply, Mr. Ratcliff ran towards the bridge-ladder. He called out in shaking tones to the captain:

"Captain Bolsover, lower the boats at once! The ship is sinking!"

Mr. Railton bit his lip. He did not like the senior master, but he liked still less to see his colleague so utterly unnerved before the boys, many of whom were beginning to exchange winks and grins.

"Mr. Ratcliff, there is no immediate danger."

"But the ship is going down!" gasped the senior master.

"We shall be ashore in a few minutes."

Mr. Ratcliff gasped. Something of a flush crept into his cheeks as he caught a smile on Kildare's face, and intercepted a wink passing between Monty Lowther and Jack Blake. He realised that he was showing less firmness than the boys of the Lower School mostly were, and he strove to master his uneasiness.

"I think that the boats should be lowered!" he muttered.

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"We shall be safe when the steamer is run upon the sand. Captain Bolsover wishes to save his ship."

"But lives——"

"The lives are not in danger now."

It was true. The captain had signalled for steam to be shut off, and the firemen crowded up from below. There was a possibility of exploding boilers, but at the worst no lives would be lost.

There was a heavy grating under the keel of the steamer a few minutes later.

"We're aground!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

But the steamer was not aground yet. Borne along by the impetus of her rush, she tore through a sandbank, and rushed straight upon the sandy beach. She grated again—and again—and stopped, shivering, her bows almost buried in deep, soft sand.

The escaping steam was hissing away. The fires were out. The steamer heeled over a little, and the crowd on her decks clung to everything that could afford a hold. Many of the boys rolled down the sloping deck, and bumped on to the rail and one another. Two or three plumped into the water; but it was shallow here, and there was no danger.

In the sandy stretch at the foot of the great headland, the Condor lay with her hull half imbedded, fast aground.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy, who was clinging to Blake's ankle, while Blake clung to a stanchion—"bai Jove, this has thwown me into quite a fluttah!"

"Leggo!"

"I'm afwaid I can't let go, Blake, or I shall slip away and bump on the wail."

"You're pulling my beastly leg off!" grunted Blake. "If you don't let go, I shall bump you in the eye with the other foot."

"It is absolutely imposs. for me to let go!" gasped D'Arcy, who was sprawled on the sloping deck, with only his hold on Blake to keep him from slipping off and rolling on the sand beside the tilted steamer.

"Well, hold on, then," grunted Blake. "I can't hold on long——"

"Pway don't let go, deah boy!"

"I can't help it."

"Make an effort. You uttah ass, I —— Oh!"

Blake's fingers slipped from their hold, and he slid down, and D'Arcy slid, too. The swell of St. Jim's bumped upon Manners, who was trying to right himself by holding on to the sloping rail, and they rolled over together. In a moment more Blake bumped upon them both.

"Ow!" gasped Manners.

A friendly pair of hands seized Manners and dragged him over the rail to the sand, which was on a level with the sloping deck on the land side of the steamer. The hands belonged to Tom Merry.

"Thanks!" gasped Manners, sitting on the sand, and staring blankly about him, too dazed to do anything else for the moment.

Blake extricated himself from D'Arcy, and came scrambling over the rail. Arthur Augustus wriggled under the rail and plumped on the sand, and sat there.

"Bai Jove," he gasped, feeling for his eyeglass, "what a feahfully excitin' time! I say, deah boys, the ship is agwound."

"Go hon!" panted Tom Merry.

"It is, weally, Tom Mewwy. And I—— Bai Jove, I feel awfully cold sittin' here! I think I must be wet."

"Ha, ha, ha! I think so, too!"

D'Arcy looked down at the sand. It was wet sand, very wet, and his weight had made him sink in where he was sitting, and he was now sitting in a pool of water. He jumped to his feet.

"Bai Jove, that is wathah wotten!"

"This is a very unfortunate circumstance," said Skimpole, adjusting his spectacles and staring at the grounded steamer. "I have not been able to make my experiment."

"Your what?" demanded Tom Merry.

"My experiment. I had discovered a keg of curious-looking powder, and had taken it into the lower hold to analyse it——"

"Powder!" said Tom Merry suspiciously. "What sort of powder?"

"A blackish, coarse-grained powder."

"In a keg?"

"Yes, in a keg."

"Did you leave a light near it?"

"Yes, I remember now that I left a lighted candle near it in the lower hold. Why do you ask?"

"You unutterable idiot!" said Tom Merry, in measured tones. "You ought to have a stone tied round your neck, and then you ought to be dropped into the deepest part of the North Sea."

"Really, Merry, that is almost rude. Why——"

"No need to look much further for the cause of the explosion," growled Tom Merry. "It must have been gunpowder that Skimpole was fooling about with, and the lighted candle——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, no, nothing of the sort!" said Skimpole. "You see, I left the candle standing on the chest, and it wasn't within several inches of the powder, even if it was gunpowder——"

"The ship was rolling a little, and, of course, that upset the candle."

"Nonsense! Besides, it wasn't gunpowder."

"How do you know it wasn't?"

"Really, I feel quite sure of it."

"You shrieking ass! You've blown a hole in the steamer, and stopped our cruise for us. Hush!" added Tom Merry hastily. "Here comes Mr. Railton! Don't give the howling lunatic away!"

"But really you are quite mistaken, Merry."

"Shut up, ass!"

And Skimpole, seeing Mr. Railton at hand, thought he had better do so. He was quite sure that he hadn't blown the hole in the steamer, but he realised that Mr. Railton might take Tom Merry's view of the case.

"My lads," said the School House master, "our cruise is ended, but we have lost little, as it is almost time for us to return to St. Jim's for the Michaelmas term. It is quite safe now to go aboard the steamer, as she will not shift her position till the next tide, and so you may get out as much of your personal property as possible."

"Yes, sir."

And in the red glow of the sunset, the boys of St. Jim's set to work cheerily enough.

CHAPTER 6.

Salving D'Arcy's Props!

"TOM MEWWY!"

"Hallo!"

"Pway come and help me with this twunk."

The juniors were working under difficulties. The steamer was on her side on the sand, her decks tilted at an angle of something like forty-five, and, of course, the cabins and passages below had the same slant, and were exceedingly difficult to negotiate. Falls and slips were happening every moment, and most of the boys had given up the idea of getting out anything bulky, and were carrying out their property in armfuls. That, however, did not satisfy Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He was dragging at a huge leather trunk which was jammed under his berth, and dragging in vain. Blake, Herries, and Digby had cabin-trunks of the regulation size, and they had rescued them. D'Arcy was in difficulties.

Tom Merry looked into the cabin with a grin.

"You won't get that thing out, Gussy."

D'Arcy panted, and desisted from his exertions for a moment.

"Pway assist me, deah boy, instead of standin' there talkin' wot," he said. "I am wesolved to save this valuable twunk."

"Why not open it and take the things out?"

"I should vewy likely get the things wet, and I suppose you don't want me to land in an unknown place without a single clean collah to put on."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally wish you would lend a hand, instead of standin' there cacklin', Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, all right!" said the hero of the Shell good-naturedly, and he came into the cabin, sliding along the slanting floor. "By Jove, it's heavy!"

"Yaas, it is wathah heavy."

"Better get some more help. Where's Blake?"

"I have wequested Blake's assistance, and he told me vewy wudely to go and eat coke."

"I wish I'd told you the same," gasped Tom Merry, tugging at the trunk till he was red in the face. "I can't move this. It's jammed somehow."

"You have only to pull it up the slope, and turn it wound towards the door, and then I can dwag it thwough."

"Only!" said Tom Merry. "It would take a couple of horses to pull that trunk up a slant like this."

"Oh, pway make an effort!"

"Figgins! Hallo, Figgins!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as he saw the long-legged chief of the New House juniors sliding past the door. "Lend a hand here, will you?"

Figgins stopped himself by catching the doorpost, and looked in.

"What are you trying to do, Merry?"

"Trying to lug this trunk out."

"It's a wathah valuable twunk——"

"Bosh!" said Figgins. "Better get the things out of it, and leave the trunk for the salvage chaps to salve."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. I am wesolved to save that twunk. Pway make anothah effort, Tom Mewwy."

"Well, make an effort yourself."

"I am feelin' wathah exhausted, and——"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jack Blake, sliding down the passage and bumping on Figgins. "Fancy meeting you! What's all this jaw about?"

"Get off my neck, you ass!"

"Certainly. What's the trouble here? Don't you know that the word's been passed for the kids to get ashore? The tide will be turning soon."

"Blow the tide! I am twyin' to save my twunk——"

"Blow your trunk! You're as particular about your trunk as if you were a giddy elephant!" said Jack Blake severely. "I've told you, it can't be got out."

"Yaas, but——"

"If you yanked it out into the passage, it would slide along like a cannon-ball, and bump into pieces."

"Yaas, but——"

"It was hard enough to get the thing into the cabin, as you remember, and it's simply impossible to get it out."

"I wefuse to wegard it as imposs. It is a valuable twunk——"

"Well, it won't be lost; the steamer will be salved, and your rotten trunk will be salved with the rest of the property on board."

"But I wequire it on shore. We are a long way fwom St. Jim's, and I don't know where we shall pass the next few days. I uttahly wefuse to appeah among stwangahs

without even a clean collah or a clean waistcoat to put on."

"Now, look here, Gussy, and listen to reason——"

"I uttahly wefuse to listen to weason. Pway make anothah effort, Tom Mewwy, and dwag out my twunk."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "I tell you, it can't be done."

"Pway lend me a hand, Blake——"

"I'll lend you a hand, and a foot, too, if you don't stop playing the giddy goat!" replied Blake, sliding into the cabin, and clambering towards the swell of St. Jim's. "Here, Dig, Herries, Reilly, come here."

The School House juniors obeyed the voice of their leader. They scrambled into the cabin, with about as much room to spare as if they had been sardines in a tin. Blake jammed the trunk open.

"We're going to salve D'Arcy's props," he explained. "All these things have got to be carried up."

"Blake, you wottah——"

"Here's some fancy waistcoats for you to carry, Reilly. Take care of them, and drop them in a soft place, and come back for some more."

"Faith, and I will intirely!" grinned the boy from Belfast, and he scrambled out of the slanting cabin with half a dozen gorgeous waistcoats under his arm.

Arthur Augustus gave a whoop of wrath.

"Weilly, you wottah, bwing those waistcoats back! The feahful beast is cwumplin' them feahfully! Blake, I no longah wegard you as a fwiend."

"Go hon! Dig, take these neckties."

"Certainly!"

"Blake, leave my twunk alone. I will get it out without your beastly assistance. Tom Mewwy, get out of the way."

And Arthur Augustus scrambled towards Jack Blake, who was dragging out the further contents of the trunk. He slipped on the sloping floor, and rolled with a bump under the berth, and a gasp was heard.

"My word!" said Digby. "D'Arcy has some curious tastes. But fancy rolling into a place like that from choice! What are you under there for, Gussy?"

"You wottah, I——"

"Take those things up, Dig. You take this collar-box, Herries, and the white shirts. Figgins, old man, catch hold of this giddy overcoat."

"Right you are!"

Blake gave the trunk a heave, and turned it on its side, and the remainder of its contents poured out. Tom Merry and Figgins were loaded, and they left the cabin, laughing. D'Arcy scrambled up.

"Blake, I insist upon your leavin' off immediately."

"I'm nearly finished," said Blake cheerfully. "I'm doing this as a favour to you, Gussy."

"I wefuse to wegard it as a favah, you uttah beast! Weilly, you wottah, what have you done with my waistcoats?"

The Irish junior was scrambling in again, with a huge grin on his ruddy face.

"Faith, and I've dropped them in a soft place, D'Arcy darling!"

"Where have you dwopped them, you uttah wottah?"

"In a pool of water in the sand——"

"What?" yelled D'Arcy.

"In a pool of water in the sand. I thought that would be a soft place."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "I hope they're fast colours, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He scrambled out of the cabin, and dashed off to the rescue of his beloved waistcoat.

Blake finished emptying the trunk, and several juniors carried the remains of D'Arcy's extensive wardrobe to the slanting deck of the steamer, and slid down to the starboard rail with their baggage.

Arthur Augustus was picking his fancy waistcoats from the sand. The pool of water had been a very shallow one, and only one of the precious garments was wet, but Arthur Augustus was examining them all nervously and anxiously.

"Here's the rest of your things, Gussy," said Blake, throwing a shower of socks and neckties and handkerchiefs at the swell of the School House. They descended round him like a flock of birds on the sand.

"Blake, you beast!"

"Faith, and here's your pyjamas," said Reilly, throwing two pairs of the same, of extremely gorgeous patterns, so that they twined round D'Arcy's neck and hung there. "Sure, I've saved them for you intirely."

"You howwid wottah——"

"And here's your collars," said Figgins.

"And your shirts."

"And your handkerchiefs——"

"You feahful wottahs!" gasped D'Arcy. "I shall give you all a feahful thwashin' when I get time. I——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors were shouting with laughter at the absurd spectacle D'Arcy presented, standing in the midst of his property, trying to rescue the articles as they were showered upon him.

For some minutes they did not observe a new arrival upon the scene—a youth with red hair and a freckled face, who stood with his hands in his trousers' pockets, looking on, laughing as loud as any.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake turned and looked at the laughing stranger.

"My only hat!"

The stranger looked at him.

"Hallo!" he said coolly.

"You're the chap!"

"Eh?"

"It's the red-headed, freckled specimen I saw at the telescope on the tower," said Blake; "and it's alive!"

"Oh, draw it mild," said the red-headed youth. "If you've come ashore especially to look for a thick ear, young shaver——"

Who are you calling a young shaver?"

The red-headed youth made a lofty gesture.

"You should use the accusative case there," he said severely. "Your education has been neglected, young shaver."

"Eh—What?"

"You should say: 'Whom are you calling a young shaver?'"

Jack Blake's eyes gleamed.

"Have you come here to teach lessons, or to learn one?" he inquired.

"My dear young shaver," said the red-headed youth, with irritating coolness, "it is a pleasure to me to give instruction to young shavers——"

"If you call me a young shaver again, I'll bump you in the sand!" roared Blake, getting exasperated.

"Young shaver!" said the red-headed boy promptly.

And Blake was as good as his word. He seized the stranger on the spot, and the next moment they were rolling in the sand. But it could not be denied that Blake was getting as much of the bumping as his adversary.

CHAPTER 7.

The Last Feed!

"THERE you are!"

"And there you are!"

"Ow!"

"Oh!"

"You confounded cheeky young rotter——"

"You cheeky young shaver——"

"Go it!" said Tom Merry encouragingly. "I say, Blake, you said you were going to bump him in the sand."

"Well, ain't I doing it?" howled Blake.

"I suppose so, if you say so; but it looks as if he were bumping you instead. Never mind. Go it!"

"Yaas, wathah! Undah the circs., I should not be displeased to see Blake weceive a feahful thwashin'," said Arthur Augustus. "Go it, you wed-headed wottah!"

"I'll give you a jolly good licking!" gasped Blake.

"I'd like to see you do it, young shaver."

The red-headed boy could not have been more than three months older than Blake, and so his assumption of elderliness was distinctly exasperating. The juniors stood round in a circle encouraging the combatants. "Fair play" was the motto of the boys of St. Jim's, and no one even thought of interfering.

But the eye of Mr. Ratcliff was on them from afar, and the senior housemaster came towards the scene with rapid steps.

"Blake!"

The thin, acid voice of Mr. Ratcliff seemed to cut like a knife.

Blake let go his hold as if his adversary had suddenly become red-hot. The red-headed youth, not perceiving the cause for a moment, took advantage of the relaxation of Blake's efforts to roll him over and bump his head in the sand.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Fair play!"

"Eh? Oh—I didn't know——"

The red-headed youth sprang to his feet, looking very confused.

Mr. Ratcliff fixed a stony glance upon him.

"Who are you, boy?" he rapped out.

"If you please, sir, I'm Tompkinson Tertius."

"Ah, I suppose you belong to Headland School?"

"Yes, sir," said Tompkinson III. meekly.

"Blake, get up immediately!"

Blake rose to his feet somewhat dazedly, and rubbed the sand from his face and hair.

"I say, I'm sorry," murmured Tompkinson III. "I didn't know when I bumped you that——"

Blake grinned.

"That's all right."

"Blake!" rapped out Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir."

"I am not surprised at this. It is of a piece with your usual conduct, the moment you get ashore, to pick a quarrel with an inoffensive lad, who doubtless came down to render assistance."

Blake turned red. He was at a loss for words for the moment.

But the youth from the school on the headland spoke immediately.

"It's all right, sir; it was only fun."

"Silence!"

"Besides," said Tompkinson, undaunted, "I began it."

"Silence!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "Another word, and I shall report you to your headmaster. Blake, I shall remember this. You may consider yourself released from all the restraints of a school under these peculiar circumstances, but I warn you that you are mistaken."

And Mr. Ratcliff stalked away.

"Nice sort of a beast to have around, isn't he?" said Blake. "If that animal were my housemaster, Figgins, I'd—I'd——"

"You'd put up with him, same as we do," said Figgins cheerfully. "I say, young Ginger, it was very decent of you to speak up as you did."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as distinctly wipping of young Gingah."

"Thank you," said Tompkinson III. cheerfully. "But perhaps I ought to warn you that I always tap fellows on the nose when they call me 'Ginger.' It may save trouble. I hear you chaps are coming up to the school."

"First I've heard of it," said Tom Merry. "But I suppose we're going somewhere. It's getting dark."

"I don't see why we couldn't camp out in that Norman castle on the headland," Arthur Augustus remarked.

"What Norman castle?" asked Tompkinson.

"The one on the headland, where you were standin' on the towah."

"You ass! That's Headland Abbey School."

"Wats! It may be a school, but it's an old Norman castle, too."

"It's an old Saxon abbey."

"Wats!"

"Well, of all the asses," said Tompkinson, "not to know the difference between Saxon and Norman architecture. Why——"

"I am descended fwom a Norman wace——"

"Well, you're coming to the abbey," said the Headland junior. "Lathom came up to speak to the Head about it. He used to be a master of ours, but we made things too lively for him in the Fourth Form, I can tell you. We were jolly well surprised to see his old chivvy again. He brought a message asking the Head to put you chaps up in the school to-night. There's no workhouse handy, and——"

"Bai Jove, you young wottah——"

"And no other place, either; so the Head couldn't very well refuse," said Tompkinson. "If he had seen what a scratch lot you are, though——"

"Oh, draw it mild, Ginger!"

"I don't know where they'll pack you, either," grinned Tompkinson III. "We're only just back for the new term, and there are new boys, and the place is pretty full up. I suppose we shall manage somehow. Joking aside, we shall be glad to have you, and I thought I'd run down to tell you so."

"Good!" said Tom Merry heartily. "I hope we shall see you at St. Jim's some day, kid."

"Yaas, wathah! I should be extwemely pleased to weturn the hospitality of our young fwiend."

"Who are you calling your young friend, young shaver?"

"Ha, ha!" cackled Blake. "You should say 'whom ——'"

"If you allude to me as a young shavah, Tompkinson Tertius, I shall be obliged to bweak up the harmony of the pwesent meetin' by administerin' you a feahful thwashin' for your cheek."

"Come along, kids," said Kildare, coming up, "we are going up to the school on the headland for the night, and to-morrow Mr. Ratcliff will decide what's to be done. You will have to carry your things yourselves. The tide will be in soon, and we've got to get off the sands."

"Bai Jove, I don't know how I'm to cawwy all these things," said D'Arcy, looking in some dismay at his numerous properties.

"Leave them there, then!"

"I am afraid that is quite imposs., Tom Mewwy."

"I'll carry some for you, if you like," said Tompkinson Tertius good-naturedly. "My hat! What a lot of props! How many waistcoats do you wear at a time, young shaver?"

Arthur Augustus did not deign to reply to this question.

The boys of St. Jim's, each carrying his own outfit, or as much as he could of it, formed up to march up the path over the headland. The tide was on the turn, and waves were creeping up the sands, and the huge bulk of the steamer was shaking with the motion of the water.

Mr. Railton called over the names on the sands in the growing dusk to make sure that all were there, and one junior failed to answer to his name.

"Wynn!"

No reply.

"Wynn!"

Fatty Wynn was missing from the ranks of the Fourth. Figgins and Kerr looked about them anxiously.

"Is not Wynn there?" called out Mr. Railton.

"No, sir."

The School House master finished the roll-call, but no one else was missing.

Tom Merry exchanged a whisper with Monty Lowther.

"The young ass must have stayed on the steamer for something, Monty."

Lowther nodded.

"Yes; and it's dangerous there now—she'll turn over when the tide comes in."

"Let's go and look for him."

"But Ratty——"

"They won't notice in the dark."

"Right you are!"

The chums of the Shell slipped away, keeping in the shadow of a mass of property taken off the grounded steamer, and in a minute more were climbing the slanting deck.

"You know where to look for him," murmured Tom Merry, with a grin.

"The tuckshop," grinned Lowther.

"Yes, rather."

Amidships of the steamer was the buffet kept by Mrs. Price, the steward's wife. It was the favourite resort of Fatty Wynn, and if he had lingered on board the steamer, there was little doubt that this was the spot he had lingered in.

The door was hanging open, and the chums of the Shell scrambled into the dusky room. In the dusk a dim figure could be seen.

It was that of Fatty Wynn!

He had a tart in each hand, and a bottle of ginger-beer between his knees, and was hard at work.

And to judge by the shininess of his face, and the smears of jam on his mouth, he had been similarly occupied for some time.

"Fatty!"

The fat junior started.

"Hallo, Merry! You startled me!"

"You ass! You've been missed at roll-call!" grinned Tom Merry. "Come along, or you'll have Ratty on your track!"

"All right; wait a second! The tide will fill the steamer up, you know, and all this grub will be spoiled. It makes my heart ache to think of it. I've stuffed all my pockets full, and——"

"And yourself, too?" chuckled Lowther.

"Well, I've eaten a little. You never know what will happen, and it's as well to be prepared. Take some of these tarts——"

The steamer gave a roll, and there was a wash of water on the main deck. A roller from the North Sea had washed right over the hull. The tide was coming in with a vengeance now.

"Look out!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Come on! No time for tarts now! We may get cut off by the sea!"

"Take some of the ginger-beer, then!"

"Come on, you young ass!"

"Well, just a cake!"

Tom Merry and Lowther seized the fat junior by the arms, and dragged him away. As they emerged on the sloping upper deck, there was a rush of water from seaward, and it smote them and hurled them blindly forward.

Fortunately, they retained their mutual hold. Tom Merry found himself grasping a rail, and he clung to it desperately. The water receded, and there was a gasp of woe from Fatty Wynn.

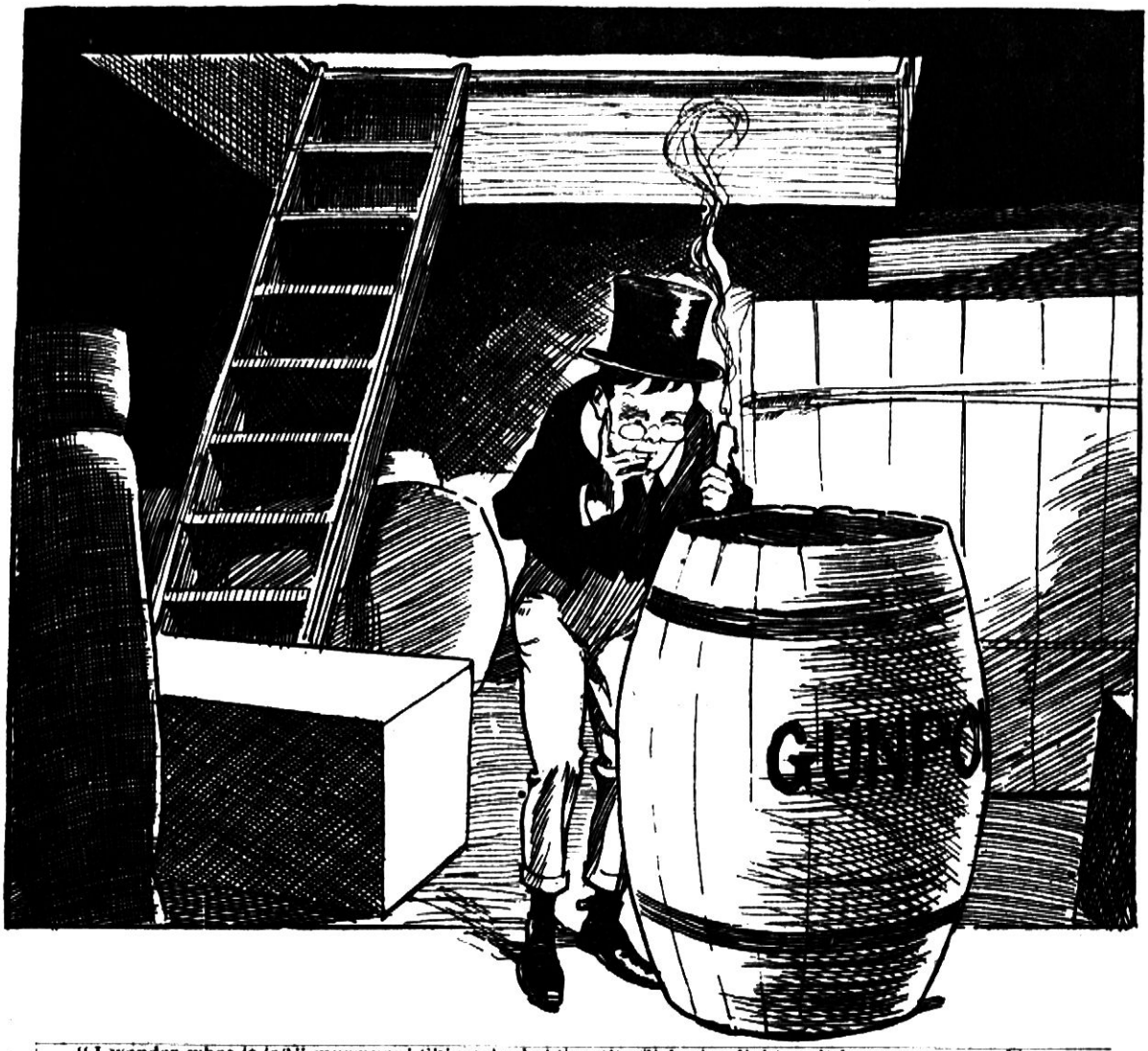
"Oh, oh, oh!"

"Are you hurt?" cried Tom Merry anxiously.

"Hurt? No. All the grub I've got in the pockets will be soaked!"

"Come on, you shrieking ass; you'll be drowned if you hang about here!" exclaimed Lowther.

And the chums of the Shell dragged the fat junior across the deck, and bumped him against the rail there.



"I wonder what it is?" murmured Skimpole, holding the flickering light a little nearer to the object of his curiosity.

"Hold on," gasped Fatty—"hold on! I'm out of breath! I—I've just dropped a bottle of ginger-beer! I——"

"Collar him!" gasped Tom Merry.

The sea was breaking over the steamer in earnest now. The three juniors went bundling over on the sand, and the wave followed them, and overthrew them, and for some moments they were gasping under sweeping water.

Tom Merry staggered to his feet.

"Run for it, Monty!"

"Right-ho!" panted Lowther.

They dashed forward up the sloping sand, dragging Fatty Wynn between them. After them, a moment later, came a rushing billow; but they just escaped it. They ran on beyond high-water mark, and stopped, panting.

"Merry! Lowther! Where have you been?"

It was Mr. Railton who asked the question, with a startled face.

"It's all right, sir!"

"Was Wynn on the steamer?"

"Yes, sir," gasped Fatty. "I didn't know the tide was coming in, sir, and I was saving some valuable things!"

"You must have gone on board again without permission, Wynn."

"There were some valuable things, sir——"

"You foolish boy, you have had a narrow escape! Fall in there! You will change your clothes at Headland School."

"You young ass!" muttered Figgins, pinching Fatty Wynn's ear as he joined them. "I hadn't any idea you were on the steamer, or I'd have fished you out. I've a good mind to give you a jolly good licking! What are you looking so down in the mouth about—cold?"

"Yes; it is r-r-rather co-co-cold and wet," said Fatty Wynn lugubriously. "But that isn't it. I—I—I——"

"What is it, then?"

"I've got a lot of grub crammed into my pockets, you know, and now—no-no-now——"

"Well, what now?"

"It's soaked with seawater, and spoiled!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"Silence there!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "March!"

And the boys of St. Jim's took their way in the September dusk up the steep path to Headland School.

CHAPTER 8.

The Commercials.

TOMPKINSON TERTIUS had joined Tom Merry, and was mounting the steep path with him, and chatting by the way to the chums of the Shell.

The Headland junior was very communicative.

He was very proud of his school, and rather inclined to patronise the boys of St. Jim's; but, of course, that was only to be expected.

"We're right up-to-date at Headland," he remarked. "I'll show you over the new buildings if you stay long enough there. Ripping new place—all of red brick, latest thing in sanitation—not a yard of wallpaper in the whole place, and everything as square as you like!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Don't you use the Norman castle for anything, deah boy?"

"Norman castle be hanged! If you mean the old abbey, that rotten old fossil is only used for show," said Tompkinson Tertius. "The buildings we live in are of the newest

design and most modern construction. Ever since Headland was turned into a commercial college it's been right up-to-date."

"Oh, you're a commercial college, are you?" said Lowther.

"That's it. None of your rotten old grammar schools!"

"Do you learn anythin'?" inquired Arthur Augustus innocently.

Tompkinson Tertius looked round to bestow a withering glance on the swell of St. Jim's.

"Are you looking for a thick ear?" he asked.

"Certainly not, deah boy! I'm askin' for information."

"I'll lay a half-crown to a threepenny bit," said Tompkinson Tertius, "that we can get ahead of you in French and German and Mathematics, anyway! You can keep your old Greek!"

"Weally, Thompson——"

"Tompkinson, please!"

"Yaas, my mistake! Weally, Tompkinson Please, I wegard you——"

"You're a funny merchant, aren't you?" said Tompkinson. "I think I shall have to give you a lesson at Headland, if you're put into my dormitory!"

"Weally, Gingah——"

"Cheese it!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Pax now, Gussy! I say, young Tertius, are there any more at home like you?"

"Two more," said Tompkinson. "My eldest brother, Tompkinson Primus, is the captain of Headland. The next, Tompkinson Secundus, is in the Fifth. I'm Tompkinson Three, and I'm in the Fourth."

"Monarch of all you survey there, I suppose?" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Yes, except for Barker."

"Who's Barker?"

"The captain of the Form, and the best boxer at Headland. I should advise this funny merchant not to be funny with him, or he'll get wiped off the earth! I'm good-tempered; Barker isn't."

"Weally, I'm not at all afwaid of Barkah."

"Wait till you see him."

"I twust that Barkah will possess sufficient good-bweedin' to be polite to the stwangah within his gates," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

Tompkinson chuckled.

"You see, you can't always trust Barker's good-breeding," he remarked. "If you're shoved into our dormitory, better give him a wide berth, that's all."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus.

Tompkinson chuckled again. He evidently foresaw a high old time for the swell of St. Jim's if he came in contact with the terror of the Fourth Form at Headland.

The top of the path was reached, and the buildings of Headland School stood out to view in the growing dusk, against a background of setting sun.

The old abbey was a picturesque ruin, and it contrasted strangely with the edifice erected near it.

Headland School was all that Tompkinson III. had described it. The buildings were red-brick, naked and rectangular, and though eminently modern and useful, their aspect might have made an artist weep.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry.

He gazed at the rectangular buildings, a glaring and unpicturesque mass in the setting sun, and thought of St. Jim's, with its grey old buildings mellowed by centuries.

Tompkinson Tertius turned to him with a face glowing with pride.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked.

"Oh, ripping!" said Tom Merry.

"So picturesque!" said Monty Lowther.

"So haunted by the poetry of the past!" remarked Manners.

Tompkinson looked at the chums of the Shell suspiciously.

"I believe you chaps are rotting!" he remarked. "I don't care! This place beats any public school I've ever seen! No filthy ivy clinging about it!"

"Yes, I notice that."

"No trees growing close to the windows!"

"Bai Jove, no!"

"No damp old glass plots in the quadrangle!"

"Ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at! I suppose St. Jim's, where you come from, isn't up to this?"

"Nothing like it!" said Tom Merry blandly.

"More like that, I dare say?" suggested Tompkinson, jerking his head towards the ruined abbey on the headland.

Tom Merry smiled.

"Yes, much more like that!"

"Well, I dare say you'll get renovated and brought up-to-date sometime," said Tompkinson comfortingly. "Hallo, the bell's ringing for tea!"

The boys of St. Jim's marched in at the great Portland-stone gateway, with its bronze gates that had as offensive an air of newness as anything else about the place.

There were, as Tompkinson had said, no grass plots in the quadrangle. It was laid out with asphalt. The great square windows of the building were unrelieved by any flowers or creepers. A crowd of boys were waiting to see the strangers march in, and Tom Merry noted two of them who had brilliant red hair and freckles, and otherwise bore a strong resemblance to his new acquaintance. He had no doubt that they were Tompkinson Primus and Tompkinson Secundus.

"Tea's late," remarked Tompkinson III. "That's on account of you fellows, I suppose. All the better; I haven't missed mine, you see!"

"Don't you have tea in your studies here?" asked Manners. "We do at St. Jim's."

Tompkinson III. sniffed.

"We don't have studies here," he replied.

"Oh!"

"We prepare our lessons in the class-rooms, and we generally have a master with us. We always have tea in hall. I say, wouldn't you fellows like to camp out here, eh, and not go back to your fossilised old quarters?"

"Immensely—I don't think!" said Monty Lowther.

"Come into hall, and I'll find you places," said Tompkinson. "There seems to be about a hundred of you, and there's bound to be a bit of a scramble for seats. You chaps with the wet togs come up to the dorm. with me and change first, though. You'll catch cold if you hang about like that."

Tom Merry, Lowther, and Fatty Wynn were glad enough to change into dry garments. The changing did not take them many minutes, and then they followed the obliging Tomkinson III. downstairs again, and joined the crowd of St. Jim's juniors who were going into the hall, into which most of the Headlanders were crowding. The hall was long and unadorned, with high, plain windows, and long tables with forms ranged along their sides. Tomkinson hurried to a table at which a number of youths of about his own age were seating themselves.

"Here you are," he exclaimed; "this is our table! Take your seats before you get shifted!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

There seemed to be no masters present. The Head was in the outer hall, speaking to Mr. Ratcliff and Mr. Railton. The boys of St. Jim's were hungry, and Tom Merry & Co. were quite ready for tea. They swarmed into the seats at the table, and as huge plates of bread-and-butter and cake were there all ready, they lost no time in starting.

The Commercial juniors showed a considerable curiosity towards the visitors, and their curiosity was not restrained by any sort of formalities. They asked questions on every point that interested them, and it was easy to see that they agreed with Tompkinson Tertius in thinking that Headland Commercial College was the finest institution on the face of the earth, and that they were the finest set of fellows that had ever been sheltered within its walls.

"We're alive here, you know!" Tompkinson remarked. "Ain't we, Punter?"

"We are, my pippin!" said Punter. "Where did you pick up this thing?"

The thing alluded to was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was just then screwing his monocle into his eye to take a survey of the room.

"Found it on the shore," said Tompkinson. "Lots of funny things are washed up on the beach, you know! I found that there."

Arthur Augustus turned the glimmer of his eyeglass upon Tompkinson Tertius.

"Are you alludin' to me, Thompson?" he asked.

"Tompkinson, ass!"

"Well, Tompkinson Ass! Are you alludin' to me?"

"Now then, Gussy, don't row!"

"Pway do not intahfeah, Blake! I have been alluded to in terms of gwoss diswespect!"

"Where did he get his accent?" asked Punter.

"Dug it up somewhere, I expect!"

And the Commercial youths roared. D'Arcy turned his eyeglass from one to another, as if uncertain which to go for, and while he was hesitating Digby dragged him down into a seat.

"Have some cake, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah, Dig; I will have some cake! But I wegard these wottahs as a set of feahful boundahs!"

"They are, and no mistake!" agreed Digby.

"Hallo! What's that?" said Punter. "Who are you calling bounders?"

"I wegard you all as a feahful set of wank outsidahs!" said D'Arcy with dignity. "I wegard your coll. as a wotten place, fit only for a bawwacks or a convict prison, and I wegard you as wude wottahs!"

There was a howl from the Commercials

"Bonnet him!"

"Jam him!"

"I wefuse to be jammed! If you appwoach me with that jam-jah, you wude wuffian, I shall pwobably lose my tempah and stwike you!"

"Hallo! Who's this in my place?" exclaimed a burly, thick-set fellow, coming suddenly up behind D'Arcy and seizing him by the shoulders. "Get up!"

D'Arcy twisted his head round.

"Pway welease me!" he said. "I am not accustomed to bein' handled in such an extwemely wuff mannah!"

"Let him alone, Barker!" said Tompkinson Tertius. "Let him have his tea, can't you?"

Barker scowled at the red-headed junior.

"Mind your own business, Ginger!"

"Look here——"

"I'm going to have some tea, I suppose? and there's no room at the table! I'll turn this tailor's dummy out if I like!"

"I wefuse to be alluded to as a tailah's dummy!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Out you come!"

Arthur Augustus caught the edge of the table and held on as the bully of Headland dragged at his shoulders.

"I wefuse to move! It is now a question of dig. with me, and I uttahly wefuse to give way! Welease me immediately, you wottah, or I shall give you a feahful thwashin'! You are wumplin' my beastly collah!"

"Out you come!"

"I wefuse!"

Barker gave a tremendous wrench, and as Arthur Augustus clung to the table with all his strength, something was bound to happen. Something did! The table tilted over sideways, and Arthur Augustus fell backwards over the form, followed by a shower of plates and bread-and-butter and cake.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped.

But it was not D'Arcy who suffered most. Barker had not expected the catastrophe and he was not prepared for it. He went down in a heap, with D'Arcy on top of him, and he gave a breathless grunt as the weight of the swell of St. Jim's plumped upon him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tompkinson III. "You've got it now, Barker!"

"Gerrof my chest!"

"Wats!" said D'Arcy. He was a little startled and breathless himself, but finding that he was seated upon the terrible Barker, he showed no disposition to move in a hurry. "Wats, deah boy!"

"Lemme gerrup!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort!"

"You—you—you—— Will you let me get up?" howled Barker furiously.

"Wathah not! You were the cause of this disastah, which has thwown me into quite a fluttah. I am in no huwwy to move. Besides, it appeahs to me that you will be violent as soon as you get up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" giggled Punter. "I think so, too!"

"Lemme get up!"

"Pway wemain where you are," said D'Arcy calmly. "If you stwuggle, I shall shove this pat of buttah in your face. There, I told you I would!"

"Groo—gerroooh—groo——"

"Your own fault, deah boy! Pway be quiet, and let us have a west!"

Barker, blind with rage—as much at the laughter of the whole table as at the discomfort of his position—made a tremendous effort. Arthur Augustus reeled, and Barker threw him off and jumped up. He gripped the swell of St. Jim's by the collar.

"Now I'll give you a jolly good licking——"

"No, you won't!"

It was Tom Merry's quiet voice that broke in. And Tom Merry's strong hand gripped the bully of Headland by the shoulder and swung him away.

CHAPTER 9.

Rival Juniors.

BARKER glared at Tom Merry for a moment, his fists clenched, his eyes gleaming, his burly frame quivering with passion.

"Let me go, confound you!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

In a moment more Barker would have sprung upon the hero of the Shell, but just then a stern voice broke in.

"What is the matter here?"

"My word," murmured Tompkinson III.; "it's the Head!"

Dr. Bosanquet, the Head of the Commercial College, looked severely at the red-faced, excited juniors.

"I am sorry to see you quarrelling!" he exclaimed. "I hoped my boys would extend a cordial welcome to the new-comers, and that the latter would try to keep the peace! I expect as much of both of you!"

And Dr. Bosanquet turned away, without making any inquiries as to the origin of the little disturbance.

Barker glared at Tom Merry.

"I'll see you again about this, later!" he muttered.

Tom Merry laughed carelessly.

"Whenever you like," he said.

The matter could be carried no further then, as the masters had come in. The hall was crowded for tea. The boys squeezed up to make room for the new-comers, and forms and chairs were brought in from all quarters. But there was not room for all, and the St. Jim's senior boys had their tea separately in a class-room.

It became evident, by many indications, that the boys belonging to the ancient seat of classical learning known as St. Jim's were not likely to pull well with the young Commercial collegians.

As Blake put it, their manners and customs were quite different, and it was useless to expect a couple of hundred fellows to get together without having a row. If anyone had expected it on the present occasion, he would certainly have been disappointed.

There was nothing like ill-feeling displayed, except in the case of Barker, but all the same a good many "rows" were simmering.

"Classics" and "Commers" naturally had different ways and different ideals, and there was bound to be disagreement in some quarters. Besides, the sudden raid of a hundred hungry boys had rather thrown the commissariat into confusion at Headland, and there were a good many fellows who did not get enough.

Tom Merry & Co. looked out for themselves pretty well, assisted by the good-natured scion of the house of Tompkinson.

Fatty Wynn, in particular, was on the warpath. His feed just before leaving the wrecked steamer ought to have kept him going for a time, but he explained to Figgins that the ducking had made him hungry. In the effort to meet the sudden demand for supplies, the housekeeper had sent up all sorts and conditions of things to the tea-table, and a large steak-pie came near Fatty Wynn. Fatty had his eye on that pie from the moment it appeared on the table, marking it out as his own peculiar property.

"I say, Merry, shove that pie over this way!" he murmured anxiously.

Tom Merry laughed, and gave the pie a shove which sent it sliding towards the fat junior, and just saved it from the clutch of Barker, who was reaching out for it.

"Thanks, awfully!" said Fatty Wynn.

Barker glared at him across the table.

"Shove that pie over here, you fat young cad!"

Fatty did not reply; he was helping himself liberally. He might have been laying in provisions for a siege, to judge by the quantity he ladled upon his plate. The crust was a beautifully-crisped one, and Fatty allowed himself a large helping of that. About half the pie was transferred to Fatty Wynn's plate, Barker watching him across the table all the time with a wolfish eye.

"Shove that pie across here, you young beast," he muttered, not venturing to raise his voice, as there was now a master at the head of the table

"Eh?" said Fatty Wynn. "Did you speak to me?"

"Shove that pie over!"

"Would you like some pie, Figgy?"

"Not half!" said Figgins, helping himself to half of what remained.

"Shove that pie over here!" snarled Barker. A steak-pie was a very uncommon treat on a junior table at Headland, and Barker did not see why he should be left out of it.

Fatty Wynn did not appear to hear.

"I say, Kerr, this is jolly good pie! Will you have some?"

"Well, rather!" said Kerr.

"I say, I'm on in this scene!" exclaimed Pratt. "Fork over."

"There you are," said Kerr, after helping himself.

"How much do you call that?" exclaimed Pratt wrathfully.

"My dear chap, if you don't want it, pass it over the table to somebody that does."

Pratt grunted, and cleared out the dish

"Will you shove that pie over here?" growled Barker.

"Certainly!" said Kerr.

He pushed the empty dish across to Barker. The Headlander gazed into it, and then gazed at Figgins & Co., who were eating steak-pie, and grinning in a row.

"It's all gone, you rotters!" muttered Barker.

"Go hon!" said Figgins.

"You boasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Barker kicked Tom Merry's leg viciously under the table. The hero of the Shell gave a startled jump.

"What the dickens are you up to?" he exclaimed.

"That's for shoving that pie over there, confound you!" growled Barker. "I hope you'll be shoved into our dorm. to-night, that's all!"

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"I hope I shall," he replied.

"If you are, you can look out for a jolly good licking."

"We shall see," said Tom Merry quietly. And he turned his back on the bully of the Headland Fourth.

Barker discontentedly made a meal of bread and butter, and even of this there was not sufficient. He was in an extremely bad temper when the tables were cleared. Fatty Wynn was looking a little troubled.

"That was a jolly nice steak-pie!" he remarked. "I shouldn't mind living at Headland, if they have steak-pies for tea every night. Of course, there wasn't enough of it. I could have done with a couple more helpings."

"You always can!" said Kerr.

"Well, that ducking made me peckish, and I get so hungry in this September weather, you know. The worst of it is, that most of the grub I had in my pockets was spoiled by the sea-water."

"There'll be some supper presently," said Figgins consolingly.

"Ye-e-es," said Fatty Wynn. "But that's a long way off, isn't it? Has either of you fellows got a tin-opener about him?"

"What on earth do you want a tin-opener for?"

"The only thing I saved from the wreck that wasn't spoiled, was a tin of condensed milk. It's upstairs in my wet clothes. The sea couldn't spoil that, and it's awfully strengthening stuff, you know. If you've got a tin-opener ——"

"Well, I haven't."

"Have you got one, Kerr?" asked Fatty Wynn anxiously.

"Yes!" said Kerr.

"Hand it over, then, and——"

"I can't just now."

"Oh, don't rot! Why can't you?"

"Because I left it in my box on the Condor."

"You—you ass! Will you lend me your penknife, Figgins?"

"Yes, I'm likely to lend you a penknife to open a tin with!" grunted Figgins. "Look here, you ought to stop eating for a bit. Suppose you were to burst——"

"Oh, really, Figgins——"

Figgins and Kerr walked away, and Fatty Wynn looked disconsolate. Tom Merry tapped him on the shoulder.

"Wherefore that pensive brow, Fatty?"

"Can you lend me a tin-opener, Tom Merry?"

"Well, I don't usually carry tin-openers about in my pockets, and the one I wear on my watch-chain is lost, and so——"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Fatty Wynn peevishly. "I want to open a tin of condensed milk. Your penknife would do."

"You'd break the blade."

"I'd be very careful."

"No fear!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "You could knock a hole in the tin, you know, with the end of a cricket stump, and let the condensed milk run out. Hold it over your mouth, and let it run down your throat, and ——"

"Well, that's not a bad idea about the stump. I dare say I shall find one upstairs."

And Fatty Wynn left the room, and hurried upstairs to the dormitory where he had left his damp clothes. And Barker, who had overheard part of the talk between the two St. Jim's juniors, whispered to two or three of his special chums, and followed him.

CHAPTER 10.

Fatty in a Fix!

FATTY WYNN switched on the electric-light outside the dormitory door, as he had seen Tompkinson III. do, and entered the long, bare apartment. His clothes were still where he had left them, the inside jacket pocket bulging with a large tin of condensed milk. The other comestibles saved from the wreck were in a sad state. Several bags of cake and tarts, reduced to pulp, lay near the clothes, and even Fatty Wynn did not feel inclined to tackle jam-tarts soaked with salt water.

Fatty Wynn extracted the tin of condensed milk from the pocket, and looked round for a means of opening it. There was no cricket stump to be seen; but a pegtop was lying on a box, and that was much more useful for the fat junior's purpose. To seize the pegtop, and jam it into the end of the tin, was the work of a moment. Another jab, and the milk began to ooze out.

"Good!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "Not much good sharing a tin of milk with anybody else, and besides, there's no spoons or anything. I had better go for it. I'm still hungry enough to manage the whole tin."

"My hat!"

It was a sudden exclamation from the doorway. Fatty Wynn swung round in alarm, and his alarm increased as he saw Barker and three other fellows come in.

"Shut the door," said Barker. "Hallo, porpoise!"

"Hallo!" said Fatty Wynn feebly. He put his hand behind him with the tin of condensed milk in it, hoping that the Commers had not seen it. But his hope was vain.

"My only pyjama hat!" ejaculated Barker. "Eating again! He wolfed my steak-pie, and now he's scoffing condensed milk!"

"Little pig!" said Punter.

"I should say so. Where he stows it all is a mystery to me. He ate enough steak-pie to kill a navvy!"

"Look here," began Fatty Wynn warmly; "it's no business of yours, anyway; and you're not going to have any of this condensed milk, either."

Barker chuckled.

"I fancy we're going to have it all, unless we give you some down the back of your neck," he remarked. "Collar the young rotter!"

"Lemme alone! I——"

But Fatty Wynn's expostulations were unavailing. The Headlanders closed round him, and collared him without ceremony. Barker made a grab at the tin of milk, but Fatty clung to it desperately.

"Hand that tin over, you young glutton."

"Sha'n't! It's mine."

"It's mine now," grinned Barker, getting a grip on the tin. "Now, let go!"

"I won't!"

"Then I'll jolly soon make you."

Barker wrenched at the tin, but Fatty Wynn held on. There was a sudden yell of disgust from the Headland bully.

"Ow! Wow! Ah!"

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Punter.

"The stuff's running down my sleeve! There's a hole in the tin."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Punter.

"Oh, shut up, you silly cuckoo! What is there to cackle at in that?"

Punter apparently saw something to cackle at. At all events, he cackled, and so did the others. Barker had let go the tin, and was whipping his jacket off. The sticky fluid was creeping up his sleeve, and it was inside his shirt-cuff. He growled savagely as he tore the cuff open and rolled up the sleeve.

"The young rotter! I shall never get this stuff off," he growled. "It's as sticky as beastly glue!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up! Give me that tin, you young cad."

"Sha'n't!"

"Then I'll show you!" grunted Barker; and he collared Fatty Wynn round the neck and dragged him backwards to the floor. With the other fellows grasping him, too, Fatty could make no resistance to the attack behind. He went down with a bump, with the Commers sprawling over him.

"You—you rotters! Lemme gerrup!"

"Sit on his chest," said Barker, wrenching the tin of condensed milk from Fatty's hand with ease now. "Down with him. It doesn't matter if you squash him!"

"Ow!"

"Here, not too heavy!" exclaimed Punter. "Suppose he were to burst——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, he looks as if he might, and it would make an awful muck in the dorm. Gently does it. If he wriggles, you can stamp on his legs."

"Ow! You rotters! Gimme that tin, you beast!"

"Haven't you made me a present of this tin?" demanded Barker.

"No," roared Fatty Wynn; "I haven't!"

"Can't I have it?"

"No, you can't!"

"Oh, very well, you can have it back," said Barker. "Hold him tight, kids. He's goin to have his condensed milk."

And Barker inverted the tin over the upturned face of

Fatty Wynn. A thin, sticky stream descended from the hole in the tin. Fatty saw it coming, and wriggled desperately to escape it, and for a moment shook the Commers loose. But they fastened on again at once, and held him fast.

The sticky stream descended, and dropped on Fatty Wynn's nose, and began to flow over his red, perspiring face.

Barker held the tin with a steady hand, and his grinning face looked down mockingly upon the helpless junior.

"How do you like it?" he asked.

"M-m-m-m!" stuttered Fatty Wynn, into whose mouth some of the sticky condensed milk was creeking, while some of it flowed round his ears, and another stream over his chin and down his neck. "Gr-r-r—mm-m-m-m!"

"What is he saying, Punter?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Punter.

"Gr-r-r-r—mn-m-m-m-m-m!"

"Talk English," said Barker. "Do you like it?"

"M-m-m-m-m-m-m!"

"I suppose he means that he likes it. I say, Fatty, you've had about half the tin now. Can I have the rest?"

"M-m-m-m-m-m-m!"

"Nod your head, if you mean 'Yes,' said Barker. "Can I have the rest of the milk, my fat pippin?"

Wynn nodded his head violently. He would have given Barker a tin of milk, or a tin of diamonds, or a tin of anything, to stop the flow of that sticky mass over his face and neck and ears.

"You make me a present of it?" asked Barker.

Another violent nod.

"Quite sure you don't want it yourself?"

Nod again. Barker righted the half-emptied tin.

"Very well," he said "since you press it on me, I accept the present, just to show that there's no ill feeling in the case."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Punter.

"Mum-m-m-m-m-m!"

Barker opened his pocket-knife, and sawed a larger hole in the tin top. Fatty Wynn looked at him wrathfully with one eye. The other was bunged with condensed milk. He made an effort to break loose, but the Commers held him down.

"Groo—— Lemmm-m-m-e ger-r-r-rup!"

"Sit on him!"

"We've got him," said Punter cheerfully. "He won't get up in a hurry. I say, suppose we tie his hands so that he can't get this stuff off, and send him downstairs in this state. It will be funny."

"Ripping wheeze!" exclaimed Barker heartily.

"Well, stop guzzling that condensed milk, and get a rope. There's one in my box."

"Right you are!"

"Lemm-m-m-me gerrup!"

"Rats! Sit on his legs, Hedges!"

"What-ho!" said Hedges.

"Here's the rope," said Barker, dragging a long cord from Punter's box. "There's enough here to tie him up a dozen times over. I'll lend you a hand when I've finished this condensed milk."

"Lend a hand now, and leave that milk for me!" growled Punter. "Here, Norris, hold the young demon's wrists. He's struggling again."

"I've got him!" grinned Norris.

"It will be rather a surprise-packet for the others when he goes down like this," chuckled Punter. "Now——"

"Rescue!" suddenly yelled Fatty Wynn.

For the door of the dormitory had suddenly opened, and in the doorway appeared Tom Merry & Co.

CHAPTER 11.
Rough on Barker.

TOM MERRY did not stop to ask questions. He came in with a run, and after him came six or seven juniors of St. Jim's. In a twinkling the tables were turned.

Barker went sprawling across a bed, with Monty Lowther and Manners sprawling across him. Punter jumped up, only to be seized by Tom Merry, and sent whirling. He whirled into the arms of Jack Blake, who promptly clasped him and plumped him on the floor, and sat on him.

Figgins, and Kerr, and Digby, and Herries collared Hedges and Norris, and pinioned them, and their struggles did not avail much.

Tom Merry gave the sticky and breathless Fatty Wynn a helping hand, and he rose gasping to his feet.

"Th-th-thanks!" he gasped.

"Lemme go!" roared Barker. "I'll break your necks for this! Get off! Let me go! I'll lick you into little pieces!"

"Go hon!" said Monty Lowther, jamming the Headland

A shower of socks and neckties and handkerchiefs descended round the swell of St. Jim's.

bully's face into the counterpane of the bed. "You're too ferocious by half to be let go! Keep hold, Manners!"

"You bet!" said Manners.

"Keep still, kid," said Jack Blake, as Punter made an effort to throw him off. "If you wriggle like that I shall very likely drive my elbow into your ribs—there, I told you it might happen!"

"You—you beast!"

"There it goes again! Why don't you keep still?"

Punter kept still. Fatty Wynn wiped the condensed milk out of his eyes, and off his face, and twisted uncomfortably as he felt his collar sticking to his neck.

"The rotters!" he said. "They were going to tie me up with that rope, and march me downstairs with my face all sticky! Ugh! I feel horrible and it's not only the discomfort, you know, but to think of a tin of condensed milk being wasted when I'm so hungry——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter, Tom Merry. There's hardly any left in the tin."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had remained in the doorway, watching the scrimmage, monocle in eye, doubtless considering that there were enough to do the struggling without his assistance. "Bai Jove, you do look a feahful sight, Fatty Wynn! It's jolly lucky for you that we came to the wescue!"

"You haven't done much rescuing, anyway!" grunted Fatty Wynn.

"Weally, deah boy——"

"We thought there was something up," said Tom Merry. "We came up to see. It's lucky we did. Of course, Wynn deserves all he's got, for being a glutton——"

"Oh, draw it mild, Tom Merry!"

"I quite agwee with my honouwable fwiend Mewwy. Fatty Wynn deserves all he has weceived, but, all the same, it's up to us to avenge the honah of St. Jim's."

"Exactly," assented Tom Merry; "that is what I was going to say when Gussy started chattering. Now——"

"I wefuse to have my wemarks chawactewised as chattewin——"

"Jam those rotters together in a row," said Tom Merry. "This rope will answer the purpose nicely. Close the door, D'Arcy, and lock it."

"Yaas, wathah! I say, there isn't a key."

"Then don't lock it. Tie these rotters up in a row, kids."

"Let me go!" roared Barker.

"Rats! Now, then!"

The four Commercial Collegians were quite helpless against such odds. They were dragged together and placed in a row, and then Tom Merry fastened them up with the rope, so that it was impossible for them to separate.

Barker was black with rage, but Punter, Norris, and Hedges seemed to be taking the matter more good-humouredly. They looked nervous, however.

"Where's the condensed milk?" asked Tom Merry, looking round.

"Ask Fatty," said Blake, with a grin.

Fatty Wynn was just finishing the tin. Tom Merry gave him a look of deep disgust.

"You—you horrid wolf!" he exclaimed. "I wanted that milk to anoint them with, and now you've been and scoffed it!"

"It would have been a sinful waste!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly. "Especially when I'm so hungry, too! I'm surprised at you, Tom Merry!"

"There's the jam tarts," said Figgins. "They're soaked with sea-water, and even Fatty won't eat them; but they're all right for anointing purposes."

"Ripping! Bring them here!"

"If you put any of that sticky stuff on my face," began Barker, "I'll—ow—wow!—I'll—— Ow—wow—wow!"

"You can wow—wow as much as you like," said Tom Merry, plastering the bully's face with sopping jam-tarts. "I haven't the slightest objection to your wow-wowing, in moderation."

"I'll break your neck for this!"

"Go hon! Any more tarts, Figgins?"

"No; but there's some cake and it's pretty sloppy."

"Right-ho; that will do for the others."

"I say," said Punter, "you might draw it mild, you know. I don't want any—grrroooh!—any—ow—don't—gerroooh—groo!"

"I think they look very nice now," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove!"

"Can you suggest any improvements, Barker?"

"I'll—I'll—I'll——"

"We haven't any ile," said Monty Lowther. "I know it's more usual to do anointing with oil, but——"

"Oh, don't be funny, Lowther! They are rotters, but they don't deserve that," said Figgins. "Ring off, old chap, there's a dear."

"Look here, Figgins, I——"

"Bring them out," said Tom Merry, interrupting the two juniors in time. "They'll make quite a sensation in the common-room downstairs, I think."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can't take us down like this!" gasped Barker, turning almost pale. "You can't! You sha'n't! I tell you——"

"I think we can," said Tom Merry coolly. "Anyway, we're going to try. Bring them along, there."

"We won't go, hang you!"

"Get behind them, kids! All kick together when I give the word."

Tom Merry did not find it necessary to give the word. The four Commers started immediately, and fairly bolted towards the door, followed by the laughing juniors of St. Jim's.

"Now, then, down you go!"

"I won't!" roared Barker, halting on the landing. "I won't——"

"Good! All kick together when I give the—— Hallo, they're starting!"

The Commers bundled down the stairs. There were a good many juniors in the passage below, and in the brilliant electric light the unhappy quartette were seen by all. There was a shout of amazement.

"Faith, and what is it intirely?" exclaimed Reilly.

"It's Barker!" yelled Tompkinson III. "My only pyjama hat, Barky, how did you get like that?"

"Help me to get loose, you idiot!"

"You can't expect much help from an idiot!"

"Get along there!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I won't! I——"

"Give him the end of your boot, Figgy. You've got the biggest feet——"

"You let my feet alone, Tom Merry!"

"My dear chap, I wouldn't touch them with a hop-pole! Get along, Barker! Did that hurt?" asked Tom Merry, giving the Headland bully a gentle lift with his foot.

"Ow!" roared Barker.

"Will you have another in the same place?"

"Stop it! I'll get along! Stop it!"

"March, then!"

The unhappy Commers marched. They marched into the junior common room, which was pretty well filled with Headlanders and Saints. From every corner of the room came a yell of laughter. Even Barker's own friends could not help seeing the funny side of the matter, though it was quite lost on Barker himself.

"Come and let me loose, some of you!" yelled Barker.

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "allow me to present to you this curious animal, which I have captured in a wild state—an extremely wild state——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is a wild beast, very dangerous at close quarters, unless kept tied up——"

"Will you let me loose?"

"When tied up," said Monty Lowther, "it can only bark harmlessly, but in a free state it is a very dangerous Barker."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I'll make you sit up for this!" howled Barker, almost beside himself at being exhibited in such a ridiculous state to the juniors of Headland, and foreseeing how much prestige he was certain to lose by it. "You wait a bit, you rotters!"

"Certainly," said Tom Merry politely. "We—— My hat!"

Mr. Skene, the master of the Headland Fourth, was looking in at the doorway. His eyes opened wide in surprise at what he saw.

"G-g-goodness gracious!" he exclaimed. "What is that? Who are those boys?"

"It's a—a—a little joke, sir," stammered Tom Merry.

"Dear me! I see now that it is Barker. Barker, you should not play jokes of this sort. I should have thought that a boy of your age, the head of the Form, would have more—er—sense of personal dignity than to get himself up in such a ridiculous fashion to exhibit his folly to the Form."

Barker was too furious to speak.

"If you please, sir," began Tom Merry, choking back his merriment, "we——"

"I fully understand. Barker has played this ridiculous trick with the idea of amusing you, and seems oblivious of the fact that he is lowering himself in the most ridiculous way!" exclaimed Mr. Skene. "I am surprised at you, Barker."

"I didn't——"

"Not a word, sir. There can be no excuse. I am surprised and disgusted."

"I tell you——"

"Silence!"

"If you please——" began Blake.

"Don't interrupt me! With you boys I have nothing to do, but I certainly must insist that the head boy of my Form shall act in a manner more worthy of a sensible human being," said Mr. Skene severely. "You will immediately cease this absurd mountebank nonsense, Barker, and clean that stucky stuff off your face, and if I find you doing anything of the sort again I shall punish you severely."

And Mr. Skene, with a warning shake of the head, passed on into the room, and sat down. In the presence of the master the juniors could not give full expression to the mirth that consumed them, but there were chuckles and cackles that could not be suppressed, and many of the fellows were crimson in the face from the efforts they made to keep down their laughter.

Tompkinson Tertius, almost choking, released Barker and his comrades, and the four, not venturing to attempt reprisals in the presence of the severe Mr. Skene, went off to get themselves cleaned, leaving Tom Merry & Co. in paroxysms of suppressed merriment.

CHAPTER 12.

Crowded Quarters.

THE adventure of Barker, though it had caused as much laughter among the Commers as among the Saints, left a good many of the Headlanders feeling a little sore. They felt that the new-comers had scored, as indeed they had. Barker had gone for wool and had returned shorn, as Figgins put it, and the Commers could not get out of that. For this reason, and for others, there was likely to be a lively time for all concerned when the masters' eyes were withdrawn.

There was a great deal of whispering and muttering at the supper table among the Headland fellows, quite enough to put the Saints on their guard.

"There's a good time coming," Figgins murmured to Tom Merry. "We shall have to look out for squalls after lights-out to-night."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, I was noticing it."

"Barker seems dissatisfied," remarked Blake. "He must be awfully greedy if he wants more, after what he's had."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I shall keep some of my things on to-night, in case of accidents," Kerr remarked, in his cautious way. "Nothing like being prepared."

"Good idea! So shall I."

"I say, Tompkinson, where are we going to snooze?" asked Monty Lowther, nudging the third Tomkinson in the ribs so suddenly that he spilled half his cup of cocoa on the knees of his trousers.

"Oh!" gasped Tompkinson the Third.

"Look out; you're spilling your cocoa!"

"You confounded ass, you made me spill it!"

"Oh, draw it mild, old chap; I didn't want you to spill it! I only asked you a question. Where are we going to sleep to-night?"

"I don't suppose you'll get much sleep," said Tompkinson, jerking D'Arcy's handkerchief out of his pocket and mopping up the cocoa with it. "You——"

"Give me my beastly handkerchief!"

"Wait a minute, till I've finished with it."

"You uttah wottah, you are spoilin' my beastly handkerchief!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's. "If you do not weturn it to me instantly I shall give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"There you are," said Tompkinson cheerfully, tossing the sopping handkerchief towards Arthur Augustus.

It alighted upon his handsome waistcoat, and D'Arcy shook it off as if it had been a snake. It left liberal traces of cocoa on the gorgeous waistcoat.

"Thompson, you beastly wastah——"

"Tompkinson, please."

"You confounded wottah, you have wuined my handkerchief and stained my waistcoat!"

"Well, it was the fault of that ass for spilling my cocoa. As I was saying——"

"You have wuined my handkerchief——"

"As I was saying, you kids won't get much sleep to-night," continued Tompkinson III. imperturbably. "You see, you're put on such airs since you've been here——"

"You mean, you Commercial kids have shown such fearful cheek——"

"Anyway, we've turned the matter over in our minds, and decided that what you really want is a thorough lesson."

"How curious!" said Tom Merry. "We've been thinking it out, and we've come to the conclusion that that's just what you fellows want."

"Oh, that's rot, you know! I expect you will get the lesson you want in the dorm. to-night. Mind, I don't say so. But I think it's likely."

"Oh, we don't mind!"

"Bai Jove, wathah not! If these wottahs start any of their twicks, deah boys, we shall just wade in and give them a feahful lickin'."

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came towards the group of juniors, whose argument was growing a little excited.

"You youngsters are going to turn in with the Fourth Form here," he said. "There is a great difficulty about accommodation. Forty of you will be in the dormitory, as that is the number of beds there."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry, beaming.

And the others grinned. If numbers were to be equal in the dormitory, the intended ragging of the new-comers might end in a way very unsatisfactory for the Headlanders.

"Mind," went on Kildare. "You're to keep the peace, and not have any rows."

Tom Merry looked injured.

"Really, Kildare, we're not the kind of fellows to need a warning of that sort," he said. "You know how quiet and orderly we are."

Kildare laughed.

"Yes, it's because I know how quiet and orderly you are that I give you the warning," he replied. "Mind, no rows, or you will be warmed."

"Weally, Kildare, undah the peculiar circs——"

"Remember what I say, that's all."

"Undah the circs., deah boy——"

Kildare walked away without waiting for the swell of St. Jim's to finish. D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye, and cast an indignant glance after him.

"Weally, I cannot help wegardin' Kildare as a wathah wude wottah."

Mr. Skene rose from the supper-table.

"Bedtime, my boys!"

There was a general movement. Mr. Railton and Kildare were sorting out the St. Jim's boys. Among the two score who were to share the beds in the Fourth Form dormitory, Tom Merry & Co. contrived to include themselves. They did not mean to be left out of any fun that might be going.

The juniors marched upstairs to the lofty, bare, colour-washed dormitory. It was in a blaze with electric light. Mr. Skene peered at them with his glasses as they filed in. He was a short-sighted and unobservant little gentleman, and he saw nothing of the suppressed excitement among the boys.

"You will—er—sleep two to a bed to-night," he remarked. "That is the only method of accommodating such an—er—an influx of new-comers. I trust that you will find yourselves very comfortable."

"They won't," muttered Barker.

"Did you speak, Barker?"

"I was only saying to Punter that I'd do my best to give the kids a good time, sir."

"That is very right of you, Barker; very right and proper. I am very glad to see this cordial spirit in you, especially as you are not—er—the boy I should have expected it of."

"Thank you, sir," said Barker, while his comrades suppressed a giggle with great difficulty.

"I hope the others will follow your excellent example, Barker," said Mr. Skene. "This is a spirit I am desirous of encouraging among my boys—this spirit of cordial hospitality. Sometimes it may lead you too far, as this evening when you appeared in the common-room in a ridiculous state to afford amusement to the new-comers; but upon the whole it is a very commendable spirit."

"Yes, sir," murmured Barker.

"I trust that these boys, belonging to another school, will appreciate your kind intentions at their true value."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We do, sir," said Tom Merry. "We quite understand Barker, sir, and we shall do our best to make him as comfy as he makes us."

"Good—very good! You will now go to bed, my boys, and I shall be back in a quarter of an hour to—er—extinguish the illumination."

And the worthy little gentleman quitted the dormitory and closed the door. He was barely outside when a buzz of voices broke out.

"Catch me sleeping with any of you rotters!" said Barker.

"No fear!" said Punter.

"Blessed if I see what you've got to grumble at," said

Monty Lowther. "You've only got to put up with us. We're the injured parties. We've got to put up with you."

"Ha, ha, ha! I wegard that as wathah funnay."

"You can get in my bed if you like," said Barker. "But I shall jolly soon shove you out again, after lights-out."

"I should considah that wathah wude, Barkah."

"Oh, cheese it, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass!"

"Get to bed!" said Tompkinson Tertius. "These kids want a lesson, and a lesson they're going to have, but nothing can be done until after lights-out."

"Good!" said Hedges. "We don't want Skeney coming in in the middle to spoil the fun. I vote we turn in."

And the juniors undressed and got into bed. Very few of them, however, removed all their garments. Most kept on their trousers and socks. But when Mr. Skene looked into the dormitory again, they all seemed to be reposing in the calmest manner in the world. The lion and the lamb had laid down together, so to speak, and the little Form master blinked approvingly on the touching scene.

"I hope you are quite comfortable, boys," he said.

"Oh, ripping, sir!" said Barker, who had Arthur Augustus D'Arcy for a bedfellow, and was already debating in what part of the elegant junior's form he should plant his foot as soon as the master was gone.

"Yaas, wathah, sir! I can't say I exactly appweciate sleepin' in the same bed with a howwid wuffian like this chap Barkah, but I am aware that beggahs cannot be choosahs."

"It's all right, sir," said Tom Merry hastily. "Shut up, Gussy!"

"I was explainin' to Mr. Skene——"

"Cheese it! We're all right, sir."

"Famous!" said Jack Blake.

"Very good. Good-night, my boys!"

"Good-night, sir!"

Mr. Skene withdrew from the dormitory, and switched off the electric light in the passage without.

The great room was plunged into darkness.

The occupants of the dormitory waited quietly until the master's footsteps had died away down the passage. Then the silence of the dormitory was broken in a startling way.

CHAPTER 13.

Barker looks for Trouble—and finds it.

"OW! You feahful beast!"

It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Barker had drawn up one leg, and planted his foot in the ribs of the swell of St. Jim's, and with a single mighty shove he had sent Arthur Augustus out upon the floor.

D'Arcy bumped down on the cold linoleum, with most of the bedclothes clinging round him, and Barker sat up in the bed and roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You extwemely wuff beast!" gasped D'Arcy. "You have startled me considewably, and thwown me into quite a fluttah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I don't wegard this as funnay at all, but if you do, you shall have somethin' to cackle at yourself, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, scrambling up.

There was a washstand next to each bed, and in each basin was a jug of water. D'Arcy had noticed that before getting into bed. He reached out for the jug and seized it with both hands. Barker was still sitting on the bed laughing, when a sudden sweep of cold water came from the darkness.

"Oh!" he yelled. "O-o-o-o-h!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Do you wegard that as funnay, too, deah boy?"

"I'll—I'll break your neck for that, you young villain!" gasped Barker, scrambling off the bed. "I'll—I'll—— Oh!"

He gave a howl as he barked his shin against the bed. Tompkinson Tertius was striking a match. He lighted a bicycle lantern which he had smuggled into the dormitory, and turned the light upon the infuriated Barker. Barker was sitting on the side of the bed, dripping with water, and nursing his shin. Most of the juniors were scrambling out now.

"My only aunt," said Tompkinson III., "you look wet, Barky!"

"I am wet!" howled the bully of the Fourth. "That young ass has chucked a jug of cold water over me!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You look funnay, deah boy, and no mistake. I am extwemely sowwy to use you wuffly, but you must wemembah that it is your own fault."

"I'll wring your silly neck!"

"I should uttahly wefuse to have my silly neck wung! I mean——"

Barker left off nursing his shin, jumped up, and rushed at D'Arcy The swell of St. Jim's put up his fists at once He did not like fighting, because, as he said, he found it "exhaustin'." But he had heaps of pluck.

Pluck, however, wasn't of much use against a fellow a head taller than himself, and nearly twice his weight.

Barker simply rushed him off his feet, and gave him left and right, and right and left, with such goodwill that D'Arcy went sprawling across a bed, without any very clear idea as to how he got there.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped.

He sat up on Tompkinson III.'s legs, and stared at Barker, who was dancing round him with brandished fists.

"Come on," shouted Barker—"come on!"

"Bai Jove! Wait a tick, deah boy, while I get my beastly bweath, you know!"

"Go it, Barker!" said Punter. "You other fellows keep back."

A dozen candle-ends and lanterns were alight now, fully lighting the dormitory, and nearly everyone was out of bed.

"Keep back there!" exclaimed Punter, as Jack Blake dashed forward. Blake gave him a shove that sent him reeling out of the way.

"Rats!" he said cheerfully. "This is my affair. Look this way, Barker, you cad. I'm going for your nose!"

"Weally, Blake, this is my affaih, you know."

"Bosh! It's mine. Come on, Barker!"

Arthur Augustus sat on Tompkinson's bed and mopped his nose, from which a thin stream of "claret" was flowing.

"Well, you can tackle the wottah if you like, deah boy," he remarked. "As a mattah of fact, I find fightin' wathah exhaustin'."

Barker turned savagely upon Jack Blake

"I'll give you a hiding first, and that ass one afterwards!" he growled.

"Right-ho! Begin with mine!" said Blake.

He was half a head smaller than the overgrown bully of the Headland Fourth, but he did not care for that. But ere they could close in combat, Tom Merry pushed forward.

"Hold on, Blake! This is my affair, you know."

"Rot!" said Blake warmly. "I'm fighting it out for Gussy. You can go and eat coke!"

"Look here, as leader of the School House juniors at St. Jim's——"

"You know jolly well I'm leader——"

"If you are going to start that bosh at a time like this——"

"Oh, go and eat coke! Come on, Barker!"

"Now, don't be an ass, Blake. You know I can lick you, therefore I've got a better chance of licking that hulking rotter——"

"You can lick me?" said Blake, in measured tones.

"Of course I can!"

"I'll jolly well give you a chance to try as soon as we get back to St. Jim's. Just now I'm going to tackle that pig!"

"You're not; I am!"

"Oh, come on, somebody!" jeered Barker. "If this is a little game to get out of it, I warn you that I can see through it."

"Oh, toss up for it!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "If somebody doesn't lick that chap soon, I shall wade in and do it myself."

"Better retire, both of you, and leave it to me," said Figgins. "I don't want to put myself forward, but as chief of the cock house at St. Jim's——"

"Oh, cheese it, Figgy!" said Blake. "We don't want any New House kids mucking it up. Look here, Tom Merry, I'll leave it to you if you like, as——"

"Right-ho! Are you ready, Barker?"

"Yes, rathor, and waiting!"

"Then come on!" said Tom Merry.

Barker came on. He came on with a rush, hitting out right and left, the same tactics that had answered so well with Arthur Augustus.

But it was not Arthur Augustus he had to deal with now. He had to deal with one who had as much pluck as D'Arcy, and plenty of science and coolness to back it up.

His savage drives did not reach the cool and smiling face that confronted him But Tom Merry's counters came home with effect.

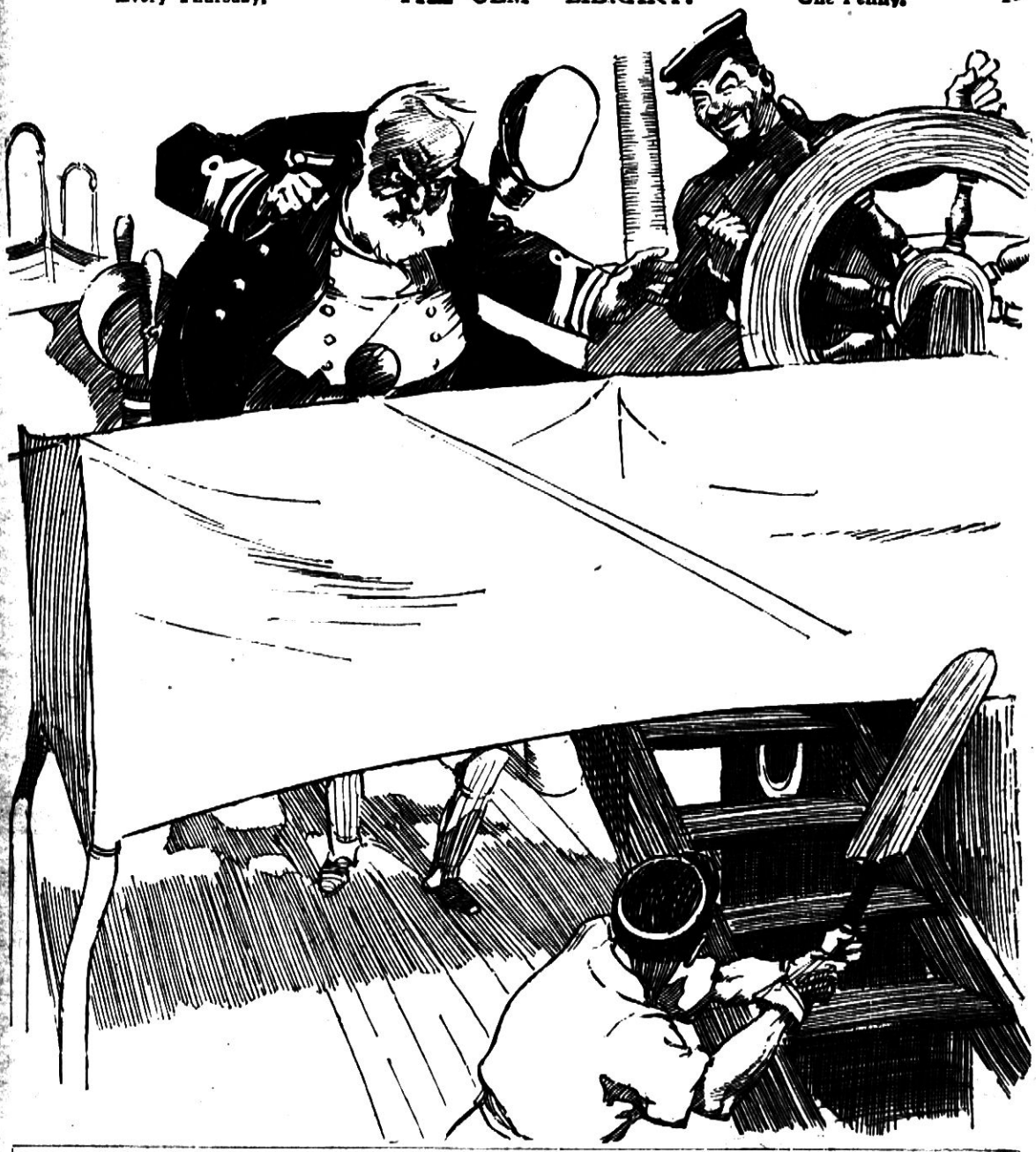
Tap, tap, tap!

Barker staggered back from the rapping on his features, and sat down upon a bed with a gasp.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Very neat— very neat indeed! I couldn't have done it better myself, Merry!"

"Yaas, wathah! That is as neat as anythin' I have evah done!" remarked D'Arcy. "Go it, Tom Merry, and give the wottah a feahful thwashin'."

Barker sprang up and rushed to the attack again. The grinning of his own Form-fellows maddened him more than the pain, though that was considerable. Hitherto he had been monarch of all he surveyed in the Fourth Form at Headland. He knew that his prestige would receive a death-



"Oh!" Mr. Thropp gave a gasp like escaping steam, and was seen to double up, as if he meant to fold himself up like a pocket-knife.

blow if he should be defeated before the whole Form by a casual stranger.

His attack was swift and powerful. But he had met his match!

Tom Merry had had one or two fights at St. Jim's which had given his friends a pretty good idea of his powers, but he had never shown them anything quite like this.

Barker was several inches taller, and longer in the reach, and a good year older. But his advantages availed him nothing against skill and coolness and pluck.

Few of his savage blows reached Tom Merry, but Tom's steady drives came home again and again.

The juniors of St. Jim's grinned with glee as the combat progressed, and cheered their champion wildly.

And the Commers, truth to tell, did not seem to mind much the fact that their great fighting-man was receiving the licking of his life.

"Go it, Barky!" urged Tompkinson. "He's smaller than you are, you know, and it's mere rot to let him lick you!"

"Who's letting him lick me?" snarled Barker

"Well, you are, I fancy, old chap. Why don't you go for his nose?"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Well, why don't you go for his eye, then?"

The question was really superfluous, for Barker had all his work cut out to defend his own nose and eyes, and he was doing it very badly.

"Oh, buck up!" said Tompkinson III. "What are you hanging about for, Barky? Why don't you go for his chin, then?"

Biff, biff! went Tom Merry's left and right, and Barker staggered and went to the floor with a bump.

"Rotten!" said Tompkinson III. "I say, Barky, we expected something better than that, you know!"

"Oh," gasped Barker—"oh!"

"Finished?" asked Punter.

"No—ye-es—I suppose so. I'm done!"

Punter helped him up. Tom Merry held out his hand.

"Shake!" he said. "It was a jolly good mill, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Barker scowled savagely, and half-turned away. But a howl from the Headland fellows arrested him.

"Shake hands," said Tompkinson indignantly, "you—you hooligan! Shake hands!"

"Shake," echoed Punter and a dozen more—"shake!"

"Oh, I don't mind!" said Barker hesitatingly. "I've had the worst of it, I suppose! I—I don't bear any malice. Give us your fist."

And he shook hands with Tom Merry.

"Yaas, that's wight," said D'Arcy, with a nod of approval. "I wegard that as weally the pwopah thing to do, deah boy. I feel just as pleased as if I had thwashed you myself, bai Jove!"

CHAPTER 14.

Something like a Battle.

THE defeated champion bathed his damaged face in cold water. Arthur Augustus advised him in a friendly way to get a beefsteak for his eye, but as he did not specify where the steak was to be obtained, his advice was not of much value to the unfortunate Barker.

"But what are we going to do about these giddy beds?" exclaimed Tompkinson III. "You see, they're only intended for one chap apiece, and they're none too large for one. Two at a time is rotten!"

"Yaas, wathah! Suppose all you Commahs sleep on the floor, you know! You can have one blanket each, and——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Punter. "As strangers here, you ought to sleep on the floor, or on the roof!"

"As our hosts, deah boy, you ought to sacwifice yourselves to make us comfy."

"Oh, rot!" was Punter's elegant reply.

"If you chawactewise my wemarks as wot, Puntah, I shall be undah the painful necessity of punchin' your head."

"Now then, Gussy, don't you start rowing," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I am not wowin', but——"

"I've got a good idea!" exclaimed Figgins. "Let's take watch and watch. We'll sleep in the beds half the night, while you chaps camp out on the floor, and you can have them the second half."

"Well, that's not a bad idea," assented Tompkinson III. "But we'll have them the first half, and you chaps can have them the second."

"Oh, that's rot, you know!"

"I don't see it. You——"

"Yes; but you——"

"Hold on!" said Blake. "We're not ready for bed yet, anyway. I've got an improvement on Figgy's plan. What price a pillow-fight, to decide which party has the beds?"

"Ripping!" exclaimed a dozen voices.

"Well, that's hardly fair on you!" said Tompkinson Tertius. "You see, you haven't an earthly against us!"

"Weally, Thompson——"

"Tompkinson, dummy."

"Weally, Tompkinson Dummy——"

"I was just thinking the same," said Tom Merry. "We shall knock you Commers into a cocked hat, and then——"

"Well, if you do that you're welcome to the beds!" grinned Tompkinson. "That's settled. The victors have the beds, and the vanquished have a blanket each on the floor. It's a warm night, anyway, and won't hurt. Are you all agreed?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes. Good idea," said Punter. "It's rough on those kids, that's all."

"Then get your pillows ready," said Tompkinson III. "I say, Barker, do you feel fit for a scrap?"

"Yes, in a minute," said Barker.

"Good! Now, look here, we're going to scrap till one side gives in, and that side's licked. Individual fellows who want to surrender can do so, and they become prisoners, and stay at the end of the room without interfering any further in the fight, on their parole."

"That's right."

"You'll send your prisoners up to the window end, and we'll send ours t'other end. We shall have a crowd up our end——"

"I don't think."

"There's not enough pillows to go round, but the bolsters just make up the number. Yank them off the beds, and let's begin, kids. Twenty bolsters and twenty pillows on each side, that's fair."

"Quite fair," assented Tom Merry.

"And don't make too much row," said Tompkinson III. "We don't want little Skene to come up here and make a fuss."

"Bai Jove, no!"

"He's not likely to hear, as he's a bit deaf. Still, don't make a row. Are you ready, Barker?"

"Yes, rather!" said Barker, giving his face a rub with the towel. "My beastly eye is bunged up!"

"You should twy a beefsteak, deah boy."

"Where am I to get one, ass?" howled Barker.

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that!"

"Come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Form into line! Comrades of St. Jim's——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Comrades of St. Jim's, you are fighting for the honour of your school and a bed apiece! Play up for St. Jim's!"

"Hurrah!"

"And don't make too much row. Are you ready, Tompkinson the Third?"

"Quite ready, ass!"

"Then kick off!"

And the next moment there was a rush from St. Jim's, and a rush from Headland to meet it, and the pillow-fight commenced.

Seldom, or never, had the dormitory seen such a fray. There were two score of juniors on either side, and most of them plucky enough for anything, and determined to win.

A few, perhaps, on both sides hung back a little at first, but the majority rushed into the combat with great ardour.

Tom Merry & Co., of course, were to the fore. Blake and Tom Merry and Figgins were all leading, but as they led in the same direction their rivalry did not matter. And the others backed them up splendidly.

At the first rush the Commers were driven back and back, till it seemed that they would be penned up at the end of the dormitory.

But there they rallied, and surged forward again, and St. Jim's receded, and lost the ground they had gained.

But they did not recede more than half-way. Their own half of the field, so to speak, was intact, and there they rallied again, and once more advanced.

But now the two parties were broken up somewhat, and were separating into little groups, fighting and chasing one another among and over the beds.

Tom Merry found himself opposed to Tompkinson III., and never did two champions in knightly times close in combat with keener ardour.

Tom Merry was armed with a pillow, and Tompkinson III. with a bolster, and they pounded at one another in splendid style.

The bolster caught Tom Merry across the chest, and he staggered, and another mighty swipe made him sit down with startling suddenness.

"Surrender!" yelled Tompkinson, brandishing the bolster over him.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry.

He was up again in a twinkling, catching two swipes of the bolster with his head as he scrambled up.

But then he replied with his pillow, and Tompkinson III. had it on the side of his head, and went reeling and staggering blindly. Another swipe, and he was on his back, and Tom Merry, in his turn, was brandishing his weapon over a fallen foe.

"Surrender, kid!"

"Bosh!" gasped Tompkinson.

He attempted to rise, but each attempt was met by the pillow-swiping, and he went down every time.

"Better chuck it!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Rats! I—I—— Oh! Ow, ow! I surrender!"

"Good!"

Tom Merry helped him up, and he walked rather disconsolately away to the window end of the dormitory, a prisoner and a spectator from that moment. He was the first prisoner, but others soon followed.

Punter was captured by Blake, being driven into a corner and pounded till he surrendered. And a minute later Barker yielded to the attack of Figgins, and joined Tompkinson III. in limbo.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was distinguishing himself in excellent style, when he dropped his eyeglass, and immediately stooped to grope for it. He was still groping when a Commer swiped him with a bolster and sent him rolling, and swiped again and again till he gasped out a surrender.

Several more St. Jim's juniors joined him in captivity, but the number of Commer prisoners was growing much faster.

In a row of this kind Tom Merry & Co. were quite at home, so to speak, and they made the fur fly. While the Commers, deprived of their leaders by the capture of Tompkinson III. and Barker, were at a disadvantage.

And the number of captures having left the odds considerably on the side of St. Jim's, the end was really inevitable.

Tom Merry's voice rallied his followers:

"Now then, kids! All together, and rush them!"

"Hurrah!"

"Give 'em socks!" shouted Blake.

And the St. Jim's juniors drew together, and rushed on in a body, and the Commers, fewer in number, and growing breathless, broke before the rush.

They went scattering among the beds, and a dozen of them were penned up in a corner, and assailed with incessant swipes till they surrendered.

This surrender was the finish for Headland. The remaining Commers were only twenty against thirty, and they were chased and run down and captured one by one.

Tompkinson III. made a grimace of disgust as prisoner after prisoner was sent to swell the crowd under the window.

"We're done in!" he remarked.

"We're not bound to stick here," Barker suggested. "Suppose we——"

"Oh, don't be a cad!"

The last of the valiant Commers was Norris, and he made a stand between two beds for several minutes, till the swipes of a dozen pillows laid him low, and he was sent to join the rest.

"My hat," gasped Tom Merry, "this is rather warm work! But we've done them!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "We've done them, deah boys!"

"A lot you've done!" sniffed Blake. "You've been a giddy prisoner all the time!"

"I was taken at wathah a disadvantage. I dwopped my beastly eyeglass, and while I was lookin' for it, a wottah swiped me."

"Game's up," said Tompkinson, coming forward, with a pink face. "Of course, we ought to have had the best of it, but you can never account for these flukes."

"Just what I was thinking," remarked Punter.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, if you're satisfied, we are; and we don't mind your calling it a fluke, either. But, look here, we're not going to turn you out of your beds. Suppose we pack in and share them, after all?"

The prospect of sleeping on the floor, now that it was certain they would have to do it, was not enticing to the Headlanders. Tom Merry's suggestion was received very cordially.

"Well," said Tompkinson III., "if all you chaps say the same——"

"Of course we do!" said Blake heartily.

"Here, I say——" began Mellish.

"Of course, we do!" said Tom Merry hastily; "and if any fellow on my side raised the slightest objection, I should give him such a hiding that his own mother wouldn't know him. Did you speak, Mellish?"

"No!" snapped Mellish.

"It's a good idea," said Figgins. "I don't mind for one, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, it's jolly decent of you," said Tompkinson III. "Let's turn in, then. I'm jolly well tired, to tell the truth!"

And the rival juniors turned in very amicably. And they did not find the close quarters so very uncomfortable, after all. As a matter of fact, the pillow-fight had pretty well fagged them out, and they would have been able to sleep soundly under almost any circumstances.

And soundly they did sleep, and did not awake till the clang of the rising-bell was borne through the morning air.

. . . . . .

The St. Jim's boys breakfasted at Headland, and then they took their leave of the Commercial Collegians. They parted with much good will on both sides.

Their acquaintance had been brief; but, as Tom Merry said, it had been eventful, and they had learned to know one another.

"See you again some time," said Tompkinson III. cheerily, as he shook hands with Tom Merry. "We may be able to fix up a footer match."

"Good!" exclaimed Tom Merry heartily. "We'd like nothing better!"

"And it would be a real pleasure to us to teach you chaps how to play footer," said Tompkinson.

"We're willing to learn," said Tom Merry, laughing. "But perhaps it will turn out like the pillow-fight, you know."

And they parted.

A crowded train bore the juniors of St. Jim's homeward. Their travels were over—for the present, at least—and the new term was before them. Their holiday had been chequered, yet, upon the whole, they had greatly enjoyed it. All the same, they were not sorry to see the familiar old scenes again. The porter's gruff voice that bade them change at Wayland was welcome to their ears, and the word "Rylcombe" at the station where they alighted for the school was really music.

A large and dusty crowd arrived in the September sunshine at the gates of St. Jim's, and Taggles, the porter, stared at them as he opened the gates.

"Here we are again!" said Figgins affably.

Taggles grunted.

"Dear old chap," said Tom Merry affectionately, "he's so overjoyed to see us again that he can't even speak. He is speechless."

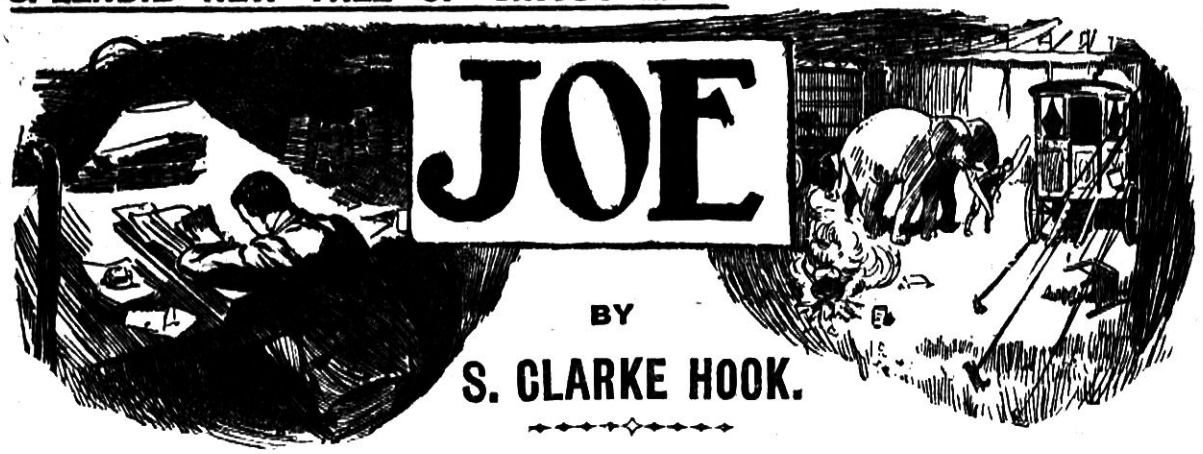
"He often is," grinned Monty Lowther. "Taggles, Taggles, while you are yet young, learn to discard the tempting cup!"

Taggles snorted, and retreated into his lodge. And the boys of St. Jim's marched in, and joyfully enough entered into their old quarters.

THE END.

Another splendid long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Thursday, entitled "Skimpole's Salvage." Please order your GEM in advance. Price One Penny.

SPLENDID NEW TALE OF CIRCUS LIFE.



JOE

BY

S. CLARKE HOOK.

READ THIS FIRST.

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. The latter, however, manages to effect his escape. One night Muerte sets fire to Ruabino's circus, and Rubby is ruined. Joe, however, persuades a Mr. Moss, whose son's life he has saved, to lend Rubby a thousand pounds. With this money the friends travel to London, intent on paying off all that is due to a Mr. Prowall, a moneylender, who is keeping Rubby's circus animals as security.

(Now go on with the story.)

Rubby Owns a Circus Once More.

Arrived in London, Rubby and Joe took up their quarters at a small private hotel, and they were now sitting down to dinner, which consisted of two chops, potatoes, and a loaf of new bread, for, as Rubby pointed out, they must avoid extravagance for the present.

"Comfort is what we want, and we will have it. For instance, it would have given me discomfort to call on that moneylending villain Prowall, and it would have cost us at least two shillings to get there. As it is, a sixpenny telegram will bring him here. He has got that telegram now, and should be here shortly, if he is a wise man, which he is—at least, he's sharp—so he's sure to come."

"Quite right, Rubby," laughed Joe. "He ought to knock something off if you take those animals out of his possession."

"So he ought, dear boy, and I will leave that part of the business to you. You can work on the lines that I owe him a hundred and fifty pounds, without interest. My promissory note is for four hundred; but then he's got to keep the animals for three months, which will cost him a frightful lot, so——"

Here the waiter entered the room, and Rubby picked up a card.

"Humph! Mr. Prowall! He has lost no time at all in coming, but he will lose a little in waiting, which shows you that the punctual man wastes his time. Tell him that I am engaged at present, but will see him shortly. The sauce, dear boy!"

The waiter handed the sauce, and left the room, but he returned almost immediately with the message that Mr. Prowall was very busy.

"Tell him that I am also very busy," said Rubby, working away at his chop. "Say I shall be engaged for about five minutes, but that if it is inconvenient for him to wait, to call again this day week at eleven thirty-three."

"Do you think he will wait, Joe?" inquired Rubby.

"Ha, ha, ha! I feel certain he will."

Joe was quite right. Prowall had had rather too much of those animals already, and he wanted no more. He waited while Rubby finished his dinner, and he also waited while he smoked a cigar; then they both adjourned to the coffee-room, where Prowall was still waiting.

"Look here, Ruabino," he cried, "my time is valuable, and you have wasted upwards of half an hour of it."

"Dear boy, that is all the more reason why we should get to business at once. How are the beasts getting on?"

"Fury! They have kept me awake all night. My neighbours complain of the roaring lions, and they fear to go out of their houses, in case one of the brutes has escaped."

"Poor dear creatures, perhaps they roar because they are homesick. No matter!"

"Perdition, but it does matter! I won't keep the brutes for three months."

"I refer you to my legal adviser," said Rubby, bowing towards Joe.

"You see, Prowall, you must," said Joe. "You have agreed to do so, and my principal will keep you to that contract. It is not at all likely that he would have signed a promissory note for four hundred pounds had you not been required to pay for their keep. He only owed you a hundred and fifty pounds."

"No such thing. Do you suppose I lend money without interest?"

"I should say you would be the last man on the face of this earth to do so; but you must not charge too much interest, otherwise we should let the matter go into court, and they would soon adjust it. Of course, if you don't like the beasts——"

"Like them, be hanged! They cost me nearly twenty pounds a week to keep!"

"Reckoning at twelve weeks, that will be two hundred and forty pounds, so that if you like to get rid of them, we should have to pay you a hundred and sixty-six pounds."

"Look here, Ruabino," cried Prowall, springing to his feet, and striking the table with his fist in his indignation, "I won't settle the matter with that boy. I will deal with you."

"My dear fellow, what are you thinking about? Joe is a simple lad——"

"I've had enough of his hanged simplicity," howled Prowall."

"I can only refer you to my legal adviser. I have every confidence in Joe's business capacity, and——"

"I should think you had. Are you going to pay me the money?"

"My principal is prepared to pay you in hard cash," said Joe. "The matter has nothing to do with me, so I am bound to do the best I can for him, and I consider that if Rubby removes the animals forthwith, and pays what he owes you with interest, you will have nothing to complain about. You see, I work on the basis that he actually owes you a hundred and fifty, so that if he pays you a hundred and sixty-six, you will be getting sixteen pounds interest. If you prefer to keep the animals——"

"I don't. I won't keep them. I shall sell them."

"Well, you can't possibly do that, because they are not yours to sell. At a forced sale you would get nothing for them even if they were yours. Now, I offer in my principal's

name, and I feel sure he will agree, one hundred and sixty-six pounds hard cash."

"Yes, I will agree," said Rubby.

"I should think you would," hooted Prowall; "but I won't agree."

"Then you are unwise," said Joe. "I am offering you very heavy interest. It is at the rate of——"

"I don't care about rates. That has nothing to do with me. I have Ruabino's promissory note here for four hundred pounds, and that is the amount I require you to pay."

"But that note does not mature for three months."

"Well, I will knock off ten pounds if you pay it now."

"That is ridiculous. The amount includes the cost of keeping the animals for three months."

"No such thing. I did not take that into consideration when accepting the note."

"Then according to your own showing you were going to charge Rubby another hundred pounds beyond the hundred and fifty you had already charged for interest."

"You offered it, and he said that he would be bound by what you offered."

"He was unwise there, because I am no good at driving a bargain or settling a business matter. It was forced upon me, and I have to do my best."

Prowall mopped his brow. It seemed to him that Joe was remarkably good from his employer's point of view in both respects. But Joe got him on the sliding scale now. He kept speaking of the promissory note as being three hundred and ninety, and reminded Prowall that that was the amount he had agreed to take.

It was about half-past six when they commenced to haggle. At about a quarter-past seven Rubby fell asleep, and when he awoke at eight they were still haggling, but, to his surprise, Prowall was not working on a three hundred pound basis. Rubby was rather interested to see how much Joe had come up beyond the hundred and sixty-six originally offered; but at first he could not gather this from the conversation, and he did not like to admit that he had been peacefully sleeping through the argument.

"According to your own showing you are claiming about seven hundred per cent. interest per annum," observed Joe, with a calmness that contrasted strangely with the other's fury. "Now, my offer of a hundred and fifty——"

"A hundred and sixty-six, dear boy," corrected Rubby.

"I have amended that offer, Rubby," said Joe. "You must have been asleep, otherwise you would have heard my arguments, which should clearly prove to Prowall the correctness of my position. You see, I did not take into consideration that he has had the use of the animals. He has actually used two of the horses for his carriage."

"Here, I'm sick of it!" hooted Prowall. "I've kept the brutal things for a week. If you like to hand me two hundred and eighty pounds hard cash, I will return your promissory note for four hundred, Ruabino."

Rubby was about to jump at the offer, when Joe stopped him.

"That would not be at all fair to my principal," he said. "We don't mind paying a hundred and fifty, and sixteen pounds for the cost of the animals for one week; and as that is the utmost we will go, it is useless to argue the matter further. Think it over. Don't settle in a hurry. We will give you a week—a fortnight if you like. The only thing is that we shall not pay any more for the keep."

"I don't want a week," stormed Prowall. "I want to get rid of them this very night. They are upsetting the whole neighbourhood, and I shall have an action for damages."

"All the more reason why you should accept our offer," said Joe calmly. "A hundred and sixty-six pounds will give you sixteen pounds interest."

"It won't. I should be out of pocket by the food."

"But then you have had the use of the animals."

"You silly young villain! I tell you they have been the torment of my life. The lions roar all night."

"You would get used to that in three months' time, and be quite sorry when we took them away. Now, Prowall, I will meet you in every possible way, and I make this offer without prejudice. While wanting to do the best possible for my principal, I wish to act fairly towards you, therefore in Rubby's name I agree to pay you a hundred and eighty-six pounds, which will be twenty pounds for the keep of the animals, and sixteen pounds interest. Beyond that we will not go."

"I agree!" said Rubby.

"I should think you did," growled Prowall. "I accept the offer, boy. The money must be paid now, and the animals taken away to-night."

"Very good," said Joe. "We can arrange that as we drew the money for the purpose."

Rubby had drawn four hundred pounds for the purpose, as a matter of fact, for he did not know what fine ability Joe was possessed of for driving a bargain. It was nearly midnight before the whole matter was settled, and, strange to say, when Joe took leave of Prowall the latter gazed at him more in admiration than in anger.

"That boy will become a wealthy man," he said to Ruabino. "He has got the best of a bargain with me, and the lad who can do that has got something in him. You ought to be proud of him, Ruabino. I thought you were an utter idiot to entrust your affairs to such a lad. Now I think you were very wise. I wish I had such a lad in my employment. And just you look here, if ever you want to borrow any more money from me, you will have to come alone. You are not bringing that plausible young rascal with you."

"Dear boy, have a cigar; I am pleased with him."

"It's more than I am," growled Prowall, accepting the cigar. "If ever I take wild beasts as security again, may I become bankrupt. They are a thousand times worse than pianos that have not been paid for."

Joe and Rubby had a busy time of it now, but they did not mind this. As Joe pointed out, they had got more than eight hundred pounds capital, and having hired a field, and left the animals in the charge of Jupiter, who was to be trusted implicitly, they returned to their hotel.

"Now, look here, Rubby!" exclaimed Joe, when the little showman had detailed his plans. "Your idea to purchase a new circus is good, but you have got to consider that it would have to be on a smaller scale than the old one, and therefore considerably smaller than Muerte's. Now, if he should follow you up, as he has vowed to do, the public would flock to the larger circus."

"I know it, dear boy, but what can we do?"

"Buy a secondhand circus, the largest we can get. The public don't care if the canvas is new; all they want is size. Shove in an advertisement."

"Word it out, dear boy. Your idea is excellent. The only thing is whether there is a circus in the market."

"Well, we will shove the advertisement in for a week, and apply to the office of the paper. It shall be a good long advertisement. It is no good economising in a thing like that."

Joe worded the advertisement, and Rubby refused to alter a single word, then they put it in the likeliest paper, and waited; but the answers they got were from tent-makers.

One evening when they were returning from the office of the paper with a pile of letters, they found a stoutish, jovial-looking man in the coffee-room, smoking a big cigar.

"Rubby, if I'm not mistaken!" exclaimed the stranger. "'Tis years since last we met. Ha, ha! Perhaps this would be more appropriate. We met, 'twas in a pub."

"Not Bunting?"

"By my troth, the same! Give us your flipper."

"My first employer, Joe. I was just such a nipper as you. No, I mean in size. Bunting, dear boy, I'm delighted to see you. What will you take?"

"Now let me see. The hour grows late, the night is chill—— Why, just a wee drop of whisky, cold."

"How did you come here?" inquired Rubby, ordering two of the drinks, and a bottle of ginger-beer for Joe, because he knew that was his favourite drink.

"Saw your advertisement. Went to the office of the paper. Asked if there were any letters in reply to the advertisement. Got into conversation with the clerk, and pumped him till he let out your name and address. Smart piece of work, you know, because he would not give the name at first. I had to cruise about till I got it. Well, I came here, and waited. You see, I thought that I would have a better chance of doing business direct. Now listen, old chap. I have made a bit, and am retiring—getting married. Rather old, but no matter. I want to sell it as a going concern."

"I refer you to my legal adviser, dear boy," said Rubby, accepting one of Bunting's cigars.

"Phew Do you leave all your business in that youngster's hands?"

"Yes."

"Wonder you don't smash. However, that's nothing to do with me. Joe's your name, eh? Well, my lad, I want to sell it as a going concern."

"There's your difficulty," observed Joe.

"Eh?"

"When do you want to get married?"

"Next week; but what has that to do with it?"

"Got anyone to carry on your circus?"

"No."

"Then, don't you see, it will take you some time to find a purchaser. Now, we—that is, Rubby—doesn't want a going concern. He wants a concern, and he will make it do all the going he requires. If you like to sell the circus, Rubby will buy, but he cannot buy the goodwill. You would not buy it yourself, you know."

"Well, perhaps—no matter. You know pretty well what the show is like, Rubby. I've got a lot more animals, and, of course, my circus is a lot larger than yours."

"True, dear boy; and mine was burnt down."

"You don't say so. I never heard of it. Well, now, the price is the thing, and to do justice to myself, I must ask two thousand pounds."

"What would you have to ask to do justice to us?" inquired Joe.

"Not bad, that, youngster. Before we start bargaining, don't run away with the notion that I am a shark. Rubby knows pretty well. Say fifteen hundred pounds, cash down. It's worth more—straight. Rubby knows it. But I want to get out of the business."

"What is your opinion of Rubby's honesty?" inquired Joe.

"As straight as a die."

"Well, is the circus honestly worth fifteen hundred, Rubby—I don't mean as a going concern."

"Yes; it's worth more, if it is like what I knew it to be—the same number of animals."

"I've got a lot more. Performing bears. They take."

"Yes, they would, dear boy."

"Look here," exclaimed Joe, "I would suggest this, and it is the best Rubby can do. Five hundred pounds, cash down—that will leave him three hundred pounds capital. Fifty pounds a quarter for three years."

"Phew!" whistled Bunting. "You haven't left your affairs in the hands of such a duffer after all. That pans out at eleven hundred pounds. It's awful! And the expense of a wife on the top of it. Eh?"

"Well, that's not our fault, you know," observed Joe.

"True! It's my good fortune—at least, I hope so. Eleven hundred, and, you see, I don't get the money down. I know Rubby is right as rain, but he might smash. Not that I think he would do that. But look here, Rubby, I'll do it. There's my hand on it. You are getting the thing dirt cheap, but you shall have it. I'd rather the old show went to you than to any man I know. I tell you what, we will come to some place of amusement to-night, then have a supper. I have engaged a room at this hotel for the night. To-morrow you shall come and see the circus, and if everything is to your satisfaction, we will close the bargain."

"You will want an agreement," said Joe.

"No; I'll trust to Rubby's honour. Bother your agreements! If he wanted to swindle me, he would do it, and I know he'd rather starve."

"Then if the purchase is completed, Rubby pays you five hundred pounds in hard cash, and fifty pounds a quarter for three years, making eleven hundred pounds in all," said Joe.

"Correct."

"Right you are, dear boy," exclaimed Rubby, shaking hands on the bargain—and he had got a really good one. "I'll stand expenses to-night."

"No," exclaimed Bunting; "they are to my account! I asked you. You say you have got three hundred pound;

(Continued on page 26.)

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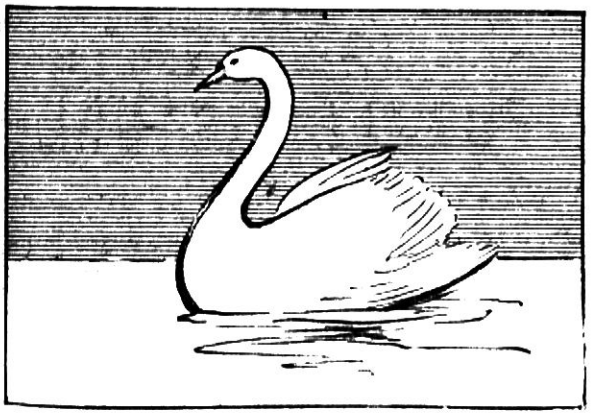

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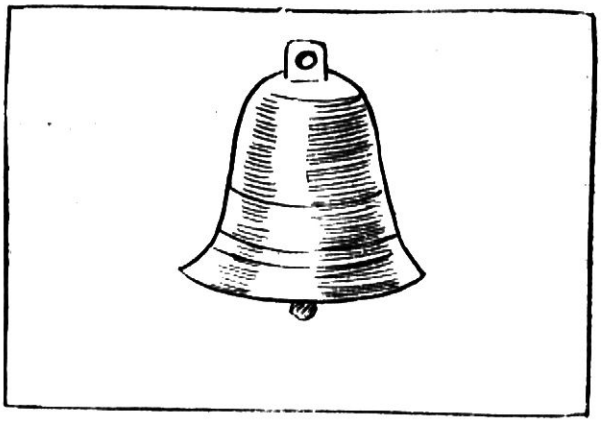

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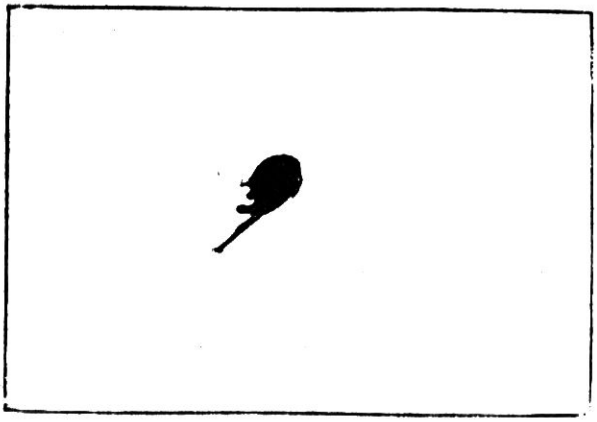

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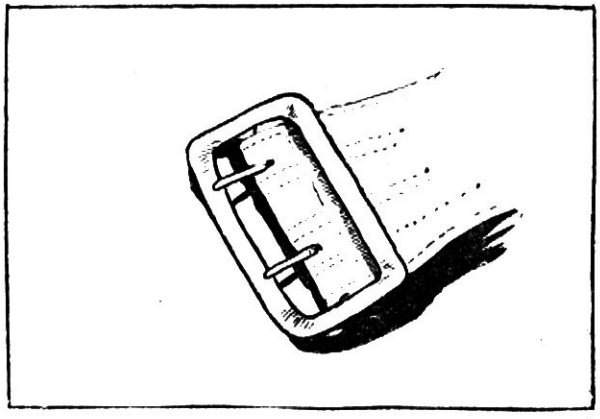

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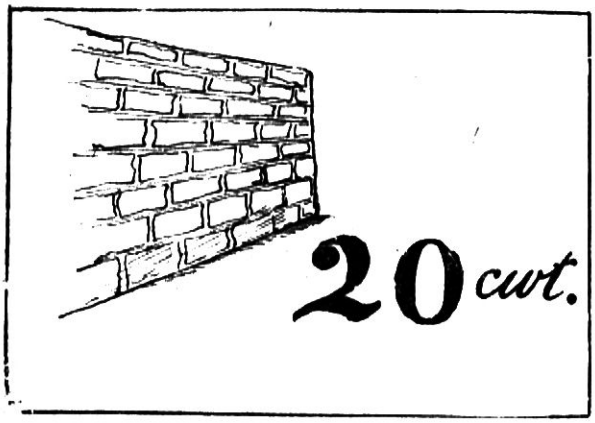

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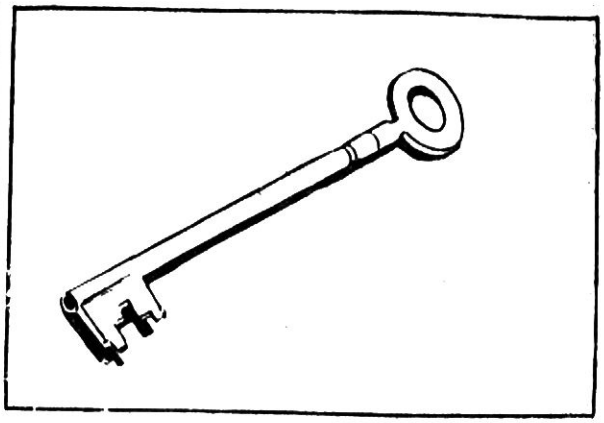

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KEEP THIS SET UNTIL NOTICE IS GIVEN TO SEND IN.

capital beyond the five hundred you are going to pay me?"

"Yes—a trifle more."

"Well, that will be ample for you. You will do nicely. Now, let me see, what would be the nicest sort of entertainment? Suppose we go to a circus?"

"Capital!" exclaimed Rubby. "I would like nothing better!"

Joe's eyes dilated with surprise. He would have thought that men who had spent all their lives in a circus would certainly choose some other form of entertainment; and yet when they asked him if he would like it, he answered quite truthfully in the affirmative, but then Joe thought that he might be able to learn a little, whereas, in their case, there could scarcely be anything to learn. Bunting could certainly not want to learn anything, seeing that he was retiring from the business.

The performance was a very good one, though the two showmen criticised it keenly, pointing out several little things that Joe would not have noticed.

Then they returned to the hotel, where Panting had ordered a hot supper. They sat up till midnight discussing olden times, and the following day they went down to see the circus, and the bargain was concluded.

Rubby now got all his old employees together, and having stood them a dinner, told them that they could commence work immediately, and that his first pitch would be as near Muerte's circus as he could possibly get.

"The villain ruined me," exclaimed Rubby; "now I will pay him back in his own coin. That is to say, I won't try to ruin him, but I will take some of his custom. Keep all dark till we start. I will tell you where the circus is to be pitched, Jupiter, and you will see that it is there three days hence. Now, enough of business."

At Joe's instigation Rubby insured his circus against fire at Lloyds'. He had to pay rather a heavy premium, but now that he had got so many responsibilities on his shoulders, he quite saw the wisdom of Joe's suggestion.

Muerte had not yet shifted his pitch. The fact is, he was doing so well since Rubby's fire, that he intended to remain there until business fell off.

One morning, on the way to his favourite inn for dinner, he saw hoardings all over the place announcing that the largest and best circus was about to visit the town. That the admission to it was half a crown, seven shillings, and ten shillings, but that on the first three nights the admission would be fourpence, sixpence, and a shilling, with a few reserved seats at half a crown. There was only one thing not mentioned, and that was the name of the proprietor.

Muerte clenched his teeth and raged a little as he gazed at one of the huge posters. There was no time for him to get out fresh posters, for the first performance was announced for that night, and he had little doubt that the circus had already arrived, although he had seen nothing of it so far.

He entered the little room of the inn in a very bad temper; then an evil grin came over his face as he saw Rubby and Joe there, eating bread and cheese.

"Why, it's Muerte!" exclaimed Rubby, helping himself to some pickles. "Sit down, dear boy. Make yourself at home. Don't let our company disturb you."

"Have you gone out of the circus line?" sneered Muerte. "Ha, ha, ha! I made sure you would come a cropper one day."

"Well, you see, when murderous incendiaries run opposition shows, one had a lot of risks," said Rubby.

"You had better be careful what you are saying, you insolent hound. There is such a thing as law in this land."

"Yes; and the surprise to me is that you have escaped its clutches so long; but the day will come, dear boy—— What?"

Here Rubby rose, and pretended to be walking up an imaginary flight of stairs.

"Ha, ha, ha! You will find that hard work!"

"I think it is done away with, Rubby," laughed Joe.

"In that case they will set him at tinkering. You see, he knows the trade, as he used to be a tinker in Spain before he came over here. The puzzle, to my mind, is why they allow these diseased aliens to enter our country. Now don't excite yourself, Muerte. If you know how unutterably stupid you look when you are excited, you would always keep perfectly calm. It's a nice day, don't you think so?"

"I think that you are the most miserable little scamp that ever walked this earth; and that boy is no better."

"But we did not set fire to your circus, Muerte."

"I'm glad you are ruined, you brutal beast. I hope you enjoy that filthy cheese."

"It is excellent," said Rubby; "so is the bread; so are the pickles. I assure you we are quite enjoying our lunch. You see, a man has to cut his coat according to his cloth, and I lost so much money by your having burnt my circus down, that it——"

"You lying villain!" howled Muerte.

"I wonder what the man is getting excited about now?" exclaimed Rubby, winking at Joe, who was grinning.

"I expect he is ashamed of his action in having burnt down your circus, Rubby."

"I vow, if you assert that I did such a thing again, I'll break your head, Ruabino. I shall take the law into my own hands, and flog you both, as you deserve."

"Dear boy, don't you be rash. You might hurt yourself, you know, or, what is more to the point, we might hurt you, and then we should have to tell the police, if you sent for them to help you, how it was that we came to punch your stupid head. No, Muerte, you must expect your vile action to come home to you. You must remember that I only accuse you of arson, and that I did not give you into custody, as no doubt I ought to have done. Bring up the evil brute's dinner, waiter. He is in a bad temper now, and perhaps when he has been fed he will be better."

Muerte, by reason of his prosperity since the fire, had ordered quite a sumptuous dinner. He commenced on soup, and then he had fish, a fowl, and entrees; and although everything looked good, he grumbled at it all.

"Doesn't he remind you of an old pig at his meals, Rubby?" exclaimed Joe. "He grunts the whole time. The only wonder to me is that he does not put his feet in his plate. Hogs invariably put theirs in the trough."

"The vulgar brutes are beneath my notice," said Muerte to the waiter. "I wonder you allow such scum to enter the place. I suppose, however, as they are not actually drunk you cannot very well turn them away."

"We are always pleased to see customers, sir," said the waiter, who knew Rubby; "especially those we respect so much as Mr. Ruabino. I don't suppose that gentleman has ever been drunk in his life."

"Pretty cattle to respect," snarled Muerte. "Bring me some cheese!"

"We have only got the same cheese as those gentlemen are eating, sir, and I believe you said that was filthy. Will you have some of that?"

"You had better be careful how you speak to me, fellow, else I shall send for your master. Bring me some cheese at once, and let me have none of your impertinence."

"Very good, sir!" exclaimed the waiter, disappearing.

But Muerte had to ring several times before the cheese appeared.

The waiter expressed his sorrow at having kept him waiting, and Muerte did not say as much as might have been expected. The fact is, he wanted to learn a little more about the circus that was advertised, and he knew that the waiter was the likeliest one to know all about it, as the customers at the inn would have been sure to mention the subject.

Having lighted a cigarette, he actually deigned to call the waiter by his christian name.

"Who is the proprietor of this circus that is coming, James?" he inquired.

"I couldn't tell you, sir," answered James, who really did not know. "I believe it is a very great affair, and I've heard several of the customers saying that they would go on the first night—which is to-night. In fact, as it is my night off, I am going myself."

"Bah! It is some wretched little concern, and you will only be wasting your money."

"Well, I'm only taking a sixpenny seat, and that won't be so ruinous, even if I don't like the show; but from what they tell me, it is going to be a wonderful affair. You see, they have performing lions and bears; and I'm fond of wild beasts."

"Do you like Muerte in that case?" inquired Joe.

The waiter coughed to conceal his laughter.

"I believe there is someone who has seen it," said James. "I didn't rightly hear, but there is a report that it is ten times larger than your circus, sir, and that they have got hundreds of animals; in fact, I have been given to understand that it is the best show in the country. I forget who it was told me—in fact, I've heard it from several who are going."

"Strange thing," exclaimed Rubby, "but I have heard the same. Everyone appears to be talking about it."

"What is the good of that, if they know nothing about it?" snarled Muerte.

"Well, it will matter to you, dear boy," answered Rubby calmly, "because, don't you see, if everyone is talking about the show it is a good advertisement for it. It is certain that they will go there in preference to your place, especially if there is a better performance at the new circus."

"There is not."

"Well, of course, you may be right there; but then, a you may be wrong. It is quite impossible for you to

whether it is better or worse, especially if you have never seen it. There is one thing to be hoped for the proprietor's sake."

"What do you mean?" inquired Muerte, who was not above talking to his hated rival if he could only get some information from him.

"It is to be hoped that the poor chap is insured, otherwise you might go and burn his circus down. I will give him a warning concerning the matter."

"Why don't you take a situation in his place?" sneered Muerte. "I dare say he would employ you to black his boots, that is, supposing he has any boots to black."

"That is not a bad idea, dear boy," said Rubby.

"That young hound might come in handy to clean out the cages of the wild beasts."

"I will see if there is a vacancy," said Joe calmly. "You might take a berth to light his fires."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Rubby. "He's got you there, Muerte. I must say, you fired my circus in a very ingenious manner, and my impression at the time was that you must have had previous experience in the art."

"What do you mean by that, Ruabino?" roared Muerte, springing to his feet, and stepping up to him in a manner that most men would have considered to be menacing.

Rubby, however, was so accustomed to being threatened with personal violence by Muerte, that he did not take the slightest notice of him.

"I only mean that you successfully burnt my circus down, and——"

"Take that, you lying cur!" howled Muerte, delivering a blow in Rubby's calm face that knocked him backwards over the chair, whose two hind legs were smashed with Rubby's weight.

Joe was not going to stand that. He charged at Muerte's back with a force and suddenness that sent him sprawling over Rubby; then, before Muerte could regain his feet, Joe leapt on his back, and, seizing a broken leg of the chair, commenced to administer justice in a manner that caused the Spaniard to howl with pain.

Muerte was lying across Rubby, and the little showman found his and Joe's combined weight considerable; but he bore the strain bravely.

"That's right, Joe; give him socks! You are rather heavy, but I don't mind bearing it for five minutes."

"He will!" panted Joe, flogging away in a most muscular manner. "I'll teach the beast to strike you in the face. Has he hurt you, Rubby?"

"In Lancashire they say 'I should smile' when they mean that the thing is so," observed Rubby. "Now, he has hurt me, but I don't feel like smiling."

"All right. I believe I am hurting him."

"I feel quite sure you are, dear boy," observed Rubby.

When a person is face downwards on the floor, and a lad sits on his shoulders, it is a very difficult thing to get up. So Muerte found it. He did eventually succeed in dislodging Joe, but not until he had received a most awful thrashing.

Jim, who had left the room, was shaking with laughter outside the door, and watching the little scene through the crack. Rubby was on his feet as soon as Muerte, and he landed the Spaniard one beneath the jaw that had such effect that he was compelled to seat himself in the easy-chair, where he sat with a very hazy look in his eyes.

"I do not know whether you would like a second round, dear boy!" exclaimed Rubby; "but I am quite ready for you now, and Joe shall not interfere. Don't say no if you would rather. It would give me the greatest pleasure to punch your silly head. I might be able to knock some sense into it, and as it would be utterly impossible to knock any out of it, why, the chance is worth taking."

Muerte, however, did not feel like taking it. He was suffering such pain that he would have risen to his feet had not Rubby's blow dazed him so that he was afraid to stand up, lest he should reveal how severe that blow was.

Rubby had known the exact spot to plant it so as to knock him out of time, and he had succeeded remarkably well.

"He doesn't want any more, Rubby!" laughed Joe. "One like you delivered is quite a sufficient dose for any man at one time."

"You shall answer for this!" snarled Muerte. "I am not going to pay for that broken chair."

"That will be for the landlord to decide," said Rubby. "I rather fancy that he will decide you shall pay for it. If it were my case I should do so, and make you pay pretty stiffly, too, for brawling in my house."

"You insulted me."

"I told you the truth. I said you burnt my circus down, and I now repeat that fact. You say it is not true. Very well, why don't you bring an action against me for libel."

"Because you are not worth powder and shot, you miserable pauper."

"If I am a pauper, it is you who made me one."

"Ha, ha, ha! I am glad!"

"You don't look it, old chap!" said Joe. "You look rather sorry, and if anyone had heard you howling a minute ago, they would never have imagined that you were glad. As it happens, I can give you all the information you require about the circus that is coming here, because I have got a berth in it. In the first place, it is quite twice as large as your show. Rubby's circus was a larger one than yours, but it was not nearly as large and as good as the one that is coming here."

"I don't believe that you know anything about it!" snarled Muerte.

"Well, I can't help whether you believe it or not. I do know all about it, and I am going to make the lions and bears perform this very night, if they don't eat me. The bears will be a great catch, because they are really clever. I have succeeded in putting them through their performance once, and I must say that it surprised me what they could do. Then there is a tiger that I am going to tackle. He is a fierce brute, but seems to have taken a fancy to me, so we will hope for the best."

"You don't even know the name of the proprietor of the circus."

"I don't see how that could be, when I am employed there," answered Joe. "Look here, Jim, you said you were going to take a sixpenny seat. Now, I have some seats, and you are welcome to that half-crown one. That will give you a better seat, and you will get a splendid view of the performance. Who is to pay for that chair?"

"Mr. Muerte will have to do that, of course, seeing that he broke it. The damage will be ten shillings."

"I won't pay it!" declared Muerte.

"Very well, sir, then I shall send for the master."

"Here!" exclaimed Muerte, flinging half a sovereign on the table. "I know that the miserable pauper, Ruabino, cannot pay the amount, and although the little brute deserves to be sent to prison, I don't want to punish him too severely. I will pay the amount for him."

"And you dinner will be another three shillings, sir," said the waiter, picking up the coin.

Muerte paid that, too.

"I say, you don't even know the proprietor's name," said Muerte, returning to the subject, which was a very important one to him.

"Well, of course, that is ridiculous!" exclaimed Joe. "I do know his name, and from what I know of the circus I would advise you to pack up yours and go, for you won't have the slightest chance against him in opposition. You would have an empty house each night, and he would have full ones. Of course, you can please yourself about that."

"I will stay here as long as the other fellow does!" declared Muerte.

"Then you will lose money," said Joe. "There is one thing more I may tell you, and that is, that the new proprietor's circus is insured heavily against fire, so that if you burnt it down you would be doing him no harm. I don't suppose you would be so stupid as to try your old tricks again, because in this case you would be given in custody, and then there is not a doubt that you would spend the next few years of your worthless life in prison."

"If you lie like this about me, how do you suppose I am going to believe what you say about the circus?"

"You know that I am not lying about you, Muerte; and when I assure you that I am engaged in the circus that is coming here, you must be convinced that I know the name of the proprietor. Besides, why should I bother about the matter. I don't care whether you know his name or not, and I am quite sure he does not care."

"What is his name, then?"

"Ruabino!"

"You lie, you young hound! You lie!" roared Muerte.

Rubby and Joe smiled, but they made no reply.

"I say it is false!" cried Muerte. "The circus does not belong to Ruabino!"

"Ah, that is what you say," observed Joe, "but I do not imagine for a moment it is what you think, otherwise you would not be so excited about the matter. Be that as it may, Rubby is the proprietor of the circus, and when I tell you that it is about twice the size of the one you burnt down, you will see how your vile act of vengeance on me has failed. All you will have to do now, if you doubt my word concerning the proprietorship of the circus, and its size, is to buy a ticket, and come and see the performance. We would rather have your place than your company, but I dare say Rubby will allow you to come in."

"Yes, dear boy!" exclaimed Rubby. "He is quite harmless, and if he attempts to create a disturbance I shall have him thrown out. He is sure to come, although I dare say he will pretend now that he will not. It does not signify to me one way or another. Should he come, he will have the pleasure of seeing one of the finest performances he has ever

witnessed, and he will also have the pleasure of learning that his circus will not have the slightest chance in competition with my new one. With the old one it was different, but this is so much larger, and I have so many more performing animals."

"You fiend!" yelled Muerte.

"Speak to the Spanish tinker, Joe," said Rubby. "I have no patience."

"Muerte, you dastardly scamp," exclaimed Joe, "you hated Rubby for the sole reason that he was more successful than ever you will be. I do not say that you would have burnt his circus down to have vengeance on him; but you wanted to have vengeance on me, because I had flogged you. Now, you low, horible scoundrel, retribution will come to you. You followed Rubby about, in the hope of ruining him, and made no secret that such was your intention. Well, you burnt his circus down. Silence, you dog—silence, I say! If you dare to deny it again, as surely as I am standing before you I will send for the police and give you in custody for attempting my life. Not many days have passed since you made the attempt, and it is not yet too late to punish you. You had better not speak, for I warn you that I would very much like to see you punished. That you will be punished I have not the slightest doubt. I believe that your circus will fail, and that you will be brought to penury, as you had hoped to bring Rubby in taking your double vengeance of burning down his circus. Go, you hound! Clear out of this place! If you don't, I'll make you wish you had."

Muerte was quelled. Joe would really have executed his threat, and Muerte guessed it by his flashing eyes and clenched fists. He knew that a lad who would venture into a lions' den must have plenty of pluck, and he also knew that he would have no chance against him, because it was a certainty that Rubby would have intervened in such an unequal struggle.

Without a word the miscreant slunk from the room, and that night Joe saw him at the circus. He told both Leo and Jim, and all three lads did their very utmost in their various performances.

Rubby was astounded at the daring of his two young acrobats. Never before had he seen them perform so well, although he did not appreciate some of their more daring feats.

However, the public did, not knowing the peril so well as Rubby.

Shouts of applause burst forth, and Muerte clenched his teeth as he saw what a success the performance was.

He knew that he could place nothing before the public to equal it, and yet he vowed that he would not allow Rubby to turn him away from the place.

Joe's performance with the lions was a great success, and although the performing bears did not obey him quite as well as he could have wished, yet the performance gave the spectators perfect satisfaction.

Then, just before the last turn, Rubby addressed the audience, and told them that there would be another performance on the morrow, which would not only be quite different to the one they had seen that night, but would excel it; and he had the satisfaction of seeing a full house go away perfectly satisfied.

Muerte's circus had suffered to such an extent that he returned the money to the few people who went there, and the following night he had an empty house.

What he ought to have done, of course, was to get away from the place, but pride prevented him from doing this. He vowed that he would remain there as long as Rubby did.

It is possible that he may have thought that Rubby would follow him up, as he had done to his rival, and therefore that it would be useless to shift the pitch; but Rubby was not at all the sort of man to trouble himself about retaliation. All he cared for was to make his circus a success; and, although he had uphill work at the start, it succeeded beyond his expectations.

And so the time passed on. From town to town they travelled, but they heard little of Muerte, until one day they saw his name in the Bankruptcy Court.

Rubby found no difficulty in completing the purchase money for the circus, and in paying Mr. Moss back the money he had advanced.

And so the time passed on until three years had fled.

Rubby had paid off every penny of his indebtedness, and had a good many hundreds to his credit besides, and all the time Joe had worked at the same wages. He absolutely refused to take a penny more till Rubby was square, and in these years Joe passed from boyhood to early manhood, and a fine young man he was.

Jupiter, the strong man, had trained him till Joe's strength was as great as his own, and his activity a good deal greater.

All this time Joe heard nothing of his uncle, and he began to hope that he was forgotten entirely by the ruffian. As for the money left by Joe's father, he cared nothing for that. Rubby had promised him good wages when the three years had expired, and Rubby was not the sort of man to break his word.

It was only when the whole debt was paid off that Rubby referred to the matter again.

"I have to go to London on business to-morrow, dear boy," he said, "so you had better come with me. We are shifting our pitch, so you and I will not be wanted."

"That's right, Rubby!" exclaimed Vera, who was in the booth. "Leave all the work to us while you and Joe go and enjoy yourselves."

"Hark at the girl talking!" exclaimed Rubby. "Here, all the work she does when we are moving is to sit in a caravan and suck chocolate creams, and now she's talking about me enjoying myself when she knows perfectly well that I am going on a matter of business. Oh, go away, girl; you annoy me exceedingly!"

"And you have annoyed me exceedingly, Rubby, by refusing me a rise in my screw."

"I am thinking of lowering it. You have a great deal too much money already. When I was a girl of your age—I mean, when I was a boy of your age, I had quite a small amount. I forget what it was, but am certain that it was a small amount. Now, Joe, we will start directly after breakfast and join them at the next pitch."

"You are horrid, Rubby, and as mean as ever you can be," declared Vera.

"Well, my dear, perhaps I will bring you a present from London, if you behave yourself. Now run away, because I have some matters to settle with Joe."

As a result of this conversation, Rubby and Joe found themselves in London the following day, and they stopped at the little private hotel, although now they were not compelled to economise. Rubby ordered the most sumptuous dinner, and the next morning he took Joe to a dusty-looking office in Lincoln's Inn, where the name of J. Mackie, solicitor, appeared on the door.

"So this is Joe!" exclaimed that gentleman, shaking hands, as Rubby introduced him. "I have heard a good deal about you, Joe, and your friend Rubby has been looking after your interests as well as I; but, you see, we had a very difficult task. I am sorry to say, my lad, that I have bad news for you now. You see, your father left some five thousand pounds in trust for you, and your uncle, Silas Read, was the sole trustee. Your father appeared to have implicit faith in the man, and it was impossible for us to interfere until you became of age, when we would have to hand the money over to you. However, from certain inquiries I made, as instructed by Rubby, I had little doubt that your uncle had been touching the capital, when he should only have lived on the interest, according to the will."

This story will be concluded. Next Thursday the opening chapters of "A Pit Hero," a tale of the coal-mines, by Max Hamilton, will appear. Please order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance.

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.

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