

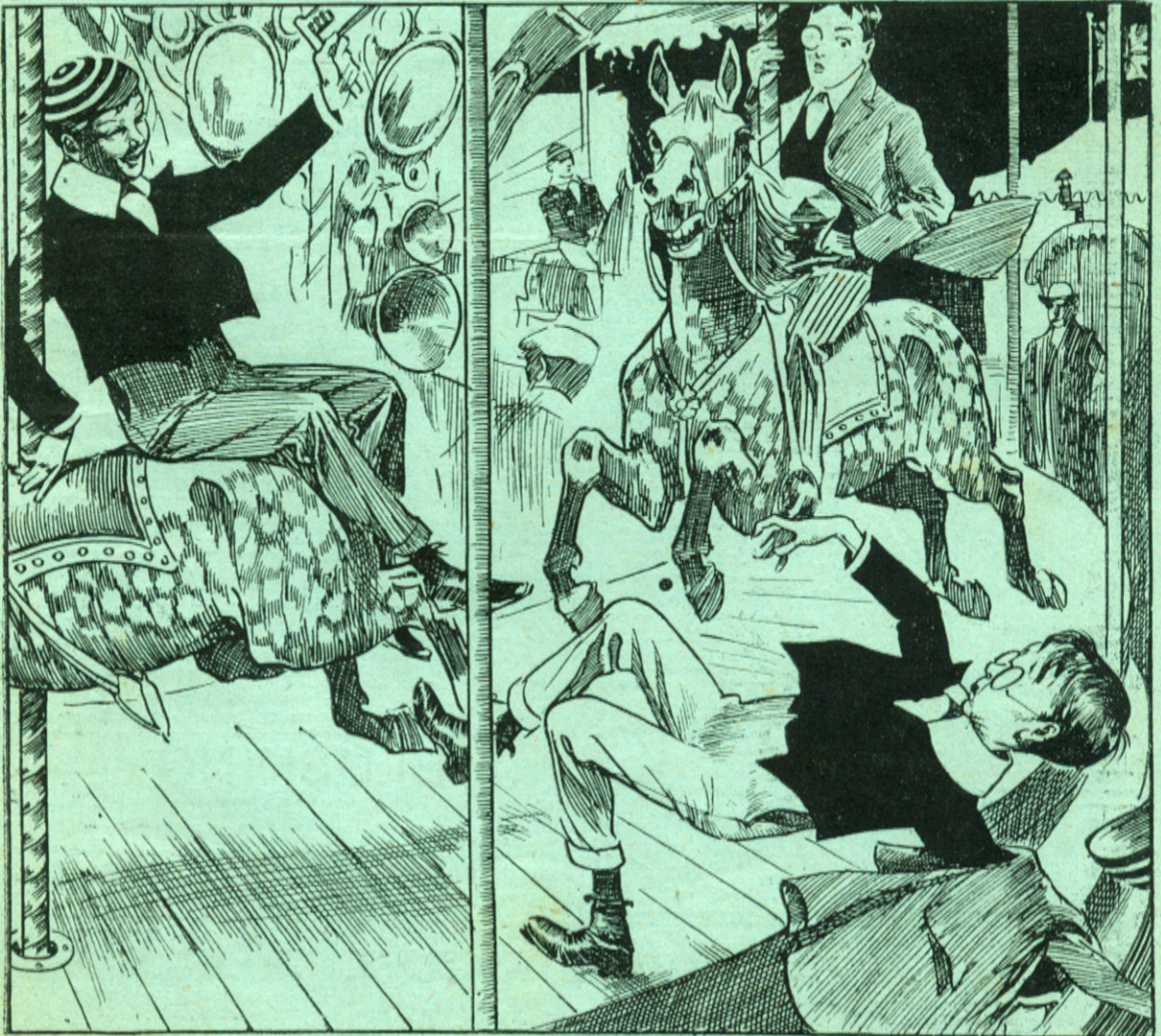
A
Tale
of

TOM MERRY AND BRITAIN INVADED.

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NEW SERIES

NO. 44. VOL. 2.



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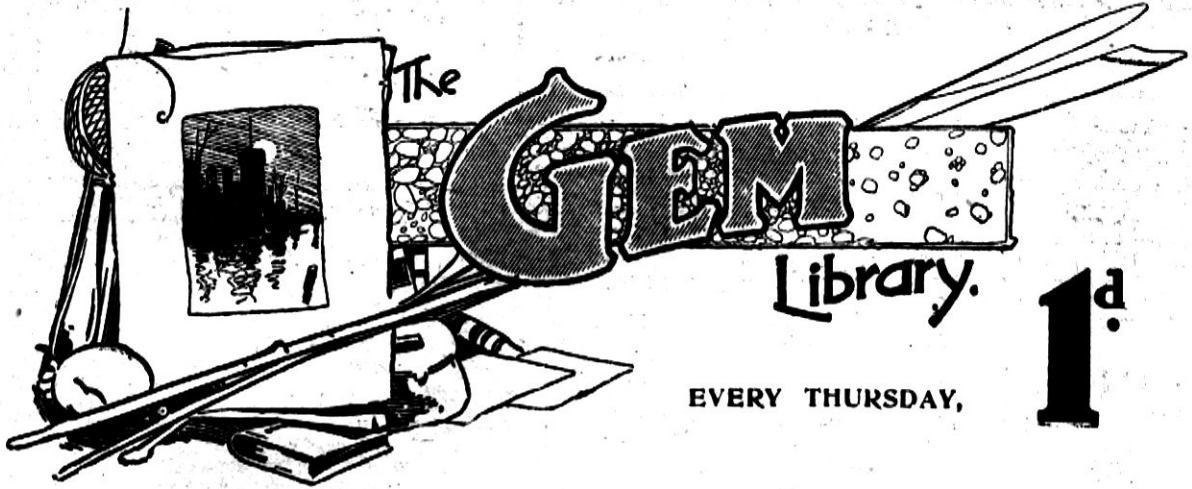
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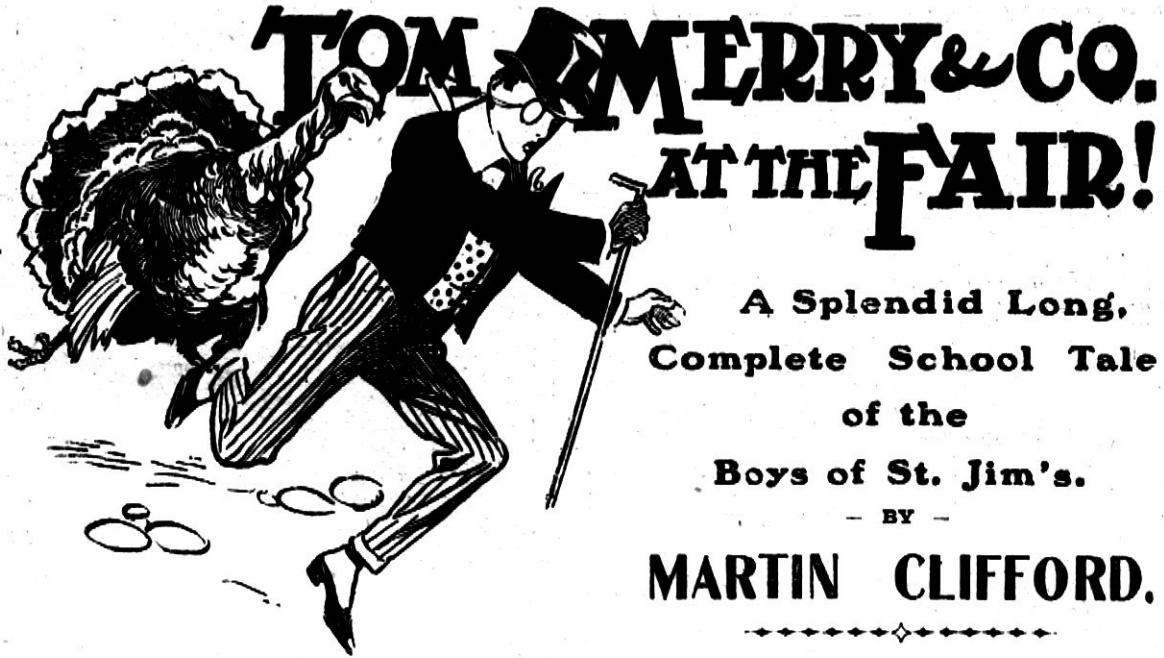
A Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



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TOM MERRY & CO. AT THE FAIR!

A Splendid Long,
Complete School Tale
of the
Boys of St. Jim's.

- BY -

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

The Juniors Who Were Good.

"I WANT to speak to you youngsters seriously," said Jack Blake.

The chums at Study No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's, received this remark characteristically. Herries grunted, Digby grinned, and Arthur Augustus D'Aroy jammed his eyeglass into his right eye, and surveyed Blake in a leisurely way from top to toe, and toe to top again.

"Weally, Blake—" he began.
"Now, don't you start, Gussy," said Blake, with a warning shake of his forefinger at the swell of St. Jim's. "We've got to go in to morning lessons in a few minutes, and I want to speak to you youngsters seriously—"

"In the first place, I object to the term youngsters. I regard it as distinctly dewogatory to the dig, of fellows as old as yourself, and—in one case, at least—vevy much wishah. In the second place—"

"Cheese it, I tell you! I suppose you fellows know that to-day—"

"In the second place, deah boy—"

"That to-day Wayland Fair opens, and as it is a Wednesday and a half-holiday, we can't do better than—"

"In the second place—"

"Than run over to Wayland immediately after dinner, and have a really ripping afternoon," said Jack Blake, ignoring Arthur Augustus. "Tom Merry suggested it to me, and he is going with Manners and Lowther, and thought it would be a good idea to make up a party. That's why I want to speak seriously to you."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Shut up, Gussy, and let your uncle speak! I want to speak to you kids seriously. If any of you are detained this afternoon, the expedition will be a muck-up as far as the detained person is concerned. Each of you, therefore, is to be good—as good as the prize little boy in the prize little story-book. Stop that cackling, Dig, when your uncle is speaking seriously to you. I suppose you want me to take you to the fair?" said Blake severely.

"I should uttably wefuse to be taken to the fair. I am quite willin' to go and look aftah you fellows."

"Oh, I'll come!" said Herries. "My bulldog would like a little run this afternoon."

"If you bring your bulldog to Wayland Fair he will die

ANOTHER DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 44 (New Series).

a sudden death," said Jack Blake. "I'm getting fed up with your bulldog."

"Yaas, I quite agree with Blake there. The wotten bwute tore a gweat hole in my twousahs only a few weeks ago."

"I suppose you looked at him," grunted Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Now, don't begin arguing," said Blake. "Listen while I'm talking seriously to you. You've all got to be good, so as not to be detained this afternoon. It was really Tom Merry's suggestion. He and Manners and Lowther are going to be very good. I don't want to leave any of you kids behind—"

"I should wefuse to be left behind."

"Hallo! There's the class-room tinkle," said Digby.

"Come on!"

"Wait a tick! You understand that I'm speaking seriously, and that you've all got to be good, and—"

"I suppose you don't want to make a start by being late for class," said Digby. "Come on, you duffer! Come on, Gussy!"

"Pway don't huvwyy like that, deah boys. I weally—"

Having the chums of the Fourth did not stop to listen. Having resolved to be very good, so as to run no risk of being detained that afternoon, it was necessary to be in good time in the class-room. Blake, Herries, and Digby joined the stream of juniors who were pouring in. But Arthur Augustus, who regarded hurry as somewhat derogatory to his dignity, followed at a more leisurely pace, with the result that he was a couple of minutes behind time in class.

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, blinked at him over his glasses. Mr. Lathom was the kindest-hearted of little men, and his Form took full advantage of that fact. But sometimes Mr. Lathom had a fit of energy, and resolved to show the Fourth that he was not to be trifled with. Then, for about a couple of days, he would become perfectly Draconic in his severity, and the Fourth would be made to fairly "sit up," as Piggins of the New House termed it. And unfortunately for the juniors who had resolved to be good, Mr. Lathom was in one of his reforming moods that morning.

He blinked at the swell of St. Jim's with unusual severity. Arthur Augustus was taking his place, and smoothing out a crease in his fancy waistcoat, when the master of the Fourth rapped out his name.

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir," said Arthur Augustus, looking up.

"You are late."

"I am extremely sowwy, Mr. Lathom."

"That does not alter the fact that you are late, D'Arcy."

"Weally, sir, as one gentleman to another, I twust that an apology is sufficient to set the mattah wight," said D'Arcy. The Fourth Form giggled, and Mr. Lathom frowned.

"Then you are quite mistaken, D'Arcy. I am resolved to keep order in this Form," said Mr. Lathom firmly; and then the Fourth groaned in spirit. When Mr. Lathom said that he was resolved to keep order in that Form, it always meant the same thing—that he was on the reforming tack. "You are two minutes late, D'Arcy. You will remain in the class-room for an hour this afternoon."

D'Arcy's face fell.

"Oh, weally, sir—"

"That is enough, D'Arcy. We will now proceed."

And the Fourth Form proceeded. Arthur Augustus looked dismayed. He had sometimes been as much as five minutes late, and the Form master had only warned him of what he would do next time.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "This is howwidly unlucky! I wegard Mr. Lathom in the light of a beast."

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked daggers at their unfortunate chum. They had made an effort and arrived at the class-room punctually, and they felt that Arthur Augustus ought to have done the same. And during the second lesson Digby could not help expressing his feelings to D'Arcy on the subject.

"How many kinds of an ass do you call yourself?" he asked witheringly, when Mr. Lathom's back was turned.

"You—"

"Weally, Dig—"

"You ought to have got in in time—"

"You are talking, Digby," said Mr. Lathom, turning round suddenly. He seemed to be gifted that morning with a much keener sense of hearing than usual. "As you cannot keep silent in the class-room during lessons, you may remain in an hour this afternoon and keep D'Arcy company."

"Oh, sir!" gasped the unlucky Digby.

"Silence in class!"

And Digby sat crushed. Jack Blake and Herries exchanged looks of hopelessness.

"Of all the giddy asses!" murmured Blake. "This is because I spoke to them seriously and warned them to be good. Both of them detained this afternoon! My hat!"

"Blessed duffer!" grunted Herries.

The third lesson was German, and Herr Schneider came in to conduct the Fourth Form on a more or less interesting excursion among German irregular verbs. In the German lesson Herries came to grief. Herries knew everything about dogs, but what he did not know about German would have filled dictionaries. And Herr Schneider, being a conscientious gentleman, devoted as much attention to the dull members of his class as to the bright ones—a conscientious discharge of duty for which Herries did not bless him.

"Das ist der ewige Gesang," said Herr Schneider. "Now, try mit yourself, Herries, and do not gif up tat easy sentence. Mein Himmel! I tink tat tat poy will be te despair of me. I have instruct you a hundred times, and you not understand and you always forget, ain't it. Go on, Herries."

"That is the—the—the—"

"Tat is right, so far. Das ist der ewige Gesang."

"That is the—"

"Go on, mein poy," said Herr Schneider encouragingly. "That is the—the earwig," said Herries, in a sudden brilliant burst. "That is the earwig singing."

Herr Schneider stood petrified for a moment. He had heard some queer German in the lower Forms at St. Jim's in his time, but he had never heard "ewige" translated "earwig" before.

"Tat—tat is vat?" he said at last dazedly. "Repeat dem words mit yourself, poy."

"Das ist der ewige Gesang," said Herries boldly. "That is the earwig singing."

"Mein Gott!"

"You ass!" whispered Jack Blake. "It's eternal; it means-eternal!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir!" said Herries. "Das ist der ewige Gesang—that is the eternal earwig singing."

The Fourth Form went off into a roar; they could not help it. It was long before Herries was allowed to forget the "eternal earwig." Herr Schneider's grim face relaxed into something like a grin.

"Herries, I tink tat you vas te stupidest poy tat nefer vas pefore," he said. "I tink tat I let you stay in te class-room an hour dis afternoon, and write out tat sentence and te English. 'Das ist der ewige Gesang' shall be rendered mit 'That is the eternal song'—and dere is noting about earwicks in tat line. Mein Gott! Earwicks! If I not possess te patience of Shob, I cane you mit pointer! You will write tat out for an hour dis afternoon, Herries. Earwicks! Mein Gott!"

"Oh, lor!" grunted Herries.

"And you, Blake"—Jack Blake jumped—"you vas tell Herries—"

"Oh, sir!"

"Do you deny tat you tell Herries vun vord?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Blake resignedly. "I told him one word, sir."

"Tat is vat I tink. You may stay in mit Herries, and write out te vord you tell him for an hour tis afternoon."

Blake gasped.

The lesson proceeded, but a cloud of glumness hung over the juniors who had resolved to be good.

CHAPTER 2.

Mr. Railton to the Rescue.

TOM MERRY came out of the Shell class-room with a decidedly cheerful countenance. The chums of the Shell, like Blake and his comrades, had resolved to be good. They had had more success in that new line than the Fourth-Formers. Perhaps it was the change that agreed with them, as Monty Lowther suggested. At all events, virtue had brought its reward, and the Terrible Three came out without a single impot to detain them for any fraction of that fine winter afternoon.

"Considering that Linton was a little tantrummy this morning, I think I've scraped through pretty well," said Tom Merry. "I thought he was going for you once, Monty, when you told him Julius Cæsar gave three parties in Gaul." Monty Lowther chuckled.

"That was a slip," he said. "I forgot for the moment that we were being good, and that it wasn't permitted to pull the august leg of our Form master. But it turned out all right."

"It hasn't turned out so well for those Fourth Form kids, I think," remarked Manners. "They are looking as if they were going to a funeral."

The Fourth Form were coming out, and it was true that the chums of Study No. 6 were looking very dejected. Tom Merry looked at them inquiringly.

"TOM MERRY, SCOUT LEADER."



"Good old Pongo! chuckled Wally. "He never can see another dog without wanting to fight him!"

"How has it worked?" he asked. "Weren't you good?"
"Oh, good enough!" growled Blake. "Gussy started the ball rolling by coming in late—"

"Weally, Blake. I was only two minutes late, and on most occasions our respected Form mastah doesn't jump on a fellow like that."

"He's got one of his periodical fits on," growled Blake.

"D'Arcy was late, and Dig started jawing him—"

"I was only calling him an ass," said Digby.

"Well, I'm not disputing that you were quite right, as far as that goes, but you ought to have kept an eye on Lathom. Then Herries had to bungle the Deutch—"

"I suppose you don't blame me for that," said Herries indignantly. "I was being awfully careful, and it was Schneider's fault."

"Blessed if I know how you make that out."

"Why, hasn't he told us himself that lots of German words are just like their English equivalents—like Stuhl for stool, and Mann for man, and Hut for hat, and Grun for Green, and Weiss for white, and so on. Well, when I can't get on to a word, I try to work it out on that system, phonetically, and I put it to you fellows doesn't ewige sound as if it meant earwig?"

"Earwig!" yelled Tom Merry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake grinned.

"The dummy construed 'Das ist der ewige Gesang' into

'That is the eternal earwig singing—'

The Terrible Three shrieked.

"I didn't say eternal till you told me," said Herries.

"Well, ass, I was trying to make you understand that it wasn't earwig. The worst of it is, that Schneider spotted me coaching him, and dropped on me, and I'm detained, too."

"That's hard cheese," said Tom Merry sympathetically.

"The lot of you detained. This is what comes of trying

to be good. I suppose it's really no good starting these things too suddenly."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You ought to have been 'cuter,'" said Monty Lowther. "Now, I was pulling Linton's leg in the Latin lesson a treat, and he never spotted it—"

"Indeed, Lowther," said Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, coming out of the class-room. "I had my suspicions, and I am glad to have them confirmed."

Monty Lowther turned crimson, and looked as if he wished the floor would open and swallow him up, as indeed he did.

"You will stay in this afternoon, Lowther, and write out a hundred lines in the class-room," Mr. Linton said grimly.

"Oh, sir—really—I—I—"

Mr. Linton passed on without listening. Tom Merry and Manners looked dismayed, but the Fourth-Formers chuckled.

"You ought to have been 'cuter,'" said Jack Blake, parodying Lowther's remark. "You ought not to have been caught napping like that."

"Oh, don't rot!" said Lowther crossly. "How was I to know the villain was just coming out of the class-room? It's all the fault of you kids, keeping us jawing here."

"Oh, weally Lowthah, you cannot say we wished you to jaw, you know. I have often pwotested against your jawin' so much. I appeal to ewery gentleman pwesent."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "Lowther's in for it, and it's no good trying to reason with Linton. The afternoon's going to be mucked up. What is that New House waster grinning at?"

"Excuse my smiling," said Figgins. "You seem to be in a state of stew this time. I was thinking of taking you kids to the fair—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Still, we'll think of you while we're there," said Kerr, "and I'll bring you home a rattle or something, Lowther!"

"TOM MERRY, SCOUT LEADER."

"Or a penny bun," said Fatty Wynn.
 "Oh, let's bundle these New House rotters out, anyway!"
 exclaimed Tom Merry. "Their features worry me."
 "Well, we're waiting to be bundled," said Figgins & Co.
 together.

The Terrible Three needed no further defiance. They
 rushed at the chums of the New House, and in a moment
 a wild and whirling combat was raging in the passage.
 Herries was rushing on to help, but Jack Blake pulled him
 back.

"Hold on!" he said. "It's three to three, and fair play's
 a jewel!"

"They're New House rotters—"

"Never mind; let 'em fight it out."

"Yaas, wathah! It will be wathah amusin' to watch the
 wottahs fightin' it out, deah boys!" said D'Arcy, putting
 up his eyeglass.

It was unfortunate for the combatants that Knox, the
 prefect, came along just then. Knox always hailed a chance
 of being down on Tom Merry & Co., and he was not likely
 to miss this one.

"Stop that row, you young rotters!" he exclaimed. "Do
 you hear? Stop it! And each of you take a hundred lines,
 and do 'em after dinner before you go out."

And the prefect stalked along the passage.

The combat ceased, and the combatants glared at one
 another. Figgins wiped a trickle of "claret" from his
 nose, and grinned faintly.

"We're done in," he remarked.

"Looks like it!" growled Tom Merry. "All the fault of
 you New House rotters."

"All the fault of you School House dummies, you mean."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack Blake. "We're all in the
 same boat. Wayland Fair is all up for to-day."

"Yaas, wathah! I am vewy much disappointed, because
 I was thinkin' of takin' my young bwothah Wally. Bai
 Jove, there he is! Wally, deah boy—"

"Hallo!" grunted Wally, otherwise known as D'Arcy
 minor. He was looking very downcast.

"What is the mattah, Wally?"

"Matter enough!" growled Wally. "My Form master
 wants suffocating. I was going to Wayland Fair this after-
 noon, and now I'm detained, just because I stuck a pin
 into Gibson and made him jump in second lesson."

"Form masters seldom appreciate humour in lesson time,"
 said Tom Merry solemnly. "Especially that kind of
 humour."

"Oh, I'm not going to stick in! It's going to be a ripping
 afternoon, and the fair will be great fun. I'm going
 to cut!"

"Weally, Wally, I cannot approve of your cuttin', as
 you call it. In fact, I forbid you to cut undah any circs,"
 said Arthur Augustus impressively.

"Oh, don't you begin!" said Wally.

And he walked on, looking very much out of humour.
 Tom Merry & Co. went out into the quadrangle, looking
 less cheerful than usual. It was very hard to be detained
 that afternoon, of all afternoons. Wayland Fair seemed
 more attractive than ever now that they had no chance
 of getting to it.

They came into dinner with serious faces. D'Arcy's sug-
 gestion that they should go to the masters in a deputation
 and request permission to go out, and leave the impositions
 till a later date, was frowned down. Mr. Railton, the
 housemaster of the School House, noticed their depressed
 looks during dinner. The housemaster took an interest in
 Tom Merry & Co., and as they went out of the dining hall
 he tapped the hero of the Shell on the shoulder.

"Nothing wrong, I hope, Merry?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Tom Merry brightly. "Only—"

"Only what?" asked Mr. Railton, with a smile.

"Only we're detained for the afternoon, sir, and we
 wanted to make up a party to go to Wayland Fair," said
 Tom Merry.

Mr. Railton wrinkled his brows.

"All your friends detained, Merry?"

"Yes, sir. It's rather rough," went on Tom, encouraged,
 "because we were trying to be extra good this morning,
 and, somehow, it worked out the other way."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"Yes, in that case it is certainly hard, Merry. Perhaps
 the detention could be left till Saturday afternoon if I were
 to speak to your master—"

"Oh, thank you, sir! But that wouldn't help Figgins
 & Co.—I mean Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn. They're in the
 New House."

"H'm! They are detained by Mr. Ratcliff," said the
 housemaster, who knew how little use it would be to speak
 to Mr. Ratcliff on the subject.

"Oh, no, sir, by Knox, the prefect. He caught 'em—us—
 fighting, and—"

"A School House prefect cannot detain New House
 boys."

"No, sir," said Tom Merry ruefully. "But if Figgins
 objected, Knox would report the matter to Mr. Ratcliff,
 who would detain them last enough."

"I see. I will speak to Knox."

And Mr. Railton walked away looking very thoughtful.

"Isn't he a brick?" said Tom Merry. "He's been a boy
 himself, you know, and he knows these little things will
 happen. I believe he'd get us all off if he could."

"Perhaps he can work the oracle," Blake remarked hope-
 fully.

It seemed likely, for five minutes later Mr. Linton called
 Lowther into his study. His looks were severe, but his
 words were cheering.

"I understand that you have some excursion planned for
 this afternoon, Lowther," he said. "I do not wish to in-
 terfere with it, and your detention can be left over till
 Saturday if you choose."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Monty Lowther.

And he rejoined his friends in great glee. A few minutes
 later Mr. Lathom extended the same grace to the Fourth-
 Formers, and, to crown all, Knox, the prefect, came along
 as the School House boys were telling the news to Figgins
 & Co. The prefect was scowling, and was evidently very
 much out of humour.

"You brats can go out this afternoon, if you like," he
 said unamiably.

"Oh, thanks, Knox!" said the juniors, in chorus. "It
 isn't so much your kindness, you know, as the nice, pleasant
 way you put it."

Whereat Knox scowled more blackly than ever, and stalked
 off. Tom Merry & Co. chuckled.

"Bai Jove, you know, I think we ought to go and thank
 Wailton!" said Arthur Augustus. "I only wish young
 Wally was free to come with us—Ow!"

He broke off with a gasp as he received a powerful dig
 in the ribs, and turned to behold his younger brother grin-
 ning at him cheerfully.

"Weally, Wally, you young wottah, I wefuse to have your
 wotten paws dug into my wibs like that!"

"It's all right, Gus! I'm let off for the afternoon.
 Hurrah!"

And Wally tossed his cap into the air, and in the exu-
 berance of his spirits tossed up D'Arcy's silk hat also, and
 the swell of St. Jim's, with a howl of wrath, rushed off to
 chase it as it sailed away on the wind.

CHAPTER 3.

Off to the Fair.

TOM MERRY & Co., with light hearts, made their
 preparations for the excursion. It was a cold but
 fine and clear afternoon, just the weather for a really
 ripping day out. The chums of the Shell were fortunately
 in funds—it was usually towards the end of the week that
 money was "tight" in the junior studies.

The Terrible Three, arrayed in coats and caps and thick
 boots, came along the passage, and bumped at the door of
 Study No. 6. They bumped it open, and looked in.

"You fellows nearly ready?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm quite ready," said Jack Blake, who was busily en-
 gaged rattling a tin money-box, into the slit of which he
 had jammed a table-knife. "I sha'n't be a tick."

"What on earth are you rattling that thing for?"

"Trying to get a bob out. It's all my pater's fault. He
 sent me this beastly thing, and promised to add a tanner to

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every shilling I had saved up at the end of the term. Fathers don't understand. The thing's a swindle."

"Ha, ha, ha! How much have you got in there?"

"Well, as D'Arcy was very flush with money last week, I thought I could put in a couple of bob, and I did. Then, of course, Gussy had to go and waste his money sending a postal order up to London for the latest thing in neckties."

"I pwesume, Blake, that you would not request me to go about in an unfashionable necktie."

"I request you to shut up when I'm talking. I've tried a dozen times to get those two bobs out, but they won't come out. It's rotten. They've been there a week, and so I'm entitled to a certain proportion of the two tanners I should have had at the end of the term; but it's no good explaining that to my pater. He wouldn't understand."

"Curious thing how these paters never do understand the clearest things in financial matters," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Of course, as soon as my capital was tied up, I had a lot of chances for investing it," growled Blake. "I could have bought young Perkins's white mice for a bob, but the bob wouldn't come out, and Perkins couldn't wait. Then there was Hancock had a knife to sell for one-and-six that was worth three bob. He agreed to take a bob on account if I could get it out, but I couldn't. I've lost more than half the amount of my capital already through having it tied up, but I'm blessed if I'm going to have it tied up any longer."

"Clink, clink, clink!" went the elusive shillings in the tin box. The juniors stood round watching Blake's efforts with great interest. Jack was growing red and exasperated. By getting the coins to fall on the flat of the knife, it was possible to persuade them out of the slit of the box, but it was a task that required skill and patience, and Blake was not feeling patient just then.

"Go it!" said Tom Merry encouragingly. "You are bound to get them out in time. Perhaps you will be an old, old man by then; but everything comes to him who waits."

"Oh, don't be funny!"

"Bai Jove, you know, I weally think Blake had better give it up! If he gets those coins on in the long run, it will prevent him from gettin' an old age pension, as he will have othah means of support."

"I've got 'em!"

"Clink, clink, clink!"

"Oh, dear, they've fallen back into the box again! Still, I'm going to have them out," said Blake determinedly.

"I'll do it for you if you like," said Herries.

"Yes, of course you could do it, when I can't!" snapped Blake. "You go and look after eternal earwigs, and let money-boxes alone."

"Still, I think I could do it."

"Oh, try, then, as you're so sure about it!"

Blake handed the box to Herries. He was red and perspiring. Herries put the box on the floor, and brought down his heel on it with a crash. The tin box split open, and two shillings rolled out on the carpet.

Jack Blake stared at his chum, seemingly petrified.

"There you are!" said Herries.

"You—you utter ass! You've busted my money-box."

"Of course, there was no other way to get them out. I've no time to waste fooling round with a knife."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "The box was worth about as much as the money in it. Still, you've got the boblets now."

"Oh, let's start!" said Blake. "If I stay here I shall suffocate Herries, and I don't want to do that. Come on!"

"Well, I like that!" said Herries indignantly. "You might have spent hours fooling about with that box, and never got the money out, and now I've got it out for you."

"What price the box, fathead?"

"Well, what was the good of the box if you weren't going to keep money in it?"

"Oh, don't start arguing; let's start."

And the juniors left the study. Arthur Augustus was looking ripping, as usual, in a beautifully-fitting coat, a shining silk hat, elegant boots and spats, and turned-up trousers. They went out into the winter sunshine in a merry party, and crossed over to look for Figgins & Co.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were ready. Fatty Wynn had a little bundle in his hand, looped over his finger by a string, and he seemed to give it a great deal of his attention. It might have contained banknotes by the care he took of it.

"Ready?" said Figgins, with a grin. "Ripping weather, isn't it. I suppose we are going to walk over to Wayland?"

"Yes; may as well save the fares, and it's not so long by the short cut."

"Bai Jove, dear boys, I don't know how I can undahtake to walk to it. I always find walkin' wathah exhaustin'. Besides, there are twaces of the last fall of snow on the ground, and I am afraid we shall make our boots dirty."

"Then you'd better tell Taggles to whistle a cab," suggested Blake humorously. "Come on, kids! Where is that young brother of yours, Gussy?"

"I weally do not know, Blake. Bai Jove, there he is, waitin' at the gate, and bai Jove, too, he's got that wotten mongwel of his with him."

"He's not going to bring that poaching brute along."

"Wally, my friends insist upon your sendin' that howwid beast back to the kennels," said Arthur Augustus.

"Rats!" said D'Arcy minor. "Pongo's coming, of course."

"I wefuse to be seen out with such a feahfully wagged beast."

"Pongo's not so particular about you, Gus, and he's got more reason, too. Don't be unreasonable."

"Weally, Wally—"

"Anyway, Pongo's coming."

And D'Arcy minor whistled shrilly to his shaggy pet, and started off down the road in his jaunty way. The juniors looked after him expressively. D'Arcy's eyes glimmered behind his monocle.

"I no longah wegard that young wottah as a membah of the party," he said. "You will oblige me by takin' no notice of him. Pway let us be off."

"Hold on a minute!" exclaimed a voice, as Skimpole, of the Shell, came hurrying up. "Do I understand that you fellows are going to spend the afternoon at Wayland Fair?"

"My dear Skimmy," said Tom Merry, "what's the good of asking us what you understand. I don't believe you understand anything, as a matter of fact."

Skimpole, the amateur Socialist and genius generally, blinked at Tom Merry through his big spectacles.

"Really, Tom Merry, you are quite mistaken. The huge grasp of my brain leads me to understand matters far removed from common knowledge. What fellow is there at St. Jim's who could talk for hours on the subjects of Socialism and Determinism?"

"I know jolly well there's no fellows who will listen," said Figgins. "Let's get off before he begins."

"Pray wait a minute! It is my intention to go to the fair at Wayland, although, of course, such an entertainment is below the mighty grasp of my brain."

"Bai Jove, you know, that makes me wathah weflect," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Pewwaps goin' to the fair is a twife below my dig."

"Pray do not interrupt me, D'Arcy. As I was saying, it is my intention to go to the fair, and I offered to accompany Gore and Sharp, not because I desired their company, but because they are in funds, and I have no money. My principles as a Socialist force me to part with my ready cash to all who are in need, and I am unfortunately stony at the present moment. Gore refused my offer with what I can only regard as utter rudeness and brutality."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall, therefore, be glad to come with you," said Skimpole. "D'Arcy can pay my expenses for the afternoon—"

"Bai Jove!"

"And in doing so he will have the knowledge that he is only assisting in a small degree to help on the redistribution of wealth which common justice requires, and that any acknowledgment on my part is quite uncalled for."

"Weally, Skimmy—"

"Put like that, I don't see how D'Arcy can refuse," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, come on, before we have any more duffers coming!" said Figgins. And Tom Merry & Co. set out on the track already taken by Wally and Pongo.

CHAPTER 4.

A Close Shave for Wally.

"STOP!"

Wally stopped. He was a considerable distance ahead of the other juniors of St. Jim's, and was tramping cheerily under the big trees in the wood, taking the short cut to Wayland town. Round him the trees were stripped bare of leaves, and under foot in the ruts of the ground lingered traces of the last fall of snow. But the sun was shining through the bare branches, and the afternoon was fine and cheery. It was a lonely path, but Wally tramped along without thinking of that, with his dog at his heels. He was thinking of the fun of the fair, and unconsciously jingling several silver coins in his pocket as he walked.

"Stop, I tell yer!"

D'Arcy minor had no choice but to stop. Two men had leaped suddenly out of the crackling thickets, and planted themselves in his path, one of them with a stout blackthorn cudgel under his arm. The boy halted, and reeled a pace.

"Well, what do you want?" he said calmly, though his

heart was beating hard. He knew very well what they wanted. They were evidently two rough characters attracted to the vicinity of Wayland by the chance of pickings in the crowd at the fair.

"I reckon—" began one of them, and then he suddenly broke off with a brutal oath. "It's the young cockchafer himself, Ikey!"

"My honny 'at, and you're right, Dodger!" said Ikey.

Wally sprang back with a look of alarm. He knew the two ruffians now. Only the previous week he had seen them for the first time, and he had believed for the last. They had tried to scare the horse ridden by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in a steeplechase, bribed to do so by one of his competitors, and Wally had been the means of baffling them, though Pongo had had something to do with it.

A very ugly look came over Dodger's face.

"So it's you!" he said, in a low, savage tone. "I reckoned we'd ave your watch and tin, sonny, but now—now—"

"Give 'im a lick over the 'ead, Dodger," said Ikey.

Dodger grasped the blackthorn. The next moment a shaggy body shot through the air, and Pongo's teeth fastened in the ruffian's hand. Pongo might be a poacher, a chicken slayer, and a rabbit stealer, but anybody who threatened D'Arcy minor had to reckon with Pongo's teeth.

Dodger gave a howl of agony, and dropped the blackthorn. Ikey sprang to aid his comrade, and Wally thrust out a foot and tripped him up. The ruffian crashed in the grass, and Wally ran fleetly down the footpath, calling to Pongo. Pongo released Dodger and ran after his master, barking furiously. Back the way he had come went Wally at top speed. The grassy footpath might have been the cinder-path at St. Jim's by the way the Third Form junior covered it.

Dodger muttered a curse as he grasped his cudgel again. Whiz!

Wally heard the whiz, and instinctively dodged. It was well for him that he did so. The heavy missile whistled by and struck against a tree-trunk with a thud, and fell to the ground. For a moment D'Arcy minor changed colour. If the heavy cudgel had struck him!

But he did not stop to think. He ran on at top speed, and the heavy pattering of footsteps behind him urged him to greater efforts. He rounded a bend in the footpath, and ran full tilt into Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and there was a yell as the swell of St. Jim's went flying.

"Bai Jove!"

"You young villain!" exclaimed Blake. "What do you mean?"

"Look out!" gasped Wally. "Footpads!"

"By Jove! Line up, kids!"

The juniors could hear the pounding on the path, now, of the footpads' heavy boots. Arthur Augustus scrambled to his feet, and picked up his silk hat. Tom Merry & Co. lined up across the path to meet the footpads as they might have met a charge on the footer-field.

Ikey and the Dodger came racing round the turning, and ran right into the juniors; but the latter were ready to receive them.

Biff, biff, biff!

Right-handers and left-handers, fast and furious, rained on the two ruffians, and they reeled to and fro, and crashed down in the grass.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "This is rather a surprise-packet for them!"

"Yaas, wathah! Go it, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus did not "go it" himself. He was brushing his hat with his silk handkerchief, folded up in the form of a pad. There were enough of the party to deal with the footpads without his help, and his silk hat naturally claimed his first attention.

Dodger and Ikey lay in the grass, blinking and dazed, the juniors of St. Jim's standing in a circle round them, laughing. Never had two truculent ruffians been so quickly and completely "downed."

"My honny 'at!" said Ikey.

"Did they rob you, Wally?" asked Tom Merry.

"I didn't give them a chance," said Wally. "They would have, though, if I hadn't bolted, and if Pongo hadn't helped. They ought to be arrested."

"I disagree with you there, D'Arcy minor," said Skimpole. "It is true that they were prosecuting their aim by what may be termed methods of barbarism, but they were quite within their rights in attempting a redistribution of wealth—"

"Eh? They were going to steal my watch."

"Under Socialism all watches will be nationalised—"

"Oh, cheese it, Skimmy!" said Blake. "Look here, we can't waste the afternoon taking these blackguards to the lock-up. Ow!"

Dodger settled the question as far as he was concerned by

suddenly springing up, dashing Blake aside, and darting into the wood. Blake reeled against Herries, and the two of them went to the ground together.

"You clumsy ass!" gasped Herries.

"Why didn't you hold me, you duffer!"

"I can't hold every dummy who—"

"If you want a thick ear—"

"Look out!" yelled Figgins.

Ikey had taken advantage of the general attention being turned off him for the moment to squirm away into the thickets. Two or three of the juniors rushed excitedly in pursuit, but Ikey had vanished.

"Well, of all the asses," said Tom Merry, "to let them go like that—"

"Wally, Tom Mewwy, you let them go as much as anybody else."

"Rats! They're gone, now, anyway, so let's get on. I daresay they'll clear out now. This is what comes of being disrespectful to your elders, young Wally. Just you keep close to us now."

"Catch me," said D'Arcy minor. "I say, they were the two rotters who tried to scare Gussy's horse the other day, when he was riding in the steeplechase at Tytchley."

"My hat! Why didn't you say so before?"

"Yaas, wathah! I would have awested them if I had known that, Wally. A man who would descend to foul play at a wace ought to be made an example of."

"Oh, we couldn't waste the afternoon on them, anyway!" said Monty Lowther. "They've had some hard knocks, which ought to show them the error of their ways. Come on!"

And the juniors went on their way. It went rather against the grain with some of them to let the ruffians go unpunished, but it could not be helped now; and they had the fair at Wayland to think of.

Wally, in spite of his careless reply to Tom Merry, did remain with the party until they emerged from Wayland Wood. In spite of his recklessness, he had seen that the two rascals nourished a bitter animosity towards him, and he knew they might still be lurking in the wood. By preventing their foul play at the steeplechase, he had no doubt balked them of the price of villainy. But nothing more was seen of Ikey or the Dodger, and the juniors arrived in due time in Wayland.

CHAPTER 5.

At Wayland Fair—Arthur Augustus Buys a Dog.

"ALL the fun of the fair, gentlemen! All the fun of the fair!"

Pom, pom, pom!

"Walk up, gentlemen! This way to the world-renowned circus and menagerie—Joneski's world-renowned! Walk up, gentlemen!"

Pom, pom, pom!

Blare!

"Gentlemen, try your strength! Tuppence a time, gentlemen! Show your friends how strong you are! Only tuppence a time!"

Pom, pom, pom!

There was a great crowd and a great noise in the market square at Wayland.

The annual fair always woke up the sleepy old town—sleepy except on market days, when it was usually lively enough. The fair was a feature of Wayland, and it had been patronised by the boys of St. Jim's ever since it had started, and its commencement was lost in the mists of antiquity, as anybody at St. Jim's could have informed you. How they knew that it had been patronised by the St. Jim's fellows from its commencement, when that commencement was lost in the mists of antiquity, was a question the Saints did not trouble to answer. They were sure of the fact, and that was enough for them.

At all events, it was certain that St. Jim's patronised the fair, now. In fact, they were convinced that the thing could hardly be a success if they kept away. And, indeed, they did spend a great deal of money there—more than they could afford in many instances. But that, perhaps, was all for the good of trade.

All sorts and conditions of people came to the fair—jugglers and strong men, fat ladies and bearded ladies, menagerie-keepers, and proprietors of innumerable shows, dealers in every kind of ware, ornamental and useful, and frequently useless.

The babel of voices, the blare of cornets and concertinas, and the pom-pom of drums, big drums and side drums, and all sorts of drums, made a din that the good folk of Wayland were accustomed to during Fair week, and which they

"TOM MERRY, SCOUT LEADER."



Fatty Wynn was standing at the stall, with a sausage on a fork, and a grin of delightful satisfaction on his face.

grumbled at, and would have missed if the fair had been abolished.

To find one's way among the thronging crowds, the booths and stalls and pitches and tents, was not easy.

The din of the fair was cheery enough to the juniors from St. Jim's, by no means averse to a noise, and always ready for excitement and fun.

"All the fun of the fair, gents! Coconut shies, penny a time!"

"Walk up! Joneski's world-famous—"

"'Ere you are! Round a dozen times for the 'umble brown!"

The juniors stopped and looked at the merry-go-round. Early as the hour was for that amusement, it was already creaking round to the wheezy strains of the music. But a sudden terrific uproar drew their attention away.

"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Wally. "That's Pongo!"

And he dashed off in the direction of the uproar.

It was, of course, Pongo. Two or three shaggy curs were quarrelling over a bone outside a tent, and, of course, Pongo felt it incumbent upon him to join in, and rob them of it. Wally ran up, but Pongo was busy.

"Pongo—Pongo! Old Pongo!"

But Pongo paid no attention. Wally sometimes boasted of the way Pongo would obey his orders, but there were many fellows who declared that Pongo only obeyed his master's voice when he was calling him to his meals. Then, certainly, the mongrel came promptly to the call.

"Good old Pongo!" chuckled Wally. "He never can see

another dog without wanting to fight him. What a spirit that dog has!"

"Yaas, wathah! And what a fealful wow he makes!" said Arthur Augustus. "There's the ownah of some of those dogs comin', Wally, and he looks as if he's goin' to stwike your wotten mongrel with a stick."

Wally's eyes gleamed.

"If he does I'll jolly soon hack his shins!" he exclaimed.

A gentleman in a shapeless cap and a figured neckerchief had come round out of the tent, with a big stick in his hand. He had a couple of puppies in the loose pockets of his coat and a doggy smell all over him, and was evidently a dealer in canine specimens.

"Oldjer row, you beasts!" he said; and was about to bring the stick into play, when he caught sight of Wally and Arthur Augustus, and his manner changed.

Wally was trying to get Pongo off, but Pongo, like the famous smile, wouldn't come off. The junior got a grip on his collar at last, and the mongrel yapped and snapped.

"Fine dorg that, sir!" said the gentleman in the neckerchief. "You fond of dorgs, sir?"

"Yes, rather!" said Wally. "I'm sorry Pongo went for your dogs, sir; he's always fighting."

"Shows his sperrit," said the other cordially. "If you'll step into my tent, sir, I'll show you something in the dog line you'll like to see."

"Thanks, awfully!" said Wally instantly. "Come on, Gus!"

Arthur Augustus hesitated, but he never liked saying no, and he followed his younger brother and the dog-fancier into the tent. The other juniors were otherwise occupied just then.

"TOM MERRY, SCOUT LEADER."

The dog-fancier's name—according to a daubed board outside the tent—was Joseph Tigg, and he dealt in every kind of member of the canine tribe. And, indeed, the inside of his ragged tent had the appearance of a dogs' home.

Wally, who was doggy to the core, looked round him with great interest. Mr. Tigg opened a portable kennel, with a great air of mystery, and called out "Flo!"

A handsome collie came out at the call. Wally's eyes sparkled. The collie was small, but beautifully shaped, and had a coat like silk. His eyes were dark and gleaming with intelligence. He laid his black muzzle in the hand of Mr. Tigg, with a movement that was fascinating to a lover of dogs.

"What do you think of that dorg?" asked Mr. Tigg hoarsely.

"Ripping!" said Wally. "I suppose you're not giving him away?"

Mr. Tigg chuckled hoarsely, as if he considered the little joke a very good one.

Arthur Augustus, who did not care for dogs on account of the way his trousers had suffered at the jaws of Herries' bulldog, was charmed with the collie. He looked too gentle a dog to attack anybody's nether garments.

"Yaas, wathah! That's a fine dog!" he said. "I wathah like him. What do you call him, my deah sir?"

"His name's Prince," said Mr. Tigg. "Named Prince because he's own son to a dorg belonging to the Crown Prince of Klein-Silberburg. I dessay you'd care to buy that dorg, young gent."

"I'd jolly well like it, but a chap isn't allowed to keep two dogs at St. Jim's," said Wally regretfully. "Besides, I couldn't afford it."

"Perhaps the other young gent—"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I wathah like the dog," he remarked; "but I couldn't keep a dog. I'm keepin' white wabbit's already, and I have to pay a kid in the Third to take care of them, and they cost me eighteence a week."

"I'd keep it for you, Gussy, if you wanted to buy it," suggested Wally.

"Weally, Wally, that would be a great deal like me buyin' you a dog!"

"Remarkable cheap, too, young gents!" said Mr. Tigg. "The fact is I'm goin' out of the business arter this fair 'ere, and goin' to settle down. What I want is to find the dorg a 'ome. You see, he's been my show dog, and he's been well treated. You can see that. I'm fond of him, and I want 'im to 'ave a good 'ome. I could see that you young gents was the sort to treat a dorg well. I'm practically givin' him away to get 'im a good 'ome!"

"What do you want for him, Mr. Tigg?" asked Wally.

"Only seven-and-sixpence, young gent," said Mr. Tigg; "it's givin' him away!"

"My hat, it is, and no mistake! There's a chance for you, Gus!" said Wally eagerly.

Mr. Tigg was certainly right. The dog was worth at least four or five times as much as he asked for it, and was certainly a bargain for anybody.

"But I don't want a dog, deah boy!"

"I'll look after him for you."

"Weally, Wally, I—"

"Oh, don't be mean, Gus! You can see what a ripping bargain it is! I'll tell you what," said Wally; "you buy the dog, and I'll look after him—and I'll look after your white rabbits for nothing as long as you keep the dog!"

"Vewy well, Wally," said Arthur Augustus, resigning himself to his fate, "I will buy the bwute if you like. Pway make out the receipt, sir."

"Certainly," said Mr. Tigg. "I think you'll admit, young gents, that I've dealt fair with you, and you kin mention my name with confidence to your friends. The dog's simply bein' given away!"

And Arthur Augustus handed over seven shillings and sixpence, and received a piece of paper and the collie-dog, and the brothers left the tent. Prince's collar went with Prince, and Mr. Tigg had attached a string to it for D'Arcy to lead the dog with.

"Not that it's necessary to lead 'im," he remarked; "he knows you already, sir, and he'd follow you anywhere! Bless you, sir, dogs can tell! He knows you're a gentleman, sir, and will treat him well! You won't lose him in a hurry!"

"Thank you very much!" said D'Arcy.

And the swell of St. Jim's walked off, leading Prince, who was certainly very docile, and not knowing whether to be pleased with his purchase or not. But there was no doubt that Wally was pleased.

Mr. Tigg, standing at the entrance of his tent, looked after the two juniors with a curious expression on his face, and winked one eye.

CHAPTER 6.

The Coconut Merchants.

WHERE'S Gussy got to?" exclaimed Tom Merry, looking round. "We shall lose that young ass if—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, here you are!" said Tom Merry, turning round and discovering Arthur Augustus just behind him in the crowd.

"What do you mean by wandering away and making your uncle anxious about you?"

"Pway don't be widiculous, you know!"

"And what on earth are you carrying round that bit of string for?" demanded Tom Merry, staring at the swell of St. Jim's.

"I have purchased a dog," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"My hat! You—a dog! Somebody sold you a pup?"

"I have purchased this handsome collie for a widiculously low figah—"

"What handsome collie?"

"This one I am leadin', deah boy!"

Tom Merry gave a roar, and Blake and Figgins joined in. "I never quite saw a handsome collie like that before," said Figgins. "It looks to me more like a dog's collar than a dog you are leading, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus, puzzled by the laughter of the juniors, looked round at the dog—or rather at the spot where the dog should have been. An empty collar trailed on the ground at the end of the string, but there was nothing to be seen of Prince.

"Bai Jove, he's gone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, where's the dog?" exclaimed Wally, pushing through the crowd. He had lost sight of his brother for a time in giving chase to Pongo, who wanted to try his teeth on some of the turkeys in the market-place. "Where's Prince, Gus?"

"He appeahs to be gone!" said Arthur Augustus, staring blankly at the empty collar.

"You don't mean to say you've lost him?"

"Weally, Wally, I don't see how I could prevent the bwute wandwin' away, when his collah came off!"

"Well, of all the duffers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Blake. "You had better wait till I'm with you before you buy a dog again, Gussy! How much did you pay for him?"

"Seven-and-sixpence."

"Might have stood a feed of these ripping baked potatoes all round for that!" said Fatty Wynn, looking at a stall where those comestibles were sold. "I say, Gussy, it was too bad of you!"

"Weally, Wynn—"

"Still, it's all right, if you stand the feed all the same!" said the New House junior. "I don't know how you fellows are, but I'm getting hungry! I do get hungry in this December weather!"

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "Gussy shall stand a feed to the tune of seven-and-six. That's only fair!"

"I weally do not see—"

"You want such a lot of explaining to," said Blake. "Tom Merry can see that it's all right—can't you, Merry?"

"Certainly," said Tom Merry. "Gussy stands a feed of baked potatoes, and that puts the matter on a proper footing."

"Exactly."

Arthur Augustus looked somewhat puzzled. He did not quite see the connection between the loss of Prince and a feed of baked potatoes. But he was the most generous of youths, and he raised no objection.

"Wight you are, deah boys!" he remarked. "Pway go ahead! And we may as well have some of this gentleman's hot coffee, too!"

The gentleman in a striped jersey who was retailing hot coffee beamed upon the juniors. The whole party from St. Jim's gathered round the stalls. The weather was cold, though fine, and the keen air made them hungry. Hot coffee and hot baked potatoes were very welcome. Fatty Wynn travelled through the baked potatoes at a rate that interested the man who was selling them. He watched Fatty as if it were a performance, and the juniors looked on, grinning.

"These spuds are ripping!"

That was all Fatty Wynn said, but his actions were eloquent. After the tenth potato he showed some signs of slackening down. The other juniors had already finished and were moving off. As Arthur Augustus was doing his paying, he had to wait for Fatty Wynn to complete his laying-in of provisions. One by one the juniors strolled off, and Arthur Augustus was left alone with the Falstaf of the New House.

Fatty Wynn, eating more slowly now, started on his twelfth potato. Arthur Augustus looked at his watch.

"Pway excuse me, Wynn," he remarked at last, "but life is wathah short, you know. Would you like the gentleman to follow us with his bawwow, instead of wemainin' here so long?"

The gentleman with the barrow grinned.

"Shan't be a few mors minutes, Gussy," said Fatty Wynn. "I don't suppose I can do more than a couple more."

"Bai Jove!"

Fatty Wynn managed three more. Then he had three to put in his pocket, in case he should get hungry again. Then he walked off in search of Figgins and Kerr, and D'Arcy settled up with the potato merchant and the vendor of coffee.

When Arthur Augustus left the stall, his comrades were out of sight in the crowd. The throng in the market-square of Wayland was thickening. The fun of the fair was attracting people from all quarters, and there were many fellows from St. Jim's in the crowd. The town was full of market-folk, too, and animals being driven through the streets added to the uproar and confusion of the place. A runaway sheep came careering along as D'Arcy left the stall, with an enraged drover in pursuit. The poor brute was frightened by the noise and the grinding music from the roundabouts, and perhaps by the stick of the drover. He dashed on blindly, and, of course, D'Arcy met him in full career.

"Bai Jove! Help!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

The sheep ran against his legs, and D'Arcy sprawled forward, falling on the sheep's back. His cane rolled one way and his silk hat another. The frightened sheep bleated, and the drover came up just in time to bring down his stick on its back. That was not the way to reassure the scared animal, and it bolted frantically, and ran across the clear space of a cocoanut-pitch.

Two men in striped jerseys were attending to the cocoanut-shy. One of them—a little man with a hooked nose—made a cut at the sheep with a stick, and sent it careering off towards the row of pegs on which the cocoanuts were placed.

"Stop him, Dodger!" shouted the little man.

"You idjit, Ikey, why didn't you stop him?" yelled Dodger.

The sheep ran among the cocoanuts, and never was there such a clearance of them as the sheep made. Dodger, with a muttered malediction, dashed towards the animal and gave it a savage blow with his stick. Arthur Augustus, who had just recovered his silk hat and was jamming it on again, uttered a cry of indignation.

"You bwute! How dare you stwike the animal like that?"

Dodger gave him a savage look.

"I'll do as I choose, and—"

"Bai Jove, it's that wuffian again!"

Dodger struck the sheep a second savage blow; but ere he could use the stick again a lithe form sprang forward, and it was wrenched from his hand. The ruffian swung round with an oath, to look into the flushed, angry face of Tom Merry.

"Hands off!" he roared.

"You cowardly hound!" said Tom Merry. "I'll lay the stick over your own shoulders for two pins!"

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, you are quite wight! I was just goin' to give him a feahful thwashin' myself!"

Tom Merry threw the stick to the ground. The sheep had escaped now. Dodger was clenching his hands and gritting his teeth—evidently inclined to hurl himself upon Tom Merry, but aware that it would be bad for his trade.

"The wotten wascal!" said D'Arcy, jamming his eyeglass into his eye, and surveying Dodger and Ikey with great contempt. "These are the wottahs that twied to wob young Wally in the wood, Tom Mewwy!"

"By Jove, so they are!"

"It's a lie," said Ikey huskily "it's a lie! We ain't never seod you afore!"

Tom Merry looked grimly at the ruffians. He knew they were the attempted footpads of Wayland Wood. They had doubtless been on their way to the fair when they had fallen in with Wally in the wood, and had been unable to resist the temptation to go through his pockets. But the hero of the Shell did not want a scene at the fair. There was another way of punishing the rascals, and it had at once flashed into his mind.

"How many shies a penny?" he asked quietly.

Dodger and Ikey stared at him, not quite knowing what to make of this change of front. Arthur Augustus stared at his comrade.

"Surely you are not goin' to have anythin' to do with these wotten wascals, Tom Mewwy?" he said. "They weally ought to be awwested!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"But I am, Gussy! How many shies a penny, my friend?"

"Seven for a tanner," said Dodger sulkily.

"Right you are; hand over the balls!"

Tom Merry laid down sixpence. Dodger, still sulky and puzzled, handed out seven balls from the basket. The other juniors from St. Jim's were gathering round now, and they recognised Messrs. Dodger and Ikey, and were puzzled by Tom Merry's action.

"Look here, what are you up to, Tom?" demanded Monty Lowther. "You don't want to have anything to do with those rotters, even if we don't bother about having them punished?"

"I am going to punish them, my son," said Tom Merry serenely.

"How?" demanded Blake and Figgins.

"By collaring their atock-in-trade," grinned Tom Merry. "The rotten blackguards ought not to be allowed here at all. I'm going to clean them out. You remember how I took your wickets last summer, Figg?"

"Blessed if I do," said Figgins.

"Well, I did, whether you remember it or not. If a champion bowler can't bowl out a few cocoanuts, he ought to give up cricket and play marbles. My hand's a bit out at this time of the year, but I think I can work it. You chaps buy some balls each, and back me up."

The juniors grinned at the idea.

It was certainly a unique and novel plan for visiting punishment upon the heads of Messrs. Ikey and Dodger.

Most of the juniors could bowl, and Tom Merry, Lowther, Blake, Figgins, and Kerr, were adepts at it. The whole party joined in the scheme, and Dodger and Ikey did a roaring trade. There were not enough balls to go round, but the juniors paid down their money and waited their turn with the balls. The crowd gathered round the cocoanut-pitch looked on curiously. Ikey and Dodger were both looking puzzled, but they were reaping a harvest of small silver, and at first they were not disposed to grumble.

Tom Merry took a ball in his hand.

"Over!" called out Jack Blake.

And the ball flew from Tom Merry's hand, with as true an aim as he had ever shown on the cricket-field at St. Jim's when he was playing the summer game.

Crack!

CHAPTER 7.

The Punishment of Ikey and Dodger.

TOM MERRY grinned serenely. The first ball had brought a cocoanut down, as he knew it would. Ikey gathered up the fallen nut, and replaced it with another. Fatty Wynn took charge of the prize, and forthwith proceeded to eat it. Tom Merry bowled again.

Crack!

Another nut fell.

Dodger scowled this time, and Ikey looked anxious. He drew another cocoanut from the sack, and replaced the broken one. Tom Merry delivered the rest of the balls in quick succession. The bowling was nothing to the crack bowler of the School House cricket team. At every shot a nut fell, and Fatty Wynn was in charge of seven cocoanuts in a few minutes.

The unexampled success of the junior drew general attention upon the spot. The crowd looked on with great interest, and the buzz of comment drew others to the spot. Tom Merry grinned as he gave place to Figgins. Dodger's face was a study.

Figgins delivered his seven balls in succession, and brought down six cocoanuts, only one ball going astray.

The crowd were grinning now, as much at the expression of Dodger and Ikey's faces as at the scene. The grinning became a roar of laughter as a sudden exclamation of disgust broke from Fatty Wynn.

"Ow! Gerrooh! Gr-r-r-r!"

Fatty Wynn had started on a second cocoanut, which had been cracked by the impact of the wooden ball. In his interest in Figgins's bowling, he had put the piece of cocoanut into his mouth while watching Figgins, without looking at it. It was then that he discovered that the nut was a bad one.

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Don't you like it?"

"Gerrooh!"

Fatty Wynn ejected the fragment of cocoanut with violence. The expression of his fat face threw the juniors almost into convulsions. Fatty Wynn brandished the black cocoanut in the face of Dodger.

"Look at that!" he roared. "Look at it! Do you call that nut good?"

Dodger snarled savagely.

"Do you expect 'em all to be good?" he exclaimed. "Old yer row!"

"I—I nearly swallowed it! I'm poisoned!"

"I wish you was poisoned—the lot of yer!" growled Dodger.

"There's plenty more, Fatty," said Tom Merry, wiping his eyes. "Start on another one. We'll have enough cocoanuts to keep you for a week before we've finished."

"Will yer?" hissed Dodger. "You won't, 'ere! Get haff with yer!"

"Rats! We've paid for the shies, and we're going to have them," said Tom Merry determinedly. "You can't back out now, my man!"

"Let 'em have the shies they've paid for!" shouted a dozen voices.

"They only want customers who miss the cokernuts!" exclaimed a stout farmer. "Let them have the shies, or we'll bust up your show for you!"

"Fair play!" exclaimed Blake. "You took our money, and we only want what we've paid for!"

"You can 'ave your money back!"

"We don't want it back," said Tom Merry coolly. "You are a pair of scoundrels, you two! You tried to rob a chap this afternoon, and you treated that sheep brutally! We're going to punish you by clearing you out! You took our money, and you can't get out of it! You're in a cleft stick!"

Dodger gritted his teeth. He would willingly have proceeded to a row, but nearly a dozen sturdy juniors were not to be lightly rowed with. And the crowd were looking threatening, too. They did not like the idea of shies being refused to customers who could bring down the nuts.

Jack Blake's turn came next with the balls, and Dodger and Ikey did not say him nay. The spectators looked on with great interest, grinning at the growing dismay of the cocoanut merchants. Jack Blake's bowling was very nearly as good as Figgins's. He brought down five nuts with seven shots.

"Next man in, Lowther."

Monty Lowther lounged forward, and took the wooden balls. He was luckier still, with six nuts to his credit. The crowd cheered.

"Ang yer!" grunted Dodger. "'Ang yer!"

Kerr was next man in, and he brought down five nuts. Then the rest of the juniors in turn essayed their skill, and though they were not quite so fortunate, the pile of nuts at the feet of Fatty Wynn grew and grew. Even Skimpole took his turn, though the juniors did not expect great things of Skimpole.

The amateur Socialist pushed his cap to the back of his head, adjusted his spectacles, and grasped the wooden ball.

He took a great deal of trouble to get a correct aim, and a dozen voices urged him to buck up. Skimpole blinked round at the urgers.

"I am afraid I cannot hurry," he said. "You see, I am not a bowler, and, in fact, I do not remember ever hitting a wicket with anything but a bat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But even the unskilled can succeed in this, or in anything else, by a true observance of scientific rules. If the ball describes the correct trajectory, and is hurled with sufficient force, it cannot fail to strike the object aimed at, and to dislodge it."

"Well, buck up, Skimmey. We've got to get in before bedtime," said Manners.

"Certainly, Manners. If you watch me, you will see how even the unpractised hand can succeed by the aid of scientific principles. I throw back my hand thus, and hurl the ball thus. Dear me, I am exceedingly sorry."

The ball had slipped from Skimpole's hand before he was quite ready to let go, and had bumped upon Mr. Dodger's head. Dodger gave a roar like a wild beast, and hurled himself at Skimpole. Tom Merry pushed him back.

"Hold on, my son!"

"He's busted my 'ead!" yelled Dodger. "I'll break 'is neck!"

"Well, it's a cocoanut shy," said Monty Lowther. "You didn't specify which cocoanuts were to be aimed at. Skimpole was quite within his rights in choosing which cocoanut to bash."

"I am exceedingly sorry," said Skimpole. "It was quite an accident, and I assure you that I had no intention of smiting you thus. Pray do not swear, my good man. I do not blame you for using this extremely coarse language, as I know it is due to your villainous training. Reared in the foul atmosphere of the slum and the gin-shop, how were you to learn better? We shall, under Socialism, abolish the slum and the gin-shop, and give dirty brutes like yourself a better chance. Dear me, he does not seem to be pacified yet!"

"Curious, too," grined Lowther. "Perhaps you had better leave off trying to pacify him, and get on with the washing."

"Certainly, Lowther. I will now take the second ball,

and I beg of you to watch me, and see what can be done on truly scientific principles."

And Skimpole took careful aim. Ikey stood well back at the end of the line of cocoanuts. The previous bowling had been so good that he did not dream that he was in danger. But he did not know Herbert Skimpole.

Skimpole's hand flew forward, and the ball whizzed away—where, Skimpole did not quite know. But a fendish yell from Ikey soon told him.

Ikey rolled over on the ground, and sat up, roaring. Skimpole looked at him in blank amazement.

"Can you tell me why that person is so excited, Tom Merry?" he asked. "I have not knocked down a cocoanut and I do not see why he should make so much fuss."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry hysterically. "Perhaps he's excited because the ball you threw biffed him in the jersey. I'm not sure, but I think that's the reason."

"Dear me, I am exceedingly sorry that I have struck him by mistake. However, I shall do much better with the third ball, and will show you that on true scientific principles, it is possible to—"

"There's not going to be any third ball," said Tom Merry grimly. "You might bash one of us next, and that would be serious. Ring off, before you do any real damage, my son. Bunk! Travel!"

And Tom Merry pushed the protesting Skimpole away. Ikey was using a fine flow of language, and did not cease till a policeman came in sight. Then the meekness that came over Ikey would have done credit to the curate of the Bab Ballads.

The juniors went on with their bowling. Arthur Augustus came last, and he gave his stick to Digby, and his silk hat to Herries to hold. The crowd grinned as they looked on, expecting another entertainment like Skimpole's. But the swell of St. Jim's could bowl. He knocked down three nuts with four balls, and grasped the fifth. But the sticks were clear of nuts now, and Ikey was not replacing them. He had groped in the sack, and his hand had returned empty.

"Put up the nuts, deah boy!" called out D'Arcy.

"I ain't got no more," said Ikey. "You've got the lot, and much good may they do yer!"

Tom Merry's expression changed. The two men were undoubtedly ruffians and scoundrels, but he remembered that they were poor. They deserved to be punished, but, after all, perhaps it was as well to temper justice with mercy.

"We don't want the cocoanuts," he said instantly. "I say, you chaps, we don't want their blessed nuts! Let them have them back!"

Jack Blake burst into a roar.

"Well, of all the giddy plans for punishing a pair of blackguards this is about the giddiest!" he exclaimed. "Where does the punishment come in?"

"Well, you see—you see—"

Blake slapped him on the shoulder.

"It's all right, Merry. I'm agreeable."

"Yaas, wathah! Aftah all, they have had their lesson, and weally, I don't see how we could cawwy away all those cocoanuts, deah boys."

"I can carry a couple," said Fatty Wynn—"one in each pocket, and another in my hand, too. They can have the rest."

Dodger and Ikey brightened up. They had lost the whole of their stock-in-trade, and their day's business would have been ruined if Tom Merry had chosen. Dodger began to count out the money.

"'Ere's your money back, young gents," he said, with an increase of civility.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Bosh! We don't want our money back. We've had our fun. Come on, kids!"

And Tom Merry & Co. marched off, leaving Ikey and Dodger staring at the heap of nuts and at one another.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Dodger at last.

"My honny 'at!" said Ikey.

"Which they're all right, they are," said Dodger. "What did you mean, ill-treatin' that sheep when the young gent didn't want you to, Ikey?"

Ikey stared, as well he might.

"Why, it was you, Dodger!" he exclaimed.

"Well, don't do it again," said Dodger aggressively, "that's all! Don't you do it again, or you'll 'ear from me, Ikey, so I tell yer! Now, set up them cocoanuts agin, and 'old yer jaw!"

And the cocoanut merchants were soon doing a thriving business again, and, fortunately for them, did not come across any more crack bowlers.

ANSWERS

"TOM MERRY, SCOUT LEADER."

CHAPTER 8.
In the Swing-boats.

THE juniors strolled on from the cocoanut-pitch. The December afternoon was deepening to dusk now, but as day waned the fun of the fair grew faster and more furious. Arthur Augustus stopped and looked up at a row of swing-boats, adjusting his monocle to get a good view.

"Like to come on?" grinned Figgins.

The swell of St. Jim's shook his head.

"Yaas, Figgins, but I am afraid I should find it wathah exhaustin'. I'll watch while you fellows go on."

The other juniors were not afraid of getting exhausted. They crowded into the swing-boats. Herries, Manners, Lowther, and Digby entered one, and Figgins & Co. the next one. Blake caught D'Arcy by the arm.

"Come on, Gussy, and we'll start same time as Figgins, and put him in the shade."

"Weally, Blake, I don't feel inclined for such extwomely exhaustin' work—"

"Rats!" exclaimed Tom Merry, taking D'Arcy by the other arm. "Why, you're just cut out for this. Come on!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

But D'Arcy's protests were not listened to. Blake and Tom Merry ran him along to the swing-boat, and bundled him in. The swell of St. Jim's sat down, and held on his hat. His cane had fallen to the ground.

"Hold on!" shouted Tom Merry, as the man started the swing-boat, and he grasped a rope. "Hold on, kids!"

"Wait a minute, Tom Mewwy! I have drowped my cane!"

"It's all right. The man's picked it up, and he'll mind it for you. Besides, you shouldn't drop it. Hold on!"

"Pway wait a moment! My hat keeps coming off!"

"Throw it out of the boat, then!"

D'Arcy's only reply was a withering stare. But Tom Merry and Blake had hold of the ropes now, and they were working the boat up. Arthur Augustus had either to hold on, or to be thrown out of the boat, and he left his hat to look after itself, and grasped the rope beside Jack Blake.

"Pull away!" shouted Tom Merry. "Blake! Gussy! All together! Figgy is going up like a rocket!"

Figgins & Co.'s boat was swinging high already. Figgins & Co. meant to go higher than either School House boat, and Tom Merry was determined that they shouldn't.

"Hurrah!" shouted Blake. "Pull for the School House! Go it!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Shut up, and pull!"

The School House juniors swung hard at the ropes. The boat went up high, and higher, and higher yet. Arthur Augustus began to get giddy. His silk hat sailed away, and landed on the ground near the posts, but the swell of St. Jim's hardly noticed it.

"Bai Jove, this is feahful!" he gasped. "Pway go a little slowah, deah boys!"

"Pull, you beggars—pull!"

"Pway— Oh dear, I am growin' quite giddy!"

"Put your beef into it, Blake!"

"Rather! Buck up, Gussy!"

"Weally, deah boys, I—oh—I—"

"Pull—pull!"

The boat swung higher. It was really going to an almost dangerous height now, but it was not quite up to Figgins's level. Figgins & Co. were working away like demons. There was a sudden crash on the ground under their boat. It was one of Fatty Wynn's cocoanuts that had escaped from his coat. The swing-boat merchant gave a yell. The cocoanut had missed him by about a foot.

But Fatty Wynn recked little. He was working away with an energy that his plumpness gave little promise of. The boat went higher, till even Figgins thought it was time to stop.

"We're the highest of the lot!" he exclaimed. "Hold on! You'll break your necks if you take a tumble now!"

"Tom Merry's still going up!" said Kerr.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy clung to his rope. The boat was swinging higher, and the swell of St. Jim's was feeling qualmy inside.

"Go it!" roared Blake. "Those New House rotters are slackening!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Put your beef into it, you young ass!"

"I—I—I feel vewy queer—"

"Never mind; you will be all right presently. Pull away!"

The swing-boat was going higher than Figgins & Co.'s now. Perhaps that was because the New House juniors were slackening down, however. Tom Merry was satisfied at last, and he slackened his efforts.

"We've beaten the New House rotters!" he exclaimed



Tom Merry dashed into the path of the maddened animal, and flung his coat with a sure hand

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gleefully. "Hallo, Gussy! You are looking rather queer about the gills!"

"I am feelin' wathah wotten, Tom Mewwy!" gurgled Gussy. "I have a peculiiah all-ovewish sort of feelin' inside!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy had a hand pressed to his waistcoat. The boat slacked and slacked, and the man dragged on it and stopped it at last. Tom Merry and Blake jumped out, but Arthur Augustus did not move.

"Jump out, Gussy!"

"I—I—I weally feel too exhausted and disturbed to move, deah boys!" said the swell of St. Jim's feebly.

"By Jove, there's somebody just going to tread on your hat!"

D'Arcy jumped out of the boat as if moved by electricity. He picked up his hat from the foot of the post. It had been Tom Merry who was just going to tread on it, as a matter of fact. D'Arcy brushed it with his sleeve, and gave the hero of the Shell an indignant look.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wegard you as a wuff beast!" he said. "I shall wefuse to entah a swing-boat with you again."

"Never mind," said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "We beat Figgins & Co."

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Figgins, as he jumped out of his boat. "Why, we went yards higher than you did!"

"Why, what rot!" exclaimed Blake warmly. "We beat you hollow. We went higher than you did before we stopped."

"But we had gone higher, and we were slackening down when you came up."

"Rais! Now, look here, Figgy—"

"Let's try again!" said Figgins excitedly. "We'll jolly soon show you!"

"Right you are! Come on, Gussy!"

"I uttably wefuse to do anythin' of the sort!" said Arthur Augustus; and having recovered hat and stick, he disappeared into the crowd.

CHAPTER 9.

The Pluck of Tom Merry.

"**B**AI Jove, Goah! Where did you find that dog?" Arthur Augustus stopped about a hundred yards from the swing-boats, where the juniors were trying over the contest again without him. D'Arcy had had enough swing-boats.

The swell of St. Jim's had suddenly encountered Gore and Sharp of the Shell in the crowd, and his attention was at once attracted by the sight of a dog Gore was leading by a string attached to its collar.

There was no mistaking that animal, with its glossy coat, its well-shaped head and intelligent eyes. It was Prince, the collie.

"Where did you find him?" exclaimed D'Arcy, greatly pleased. "It is awfully good of you to mind my dog for me like this, Goah, and I weally must confess that you are not such a wottah as I have always considered you."

George Gore stared at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Off your rocker?" he asked pleasantly.

"Certainly not, Goah! Pway give me my dog—"

"Your dog! By Jove, he's been drinking!"

"I have not been dwinkin'!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "I hurl! back the wescally insinuation in your teeth, Goah. You have found my dog—"

Gore grinned at Sharp, and tapped his forehead.

"Clean off!" was his only comment.

And Sharp nodded assent. Arthur Augustus began to grow excited.

"Look here, Goah, if you pwetend that that is not my dog—"

"Why, you ass, I've only just bought him!" said Gore, with a sneer. "You must be off your chump! Have you been buying a dog?"

"Yaas, wathah! And I bought that dog, and lost him in the crowd. His collah came off while I was leadin' him. His name is Pwince."

"Rats!" said Gore. "This dog's name is Fido, and he's mine. I've just bought him of a chap in a striped neckerchief."

"Bai Jove, that must be Mr. Tigg!"

"Blessed if I know what his name was. He sold me the collie cheap, because he's giving up the business, and wants to get the dog a good master."

"How—how much did you pay him, Goah?"

"Seven-and-six, and the dog's dirt cheap at the price of a licence."

"Bai Jove, that's what I paid him!" said Arthur Augustus faintly. "The—the wotten wescal must have caught him again, and sold him to you, Goah."

Gore shrugged his shoulders.

"No good telling me any cock-and-bull storics!" he remarked. "This is my dog, and I'm going to keep him. Come on, Fido!"

"But weally, Goah—"

Arthur Augustus was suddenly interrupted. From the street leading out of the market square on the west side came a sudden terrible uproar.

"Run—run!"

"Mad bull!"

"My hat!" said Gore, turning pale. "Run for it, Sharpy!"

And he scudded off. Arthur Augustus looked round him in alarm. The crowd was melting away as if by magic. From the end of the street came a bellow, and a terrible animal came into view—a huge bull, with lashing tail and clattering hoofs, and steaming nostrils.

"Bai—bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus, almost paralysed.

"Look out!" shouted Tom Merry, from the direction of the swing-boats. "Look out, Gussy!"

Bellow! Bellow!

"Bai Jove!"

Behind the maddened bull appeared a crowd of excited people in hot pursuit, drovers and townspeople and yelling boys, adding by their clamour to the frantic excitement of the animal.

Jack Blake turned white as a sheet.

"Gussy will be killed! Gussy! Run for it!"

He dashed towards the spot. D'Arcy, recovering himself, ran. The bull, bellowing furiously, was dashing in the same direction. Blake dashed forward, but Tom Merry was nearer.

Tom's face was white and hard. He had his coat on his arm, which he had taken off in the swing-boat. He gathered it up in his hands as he dashed towards the bull. The beast had caught sight of the running figure of D'Arcy near him, and he was charging down upon the fleeing junior.

Blake stopped, his heart almost ceasing to beat. He could not reach his chum in time; could not have helped him if he did. All depended upon the brave-hearted junior who was rushing between the bull and his victim.

Tom Merry's face was white, but his nerve was firm. He knew what he was about. He dashed intrepidly into the path of the maddened animal, and flung the coat with a sure hand. It spread over the lowered head, catching on the horns as he intended, and the junior sprang swiftly back.

The bull stopped short in his career, bellowing furiously, and endeavouring to tear his head loose, but the coat, clinging on his horns, was not easily got rid of. The frantic animal whirled round in a circle, bellowing, and Tom Merry dashed out of its way.

The pursuing crowd were now on the spot. Two or three stalwart drovers threw themselves upon the bull, and its neck and legs were shackled with strong ropes.

The coat, sadly torn and trampled, was jerked off, and the savage eyes of the bull glared round upon its captors. But with the ropes dragging on its limbs it was helpless now, and could only bellow with impotent rage.

"Hang me, sir!" said one of the drovers, as he handed Tom Merry his torn coat. "But you are a good-plucked 'un, sir!"

Tom Merry laughed breathlessly.

"I was lucky," he said.

"You was, sir, and no mistake. You might have got gored to death. There was mighty few would have cared to tackle that bull like that."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, joining Tom Merry, and panting for breath, as the drovers dragged the bull away, still furiously bellowing. "I wathah think the bwute was wunnin' aftah me, you know, when you blindfolded him."

"I rather think he was," grinned Blake. "His horns were about a yard behind the tail of your jacket, my son."

Arthur Augustus shuddered.

"Bai Jove! Then I have had a feahfully nawwow escape."

"All's well that ends well," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! But weally, I am vevy gwateful, you know, and I excuse you for your wotten wudeness to me in the swing-boat, Tom Mewwy."

"Go hon!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Yaas, but I am speaking quite sewiously, you know. Bai Jove, that wotten bwute has thwown me into quite a fluttah!"

Tom Merry looked at his coat rather ruefully. It was torn in four or five places, and not much use for wearing. D'Arcy's glance followed him sympathetically.

"Yaas, it's wathah wuff on your coat," he remarked. "I can show you a place where you can get it stitched up,

If you like, Tom Mewwy, and the chap will do it while you wait—a vewy decent tailah-man."

Tom Merry slapped him on the shoulder.

"Then lead the way, Macduff!"

"Yaas, wathah, but pway do not be so vewy wuff."

And Arthur Augustus led the way to the shop of the decent tailor-man, who stitched up Tom Merry's coat in a workmanlike way, and kept him waiting only half an hour while he did it. It was quite dark when the juniors left the place; Arthur Augustus having remained with Tom Merry, looking over patterns—an occupation of inexhaustible interest to the swell of St. Jim's.

The market-square was a blaze of light from the naphtha lamps of the various shows, and the more or less sweet strains of music were proceeding from various directions. There was a dancing-booth, from which came the strains of the "Merry Widow" waltz, and the trampling of feet. A hurdy-gurdy was grinding out the latest popular song, and the roundabout was adding another tune to the general discord. A prosperous-looking merchant was attending to a gramophone, from which came the well-known tune of "On the Ball," and selling sixpenny copies of the music to the passers-by. Several drums and cornets were also at work, so it may be imagined that the air was filled with a "concord of sweet sounds."

"Lively, isn't it?" said Tom Merry. "Hallo, Gore! What are you looking like a funeral-mute about? Lost a threepenny-bit?"

"I've lost my dog!" growled Gore. "It was in scudding off from that beastly bull. Fido's collar seems to have been too big for him, and when I stopped running I found it dangling on the end of the string. Have you seen anything of the dog, D'Arcy? You know him by sight."

The swell of St. Jim's chuckled.

"No, Goah, I have not; but I am beginnin' to think that that dog-merchant takes the twouble specially to give that dog a large collah, you know. I wondah how many people have bought him and lost him again?"

"Oh, rot!" said Gore; and he passed on, still looking for Fido.

CHAPTER 10.

Figgins Has a Fight on His Hands.

FATTY WYNN was standing with a rapt expression upon his face when Tom Merry tapped him on the shoulder. Wynn turned his head slowly.

"Hallo! Is that you, Merry?" he said absently.

"I think so," grinned Tom Merry. "A penny for your thoughts, Fatty. Are you composing a poem for the 'Weekly,' or are you thinking of supper at St. Jim's?"

"I'm thinking of those turkeys," said Fatty Wynn, whose gaze was directed towards some fine specimens of those birds, alive and very lively, for sale in the market. "Look at that big fat one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall dream about that turkey to-night," said Fatty Wynn; and, with a sigh that expressed the depth of his feelings on the subject, the fat Fourth-Former thrust his hands deep into his pockets and walked away.

Meanwhile, Monty Lowther was pointing that same big turkey out to Arthur Augustus. D'Arcy was very interested by the information he received from the joker of the Shell upon the subject.

"Bai Jove, it looks alive!" he remarked, sucking the end of his cane and staring at the turkey, which stared at him in return.

Monty Lowther laughed.

"My dear chap, that's the way it's made. These automatic turkeys are a triumph of modern invention, and are very popular as Christmas toys. When you look at it closely, you can see that the colouring is a little too vivid to be real."

"Yaas; now you mention it, Lowthah, I can notice it."

"And the way it moves its head isn't quite lifelike, either."

"No, pewwaps not."

"Still, they're wonderfully well made," said Monty Lowther seriously. "At a casual glance, you would take that for a real turkey."

"Yaas, and a wathah ill-tempered-lookin' one, too," remarked the swell of the School House. "It is weally remarkably lifelike, in eweythin' except the colouwin', which certainly is laid on a little too thick."

Tom Merry laughed, and Arthur Augustus turned his eye-glass upon him.

"You do not take that for a weal turkey, Tom Mewwy?" he remarked.

"Well, yes, I think I did," said Tom Merry. "Perhaps I was mistaken."

"Oh, yaas, you see, the colouwin' is laid on a gweat deal too thick. I will stir him up with my stick, and you will see."

"Hold on, Gussy——"

But Arthur Augustus was already stirring the turkey up with his stick. The result was surprising—to the swell of St. Jim's, at least.

The turkey flapped and gobbled, and rushed right at the incautious Arthur Augustus, and the junior gasped in amazement.

"Bai Jove, Lowthah, it's alive!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove—— Help! Wescue!"

Right at the elegant junior dashed the enraged turkey, and Arthur Augustus turned and fled for his life. And after him dashed the furious bird, in hot pursuit. Monty Lowther fell on Tom Merry's neck and gurgled.

Arthur Augustus dashed on at top speed. It was not till he was nearly at the other end of the square that he ventured to slacken pace and look round, and then he gave a great gulp of relief. The turkey had disappeared, and the pursuit was over.

"Bai Jove!" muttered the swell of St. Jim's, pushing back his silk hat, and mopping his perspiring brow with a cambric handkerchief. "Bai Jove, that wottah Lowthah was only wottin' all the time! I wegard him as a beast!"

"Hallo, Gussy! Practising for a foot-race?" asked Figgins, coming along, leading a collie-dog on a string. "You look fagged."

"I am fagged, Figgins," said D'Arcy. "In fact, I am uttaly exhausted. I have been chased by a howwible turkey!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I saw it all. He only followed you about a dozen yards, and then he was grabbed."

Arthur Augustus turned pink.

"Bai Jove! I thought he was on the twack all the time, you know. But I say, Figgins, where did you get that dog, you know?"

"Bought him," said Figgins. "Ripping collie, isn't he?"

"Y-a-a-a-s, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, adjusting his eyeglass and looking curiously at his old acquaintance Prince, alias Fido. "Did you buy him of a man named Tigg?"

"Blessed if I know his name! He was a decent chap. He's going out of business, and he's selling the dog cheap because he wants to get him a good home," explained Figgins. "What the deuce are you cackling at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see the joke," said Figgins, looking puzzled. "You can't say I've been done. I know how to buy a dog, Gussy. I only gave seven-and-sixpence for Tray."

"Bai Jove! Is his name Tway now?"

"What do you mean? I suppose his name-always was Tray. What rot have you got in your fat head, Gussy?"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as fatheaded!"

"Well, don't be an ass, then!"

"I wegard that expression as wude. I can only caution you, Figgins, not to lose that dog," said D'Arcy, with a warning shake of the head.

Figgins snorted.

"I'm not likely to lose him, duffer."

"I wefuse to be called a duffer."

"Don't be one, then. Blessed if I understand you, Gussy."

What have you got in your noddle? What are you sniggering at?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I wathah think you will lose that dog."

"Oh, rats!"

And Figgins marched off with his prize, leaving Arthur Augustus still laughing. Figgins was considerably puzzled, but he was quite satisfied with his prize, and indeed Tray, alias Fido, alias Prince, was a dog to be proud of. He was certainly ridiculously cheap at seven-and-six.

"There he is!"

It was a sudden shout, and Gore rushed up to Figgins, with Sharp at his heels. Figgins stopped and stared at them. Gore and Sharp belonged to the School House, and it looked like a House row. They were both very excited.

"Yes; here I am!" said Figgins genially. "Are you looking for trouble?"

"I wasn't speaking of you," said Gore, "I was speaking of that dog. That's my dog. Did you find him?"

"Your dog?"

"Yes, mine! Where did you find him?"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Figgins. "I've just bought this dog. I'm going to take him to St. Jim's, and give my dog, Spot, to Kerr to mind for me, as we can only keep one animal each. What do you mean by saying he's your dog?"

"He is mine!" yelled Gore. "Don't tell me any yarns about buying him, Figgins! That's my dog, Fido!"

"Bosh! He's my dog Tray!"

"TOM MERRY, SCOUT LEADER."

"Sharp, isn't he my dog? You saw me buy him?"
"I saw you pay seven-and-six for him, Gore," said Sharp solemnly.

"Oh, don't be funny! I gave seven-and-six for him!" said Figgins. "If this is a joke, I'm blessed if I see where the fun comes in!"

"It's not a joke, you New House waster, unless you think dog-stealing is a joke!" snarled Gore. "Give me my dog!"

"He's not your dog; he's mine!"

"It's a lie!"

Figgins flushed red.

"If you say that again, Gore, I'll wipe up the ground with you!" he exclaimed.

"It's a lie, then!" yelled Gore. "That's my dog! Come on, Sharp!"

And he rushed at Figgins without wasting more time in words. Sharp backed him up, and the New House junior soon had his hands full.

Figgins was angry, too—angry at having his word doubted, and at being attacked without cause, as far as he could see.

He put his hands up willingly enough, and met the attack of Gore and Sharp; but, of course, he had to release the string he was leading Tray by.

A crowd quickly gathered round, cheering on Figgins, and hissing Gore and Sharp, as being two to one.

But the two ends of the School House did not care. They attacked Figgins hammer-and-tongs. But Figgins was a tough nut to crack, even at two to one. His left came under Gore's end like a hammer, and Gore sat down with a separate crack on every tooth in his head.

Then the New House junior closed with Sharp, and the two went staggering to and fro blindly in furious combat.

Gore sprang to his feet and rushed at Figgins from behind.

"Shame!" yelled a dozen voices.
But Gore did not care. He threw his arm round Figgins's neck, and got hold of him under the chin, and dragged him back so that Sharp could pommel him.

Figgins struggled fiercely, but he was at a disadvantage.

But just then there was a sudden whoop, and Kerr came dashing up. Without stopping to speak, the Scottish partner in the New House Co. joined in the fray. His clenched fist under Sharp's ear sent that worthy spinning, and then he clawed Gore off, and flung him across Sharp.

"Thanks, old chap!" gasped Figgins.

"What's the row?" asked Kerr.

"The rotters wanted to take my dog away."
"Your dog! I thought you left him at the school!"

"Oh, I don't mean Spot! I've just bought a collie dog. He's here somewhere! Why, where is he? Bless my boots, he's gone!"

The collie had disappeared.

CHAPTER 11.

Skimpole Falls Off.

WITH the fall of night and the lighting of the naphthalene lamps, the fair seemed to awake to new life and jollity. The crowd was thicker than ever. Stout farmers and farmers' men, brawny drovers, and cattle-dealers, elbowed their way among the crowds of townspeople and the schoolboys and urchins from miles round. The various shows were better patronised as evening drew on, and the stars came out in the clear wintry sky.

Tom Merry & Co. had gathered together again, and they stopped to look at the merry-go-round. Arthur Augustus was a little afraid that it was beneath his dig, to venture on the whirling wooden horses, but he allowed himself to be convinced.

"Of course, if you're nervous, you can stick where you are," Blake remarked.

"Weally, Blake, a chap who has widden in a crows-country steeplechase is not likely to be nervous of a wide on a wooden horse," said D'Arcy.

"Then what are you hanging back for?"

"I am not exactly hangin' back, but I am thinkin' of my dig, you know."

"Then don't," said Blake. "Come on, and don't be a duffer! I suppose, as a matter of fact, you're nervous?"

"Come on!" exclaimed Figgins. "Where is Fatty?"

"Sha'n't be a tick!" exclaimed Fatty, who was stuffing roast chestnuts at a barrow near at hand. "I shall be finished in a minute!"

"Catch us waiting for you, you porpoise!"

"Oh, I'm coming!"

Fatty Wynn bolted some chestnuts, and jammed a handful into his pocket, and rushed over to join Figgins.

The juniors of St. Jim's occupied a considerable portion of the roundabout when they mounted the wooden steeds.

"Wait for me, please," came a breathless voice. "I wish

to go round, you know. Will you kindly pay for me, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah, Skimmy, deah boy! Jump on!"

"Pray wait a minute. I am quite out of breath. Yes, my good man?" said Skimpole, stopping with one foot on the edge of the revolving platform which supported the wooden horses in a circle. "What are you poking me for?"

"Get hon, please."

"Yes, I am getting on. Have you any idea why this rough-looking person is so impatient, Tom Merry?"

"Perhaps he wants to get his machine started," grinned Tom Merry. "You see, he's here to make money, not to look on while you jabber."

"Get hon, sir, please!"

"It is very sad to see how this sordid desire to make money penetrates into every class of society," said the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's, with a shake of the head. "Under Socialism, of course, all roundabouts will be nationalised."

"Will you get hon or will you get hoff?"

"I will get on if you will allow me a moment to recover my breath. I regard this entertainment as a very youthful one, and should not mount one of these wooden steeds, my friends, but for the purpose of establishing certain scientific principles."

"Oh, buck-up, Skimmy!"

"Pray do not be impatient, Blake. The principles I wish to establish are, whether—"

"Har you goin' to get hon, or har you goin' to get hoff?" roared the proprietor of the roundabout.

"I am going to get on."

"Start it, my dear sir," said D'Arcy. "The silly ass will nevah leave off talkin' othahwise."

"Really, D'Arcy—Dear me, the thing is going round!"

Skimpole scrambled astride of the wooden horse, with his cap on the back of his head, and his spectacles sliding down his nose, and held on as if he were on the back of a fiery steed.

"Dear me!" he gasped. "I—I feel quite insecure!"

"Hold on!" yelled Wally, coming on the scene with Pongo at his heels.

"I am holding on," replied Skimpole, who thought the words were addressed to him. "Indeed, I think I should fall to the ground otherwise."

"Hold on!"

Skimpole was whirled away with the rest as the machine worked on, grinding out a strain of music that might have made a Philistine weep. But the ears of the juniors were growing hardened to discordant sounds.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Wally indignantly. "Why didn't you wait for me?"

"Full up this time, sir."

"I could have pulled that spectacled ass off."

The man grinned.

"Better wait your turn, sir."

Wally sniffed.

"Catch me waiting while those duffers are going round!"

He stood and watched for Skimpole to come round again. Skimpole was on the horse just in front of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who, with his silk hat in his hand, and his eyeglasses jammed in his eye, was sitting his wooden steed with his usual grace.

As Skimpole came round opposite Wally the junior made a nimble spring upon the wooden platform of the roundabout.

In a twinkling he was upon Skimpole's horse, much to the amazement of the amateur Socialist.

"Really, young D'Arcy," gasped Skimpole, "I—I—There is not room for two of us on one horse, you know!"

"Get off, then," said Wally.

"But I have paid—or, rather, D'Arcy has paid, which comes to the same thing."

"Well, if you pay, and I ride, that's an equal division of labour!"

"Really, Wally—"

"I don't mind your sticking on the horse if you keep quiet," said Wally magnanimously. "But don't jaw."

"I—I—I—Pray do not push me."

"Why not?"

"I am afraid that I may fall off. I am not used to these entertainments. I have mounted this machine simply in order to establish some scientific principles—"

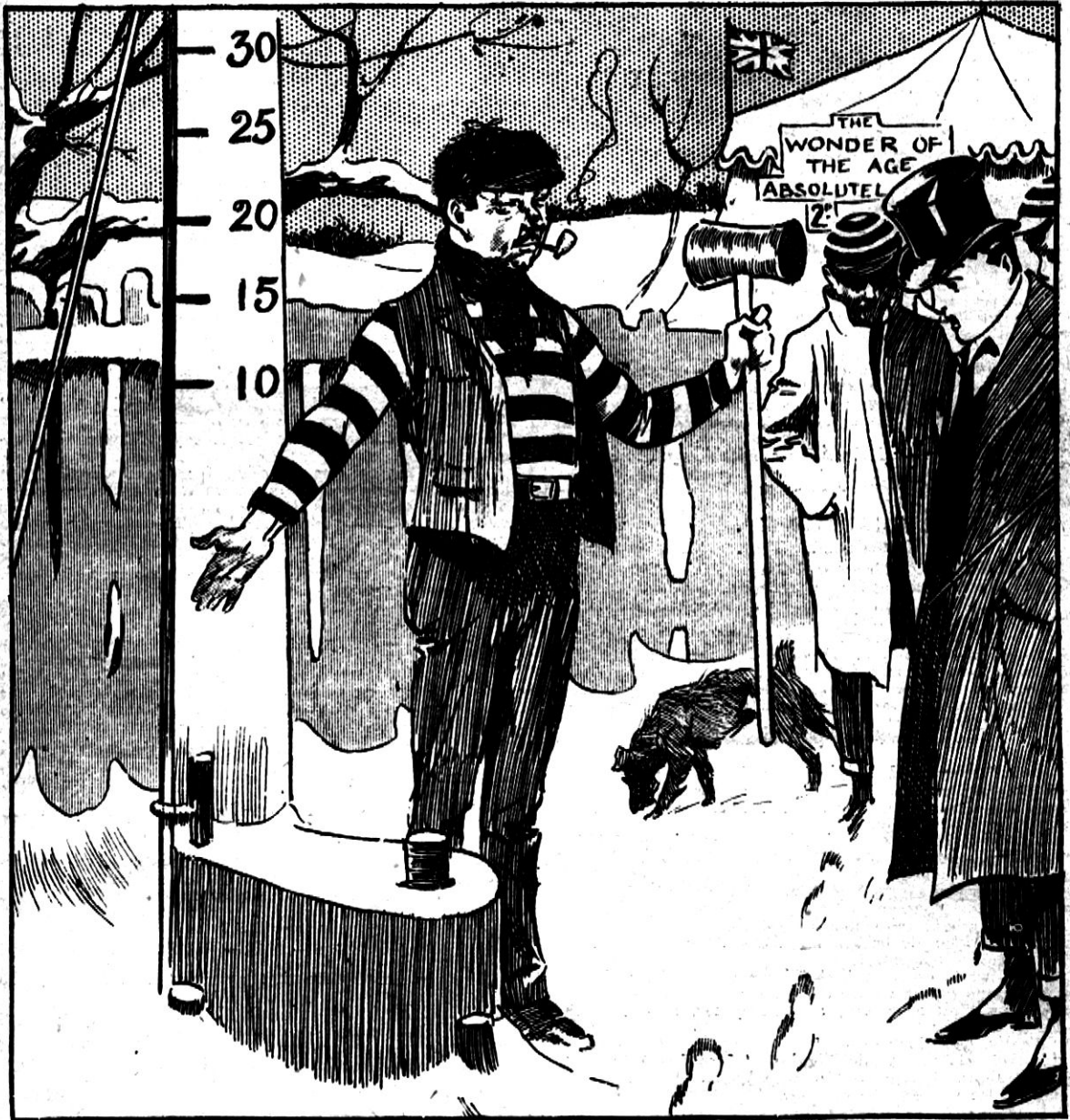
Skimpole broke off with a yell. His overcoat slipped, and he made a grab at it, and the next moment—he didn't know how—he was flying.

Wally, sitting with his face to the tail of the wooden steed, one arm round the supporting-pole, waved the other hand at the falling Skimpole.

"Good-bye, Skimmy!"

"Dear—dear me—"

Skimpole bumped on the ground. He sat up, blinking at the wooden horses as they circled past again and again,



"'Ere you are, young gent!" A man in a striped jersey, with a pipe and stubby chin, lifted up a huge hammer and extended it to Arthur Augustus. "Try your strength, sir!"

while the juniors of St. Jim's grinned down at him from their perches.

"You young wascal, Wally!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally——"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gussy!"

"Weally, Wally, I considah——"

Wally began to whistle, and Arthur Augustus gave him a glare of indignation, and ceased to remonstrate.

The wooden horses finished their journey, and the juniors scrambled off, and found Skimpole standing rubbing his bones where they had come into violent contact with the ground.

"Hurt?" said Wally cheerfully. "Why the dickens didn't you stick on, Skimmy?"

"Really, young D'Arcy——"

"Have you established your scientific principles?" demanded Digby.

Skimpole shook his head.

"No, Digby, I have not. Owing to the——"

"Have anothah wun wound, then," said D'Arcy. "It will be a weat pleasure to me to stand tweat, Skimmy, deah boy."

Skimpole made a grimace.

"I thank you very much, D'Arcy, but I do not think I will mount that very dangerous contrivance again. You must not think that I am in the least nervous, of course, but, upon the whole, I regard it as injudicious to risk such a shock to the system a second time."

"But what pwice the pwinciples you were goin' to establish?"

"I shall have to establish them another time. After all, I have plenty to do," said Skimpole. "There is my speech yet."

"Your which?" demanded half a dozen voices.

"My speech. I am going to take advantage of the great crowd collected on this spot to attempt to disseminate some of the principles of Socialism," explained Skimpole. "Do you not think it is a splendid opportunity?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no occasion for this ribald laughter. As so many people are met together here from various parts of the county, I think the time has come for a little effective propaganda work."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"TOM MERRY, SCOUT LEADER."

"A true Socialist is never turned from his purpose by the mockery of fools and idiots," said Skimpole loftily.

"Eh, what? Where are the fools and idiots?" asked Jack Blake politely, taking hold of Herbert Skimpole by one of his large ears.

The amateur Socialist blinked at him.

"Of course, I was speaking figuratively. What I mean is—"

"You can wait while he explains what he means, Blake," said Digby; "I'm off."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thanks, I don't think I'll wait," said Blake. "Never mind what you mean, Skimmy. But I advise you as a friend to give up that speech."

"As a sincere Socialist—"

"Oh, rats; I'm off!" And Blake ran. The others ran, too. Skimpole blinked after them, and shook his head in a solemn and serious manner.

"Amazing!" he murmured. "Amazing that even intelligent youths should take absolutely no interest in the higher ethics and the ideals of the—the—the—in short, in the ideals. But I shall keep on; I shall not abandon my task in despair. St. Jim's shall be converted into a stronghold of Socialism before I am done, and meanwhile I will try the effect of a really eloquent and excellent speech upon these persons at the fair."

And Skimpole looked about for a suitable spot to address a meeting.

CHAPTER 12.

In the Boxing Tent.

"PETE PIPER, the Bethnal Green Chicken!" said Tom Merry, reading from a flaring poster on the outside of a large tent. "Boxing; face any comer. If'n! Perhaps that is worth seeing, kids."

There was a gentleman in a neckerchief and pimples at the entrance to the tent. From within came a buzz that showed it was already pretty well filled. The pimply gentleman was announcing the show in a raucous voice, hoarse with exertion and the stimulants he had taken.

"Pete Piper, gent! The Bethnal Green Chicken, gent! Unequaled boxer, and champion bantam weight of Hengland!"

"Rats!" murmured Figgins, who knew very well that that was not the case. The gentleman in the pimples overheard the remark, and without the slightest change of countenance he went on:

"Champion boxer, champion bantam weight of Middlesex! Walk in, gent, and see the one and honly Pete Piper!"

Tom Merry looked at his chums.

"What do you say, kids? A good boxing show is always worth seeing. You can pick up points from it, you know."

"Yaas, wathah, unless it is a brutal show, you know, and in that case it would be below our dig. to patwounise it."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, we sha'n't see that till we get inside, and then we can come out if we like. If we consider the show too brutal, we'll all come out, and Gussy can refund us the price of entering."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"That's only fair," said Figgins. "I confess I'd like to see this show. I suppose the chap knows how to use his hands, or he wouldn't be giving a show here."

"But where does he come from, deah boys?"

"Didn't you hear what the man says—Bethnal Green?"

"Is that a weal place?"

"Aye! It's a famous place. Everybody in the British Empire has heard of Bethnal Green," said Figgins scornfully.

"Bai Jove, I must make a note of that, you know!" said Arthur Augustus, with great interest. "Is it in England?"

"Yes, duffer, in London."

"I wefuse to be called a duffah, Figgins. Bai Jove, fancy Bethnal Gween bein' a weal place, you know. I shall go there next time I go to London. Yaas, wathah, let's go in and see this chap from Bethnal Gween!"

"Tanner a time," said the gentleman in pimples, as the juniors presented themselves at the entrance of the tent.

"What does he mean by that, Tom Mewwy? Is that the way they talk in Bethnal Gween, do you think, or is he a foweigner?"

"You cheerful ohump, he means that it's sixpence each," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Come on, you kids, I'm paying the tanners a time, Gussy to refund the money if we come out without seeing the show."

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Can't take that dorg in!" said the guardian at the door, as Wally followed on with Pongo.

"Oh, hold him for me, then!" said Wally.

"I'll tie him up 'ere for you, if you like, sir."

"Right you are."

And Wally followed the rest into the tent. Arthur Augustus gave him a glance of approval as they made their way to the crowded seats.

"It was very wight of you to leave the dog outside, Wally," he said. "I am vevy glad you are gwowin' more polite and weasonable in these mattahs."

"Seat!" said D'Arcy minor. "I know jolly well Pongo won't remain outside many minutes, Gue, old son."

And Wally was right. The juniors had scarcely taken their seats when Pongo came smuggling up to Wally's knees. He had got loose, and crawled in under the canvas of the tent, as the hero of the Third knew he would.

Wally patted his favourite's shaggy head.

"Good old Pongo!"

The juniors grinned, with the exception of Arthur Augustus. He drew a little further away from the shaggy mongrel.

"Pway keep that howwid beast away from my trowsahs, Wally," he said plaintively. "You know how I dislike havin' doggy hairs on my beastly clothes."

"Oh, don't be fussy, old chap!"

"Weally, Wally, you young wascal—"

"Dry up," said Tom Merry, "the show's going to begin."

"I wefuse to dwy up. I was sayin'—"

"Hallo, what's that chap got to say? Silence all!" exclaimed Blake.

A sanded space was set aside for the Bethnal Green Chicken, the seats converging upon it in a crescent. The seats were merely boards laid on trestles, and Arthur Augustus was most uncomfortable. The glare of several naphtha lamps lighted up the Bethnal Green Chicken as he lounged forward and faced the audience.

He looked like a bantam weight a little run to seed. He was a young man, with a head like a bullet, and a face hard and determined. His figure was light and agile, and there was a springiness in his tread, that Tom Merry noted at once. Tom Merry was given to boxing, in an amateur way, and he had an eye for a boxing man's points.

The man with the pimples at the door had closed the entrance, and come in now. The tent was pretty full, and the audience were growing impatient. He came forward to speak, and the crowd in the tent listened with attention.

"Gentlemen, this is the Bethnal Green Chicken, the champion bantam weight of—of Middlesex. He's hopes to box any gentleman who cares to come forward, anything' within a couple of stone of his own weight. The Bethnal Green Chicken has never refused a challenge, and he never will."

There was a murmur of applause.

"Any gentleman comin' forward?" asked Mr. Piper's backer genially. "It ain't possible 'ere to box for money, of course; but there's a purse lying on the seat there. It's a present for the man who can lick the Bethnal Green Chicken, and there's a sovereign in it."

There was a pause, and then a burly young drover rose up in his place.

"I reckon I'll try for that sovereign, Mr. Harker," he called out.

Mr. Harker grinned and nodded.

"Come out 'ere, then," he said.

The young drover, colouring a good deal as the general gaze was bent upon him, advanced into the glare of the naphtha lights.

Figgins gave a low whistle as he watched him.

"I rather think he's more'n two stone better than Piper," he murmured, "but I think Piper will walk over him."

"A good middle-weight, anyway," said Monty Lowther; "but he won't have much chance against Piper. That chap isn't in form for a sporting club show, but he's all right to walk over a countryman, and not half try."

The Bethnal Green Chicken seemed to be of the same opinion, for there was a grin on his face as he prepared for the contest.

The young drover stripped, and Mr. Harker took out his watch to keep time. A number of encouraging voices were heard from the audience, addressed to the bold aspirant for fistical honours.

"Go it, Willyum!"

"You'll fix him!"

"We're a-watchin' you, Willyum!"

Willyum blinked and grinned at his friends. Then he put on the gloves, with Mr. Harker's assistance, and faced his adversary in the ten-foot ring.

Burly as the young drover was, and almost as strong as a horse, he had no chance from the first against the Bethnal Green Chicken.

The Chicken, however, did not want to end the show at a blow, and he gave Willyum plenty of rope, and for a time the drover imagined that he was getting the best of the encounter.

The Chicken received a tap now and then, but he took

"TOM MERRY, SCOUT LEADER."

care not to get any hard ones, and in return he tapped Willyum in various places, on the nose and chin, and chest and neck, rather to his bewilderment.

Willyum did not seem to quite know where the blows were coming from, but the Chicken did not hurt him much, and at the end of the first round Willyum was not much damaged, save that his wind was gone.

He sat on a stool in the corner of the ring to recover himself, and was ministered to by his second, another drover. Mr. Harker was grinning at his watch.

"Time!" he called.

The Chicken stepped up to time as fresh as a daisy, and Willyum rose somewhat heavily from his stool.

"Go it, Willyum!" whispered his second encouragingly. "You're cavier and stronger than he is, and you'll fix him."

Willyum grinned rather breathlessly.

"I'm goin' to try," he said.

"That's it! Give him the upper-cut you knocked out young Josh Perkins with at Elderberry Hollow," said the second.

"That I will, George!"

And Willyum stepped up for the second round. But in the second round it was plain to even Willyum's friends that the Bethnal Green Chicken was only playing with him. He forced Willyum round the ring, tapping him here and there, and avoiding all his wild drives with perfect ease.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"I rather think Willyum is a goner," he remarked.

"Yes, rather; he won't try another round."

"Yaas, wathah! Do you know, deah boys, I should feel incined to tackle the boxah myself if it were not so beastly exhaustin', you know."

"Yes, you'd knock the Chicken out in no time—I don't think!" Monty Lowther remarked.

Arthur Augustus turned his monocle upon Lowther.

"I twust, Lowthah, that you do not considah that—"

"Hallo, there goes Willyum!"

William had sat down suddenly in the ring. He did not know why, but he had a pain in his nose. Mr. Harker began to count.

But Willyum was up at eight, continuing the fight. He had plenty of pluck, though not much knowledge of the manly art of self-defence. The upper-cut with which he had knocked out young Josh Perkins at Elderberry Hollow wasn't of much use against the Chicken from Bethnal Green.

"He's a plucked 'un, but no good," said Figgins. "What are you revolving in that mighty brain of yours, Merry? Wherefore that wrinkled brow? Are you thinking of tackling the Bantam?"

Tom Merry nodded coolly.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, that's just what I was thinking of."

Figgins whistled.

"Why not?" demanded Tom Merry warmly. "I'm just about his weight, and I'm as big as he is, or very nearly; and I can box, as you ought to know, Figgy, from the number of times I've dotted you on the nose."

"Well, I don't know, you know," said Figgins thoughtfully. "I could lick you, and I don't know that I should care to tackle that chap. So what chance will you have if you tackle him?"

"Oh, don't be funny, Figgins. I'm going to take it on, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah! But weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Don't you think I could keep my end up, Gussy?"

"I wasn't thinkin' of that, deah boy. The only question to my mind is whethah it is pewwaps below your dig."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, I think I could risk that," he said. "It will be fun, anyway, and he seems a decent chap; nothing of the bully about him. It's all moonshine about his being a champion bantam weight, but he's a good boxer, all the same, and looks as if he's had some experience in the ring. I'll tackle him."

"Good!" said Lowther. "It will be fun, anyway, and if you're knocked into little pieces, I'll plant a bunch of celery over your grave, with the inscription, 'Died of too much nerve!'"

"I wish I had brought my camera!" said Manners, with a sigh.

"Oh, that Miss Priscilla were here to see her darling boy!" murmured Digby.

Tom Merry turned red. The chipping of his comrades only made him the more determined. There was a sudden exclamation from Herries, who was watching the contest in the glare of the naphtha lights with deep and thrilling interest.

"He's done!"

Willyum was indeed done!

The end of the second round left him sitting in the sand, and at the call of time he declined to come up to the scratch.

"Go on another round, Willyum!" urged his friend.

Willyum shook his head decidedly.

"But you haven't tried on him that upper-cut which settled young Josh Perkins at Elderberry Hollow," urged George.

"I ain't going on!" said Willyum.

And he resumed his upper garments with the assistance of Mr. Harker, and returned to his place among the audience. Mr. Harker winked at the Bethnal Green Chicken, and fixed his eyes on the audience.

"Any other gent care to meet the Chicken?" he asked.

"Yes!"

It was a clear, boyish voice, as Tom Merry rose in his place.

CHAPTER 13.

Tom Merry: Boxer.

TOM MERRY calmly met the astonished gaze Mr. Harker turned on him. He coloured a little as he saw the wink exchanged between Mr. Harker and the Chicken.

"Did you speak, young sir?" said Mr. Harker, in a tone of elaborate politeness, and most of the audience turned grinning faces towards Tom Merry.

"Yes, I did," said Tom quietly. "I accept Mr. Piper's challenge."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am speaking seriously. I think somebody in this part of the country ought to stand up against a giddy Londoner, anyway," said Tom Merry. "I'm going to try."

"My friend, Mr. Piper, didn't issue his challenge to children, you know," said Mr. Harker, amid laughter. "You had better go back to the nursery, young man."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rose to his feet.

"Mr. Harkah, if that is your name, I wegard that remark as insultin' to my friend Mewwy. Leave off pullin' my jacket, Blake."

"Sit down, then, duffer!"

"I wefuse to sit down. Mr. Harkah, I think that as a gentleman you ought to withdwah that remark, and I for one insist upon Mr. Pipah meetin' my friend Tom Mewwy, or else handin' ovah the purse without a fight."

The Chicken chuckled, and Mr. Harker frowned.

"Mr. Piper ain't going to meet a boy," he said.

"Then hand ovah the purse!"

"Stuff! I tell you—Get back there!"

Tom Merry was walking towards the sanded ring. Arthur Augustus, in his excitement, followed him, putting up his eyeglass. Lowther and Manners hurried after their chum. They meant to back him up, anyway.

"Fair play!" said Tom Merry. "I appeal to the folks of Wayland," he went on, looking at the audience. "If Mr. Piper won't back up his challenge, he hands over the purse."

Mr. Piper whispered to his manager.

The latter turned to Tom Merry with a grin on his face.

"Very well," he said. "Mr. Piper agrees to knock this confoundedly cheeky kid into the middle of next week, and 'opes he will like it!"

"Hear, hear!" said the audience.

"Yaas, wathah! I think it extwemely pwob that Tom Mewwy will be knocked into the middle of next week, deah boys, but he has a wight to be knocked into the middle of next week if he likes."

"Cheese it!" said Lowther. "We're your seconds, Tom—"

"I wefuse to cheese it—"

"Get your jacket off. What price the gloves? Are they small enough?"

"We've got plenty 'ere," said Mr. Harker. "The young gentleman can choose. Chicken, you've got to put your best foot forrard this time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the Chicken.

Tom Merry stripped off jacket and vest, and rolled back his sleeves, and tied his braces round his waist. Then he slipped on the gloves and was ready.

"Go it, St. Jim's!" rose in a roar from the tent. There were plenty of St. Jim's fellows there as well as Tom Merry & Co., and they were all backing up their schoolfellow. And a great many of them had very strong faith in the powers of the champion junior athlete of the School House.

Tom Merry was very quiet and confident, though there was not a trace of boastfulness in his manner. He had accepted the challenge of Mr. Piper in a sporting spirit, to stand up for St. Jim's against a boastful stranger, and he was quite prepared for a licking if the Chicken proved the better man. At the same time, he believed that he had it within him to lick Mr. Piper.

The Chicken had made rings round the burly young drover, but Tom Merry was a scientific boxer, as hard as nails, and in the pink of condition. As a matter of fact, Tom would

have made a very respectable bantam weight for the sporting ring.

"Time!" grinned Mr. Harker.

Tom Merry stepped into the centre of the ring to meet the Chicken, and shook hands with him in his frank way. The Chicken grinned at him genially as he shook hands.

"I like pluck," he remarked. "I'll let you down easy."

Tom Merry smiled quietly.

He did not want to be let down easily. He wanted to win, and if he could not win he was ready to take his gruel.

The Chicken led off with the amusing tactics he had found successful against Willyum, the drover, and the audience looked on with glee, prepared for a laugh.

But the occasion for the laugh did not arise.

Mr. Piper found that his gentle taps were all stopped, and instead of driving Tom Merry backwards round the ring, he found the junior standing like a rock, and stopping him every time.

Mr. Piper looked surprised, and he began to take the combat more seriously. He feinted cleverly, and let out his right with force enough to sweep Tom Merry off his feet. But the feint was watched by his young adversary, and his right was knocked swinging up, and Tom Merry's right came home upon his nose with a thump.

The Chicken staggered back, more amazed than hurt.

"My at!" said Mr. Harker. "Look out!"

There was a roar from a score of youthful throats in the crowded tent.

"Bravo, St. Jim's!"

"Buck up, Merry!"

The Chicken was looking a little annoyed. His little, round eyes were glittering now. He sparred up to Tom Merry, and the junior received several taps he could not guard. Then the Chicken pressed him close, and some sharp in-fighting followed, which Tom Merry stopped by a sudden heavy body blow for which the Chicken was not prepared, which folded him up like a pocket-knife.

The Bethnal Green Chicken gasped like air escaping from a bellows, and sat down abruptly on the sand.

There was a roar from the audience.

"The Chicken's down!"

"Bravo!"

Mr. Harker stared at his friend in such blank astonishment that he forgot to count. Monty Lowther gave him an excited dig in the ribs.

"Count!" he yelled. "Count, you beggar!"

Thus reminded, Mr. Harker proceeded to count. Had he counted ten before the Chicken rose to his feet, the fight must have been awarded to Tom Merry. But at seven the Bethnal Green champion jumped up actively enough.

He was looking astonished. He was a little dazed, too. The gloves were thin enough, and every blow told. Tom Merry was looking rather red and glowing, but he was hardly touched yet.

"My word!" ejaculated the Chicken. "My word!" And he renewed the combat with great spirit. This time Tom Merry was forced to give ground, and perhaps the call of time came well for him. The first round was over. Tom Merry sat down, and Monty Lowther sponged his heated face. "Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, this is wippin'!" said D'Arcy. "I weally am beginnin' to think that you will pull it off, you know."

Some such thought was evidently in Mr. Harker's mind, for he was whispering earnestly to the Bethnal Green Chicken. Mr. Piper shook his head impatiently.

"It's all right," he growled. "Do you think I'm going to let a schoolboy walk over me, Jim Harker?"

"The fact is, Pete, he looks like a young champion himself," said Mr. Harker. "Look at his arms! Look at his action! Good condition there, my boy!"

"I'm goin' to lick him!"

"I hope you will. Time!"

The second round commenced. The Chicken looked rather ill-tempered; doubtless his friend's remarks had annoyed him. He pushed Tom Merry hard, and rather incautiously, and Tom was not an opponent with whom risks could be taken. In the middle of the round Mr. Piper found himself lying in the sand, without quite knowing how he got there.

There was a cheer from the audience. The Chicken was plainly groggy for the rest of the round, and glad of the next rest.

"My word!" said Digby. "I never saw Tom Merry shape like that before. He's in jolly good form, kids, and I fancy he will pull it off."

"Looks like it," said Fatty Wynn. "I hope he will. I suppose he will stand a feed with the sovereign?"

"Trust you to think of that," grunted Figgins.

"Well, you know, Figgins, we've been in here some time, and I've finished the chestnuts I had in my pocket, and I'm getting hungry. I do get jolly hungry at this time of the

year, and I admit it. There's a stall outside where they're selling hot sausages."

"Go out and have some, then," growled Blake, "and don't bother!"

"Oh, I'm going to stay for the finish," said Fatty, with the air of one who knew he was making a great sacrifice.

The third round was commencing in the flare of the naphtha lamps. The Chicken was looking a little uncertain now. As a matter of fact, he was not in the best of form. In the work of a travelling boxer at fairs, he seldom found an opponent tough enough to put him on his mettle, and he had allowed habits of drinking and smoking to put him quite off his form. His schoolboy adversary was younger, slighter, but "clean all through," and as hard as nails. The Chicken began to realise that he had taken a big task on his hands, and heartily wished he was out of it. He was looking for cash, not for tough fights, at Wayland Fair.

But it was impossible to back down, and he was too plucky to want to do that. He went into the third round tooth and nail. Tom Merry, in spite of his splendid defence, was driven twice round the ring, and received several hard taps on the face and chest. But towards the close of the round his turn came.

The Chicken, thinking he saw a good chance, rushed in to close quarters, hitting out with left and right, only to have Tom Merry's right come swinging round into his upper ribs with a force that sent him staggering back, and Tom's left followed him up as he staggered, catching him under the chin with an upper cut that brought a yell of delight from the audience.

"Bravo!"

The Chicken went down with a crash, looking dazed, and Mr. Harker again forgot to count, in his blank amazement. Lowther jerked at his arm, and he lifted his watch and mumbled out the numbers.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven——"

There was a buzz from the audience. The Bethnal Green Chicken had not moved!

"Eight, nine, ten!"

The Chicken made an effort, and sat down again. Mr. Harker, looking rather dazed, snapped his watch shut, and returned it to his pocket.

"The kid wins!" he said, in a tone of amazement and disgust.

There was a roar that shook the tent.

"Hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Mr. Harker helped the Chicken to his feet. Tom Merry was putting on his upper garments with the aid of his jubilant chums. Pote Piper looked at the victor in an extremely uncertain way.

"Well, you've done me," he said. "I own up. The Bethnal Green Chicken ain't afraid to own up to a fair licking. The sovereign's yours."

Tom Merry laughed, and shook his head.

"Not a bit of it," he said cheerily. "I boxed you for the fun of the thing, not for money. I shouldn't think of taking it."

"You're a gentleman, you are," said Mr. Harker, with emphasis.

"Thank you," said Tom Merry, laughing. He finished donning collar and necktie, and then stepped up to the Chicken and held out his hand in the frank way that few could resist. "Shako, Mr. Piper. It was a jolly good fight."

And Mr. Piper grinned and shook hands. He was a sportsman, too.

CHAPTER 14.

Skimpole is Interrupted.

TOM MERRY & Co. crowded out of the tent with the rest of the audience. Mr. Piper's defeat ended his show for that evening, and he was not sorry for it. Tom was the recipient of slaps on the back from all his chums, till every ounce of breath was knocked out of his body, and he began to hit out in return. Then his delighted chums moderated their transports a little.

"It was ripping," said Figgins, "really-ripping; and I must admit that a School House chap has kept our end up nobly for once."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Tom Mewwy as havin' deserved well of St. Jim's, deah boys. I could not have done bettah myself."

"Go hon, Gussy! Hallo, it's snowing!" said Monty Lowther, turning up his coat collar. "Beastly of it to snow before we were ready to go home!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wondah whethah I could buy an umbrellah here. I nevah thought of bwinging one, you know, and I am afraid my hat will be spoiled."

"Have you seen Fatty?" asked Figgins anxiously. "Where has that porpoise got to? He slipped out of the tent just before we got up."

"TOM MERRY, SCOUT LEADER."

"Look for him in the nearest grub shop!" grunted Herries.

"Bai Jove! there he is, deah boy. You were wright, Hewwies."

Fatty Wynn could be seen at a short distance. He had hurried out of the tent and made a bee-line for the stall where the hot sausages were sold. A stout old lady, who looked as if she were her own best customer, presided at the stall, with a large umbrella up against the snow. Fatty Wynn wasn't thinking of the snow. It is doubtful if he knew that it was snowing.

He was standing at the stall, with a sausage on a fork, and a grin of delightful anticipation on his face.

"Fatty! Coo-oo, Fatty!"

But Fatty Wynn did not turn his head. He blew on to the sausage to cool it, and started munching.

"We can't do better than follow his example," grinned Tom Merry. "Come on! A few sausages will do us all right, while we're looking for a place to have a solid meal."

"I am afraid it would be wathah below our dig to feed on hot sausages at a stall in the sweet, Tom Mewwy!"

"Well, you needn't have any, you know!"

The juniors hurried over to the stall. Figgins gave Fatty a slap on the shoulder that made him drop the fork and half the sausage into the snow. Fatty Wynn turned round with a howl.

"You silly ass! Oh, is it you, Figgins? What the dickens do you startle a chap for? That sausage is done in, now."

"Never mind," grinned Figgins, "there's plenty more. Hand 'em over, mother!"

The old lady handed out the sausages, and the juniors did them full justice. The weather had become extremely cold, and the cold made them hungry. The old lady was beaming when they left the stall. She hadn't had so many, and so good, customers for some time past.

The falling of the snow was rough on many of the entertainers of the fair. Most of the crowd were driven to shelter, and the shops under cover were the only ones to be patronised. Tom Merry & Co. congratulated themselves that they had had most of the fun before the snow came on.

"Must expect it this time of the year," said Tom Merry philosophically. "We shouldn't like a Christmas time without snow, you know."

"The pressing business of the present moment is to find a place where we can have a square meal," said Fatty Wynn anxiously.

"My only hat!" said Blake. "He was munching chestnuts till we came out of the tent, and since then he's eaten fifteen sausages!"

"Only eleven, Blake."

"And now he wants a square meal! Where will you put it, Fatty?"

"Oh, don't be funny. It's a serious matter. I get so hungry in this December weather, and I've had practically nothing to eat all day. Hallo! there's a jolly big crowd under that tree," said Fatty Wynn. "I wonder if they're selling any hot drinks or grub there?"

"Ha, ha, ha! It's Skimmy!"

"Bai Jove! so it is."

The huge tree at the end of the market square, although almost leafless, was thick enough to afford shelter from the lightly falling flakes of snow. Under the tree, on an up-turned tub, Herbert Skimpole stood, with about twenty curious people gathered round him, staring, and the juniors from St. Jim's hastened to join the crowd.

Skimpole, who was fairly mounted on his hobby-horse, had no eyes for them. He was embarked on the subject of Socialism.

"I repeat, my friends," he said, waving both his arms in the air. "I repeat, and I challenge contradiction, that the present system of government is entirely played out, and the nation will have to come to us in the long run for a new system."

"My hat!" said Herries, puzzled. "Does he mean St. Jim's?"

"Ha, ha! He means they will have to come to Socialism!"

"Oh, I see. I wonder if he knows what it is? I don't."

"Yes, gentlemen, and you observe that I apply the term gentlemen to you, although many of you are of a coarse and low-bred class, without sufficient mental initiative even to wear clean linen and wash your finger-nails. But do I blame you for this, my friends? No! I know it is due to the fact that you were trained amid filthy and sordid conditions. Ow!"

A cabbage-stump, hurled by someone who, perhaps, did not like being considered coarse and low-bred, even by one who was anxious to improve him, smote the amateur Socialist on the chest, and he disappeared off the tub. There was a yell of laughter from the ribald crowd.

"Exit Skimpole!" grinned Figgins.

But Skimpole was not done yet. He was up again, and

on the tub, in a twinkling, looking somewhat muddy but quite resolute.

"As a sincere Socialist, I deprecate violence in any shape or form," he said. "Our methods are the methods of persuasion. Therefore, I forgive the uninformed, stupid, brutal, densely ignorant savage who hurled that cabbage-stump, and shall not even say a word against him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nor will this ribald laughter affect me. I appeal to your brains—such brains as a rotten social system and a vicious training have left you. We aim to improve you, my dear friends, to free you from the domination of a powerful upper class, and from the still stronger domination of your own vices and self-indulgence. Do we blame you for your ignorance, your brutality? Certainly not! We—Oh!"

It was a snowball this time, and it squelched under Skimpole's chin. The crowd swayed and roared. Skimpole brushed as much of the snow out of his neck as he could.

"Really, gentlemen, I protest against this violence. It is no argument, and a sincere Socialist is always opposed to violence, especially when directed against himself. There is, at such a time, no possibility of doubting his sincerity. I, therefore—Ow! I, therefore—Oh! oh! I—Ooooooh!"

A shower of snowballs fairly knocked Skimpole off the tub, and the volley was followed up by a rush of the crowd.

Skimpole was bumped down in a sitting posture, and the tub was bonneted over his head, and so he was left. It was Tom Merry who generously lifted the tub off, and Skimpole blinked up at him dazedly.

"Wh-wh-what is it, Merry? What has happened? I trust it was not an earthquake."

"Ha, ha, ha! It was only an argument, I suppose?" said Tom Merry. "Somehow, they don't seem to like your speeches. You might be a little more factual."

"As a sincere Socialist I am bound to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Then you are booked for a high old time, I think," said Tom Merry, as he dragged the amateur Socialist to his feet. "There is such a thing as gliding gently over unpleasant facts, you know."

"It would be against my conscience—"

"For instance, how would you like anybody to tell you you were a shrieking idiot, a howling maniac, a dangerous lunatic, a frightful bore, and a fearful fathead?" asked Tom Merry. "Yet it would only be true."

"Really, Tom Merry!"

"Oh, ring off, and come and have a feed!"

Skimpole blinked as he rubbed his bruises.

"I think I had better, Merry. I do not feel quite fit for carrying on further propaganda work at present, and even a Socialist must attend to the sordid wants of the body. I am very hungry."

And ere long, Tom Merry & Co. were sitting down in a warm restaurant to a meal that even Fatty Wynn pronounced sufficiently plentiful.

CHAPTER 15.

The End of a Jolly Day.

TOM MERRY turned up the collar of his coat as he looked out into the snowy market-square. The snow was coming down more thickly, and it was evidently going to be a snowy and windy night. But little the juniors cared for that. They had had the fun of the fair that eventful day, and they did not mind a walk home of a few miles in the snow and the wind, cold as it was. There was nothing "soft" about Tom Merry & Co.

"Jolly cold!" said Wally, with a sniff. "I say, would one of you fellows mind tucking Pongo under your coat? Mine isn't big enough."

Tom Merry & Co. looked at the hero of the Third Form with glances that ought to have felled him to the ground.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I think I can see myself stufin' a hairy and dirty mongwel inside my coat. Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I don't like the idea of his walking," said Wally.

"I don't mind carrying him to the vet's for you," suggested Monty Lowther. "I'd willingly spend a bob on having him painlessly extracted."

"Yaah, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I think I can tion for that laudable purpose."

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Wally. "I suppose I must carry the brute myself. Come on, Pongo! Good old Pong! Come on!"

But Pongo refused to come. He preferred his freedom. He skipped round the juniors as they left the restaurant.

Fatty Wynn had been the last to leave the dining-table, and he had stuffed all the dessert that was not eaten into his pockets. He did not mean to suffer from hunger on the walk home to St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus glanced up and down the street with a somewhat anxious expression. Blake asked him if he had lost anything.

"No, deah boy, I haven't lost anythin'. I was lookin' for an umbwellah-shop. I am afwaid my hat will be spoiled in this snow."

"Why don't you carry it in your hand, then?"

"Oh, pway don't wot, deah boy."

"Try your strength, sir!"

The juniors stopped and looked at the speaker. He was a man in a striped jersey, with a pipe and a stubby chin. He lifted up a huge hammer and extended it to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Try your strength, sir! You takes the 'ammer in your 'ands, you know, and brings it down as 'ard as you can, and that flies up the indicator, sir, and you—"

"Go it, Gussy!"

"I weally do not feel inclined just now for feats of stwength," said the swell of St. Jim's. "Thank you vewy much, my good man, but I won't twouble to bowwow your hammah."

"Better 'ave a try, sir. It's a good exercise, and I ain't done much trade to-day, sir; the snow has spoiled it all. Only tuppence a time, sir."

"Oh, in that case I shall be vewy pleased to have a twy," said Arthur Augustus, who had a keen enough sympathy with anybody who was down on his luck. "Pway hand me the hammah."

"Ere you are, sir."

"Pway stand back, deah boys. Will you hold my hat, Digby, and without dwoppin' it in the snow, please? Pway take my cane, Blake. Stand back, deah boys."

The "deah boys" took care enough to stand back. They knew that Arthur Augustus might be dangerous when he started swinging that hammer.

D'Arcy went at it in a business-like manner. He grasped the long handle of the hammer in both hands, and swung it round, and there was a fendish yell from the man in the striped jersey.

"Oh, owl! You young willain!"

"Deah me! I am extremely sowwy I stwuck your leg with the beastly hammah, you know, and I twust I did not hurt you?"

"Ow, ow, oh!"

"Pway stand furthah back!"

And Arthur Augustus swung up the hammer and brought it down. This time he hit the mark, and the number ran up.

"Bai Jove, I weward that as wathah good, you know!"

"Rippin' good, sir!" said the hammer-merchant blandly.

"Try again, sir."

"No, I don't think I'll twy again, deah boy, as I find it wathah exhaustin', but these fellows had bettah have a twy all wound. Pway have a twy all wound, deah boys, as our friend has not done much trade to-day."

The juniors of St. Jim's had a try all round. The spirit of emulation entered into the matter, and they tried and tried again. The highest number was scored by Jack Blake, as it happened, though Tom Merry and Figgins and Kerr were only just a little lower. The cash for the repeated tries ran up to quite a figure, but the required sum was made up, and the hammer-merchant was satisfied. Then the juniors resumed their tramp towards St. Jim's. As they entered the shadowy path through the Wayland Wood two dim figures loomed up in the shadows.

"Look out!" muttered Tom Merry, recognising a familiar hooked nose.

"It's all right, young gents," said the voices of Ikey and Dodger together; and Dodger went on: "We wasn't layin' for you, sir. We wouldn't, arter the way you treated us."

"I suppose you were laying for somebody, as you call it," said Tom Merry sternly.

"We've 'ad a 'ard day," said Dodger, without answering the question. "A policeman reckernised us, and we had to bunk and leave the pitch—leave everything, sir. We're busted!"

"If we could honly git our fare back to London?" sighed Ikey.

Tom Merry hesitated for a moment. The men were a pair of ruffians, and had doubtless broken the law many a time and oft. But it was terrible to be destitute in that bitter weather, without a shelter, while the snow was falling, and the bitter December wind wailing in the trees.

"How much can you get home on?" he asked abruptly.

Dodger gave a start.

"We could do it on five bob, sir."

"What do you fellows say?"

"Yaas, wathah! Let us waise the sum for the unfortunate wotahs," said Arthur Augustus. "On condish that they give us their word of honah to go away at once, and not wot anybody in this neighbourhood."

Tom Merry grinned.

"I certainly approve of helping these victims of the present social system," said Skimpole. "If I had any money I would gladly contribute it. As I have not—"

"As you have not, ring off, old chap," said Tom Merry.

"Now then, you fellows, shell out!"

The fellows shelled out. Arthur Augustus had to owe his share, and so did Digby. Fatty Wynn was broke also. But the others made up the five shillings, which were handed to Dodger. He received them half incredulously.

"Thanky, young gents," he said, in a sober voice. "I hain't often come across the likes o' you, or maybe I wouldn't be just as I am now. You've done us a good turn, and we ain't often 'ad one done us, neither. Good-night, gentlemen, and a merry Christmas to yer."

"A merry Christmas!" repeated Ikey, through his chattering teeth.

And the two tramps disappeared. Tom Merry & Co. walked on.

"Do you think they will go?" asked Figgins, after a pause.

"I think so," said Tom Merry; "and they would pretty certainly have robbed some of the fellows coming home to-night otherwise."

"Yaas, wathah! They are on their honah now, deah boys, and I am quite certain that they will clear out."

And, as it happened, Arthur Augustus was quite right.

The juniors tramped on, and within sight of the gates of St. Jim's overtook Reilly and Kerruish, who were also walking home. Reilly was leading a dog by a string.

"Bai Jove," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "that's my dog Pwince!"

Figgins gave a yell:

"It's my dog Tray!"

"Faith, and it's jokin' ye are," said Reilly, looking round. "Sure, this is our dog; we bought it between us, didn't we, Kerruish?"

"That we did!" said Kerruish.

"A very dacent chap sold us this dog," said Reilly. "He was givin' up the business, and he sold Hector cheap because he wanted to find him a good home, and he knew we should treat him well. Kerruish and I clubbed up to buy him. We gave seven-and-six for him, and he's worth four times the money."

"Bai Jove, you know, I gave seven-and-six for him, and his name was Pwince then!"

"And I gave seven-and-six for him," shouted Figgins, "and his name was Tray!"

"And when Goah bought him his name was Fido, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Tom Merry. "That dog-merchant made a jolly good thing out of that collie before he parted with him for good!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Howly Moses!" said Reilly. "It's mistaken ye are! Anyway, this is our dog now, isn't it, Kerruish?"

"Yes, rather!" said Kerruish.

And they tramped on to the gates of St. Jim's. But at the gates Reilly's generous Irish nature prompted him, and he turned to Figgins.

"Faith, Figgins, and if ye paid for the dog, you shall have a share in him, if you like, and if Kerruish is agreeable?"

"All right," said Kerruish. "It's only fair; and Gussy, too."

"Well, it's only fair," said Figgins. "But I tell you what. I'll pay you two fellows what you gave the rascal for the dog, and he can belong to me. I bought him first, you know."

"Well, that's fair, but—"

"Hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "But whore's the dog?"

There was a howl from the various owners of the collie as they became aware that Reilly was dragging an empty dog's collar through the snow.

"He's gone!" yelled Figgins.

He was indeed gone. Prince, alias Fido, alias Tray, alias Hector, and alias probably a score of other names, had vanished.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors who did not own the dog of many names. And even the others could not help joining in the laughter.

It was the last that was seen of the collie. And so ended the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. at the Fair.

THE END.

(Another long, complete school tale of Tom Merry and Co. next Thursday, entitled "Tom Merry, Scout Leader," by Martin Clifford. Please order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

Please tell your Friends about this Story.—Ed.

BRITAIN INVADED!



A Powerful and Stirring War Story.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

The Greyfriars School Cadet Corps, commanded by Captain Sam Villiers, scout, are standing about in small groups, talking anxiously, when the clattering of hoofs is heard, and a young farmer from one of the homesteads on the cliffs comes galloping in on a sweating horse, and reins up hastily.

"The furriners are on us!" he cries. "There's a whole fleet o' tugs an' barges an' ships o' war headin' in for Frinton Gap, wi' thousands o' men aboard! They're Germans, an' they're goin' to land!"

Captain Sam Villiers was at his side in a moment.

"How far off are they?"

"Four mile out when I left, an' comin' in fast. I seed the men aboard 'em wi' my owd telescope, an' the sun glintin' on their helmets; an' I've tried to send messages at the telegraph-offices, but none can't get through. They tells me all the wires is cut. Let me go! I must push on!"

Nearly all the boys are killed or captured when the first German column attack and capture the school.

However, Sam Villiers and his brother, Steve, manage to escape and gain the Colchester garrison, who have turned out and entrenched themselves for the defence while the main forces come up.

The boy scouts tell their story to the British general, and, after a good sleep, go out and reconnoitre.

Sam Villiers Scores.

Sam Villiers is able to capture the German plans, and thus saves the British forces from a terrible defeat.

General Sir Sholto Nugent retires with his men, and manages for a time to keep the Germans in check.

Sam and Steve are sent out by Sir Sholto to find the strength and position of the Germans in Maldon. Sam is captured; but Steve manages to rescue his brother, and in their flight the two come across Ned Musset, a fisherman. They shelter in his floating home, and later on Sam, disguised, goes into Maldon, and completes his mission.

(Now go on with the Story.)

How Sam Rammed a British Warship.

The young scout reached his boat, and pulled away down the river again, no man hindering him. It was just as Astley said—the Germans did not trouble about the fishermen and townspeople. They knew they had the place safely ringed. The sentries on the bank, and one or two staff-officers at the Hythe scrutinised Sam and his boat as he passed, but none challenged him. He went straight down towards Northey.

Rowing through the narrow southern channel, Sam doubled the island, and keeping close in under the shore of it, he reached Ned's house-boat. The young fowler was away, but Stephen was there.

"Make sure of everything I tell you, Steve," said his brother; "store it in your head, an' if by chance I don't come back, go to General Nugent, and let him know the whole thing."

He told Stephen all he had learned, and the boy listened attentively. He had a memory that lost nothing, and needed to take no notes.

"But where are you goin', Sam?"

"We can't start back till night. There's one more thing I've got to do before then. You lie doggo here while I go down the river. If you have to leave by yourself, get Ned to punt you down to Goldhanger, and from there you'll have a chance to get past the German outposts and back to Nugent's camp. Don't wait for me longer than an hour after sundown."

Sam waited no longer, but borrowing the boat's mast and sail from Ned's store, he took them aboard, with some biscuits and salt bacon. He ran down the river before the freshening breeze, leaving Stephen disconsolate behind him.

"I hope that kid won't get up to any devilry while I'm away," said Sam to himself; "he's hard to hold at this game. I wonder if those ammunition ships'll come right up to Maldon with the tide, or stop and unload at Osea Island?"

The estuary widened before him as Northey and Osea were left behind, and the salt breeze hummed in the ropes of the little sail. When he had voyaged as far as Bradwell, Sam saw that Astley had been right about the blockade.

"TOM MERRY, SCOUT LEADER."

Outside, guarding the great river's mouth and the mouth of the Colne, were three long, slate-coloured cruisers and four torpedo-craft—all flying the German flag.

"Yes, there they are, the Kaiser's beastly cock-boats!" said Sam grimly. "I'd like to see the Terrible or the Magnificent come up an' make hay of 'em. But they're hundreds of miles away yet; an' if they weren't, they draw too much water to get within reach on this shallow coast. The Kaiser's got his turn now."

Taking careful note of the warships, Sam sailed to and fro close to the edge of the channel, a long way off, waiting.

As if in mockery of the armed German ships outside, there were six British ironclads moored in the channel of the estuary, and Sam passed and re-passed them. But they were old ships, dismantled, and condemned out of the Navy in 1905, sent here to be out of the way, and no more use than coal-barges, for their guns and crew had long been taken out of them. They were moored in a line, off the northern shore.

All day did Sam cruise up and down in his little sailing-boat, waiting and watching the German ships. The evening was beginning to draw in, when the smoke of steamers was seen on the seaward horizon, and three large steamships came in past the war-vessels, which they saluted as they made for the mouth of the river.

"At last!" said Sam, watching them keenly as they steamed up. "Astley was right; those are some of the store an' ammunition ships for the German Army. Oh, for a torpedo-boat, to make a dash in an' send 'em to blazes!"

He let out his sheet, and sailed right out into the deep fairway to have a close look at them.

"They'll go right up to Maldon with this tide," he said to himself. "They're broad but not deep; they don't need much water to float 'em. By gum! I'd bet a trifle they get stuck once or twice on the way. It takes an old hand to keep off the shoals in the Blackwater with big vessels like that. That foremost one's an iron ship, but the big one behind her is a light-draught wooden vessel, made into a steamer. Hallo! They're stopping!"

The steamships slowed down, and, to Sam's surprise, he saw several men on her deck pointing towards him. His first thought was that they meant to stop or capture him, that he might give no information about them.

He put his helm up, when a loud, authoritative hail reached him from the steamer's bridge, in tolerable English.

"Boat ahoy! Come alongside der steamer at once. Refuse at your peril!"

Sam asked nothing better. He ran his little craft down abreast the steamer's port side. She was low in the water, and a boathook was instantly hitched to the dinghy's bow. A big, brown-bearded man, in captain's uniform, looked down at him grimly, but it was a sharp-featured, alert, military officer who spoke.

"You vos pilot, eh, or fisherman? You know der way through der shoals of der river up to Maldon?"

"Like a book, sir, every blessed inch of 'em," said Sam, in the Essex dialect; and it was true.

"Leave your boat and come aboard instantly. You vas commandeered to take dis ship to Maldon."

Sam's heart gave a leap, but he obeyed at once, and, leaving the dinghy to float away, clambered up the side by a rope thrown him. He had no sooner heard the order than a desperate thought entered his head.

"It's worth trying," he muttered to himself; "but—but I don't like to do it unless they make me pilot by force. If they do that, it's their own look out. I'll refuse, and chance it, at first."

He found himself very soon on the bridge-deck of the steamer. She was strongly manned, and besides her scamen there was a guard of German riflemen and marines. Sam was brought before the captain and the military officer. The former looked rather doubtfully at Sam.

"I believe I'd rather take her up the river myself, sir," he said to the officer.

"You said you would be glad of a pilot," returned the officer shortly, "and it seems you have no man aboard who knows the channel thoroughly."

"It is a very difficult channel. I had expected to find one of the regular pilots or smacksmen from Mersea. There are always plenty, and we could have pressed one. Our German pilots are both disabled."

"But there are no Mersea pilots out, and if you send ashore and compel one to come, you will miss the tide," snapped the officer. "Decide instantly, sir, one way or the other."

"Very well, I will take this youth. I beg you, make him understand."

The officer turned to Sam.

"Listen to me," he said threateningly. "Yop are a prisoner of der Cherman flag, but if you obey no harm will be done to you, and you will be released at Maldon. You

vill pilot dis ship dere at once. She draw seven foot of water."

"I 'on't dew it," said Sam gruffly, "not unless you forces me."

"I do force you!" said the officer fiercely. "Go to the wheel at once, and direct the steersman."

"All right," said Sam, with a shrug of his shoulders; "you're a hundred to one agin me."

"One question," said the German grimly. "Have you read the Kaiser's proclamations ashore in your town?"

"Yes," said Sam.

"Very good. Then you know that any person impressed as guide giving false information to the commander-in-chief's troops will be summarily shot. If this steamer takes the ground on her way up, or as much as touches the mud, it will be your death-warrant!"

He turned to his lieutenant, who was standing on the lower deck in charge of the riflemen.

"Order your men to load with ball-cartridge, lieutenant," he said; and then, motioning to Sam again: "Now, get to work!"

Sam went to the wheel, which was in charge of a German quartermaster. He was not allowed to touch the helm, much to his disappointment, and the lieutenant, telling him the German words for "port" and "starboard," bade him give the quartermaster directions how to steer.

The water was wide enough, but the part that would float a deep vessel was narrow and winding, especially above Osca. The steamer started, and Sam gave his directions, pronouncing the words shockingly badly, and kept contradicting himself, till the wheel was spinning backwards and forwards, and the skipper swore savagely.

"Are you making tools of us?" cried the lieutenant angrily. "Be careful, or you will pay for it with your life!"

"It ain't no good, sir," grumbled Sam. "I can't tell this silly fool 'ow to steer, an' I can't remember them words o' yours. The channel's that narrow up above there won't be time to give no orders."

"You'll have to let him take the wheel himself," said the officer to the skipper; "he'll be putting us on the mud else."

The captain assented, still swearing, and watched while Sam took the wheel. He was easy in his mind as soon as he saw Sam steer. The boy had often taken the helm on his father's steam-yacht.

"There ain't no time to lose, or we shall miss this tide, sir," he said. "Unless your steamer can go twelve knots, you won't see Maldon till the next high water."

A bell rang in the engine-room, and the steamer leaped ahead at full speed, the others following her course astern. The captain watched Sam's steering closely; but the boy took her along with perfect ease. The three vessels rushed along up the fairway.

Though outwardly calm, Sam's heart was beating as it had never beat before. He had made his mind up, and the desperate plan that had first occurred to him was fixed upon.

"There's mighty little chance for me when I've done it," he thought; "but I mustn't think of that. It'll be a big loss to the enemy, and a big gain for Britain. I've got to brace my nerves an' do it. Steve 'll get away with his news, if I can't. Here goes!"

The Germans seemed on good terms with themselves. The captain and the officer of the riflemen were talking volubly close by, and pointing to the distant town. The ships were rapidly approaching the forlorn old British ironclads moored in the channel, and the officer of marines directed a jest and a sneer at them.

"Part of the British Navy!" he said to his companion, with a jerk of his head towards the iron hulls. "Like the British nation itself—awake and snoring, till we wake them up. Fine, useful ships, aren't they?"

"Perhaps they can do some damage yet," said Sam quietly.

As the words left his lips he suddenly spun the wheel hard over. Swerving from her course, the steamer swung sharply to starboard. A cry of warning arose. The skipper sprang forward, but before he could intervene the German ship had charged at full speed into the nearest of the old British ironclads.

There was a crash like the bursting of a thousand kitchen boilers. The thin plating of the steamer, hurled at top speed against the steel armour of the old warship, crumpled up like a paper bag, and the German vessel's bows were smashed into scrap-iron, and the water roared into her hull and bowed her broken head down bodily.

Even before she struck, Sam had sprung from the helm and cast himself overboard, among a vicious spatter of rifle-bullets. In that fraction of a second none of them hit him, and, striking downwards with all his might as he struck the water, the boy dived deep under the old warship's ram,

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and, scraping beneath it, came up on the other side, with the iron hull between him and the foundering steamer.

The shouts and curses of the Germans, the crack of blindly-fired rifles, still rang in his ears as he came to the surface. Luckily for himself, he could no longer see the steamer, and, striking out hard, kicking off his sea-boots as he swam, he made off at right angles for the northern shore, where the ooze was still uncovered by the tide, and a wide creek opened through the mud. Keeping the warship half between him and the German ship, he gained the creek and swam up it.

A glance back over his shoulder showed him the steamer, with her head right down, slowly sinking, beyond help of saving. The other two ships were standing by, taking off her crew, and a thrill of exultation ran through Sam as he pegged along desperately.

"There go the guns an' stores for the German troops!" he sputtered. "Ten thousand pounds' worth, or I'm a Dutchman! I wish I could sink the lot. By gum, am I goin' to get away with a whole skin, after all!"

He had scarcely dared cherish the idea when he did the deed. Sam had nerved himself to give his life that his country might be so greatly the gainer. But now it seemed he had a chance, in spite of all. He swam up the creek as fast as his sodden clothes would let him, and, reaching a little patch of weedy ooze, he crept behind it, and rested, flat in the shallow water, too exhausted to swim another stroke.

"Maybe they won't bother about me now," he gasped. "They've enough to think about, I reckon."

He little knew the ways of the Germans. Slow, but fatally sure, they never let a foe escape who has done them an injury, if they can be revenged. While the undamaged steamers were taking off the crew of the sinking ship, three of their boats, manned by sailors and carrying riflemen, scattered in pursuit of the swimmer, who had been lost sight of for the moment.

Sam saw the boats searching for him, rowing in and out among the hulks, cruising along by the edge of the ooze, and watching every inch of water. New hope rose in him as they failed to come his way. Then suddenly one of them turned into the creek and came rowing up it.

The boy crouched like a winged wild-duck, wishing he could get under the very ooze itself. Perhaps they would not come so far. As yet they had not seen him. He was too exhausted to move, and severe cramp attacked him.

Then one of the riflemen, standing up in the boat, caught sight of him, and shouted. The sailors bent to their oars, and made the craft fly towards the spot; and Sam, unarmed and powerless even to lift a hand in his defence, was seized roughly and dragged into the boat, amid shouts of triumph.

They flung him down on the bottom boards, and rowed swiftly back towards the steamers, two marines sitting over Sam with their rifles ready. He said no word, nor did he

pay any attention to the talk of the men as they exulted over their capture.

He lay where he was till the boat came alongside the second of the steamers—the large, wooden-built one he had noticed before. He was hauled up and dragged to her upper deck, where a knot of officials awaited him, and foremost among them was the officer of riflemen who had dealt with him on the first steamer, and who had been transhipped.

There was a moment's grim silence, and then the officer, whose face was pale with wrath, turned to Sam with a terrible look.

"Well, Britisher," he said, in a rasping voice, "you have done the deed; now you come to reap the penalty."

"You are welcome," said Sam, his eyes sparkling strangely. "Look!" he cried, pointing to the sinking steamer, that was plunging slowly to the depths as he spoke. "There go your guns, your stores, and your ship! They're past doing any harm to Britain. Shoot me, if you like, and be hanged to you!"

And snatching off his cap, that still clung to his streaming forehead, he swung it aloft, and cried at the top of his voice:

"God save the King!"

How Stephen Fired the Big Duck-Gun.

"If I've got to hang about here all day doing nothing," said Stephen desperately, "I shall absolutely go off my chump! Sam might have let me go with him."

"I reckon he knows what he's about," replied Ned of Northey. "You sit tight till he comes back, young master."

Stephen grunted. He loathed doing nothing above all things, and, with the stress and strife he knew was going on all round, it was doubly hard. When Sam had given his report of Maldon, and gone on down the river to watch for the incoming German store-ships, the younger boy was at his wits' end what to do. He poked disconsolately about the house-boat's little cabin, looking at the nets and eel-spears and guns.

"You haven't got a rifle here, have you, Ned?"

"Nay; rifles be no good to we chaps, out here among the wildfowl an' fish!"

"That's a pity!" said Stephen, with a sigh. "About the only thing I'm good for is rifle-shootin'. Though I say it, I ain't such a bad hand with a Martini or an Enfield. If you'd got a rifle, I might slide up the creek an' try to pot a German or two. Up to 800 yards I can make sure of 'em. They'd pot back at me, but that's only part of the game. I'm a bit smaller to hit, and I hear they ain't mostly good shots. I say, Ned, what's this?"

He pointed to a huge metal tube, evidently a gun, as thick at the breech as a man's arm, with a barrel nine feet long, and a little, short stock with a groove in it.

"That's my owd punt-gun," said Ned, "what I goes after duck with in the winter."

"How on earth d'you fire it? You could hardly lift it!"

"Only just. It fits on a swivel in the punt, with ropes to take the recoil, an' lies along the punt's fore-deck. It's one o' the biggest about here. Carries a pound an' a half o' shot. I've killed as many as forty duck an' widgeon with it at one shot, when they sat thick on the water."

"Call that sport?"

"I reckon it is, an' good sport, too. But we chaps shoots for the market, not for sport."

"My eye! What effect would it have if you fired it in here?"

"In here? Why, bless you, it'd blow one end o' the house-boat out! At close range, before the shot's got time to spread, the whole pound-an'-a-half flies solid. Why, that gun'd smash a hole big enough to crawl through in the church door at Maldon, if you fired it at three feet range. But, o' course, sixty or seventy yards is the distance for duck, an' it do make a sweep in 'em, I tell 'ee!"

"Hum!" said Stephen thoughtfully. "It ought to be a caution to 'em, I should think. Any sign of Sam coming back?"

They could only just see the sail of his boat in the distance when they went outside the cabin. Stephen passed an hour or more in fretful impatience, making a thorough examination of the punt-gun to keep himself occupied; but at last the tension became too great to be borne.

"I can't stand this," he said. "I shall have to borrow that old pair of field-glasses in your cabin, an' go an' do a bit of scoutin' on my own. Lend me the little punt, Ned, an' put the oars in. I'll paddle round by the south shore, an' see if I can't learn something useful about the enemy."

"If you get caught, an' Sam, too, what am I to do?" said Ned warningly. "I b'lieve I ought to stop your goin', young sir. You'll get shot!"

"Stop my going! You interfere with a King's colour-sergeant, an' see what you'll get!" said Stephen indignantly. "No, I didn't mean that, Ned, old chap! We owe



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our lives to you, an' that's a fact. But I can't sit here an' think about Sam being caught; I must go out on my own."

He stepped into the smaller of Ned's two punts, and, taking the little sculls, pulled swiftly away down the creek and out round the shore of Northey Island. Few rowing craft go faster than a light, low, Blackwater shooting-punt, and it did not take Stephen long to clear the east end of the island and glide away down towards Stangate.

Approaching the large island of Osea, Stephen lay down on the punt's floor, and sculled along gently with a single oar over the quarter, edging in towards the southern shore of the estuary. It was the glint of the setting sun on a piece of metal, away up the hillside beyond the marshes, that caught his eye.

"That's a sword or a side-arm winkin' in the sun," he said to himself. "It means there's a force of Germans up there, an' if they've got a strong position, it'll be an awkward place for our chaps to tackle when they come. I expect there'll be red war ragin' all round here by day-break, an' I doubt if the scouts know the enemy have pushed out so far south."

He focussed the field-glasses carefully. They were not very strong; but, after searching carefully along the crest of the wooded hill with them, he made out several companies of Prussian artillery, and two screened batteries of guns, which were hidden from him till he had looked very long and searchingly. There were also two companies of German mounted infantry. Stephen knew well enough what he saw, when he had found it. He had never once missed the autumn manoeuvres, and knew how guns and corps had to be placed. Now the real thing was before him, his knowledge stood him in good stead.

"Glory!" he murmured to himself, sweeping every inch of the hill-top with his glasses, "that's worth knowing! I'll bet they're patrolling the country so well on the landward side that our scouts won't be able to get through an' find out anything."

Pulling along rapidly, close to the marshes edge, he was soon round the bend, and able to strike across for Northey and Ned's houseboat, which he reached just as twilight was settling down on the great river.

"Hallo! Isn't Sam back?" exclaimed Stephen.

"No sign of him!" said Ned uncessily. "I'm glad to see you back, anyhow. I didn't expect to."

Stephen looked very grave.

"He said he'd return by sunset. It's long past that now. I was to try an' get back to Nugent's camp an hour later, if he didn't turn up."

"I expect he will," was Ned's reply. "It's a precious tight hole that Master Aubrey can't get out of. Most likely he ain't found out all he wants to, an' he's stoppin' on. You'd better give him a full hour after dark; he may be waitin' for that to get back. Look! That's what he went to see, ain't it?"

Ned pointed down the river, where, in the distance, the masts and funnels of two large steamers were seen coming very slowly up towards Northey and Maldon. Stephen jumped ashore on a knoll of the saltmarsh with his glasses.

"They're flying the German flag!" he said.

"Ay," said Ned, joining him and taking the binoculars. "they'll be taking supplies up for those blessed Kaiser's troops."

"Yes, an' ammunition," put in Stephen. "They're waitin' for this."

"I'd like to see one o' our smart little torpedo-boats, like I've seen at Harwich, run in an' send the beggars to the bottom!" said Ned between his teeth. "Guns, shells, an' all!"

"They're all up north, fightin' with the main fleet," groaned Stephen.

"That first ship—the big 'un—is a wooden 'un," said Ned, watching carefully, "an' old barge, with good engines put in her. Lots o' room in her, I'll bet, an' crammed with stuff for the rotten Dutch sodgers!"

Stephen turned suddenly on him, his eyes shining excitedly.

"Ned," he said quickly, "the gun! Your big duck-gun in the cabin!"

"Eh?" said Ned, in surprise.

"You said she'd blow down a church door at close range. Why shouldn't she run up alongside that steamer from one o' the creeks? If she were fired close at the water-line she'd sink a wooden ship, if what you say is right."

"Ay, or an iron one either!" exclaimed Ned. "D'you mean to—"

"Shove her in the punt!" cried Stephen, leaping aboard the houseboat again. "Load her!"

"Nay, you can't do it alone," ejaculated Ned, as eager as Stephen. "You don't know how to punt. We'll go together in the double-handed one. I'll paddle, and you can handle the gun. Come on, sir; we'll try it."

"You'd better let me go alone. We're pretty safe to get wiped out," said Stephen, helping vigorously to lift the great gun down from its chocks.

"Who cares for that if we can sink yonder varmint!" exclaimed the fierce marshman savagely. "Get the long ramrod there, while I charge her!"

"Put a double load in, an' chance her bursting!" said Stephen, fetching him the powder-canister.

The strong, coarse powder rattled down the coarse barrel, which was nearly two inches wide in the bore, and the charge rammed down heavily with a large wad of oakum. Then came two brimming handfuls of the largest mould-shot, covered over with a lighter wad, and then Ned primed the tube and nipple with fine powder, more carefully than he ever had for the biggest flock of wild geese afloat. His eyes gleamed as if he relished the job intensely, as indeed he did, for the old Viking blood was stirring in the marshman's veins. As they loaded the comrades glanced out at the distant masts of the steamers, which were still some way down the Channel.

"We shall be in time," said Ned. "They're crawlin' up bit by bit, feelin' their way. Looks as if they hadn't got pilots. We'll pilot some of 'em out o' the world to-night, even if we follow 'em ourselves. Bear a hand to ship the gun."

They carried the big weapon out between them, and fitted it on its swivel in the forepart of Ned's double-handed punt. Two thick hemp ropes, running from the vessel's stern, were passed through a deep slot in the gun's short stock, and the barrel lay along the little fore-deck, resting on a chock. Gun, punt, and all were only a few inches above the level of the water.

Ned placed a cap on the nipple, and laid an oilskin cover over to keep it dry. Stephen lay flat down in the punt, his hand on the short stock of the gun, and his eye looking along the barrel. Ned lay prone behind him, with only one hand showing above the level of the punt's side, sculling quietly with a single oar over the quarter, for the craft was too broad a one to paddle on either side.

The dusk had given place to darkness, and the leading steamer was now within a few hundred yards of the creek, steaming dead slow, for fear of running on the flooded mud-banks, and the second was another two hundred yards behind her. The dark bulk of the leader was the one the boys fixed their eyes on, and they waited eagerly for her to come abreast the mouth of the creek they lay in.

Would the punt be seen before she could get close enough? All depended on that. Almost up to the last she would be hidden by the shores of the creek. It was a game of chance, a tiny power striking against a great one.

"They may finish us," said Stephen grimly, "but it'll be worth while. We ain't worth so much to the country as it would be to have that shipload sunk. Can we start now, Ned?"

"In a brace of shakes!" was the reply. "Do you keep low behind the wash-strokes, an' don't move a finger till the time comes to pull. Five or six feet'll be the best range. I'll put you on her sideways if I can, then you'll get a rakin' shot."

For a few seconds they waited, and the punt began to glide gently down the creek. The tide was not yet up, and the long grey craft was shielded by the banks of ooze

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through which the creek ran. Down she went, almost to the mouth.

The leading steamer came gently onwards, the slow throb of her screw the only sound she made, and her dark hulk looming through the night like some great ghost of the waters. Her bows became visible opposite the creek's mouth.

"Now!" whispered Ned. And the punt shot out into the open water with a lunging roll, as the young marshman vigorously plied his single scull.

Stephen's heart seemed to stand still in his breast. Every moment he expected the cry of warning from the vessel's decks, and the hail of lead from a dozen rifles directed at the inmates of the little craft.

But the great ship seemed asleep. So grey and invisible and low was the punt, and so noiseless her progress, with the crew of two lying flat in her, that she shot across the intervening water unseen. Stephen had one hand on the gun-stock, and another on the chain fixed to the trigger. The great hammer was cocked.

The steamer's side seemed to rise up before them like a great black wall. The distance lessened to thirty feet—twenty—ten.

Then came a sharp, harsh cry from the deck above them, as a helmeted head looked over the steamer's bulwarks, and as it fell on his ears Stephen pulled the trigger.

How Sam Leaped for his Life.

The result was appalling. There was a roar and a flash of flame as the big duck-gun belched its contents into the steamer's side, tearing a hole a yard square right on the water-line.

But immediately after the report, with the fraction of a second between, came a second explosion in the ship itself—a crash that shook the vessel as if she were a canoe, and heeled her bodily over for a moment, showing a fearful rent in her side, with a sudden sheet of flame that lit the whole river.

Ned and Stephen flung their arms before their faces, blinded and half stunned, feeling as if they had been struck by a battering-ram. They were dimly conscious of a wild shouting on the vessel above them, and a sudden sputter of bullets around them and through the punt as she shot backwards by the recoil of her own gun.

Ned caught his breath as a slip of lead drilled him through the arm, but the rifle-shooting was but one hurried volley of snapshots, chiefly before the explosion. The steamer rolled back again towards them, with a roar of water rushing into the huge gap in her side.

"Back! Pull back for the creek!" gasped Stephen. He was amazed to find himself alive, and had he known, it was only the panic aboard the German ship that saved him for the moment. Cries and shouts came from every part of her as she rapidly settled, and shots were fired from her blindly all over the river. The one thing her guard seemed unable to see was the almost invisible destroyer just below her that had struck the deadly blow.

It all came about in as many seconds as it takes to stride across a room, and the echoes of the crash had hardly given way to confusion and shoutings on her riven decks, when something came hurtling through the air, and plunged down not three yards from the punt, which was already darting away, as Ned bent to the oars the moment he recovered himself from the shock of the explosion.

"Pull! There's somebody jumped in after us!" gasped Stephen, wondering who was foolish enough to do such a thing. "Give me the eel-spear!"

He seized it, ready to defend himself if the assailant tried to board, when the white face of the man who had jumped in came to the surface a little distance away, and Stephen's heart leaped to his throat.

"Sam!" he cried. "Good heavens! Ned—Ned, pull round!"

In a couple of seconds the punt was alongside the swimmer, who seemed in great difficulties; and as Stephen hauled him bodily inboard, Ned dashed away for the mouth of the creek again, and gained it, just as two boats were lowered swiftly from the sinking steamer.

"You, Steve?" gasped Sam, for it was he. Words failed him, and he could say no more. And as for Stephen, the discovery gave him a bigger shock than the explosion. How his brother came there he had no notion, but as he hauled him aboard he saw Sam's wrists were fettered with irons.

"Lie low, you two! Crouch!" whispered Ned, who was the coolest of the three. "If they find us now they've got us. Don't make a sound!"

He stretched himself out in the punt, and poled her along swiftly with one oar, threading his way up the narrow creek. The turn of it already hid them from the main river and the steamer. The two brothers lay quiet.

"Did they see where we went, Ned?" whispered Stephen. "Dunno. Don't think so. They're too full o' their own troubles. But don't talk."

Sam seemed beyond speech. The punt wormed her way up to where the houseboat lay, and Stephen helped his brother aboard.

"If they row up the creek after us we'll have to hide ourselves on the island," said Ned. "I know a place. You look after Sam while I keep watch. He's near done. There's some Hollands in the locker under my bunk."

Neither of the boys touched spirits, but at such times they are necessary as a medicine, for Sam was all but unconscious. His brother unearthed Ned's store of smuggled Hollands, and a drain of the raw spirit scorched Sam's throat, but brought the blood back to his lips and revived him.

"Great Scott, Sam! How did you get aboard the steamer?" was the first thing Stephen said.

"Knock off these infernal things first," replied Sam, holding out his manacled wrists.

Stephen hunted for Ned's hammer and a chisel, and after some trouble he managed to rid his brother of the irons. Outside, Ned watched the creek cautiously, creeping down along the bank.

"First of all, how in the world did you manage this business, Steve?" said Sam, who was now nearly himself again, though still very pale. "Was it you who sunk the steamer? Tell me—"

"There's nothing much to tell," said Stephen. "We punted down an' shot a hole in her with Ned's big duck-gun. It came off even better than we expected, because it exploded one of her magazines of shells or something—"

"I should think it did!" exclaimed Sam.

"It's lucky we were lying down flat, or we should have been spificated. The explosion blew about a hundredweight of wood an' stuff over our heads, but, barrin' the shock, it didn't harm us. We'd quite expected to be smashed up. Ned," he called, as the young marshman looked in at the door, "any signs of 'em?"

"No," was the reply. "I can't make out how they've missed us, though. Lie low a bit; they may find us yet."

"In the Ranks,"

A Tale of Army Life in Peace and War, is in

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.

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The steamer's sunk—gone to the bottom. We got the beggars all right, whatever happens to us!"

"Well done!" exclaimed Sam, with fierce glee. "By gum, what a day for the old country! That's two of the Kaiser's transports in one day!"

"Two!" said Stephen.

"Yes. I met 'em down below, off Bradwell. There were three, an' the leading one pressed me into service for a pilot. I took the job on, as they made me do it at the gun's muzzle; but I'm afraid I didn't please 'em, for I had an unfortunate accident," said Sam, with a wink. "I rammed one of the old ironclad hulks down there, an' the steamer bein' too weak to stand it, she sunk. I jumped overboard an' swam for it, hiding behind a mud-bank; but a boat's crew caught me an' took me back aboard the second steamer—the one you've just tickled up with Ned's duck-gun!"

"By gum! I see!" said Stephen. "I say, what luck we've had! An' what nerve, for you to ram their steamer with 'em all round you! I wouldn't have done that for—"

"It's no more than you did here with Ned," interrupted his brother. "An ammunition transport's a big prize, an' worth takin' a risk for. Well, they took me aboard, an' the officer in charge of the ship I'd sunk wanted to have me shot on the spot."

"Gosh! What then?"

"I reckoned there was no chance for me, so I told him to go to blazes! But there was a senior officer on the big steamer, who decided I must be taken before Colonel Blitz, at Maldon, who'd have a use for me before I was shot. Then I was to be wiped off comfortably by a firing-party outside the colonel's quarters in public, as an example to the citizens of Maldon. So I was ordered to be taken below an' put in irons, with a sentry over me, an' I heard the two ships start off again. I'd given myself up for lost, of course, for it didn't seem there was any earthly chance of my escapin'. So I just sat where I was, an' tried to grin an' bear it, knowing nothing of what was going on on deck till I suddenly heard some shots and an explosion, an' then a second one, that fairly hoisted the heart out of the ship. You mayn't know it, but that explosion shot right up, an' blew through part of the decks, an' the passage of it was

only just clear of the lamp-room where they'd put me. A few feet more, an' you'd have wiped me out without ever knowing it.

"It knocked any sentry spinnin', an', seein' what confusion the ship was in, I took the chance while I could get it, an' bunked up on deck like anything. Luckily, they hadn't fettered my legs, not having any ankle-irons handy. I just reached the deck, an' chucked myself overboard without askin' any questions.

"Nobody was troubling about me. They'd all got troubles enough of their own, for the ship was goin' down fast, an' the explosion had mopped a lot of the crew up. I never really expected to get away alive with those irons weighing me down. I got a blow over the head goin' up the companion-way, an', of course, I couldn't use my hands. The next thing I know, was you haulin' me into the punt."

There was a long pause as Sam finished. The same thing occurred to both the boys, for they saw in the narrow escapes they had both had in the service of their country, the guidance of a Power before whom both Britain and Germany were no more than reeds shaken by the wind.

"I don't think it is a time to talk of 'luck,' Sam," said Stephen soberly. "I think we might go on our knees for a spell, and give thanks where it's due."

"Yes," said his brother quietly, "and to pray for His blessing on the arms of the old country, and that this nation that's brought blood and fire among us, may be driven back into the sea. Come here alongside me, Steve. We don't know how soon we may be called up before our Judge."

Dead silence fell on the dark cabin as the boys sank to their knees.

When the brothers rose, Ned came quietly in, and reported that the last of the three German steamers had picked up the boats of the other, and steamed on up to Maldon.

"They ain't searchin' for us," he said; "they haven't even entered the creek. Blessed if I can understand it."

"I can tell you," said Sam. "They knew nothing about your punt—they don't know such things exist. They thought their ship had struck a floating mine. I heard the skipper shouting it out when I scuttled up on deck."

"But some of them saw us an' shot at us, just as I pulled the trigger," objected Stephen.

"Those were the riflemen, an' they probably got wiped out when the magazine exploded. Anyway, they couldn't spare a boat to search for anything to-night. It was all they could do to save their own men."

Sam spoke thickly, and his head drooped even as he uttered the words. While telling Stephen what had happened off Bradwell, he had taken off his sopping longshore clothes, towelled himself down, and donned his uniform again. But now the strain and stress of the past twenty-four hours overcame him. Flesh and blood could stand no more. Stephen was nearly as exhausted at his brother, and was dropping asleep where he sat.

"I tell you what it is, it's a sheer impossibility for us to get on till we've had a rest," muttered Sam. "We should get caught for a certainty tryin' to get through the German lines when we can hardly stir a foot, an' we musn't let that happen. We've got to get four hours' sleep, an' start soon after midnight, so as to pass the lines before dawn."

"I'll keep watch," said Ned. "I ain't had half the work you have, an' I'm used to bein' up all night. You turn in, an' I'll have some grub ready against your start."

The boys were fast asleep before Ned had even finished speaking, and the young marshman, leaving them where they were, went out in the smaller punt to reconnoitre and watch. He found nothing to disturb him, and at about half-past twelve he returned and awakened the brothers. They woke greatly refreshed, though still stiff and sore; but both of them had the gift of being able to do with a short allowance of sleep, and after falling to on some cold boiled bacon and bread that Ned provided, announced themselves fit for anything.

"Now, look here, Ned," said Sam. "You've got to clear out of here, too. We can't leave you alone to face the music. When the day breaks there'll be German boats hunting every inch of the river and marshes for miles around in search of the Britisher who sunk their steamer. They can't do it in the dark, for they don't know the marshes and creeks well enough. So many of 'em are bound to find you and your houseboat an' your punt and gun, and they'll give you short shrift."

"That's so," said Ned; "but what am I to do? Come with you? I'd like that fine."

"And I'd like to have you, Ned, but that won't do. Three of us is too many to be scoutin' through the German lines, an' I know you don't know your way about much once you're off your native marshes. Ain't that so? I want you to go the other way, from the southern shore, an' strike away south an' west to my people's place—Cotehall Towers,

ten miles from here. You know where it is—you came home with me once. Go there, an' you'll be right. My people will look after you, and you must tell them Steve and I are flourishing, and that they needn't worry about us, because we'll be safe with General Nugent before you get home, and that we'll see 'em soon. See?"

"All right; if I've got to leave the Blackwater, I'll go there," said Ned, "though I want another slap at the Germans, soon. What shall I tell your mother, Master Aubrey?"

"Give her our love, an' say we've been playing at soldiers, but we're quite safe now. You must be careful how you tell her, Ned. I particularly want you to take the news, because the folks don't know where we are, an' they'll be in a stew about us. I'll be glad to have you there, because you're a good chap, an' if anything happens you'll be useful. But Cotehall's well out of reach of the fighting, an' there's no danger."

"Right-ho, sir," said Ned, rather gloomily, for the prospect of being well out of the fighting did not seem to please him.

"You won't have any difficulty in getting away to the south," said Sam, as they hurriedly made the punts ready and embarked. "If you go down towards Bradwell before you land, you won't find any Germans to speak of. It's on the north bank they're swarmin', an' we shall have a dickens of a job gettin' through; but we've got to do it, so let's be off. Good-bye, Ned, old chap. We sha'n't forget we owe you our lives, an' we hope to pay the score before long."

"There's nowt I wouldn't do for you an' Master Steve," said the young marshman earnestly, as he gripped the hands of the boys; and a few moments later both punts were gliding swiftly down the creek.

Ned, in the smaller one, soon struck away to the southward, and was lost to sight. The two brothers, in the double punt, shaped their course over towards Osea Island, keeping a sharp look-out on their way. The tide was now well over the flats, and they were soon far out of the channel where ships could pass, and pulled through the shallow water towards the northern shore.

"Hope Ned'll get through all right," muttered Sam.

"He ain't so much of a hand on dry land."

"He will if he goes down far enough before landing," answered Stephen. "The Germans have pushed out a biggish force as far as Mundon, and planted themselves there."

He forthwith told his brother about the scouting expedition in the punt, which had been almost forgotten in the later excitements.

"Jove! That's useful, Steve!" said Sam. "Two batteries, did you say, an' screened on Mundon Hill? The Staff'll be glad of the news. By gum, we've got a rare fat budget for General Nugent! Now quit talking, old boy, for we've got to make our landing pretty soon."

They rowed right into the saltings near Goldhanger, and skirted along them for some distance, going seaward all the time. Outside by the bar, they could see the searchlights of the German warships, marching in great pencils of light over the sea and estuary; but the boys, close inshore, were out of their range, and stole along safely in the darkness.

Three times they saw the groups of the outposts, and along the sea-wall the sentries were pacing, as the British coastguards used to pace before the invasion. Now the coastguards were prisoners, or shot, or called away—those that had escaped—to join the reserve ships of the Navy, and their place was taken by armed soldiers of the Kaiser.

The punt crept along till she reached Thurslet Creek, where she turned in and headed straight for the shore. A sentry paced past and disappeared into the darkness. As soon as he had gone, Sam drove the punt right up to the embankment—for the tide was still high—and both boys stepped quietly out. Sam sent the punt out again with a shove, and let it drift where it chose with the tide, for he did not want it to remain and advertise their landing-place.

The sentry returned, and the brothers crouched among the thorn-bushes that grew at the foot of the wall. Up came the man, his big ammunition-boots crunching on the dry clay of the wall, and he stopped dead within six feet of Stephen.

It was not the boys who attracted his attention—he did not see them. It was the empty punt, now drifting slowly along on the ebb-tide some fifty yards from shore, that caught his eye. He stared at her suspiciously, and then, with a guttural exclamation, strode down on to the saltings to get a better look at her.

The boys seized their chance and darted over the wall the moment he left it. They jumped the dyke on its landward side, and hurried away across the marshes. These were soon crossed, and they reached the cover of the hedges and uplands beyond.

"The day's breaking fast," said Sam, for the stars had

"TOM MERRY, SCOUT LEADER."

grown pale, and the east was lightening every moment; “we’ve got to hurry. Keep a sharp look-out.”

Tollesbury village lay to their right and they gave it a wide berth, knowing it was sure to be occupied by Germans. It was not long before, taking a careful outlook from a small hilltop on their way, they found there was another line of pickets ahead of them.

“We’ve got to pass those, an’ then we ought to be clear of the lot,” said Stephen. “Let’s creep down by the side of the copse there.”

Keeping close by the edge of a little wood, they gave the go-by to a picket that was posted on the other side, when suddenly Stephen put his hand on Sam’s arm, and both halted. A little way ahead of them was a German infantryman, lying face downwards in the long grass, evidently fast asleep, his rifle by his side.

“My eye!” whispered Stephen. “That’s a pretty sort of sentry, eh? They don’t stand this sort o’ thing in the Kaiser’s army. He’ll be shot for it if he’s found.”

“It’s hard luck,” breathed Sam; “but we’re not his colonel. Move out to the right an’ get round him quietly.”

Sam made a wide detour, only anxious to get back to camp with his report; but the younger boy, who had not yet learned caution for all Sam’s teaching, tip-toed gently up to the sleeping man, and, bending down, picked up the rifle and stole away with it, a triumphant smile on his face, as though he had played a successful trick on some dormitory chum at Greyfriars.

“You silly young ass!” whispered Sam with a frown, as they met again at the end of the wood. “Why risk the whole affair for nothing? An’ what’s the good of that thing? Put it down. It’ll only get in your way if we have to run.”

“I never feel comfortable without a rifle,” returned Stephen cheerfully. “It’s a nice little weapon this—a repeater, an’ the magazine’s loaded right up, too. Wish I knew how many shots it holds. I’ve never seen this make.”

Sam said no more, but led the way on through the next two fields. The boys were congratulating themselves on having passed the second line and being clear of all danger. They little thought, after all the care they had taken, that an accident would bring their plans to nothing.

A harsh shout suddenly rang out from a knoll away to the left, and a shot was fired. A German scout, suddenly appearing there, caught sight of the boys, and knowing their uniforms were British, at once gave the alarm.

“Bunk for it!” said Sam desperately. “Only our legs can save us now!”

They took to their heels and flew like the wind, Stephen refusing to throw away his captured rifle. He stuck to it like glue. A party of Prussian riflemen, coming quickly to where the scout had first seen them, rushed after the boys in full cry.

Sam did not lose his nerve, hopeless as the case seemed.

He led the way through a spinney, down into a farmyard and out on the other side, where he was lost to the view of his assailants for a moment. Doubling quickly back towards Tollesbury, he threw the pursuers completely off the scent, and they went rushing off in the wrong direction. The boys were forced to take to the open again, but they put a long distance between themselves and the danger-zone, till presently a couple of solitary infantrymen, well apart from each other, saw them and gave chase.

“Separate! Strike away to the right!” said Sam. “If we can shake these two beggars off we may do ‘em yet.”

The brothers dashed off in different directions, and Stephen was soon lost to Sam’s sight, one of the Germans panting after him a long way to the rear, shouting, and snapping off his rifle. The other followed Sam, who led him right away across the open towards a rushy marsh, beyond which he knew lay safety.

“If I can lead him across that—or half-way—the game’s mine!” thought Sam.

The pursuer was running like a deer, gaining slightly, for Sam was weary and winded. The German showed little enough sense, for instead of halting and trying to make sure of his victim with the rifle, he stopped to take a couple of hurried shots that went wide of the mark, rushed on, stopped and fired again, by which time Sam had reached the marsh itself.

He had often passed over it before, and knew how deep and rotten was the ground, for it was undrained. The only foothold was on the tussocks of sedge, and Sam went bounding from one to another of these as actively as a chamois; the ground quaking around him, while the bullets came whistling about his ears.

Suddenly his foot slipped, and the rotten edge of a tussock gave way under him. The next moment he was floundering helplessly in the soft quagmire, sinking rapidly, and the German, with a shout of triumph, fixed his bayonet and came cautiously out towards him, stepping with great care from tussock to tussock.

Sam struggled desperately to regain his feet, but it was useless. He sank in the half-liquid mud till he was engulfed to the shoulders, and the German, slowly and steadily, plodded out towards him, a grim, exulting look on his heavy face; nor did he stop till he stood, braced on the tussocks, right over the helpless boy.

“Donnerwetten!” cried the German, with a sudden flash of recognition. “It’s the young demon of a scout who escaped from the tent on Tiptree Heath! Teufel, but I’m in luck! This will win me my stripes!”

“It would win you a broken neck, you sweep, if I were out of this and had my hands free!” panted Sam in German. “You can do your worst. I don’t surrender to you!”

“Surrender? Tausand teufels, I shall not give you the chance!” sneered the rifleman. “I shall make sure of you, verfluchte Engländer, and save the firing-party the trouble!”

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You are wanted by Herr Colonel Blitz, dead or alive, and two steps in rank for the man that takes you!"

With an ugly grin the man gripped his rifle and swung it up to send the glittering bayonet through the young scout's breast with one quick drive.

Steve's Bull's Eye!

Sunk to his shoulder, imprisoned in the grip of the ooze. Sam saw the bayonet flash above him as the rifeman raised it to strike. He saw the ugly grin on the man's face, and the eyes fixed on his. Looking defiantly back at his assailant, rather than flinch before a German, he steeled himself to meet his death.

It was only the fraction of a second that that cruel, three-edged blade hung above him, but it seemed like an age. Then, quite suddenly, the Prussian gave a strange, choking cry, his eyes seemed to start from his head, and he pitched forward on his face—a limp, quivering heap. The distant crack of a rifle, from some unseen spot, came down the breeze.

Sam, unable to move in the cold slough, stared blankly at the fallen figure. He could hardly realise what had happened. The German's helmet had rolled off, his face was buried in the soft mud within a foot of Sam, and the life was leaving the quivering form. The weapon had flown out of his hands and was sticking, bayonet downwards, in the mud a yard away. Only one thing Sam could tell at that moment—he was saved from what had seemed certain death.

Out of the distance, from a clump of low, blackthorn bushes, a figure came running towards him as fast as it could travel. It was Stephen, a German rifle in his hand, from the muzzle of which a tiny wreath of white powder smoke was curling. He sprinted across the open grassland till he came to the marsh.

"Sam—Sam!" he called. "Hold up, old boy; I'm coming!"

He bounded actively from tussock to tussock, without a false step, and in twenty seconds, panting from the exertions, had reached his brother. Taking a firm foothold on a couple of tussocks, he grasped his rifle with both hands wide apart, holding it horizontally, and bent down over Sam.

"Catch hold!" he cried. "And hang on like blazes!" Sam gripped the rifle, and struggled hard to raise himself, while Stephen heaved upwards with all his might. The exertion was tremendous—the ooze seemed to hold like glue—and the perspiration started out on the foreheads of both the boys. But the hold gave, for Sam started to come upwards, and, once started, he came quickly. Wet, and daubed with black mud, he was hauled out and got his foothold on the tussocks.

"There they come!" exclaimed Stephen, glancing back to the distant hillside, where eight or ten soldiers in the detested uniform suddenly broke over the crest and sighted the boys. "Can you run for it, Sam?"

"Got to!" panted his brother; and both of them started away across the tussocks, leaping from one to the other. Sam did not slip this time, and, blown as he was, he kept up with his brother, who still retained the rifle.

They had thrown the bulk of their foes so thoroughly off the scent that when Sam's single pursuer was disposed of there was nobody in sight, and Stephen had just time to rescue his brother unmolested. But with the whole countryside up and after them, they could not expect to remain unseen in the open for long, and now the men of the German outposts were in full view once more.

The bullets began to whistle past them as Sam and Stephen took to their heels, but the two boys, bounding up and down over the tussocks, made bad marks to aim at, and, barring a single leaden messenger that drilled Stephen's sleeve and seared his skin, the rest

of the shots merely sent the mud flying around them in vicious spurts. They were under fire but a very short time rapidly leaving the marsh behind and gaining the rough cover of alder-copses beyond, into which they disappeared.

"They'll take twice as long to get across the marshes even if they don't get bagged!" panted Stephen. "What's wrong?" he added, seeing Sam's anxious glance to the westward as they dashed into shelter.

"Mounted scouts!" was Sam's reply, and Stephen caught sight of three uniformed horsemen galloping along the dry ground away to the left of the marsh.

"Did they see us go in here?"

"The others'll soon let 'em know, if they didn't. If we don't get out of here in two jiffs, an' give 'em the go-by, our lives ain't worth a rotten apple," said Sam, as he ran. "But, after the luck we've had, I don't believe we're to be nabbed, after all!"

"Where are we making for?"

"The old fox-earths in Silver's Wood." Sam bore away sharp to the right, reached the edge of the alder-copse, took a quick look up and down, and led the way in a quick dash across the open to the next spinney, a few hundred yards distant. Reaching this, they went the whole way along it, and then gained another one farther on. When they reached the big wood, which, but for Sam's careful look-out and sharp doublings they would never have reached alive—for German searchers were everywhere—the boys made their way to a couple of half-hidden openings in the gravelly soil of a small clearing.

The larger of these was big enough for a man to squeeze into, for it had been much widened when the East Essex Hunt dug out a fox some months before, and the boys, who had ridden with the pack on that occasion, knew it well.

"In with you, quick!" whispered Sam, catching sight of a spiked helmet moving through the trees not far off.

Stephen threw himself down and wriggled backwards into the burrow, Sam following the moment he was able. It was a tight fit, but Sam had tried it before, and knew the earth widened out into quite a comfortable little cave at the far end, the burrow curving round. They reached the end and lay there, scarcely breathing, in the darkness, for the sound of heavy bodies crashing through the brambles, and feet treading ponderously, came from outside.

"Clumsy sweeps!" muttered Sam under his breath. "They make enough rōw for a herd of cattle. That's what they call scoutin'!"

The footsteps halted at the burrow, and the boys wondered grimly whether their retreat down the fox-earth had been seen. Evidently the pursuer was listening at the mouth. Then came a deafening bang as a rifle was fired down the hole, the bullet burying itself in the curve of the tunnel, and, a little later, the footsteps were heard departing.

"That's rather kiddish," said Stephen in a whisper. "I s'pose he did it to make sure of us if we were in here. Didn't fancy crawling in to see. It shows we weren't seen mounted guard and called up his beastly pals. I say, it's a good thing old pa fox ain't at home—eh? How long are we to stop here?"

"Till they've cleared right out. They'll think we've bolted on towards the British lines, an' they'll push on after us. When they've got well away we'll slide out, an' it won't take us long to get to camp."


"They're taking a lot of trouble over us."

"We're badly wanted," murmured Sam grimly. "They know we're the two who're givin' 'em a goodish bit of trouble, an' that beggar who was goin' to bayonet me said there was a rise in rank for any man who brought us in, dead or alive. My aunt; but I thought I was a goner then! How the dickens did you manage it, old boy? I didn't know you were even within sight!"

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Now, I cannot do better than wish you all a MERRY time at Christmas, and remind you that if you want more to read than is provided in this book, to get the Christmas Double Number of "The Marvel." Out this week.

The EDITOR.

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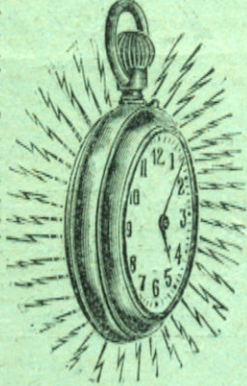
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