



Grand Long Complete Tale. A Tale of the Terrible Three. by MARTIN Clifford.

ST JAMES' COLLEGE RYLCOMBE
St. James' School House
June 20th 10

Dear Father
I am extremely sorry to say that the fun is all gone. I took your advice, for which I am very grateful, and made it last as long as possible. If you would be kind enough to send me another piece I will do the same again. Please tell Ethel not to write.

Dear Dad, would you mind letting me have the fun by return of post. I am in debt at the time. I don't know how I can get the money. I am not thinking of any more. I have always done my best to get to be a debt and I don't love to do it.

Arthur Augustus Billings

ST JAMES' COLLEGE RYLCOMBE
St. James' School House
June 20th 10

Dear Father, I have not received the fun as you said that my letters have miscarried. Shall I suggest at the Post-office about them as will you communicate with Post master General? Affectionately Arthur Augustus Billings

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St. James' School House
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Arthur Augustus



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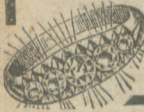
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A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.,
By **MARTIN CLIFFORD**

CHAPTER I.
The Problem.

SUPPOSE—" "
"Eh?" "
"Suppose—" "
"Well?" "
"Suppose—" "

For the third time Arthur Augustus D'Arcy paused. Tom Merry and Jack Blake were sitting on the back of a bench under the elms in front of the School House at St. Jim's, swinging their legs. Blake was in flannels, with a cricket cap, and Tom Merry had a straw hat on the back of his head. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was dressed with his usual elegance, and his silk hat glistened in the sun, as did his diamond stud and his gold-rimmed monocle.

He stood before the two juniors with an extremely thoughtful expression on his face. Tom Merry and Blake had been talking cricket when he came up, but they politely bestowed their attention upon D'Arcy when he began to speak.

But the swell of St. Jim's did not seem quite able to get his sentence out.

"Suppose—" he began, for the fourth time.

Tom Merry grinned.

"I'm quite ready to suppose, if you like," he assented. "But what shall I suppose?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" "
"Suppose Gussy is an ass!" observed Blake. "Suppose he is a chump—a gilt-edged, double-action, non-skidding chump!"

"Weally, Blake—" "
"Suppose—" "
"I was goin' to remark—" "

"Well, go ahead!"

"Suppose—" began D'Arcy.

Then he paused once more.

Blake looked at Tom Merry, and tapped his forehead significantly.

"Fairly off it!" he murmured.

And Tom Merry nodded.

"Poor old Gussy! I suppose what he means to say is, suppose we have a whip-round to buy him a strait waistcoat," he remarked.

"Nothin' of the sort, Tom Mewwy. I was goin' to say, I am in a wathiah awkward posish, and suppose—" "

"Oh, get on with the washing!" said Blake. "Our supposers are in perfect working order, and we'll suppose anything you like. I can't say fairer than that."

D'Arcy paused for a moment. There was evidently some difficulty in getting out the statement he wanted to make.

"You see, I am in a beastly awkward posish," he said.

"I am short of money—" "

"How odd!" said Tom Merry.

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No. 127 (New Series.)

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"Never mind, Gussy!" said Blake consolingly. "I've been short of tin before, and lived to tell the tale. It's a thing you can live down."

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake! I was goin' to say, I want you fellows to advise me, but pway do not wot. It's a wathah sewious mattah."

"Go ahead, old son!" said Tom Merry, giving his straw hat another push back, which brought it dangerously near toppling off altogether. "What's the trouble? Not in love again, I hope?"

"Pway don't be an ass. Suppose——"

Another pause.

"Do you think you could get it out if I patted you on the back?" asked Blake, with great sympathy.

"Suppose a chap's governah wufused to play the game?" said Arthur Augustus, getting it out at last. "What would you fellows do?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to laugh at. It's a beastly awkward posish. Suppose a chap's governah wufuses to play the game, what is a chap to do? I wegard it as a sewious problem!"

Tom Merry and Blake assumed expressions of great gravity. D'Arcy was evidently in earnest, and required them to take his problem seriously, and they did their best not to grin.

"What would you fellows advise a chap to do?" said D'Arcy, jamming his monocle into his eye, and surveying Tom Merry and Blake through it. "Suppose a chap's governah wufuses to play the game——"

"That depends," said Tom Merry, with almost preternatural gravity. "We must know the circumstances. Whose governah are you talking about?"

"My governah."

"He wufuses to play the game?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, it looks to me as if you haven't brought him up properly," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "In that case, the fault lies with you."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Did you care for him in his early years?" asked Tom. "Did you watch over his boyhood with a loving eye? Did you train him in the way he should go——"

"I wegard you as an ass, Tom Mewwy!"

"Quite right!" said Blake. "He is an ass! But what has your governah been doing, Gussy? We ought to know the offence before we pass the sentence."

"Yaas, that's wight enough! I am short of money——"

"I believe I've heard you make a remark to that effect before," Tom Merry observed.

"Pway don't intewwupt me. This is how the mattah stands. I have an allowance from my governah, and I always get through it before the week is half out."

"Either the week is too long or the allowance is too short," said Blake. "I don't see how we can have the week altered, so it will have to be the allowance that is set right."

"Exactly!" assented Tom Merry.

"Well, I have to eke out my allowance, you know, by askin' my patah to send me fivahs," said D'Arcy. "He used to be quite libewal with fivahs. But since they've passed the Budget my governah has been wathah close with money. He sent me a fivah last week, and when I w'ote for anothah he didn't weply to my letlah for two days."

"Rotten!"

"I wouldn't have minded that so much, only when he did weply there wasn't any tin in the lettah, and I wegard that as cawwyin' the thing altogether, too fah."

"I should say so! I hope you put it plainly to him?" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I w'ote again and again—in fact, I w'ote quite a large numbah of lettahs, and pointed out to the governah that he was puttin' me to a gweat expense in postage-stamps, you know. I thought that ought to have some effect, because he's always opposed to extwawagance, you know. But he nevah sent any money."

"Horrid!"

"Then I sent him a wiah."

"And the fiver came by return, I suppose?"

"Not at all! He didn't weply to the wiah."

"Oh, come, that's too bad!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, I wegard it as wathah wotten, you know. I cannot considah that the governah is playin' the game," said D'Arcy. "I am in a state of howwid stoniness, and if the governah wufuses to play the game what am I to do?"

Tom Merry nodded seriously.

"That's what I want advice about," went on the swell of St. Jim's, frowning thoughtfully. "If a chap's governah wufuses to play the game what is a chap to do? I wegard it as a vewy sewious problem."

"Lord Eastwood will have to be taught the error of his ways," said Blake seriously. "Suppose we all send him a round robin, pointing out that he's settin' a bad example to youth by refusing to play the game."

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D'Arcy looked thoughtful.

"Or we might ask leave of the Head and go down to Eastwood House in a body and interview him," suggested Tom Merry. "There's nothing like a personal interview to clear up doubtful points."

"Yaas, wathah! That's a good wheeze! I suppose the Head would give us leave if I explained the mattah to him?" said D'Arcy, in a thoughtful way.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry and Blake together.

They could not help it.

The idea of D'Arcy asking leave of the Head, and giving such an explanation, was too much for them.

They roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed the two juniors with mingled surprise and annoyance.

"Weally, deah boys——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any weason whatevah for this wibald laughah. I twust you have not been wottin', you wottahs——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Oh, dear! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a wottah! Pway get off that bench, deah boy, and put up your hands," said D'Arcy wrathfully. "I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus brandished his clenched hands under Tom Merry's nose, but the hero of the Shell only roared louder.

"Will you put up your hands, you wottah?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

"Give it to Blake instead," suggested Tom Merry. "I'll hold your hat."

"I am goin' to thwash Blake as well——"

"My hat! He's getting dangerous!" ejaculated Blake, looking greatly alarmed. "We'd better cut."

"Yes, rather!"

Tom Merry and Blake slipped off the bench. They took the swell of the Fourth Form by the shoulders, and with a sudden jerk sat him on the grass. Then they ran off laughing towards the School House.

A handsome automobile had just glided up the drive, and stopped outside the house. Tom Merry and Blake passed it as they ran in. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat in the grass under the elms for a few moments in a dazed state. His hat had fallen over his eyes, and his monocle was clinking against his watch-chain.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

He jumped up, red and wrathful.

"You wottahs!" he shouted. "Come back! I insist upon your comin' back and bein' thwashed!"

But Tom Merry and Blake did not come back.

D'Arcy jammed his hat tightly on his head, stuck his monocle in his eye, and rushed in hot pursuit.

He bounded up the School House steps, and rushed into the hall—and rushed right into a tall, handsome gentleman who had just entered.

There was a sharp exclamation.

"Oh!"

"You wottah!" exclaimed D'Arcy, under the impression, in the confusion of the moment, that he had run into Tom Merry. "You uttah ass——"

"Eh?"

"Oh!"

"Arthur!"

D'Arcy staggered back in dismay.

"The governah!"

CHAPTER 2.

D'Arcy Makes it Pax.

LORD EASTWOOD breathed rather fast. He was frowning a little. Lord Eastwood was an exceedingly stately gentleman, and his stateliness had been considerably disturbed by the collision.

But his frown melted into a smile as he saw D'Arcy's dismayed face.

"Arthur!" he repeated. "So it is you?"

"Ya-a-as, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Ah! You were so eager to see me that you rushed in at top speed, I suppose?" said Lord Eastwood.

"I—I—— As a mattah of fact, I—I did not know you were heah," said Arthur Augustus. "I was wunnin' 'aftah a couple of feahful wottahs. I did not notice your cah. I——"

"Well, never mind!" said Lord Eastwood. "Fortunately, no harm is done, but I should recommend you to look where you are going in future."

"Yaas, wathah, dad! I suppose you have come down to see me?" said Arthur Augustus.



Tom Merry seized the tongs from the grate; Jack Blake snatched up a cricket bat. They set their backs to the wall, as if terrified by a fearful danger; but determined to sell their lives dearly. "Keep off!" shrieked Tom Merry. "We will defend ourselves to the bitter end." Arthur Augustus surveyed them wrathfully.

The earl smiled grimly.

"Quite a mistake, Arthur. I have not."

"But—"

"I have come to see the Head."

"Oh! But you have had my lettahs?"

"Yes."

"And my wiahs?"

"Certainly."

"Then you know just how the mattah stands?"

"Exactly."

"Then I twust—"

"Will your lordship please to follow me?" said Binks, the buttons.

"Thank you!"

"But weally, fathah—"

Lord Eastwood gave his son a nod, and walked away.

The swell of St. Jim's was left looking after him in dismay.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "This is wathah wotten.

I weally do not undahstand the govannah at all."

He ascended the stairs slowly to Study No. 6, where he

expected to find Blake. There was a sound of chuckling in

the study as the swell of St. Jim's approached it.

D'Arcy coloured

He looked in at the open door. His study-mates, Blake and Herries and Digby, were there.

Tom Merry was with them, and the four juniors were chuckling, and D'Arcy had little doubt that it was his collision with his "governor" in the hall below that was the cause of their merriment.

"Hallo, hero's Gussy!" exclaimed Blake. "Look out!"

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry, in great alarm. "En garde!"

Tom Merry seized the tongs from the grate; Blake snatched up a cricket-bat. They set their backs to the wall, as if terrified by a fearful danger, but determined to sell their lives dearly. Herries and Digby yelled with laughter, but Blake and Tom Merry only looked alarmed.

Arthur Augustus surveyed them wrathfully.

"You uttah asses—" he began.

"Keep off!" shrieked Tom Merry, brandishing the tongs.

"Hands off!"

"Stand back!" yelled Blake.

"We will defend ourselves to the bitter end."

"To the last gasp."

"And sell our lives dearly."

"Most expensively."

"You uttah chumps!"

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S REGATTA."

"Make it pax," said Tom Merry. "Otherwise, we shall vory likely faint with terror. I feel it coming on."

"So do I!" gasped Blake. "I can read slaughter in his eye, and bloodshed in his eyeglass. See me tremble!"

And he trembled so violently that his boots clattered on the floor.

D'Arcy looked at him wrathfully. Even D'Arcy could see that the juniors were elaborately "rotting" him.

"I wegard you as a pair of uttah boundahs," he exclaimed. "Howevah, I will make it pax, as I have no time to thwash you now."

Tom Merry gave a great gasp of relief, with a sound like air escaping from a punctured tyre.

Blake dropped the cricket-bat with a crash to the floor, and staggered towards D'Arcy, and threw his arms round the elegant junior's neck.

"Saved!" he sobbed.

"Oh, keep off, you ass!"

"Saved!"

"You uttah duffah!"

"Saved!"

"Saved!" panted Tom Merry, and he hurled the tongs into the grate, and also clasped D'Arcy round the neck.

"Saved!"

"Ow! Yawooh!"

"Spared!"

"Leggo!"

"But we're showing our touching gratitude——"

"Yow! Leggo!"

Arthur Augustus wrenched himself away. His collar was crumpled, and his necktie pulled out. He glared at the sobbing juniors.

"You feahful wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should give you a feahful thwashin' if I had not made it pax. I wegard you as wotten boundahs. But I am in an awkward posish."

"More trouble?" sighed Tom Merry. "What is it now?"

"My governah has come down."

"Then everything in the garden is lovely. You've only got to ask him for a fiver—or I should make it a tenner, I think."

"Yaas, I thought it was all wight when I saw him," said D'Arcy. "I thought he had come down to give me a lecture, you know, and then to hand out the tin. I wouldn't have minded the lecture, weally. I think a chap ought to be willin' to stand a lecture ewevy now and then fwom his governah. It shows pwopah wespetch."

"Hear, hear!"

"But he hasn't come down to see me," said Arthur Augustus. "He's gone in to see the Head. He hasn't come to see me at all. It looks to me as if I sha'n't get the fivah aftah all, and I am short of money, you know. What would you fellows advise a chap to do?"

The fellows all looked very serious.

"Must see him," said Blake, shaking his head. "Don't let him escape without an interview; that's the important thing."

"Yes, rather!"

D'Arcy nodded.

"But if he won't see me——"

"Suppose we puncture the tyres of the motor," suggested Herries, "then he will be delayed when he wants to go."

"Bai Jove!"

"Ass!" said Blake. "Do you think the chauffeur will look on while we're puncturing the blessed tyres?"

"H'm! I forgot the shower."

"We must capture him before he gets out of the house," said Tom Merry. "Suppose we wait for him in the hall, and nobble him as he comes out. If we could get a clothes-line or something, I wouldn't mind lassoing him."

"Pway don't be an ass, Tom Mowwy!"

"Still, it's a good idea to ambush him in the hall," said Blake. "Ho's gone down the passage to the Head's study, I suppose."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, we can wait for him at this end of the passage, and step out when he comes by," said Blake. "We can all step up and present our respects, and hope he's well, and then you can gradually and diplomatically work the conversation round to the subject of fivers."

"Good! I wathah think that's a good ideah," said D'Arcy.

"Then let's go down. He mayn't stay long with the Head, you know"

"Vewy well. I will change my collah, and then I'll be weady."

And D'Arcy changed his collar, and the juniors descended to keep watch and ward at the end of the passage for Lord Eastwood.

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NEXT THURSDAY,

"THE ST. JIM'S REGATTA."

CHAPTER 3.

The Polite Letter-Writer.

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, rose to his feet, and greeted his noble visitor vory courteously. Lord Eastwood was a governor of St. Jim's, as well as an old friend of the doctor's. Lord Eastwood was also an old St. Jim's fellow, and he had been through the old school as junior and senior in his time; and perhaps his recollection of that time made him as lenient as he was with his two hopeful sons there.

He sat down in one of the deep, comfortable armchairs, after he had shaken hands with the Head. Dr. Holmes was looking a little perplexed. He was glad to see Lord Eastwood, but he could not guess to what reason to assign the visit.

Lord Eastwood smiled genially.

"I was passing within two miles," he explained, "and as I wished to consult you about a certain matter, I called in. It is about my son."

"Ah, yes. Which son?"

"Arthur," said Lord Eastwood, smiling again, "the elder. As for Wally, he is such a young rascal that I have really given up thinking of his reformation."

The Head laughed.

"I must agree with you that D'Arcy minor is a young rascal," he said. "He is really only wild, however; there is nothing at all like vice in him."

"Oh, I am sure of that; and as for Arthur——"

"D'Arcy major is one of my best juniors, in most respects," said the Head. "There are sometimes little difficulties, but I have no fault to find with him."

Lord Eastwood nodded.

"I am glad to hear you say so, doctor; but I have a fault to find with him."

"Indeed!"

"He is very extravagant, I think, and careless with money."

"Ahem!" Dr. Holmes coughed. "Perhaps that is really—er—due to his being provided with more money than is really good for a boy of his age."

"Possibly. Yet"—Lord Eastwood paused—"I do not wish to stint my boys, and I am sure that Arthur would never put money to any culpable use. He is simply extravagant, and does not fully realise the value of it, I think. I have received from him several applications for money of late, which throw some light upon his point of view in the matter."

The earl opened a pocket-book, and took out several letters and telegraph forms, and laid them on the Head's writing-table.

Dr. Holmes glanced at them.

"I think they are interesting," Lord Eastwood remarked.

The Head laughed quietly as he glanced through the letters.

They were mostly brief, but very much to the point.

The first one ran as follows:

Study No. 6, School House, St. Jim's, June 20th.

"Dear Father,—I am extremely sorry to say that the fiver is all gone. I took your advice, for which I was very grateful, and made it last as long as possible. If you would be kind enough to send me another fiver, I will do the same again. Please tell Ethel not to forget the white mice.

Your affectionate son,

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY."

June 21st.

"Dear Dad,—Just a line to mention that I have not yet received the fiver.

In haste,

ARTHUR."

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"Dear Father,—I have not yet received the fiver, so suppose that my letters have miscarried. Shall I inquire at the post-office about them, or will you communicate with the Postmaster-General?"

"Affectionately,

ARTHUR."

"June 23rd.

"Dear Father,—Would you mind letting me have the fiver by return of post, as I am in debt at the tuckshop, and I owe Tom Merry five shillings, and I think he needs the money. Of course, I am not thinking of myself; but you have always told me to be careful not to be in debt, and I am anxious to get clear.

"With love to all,

ARTHUR."

Then followed the telegrams.

"Fiver not received.—ARTHUR."

"Please answer wire.—ARTHUR."

"Very anxious. Hope not ill.—ARTHUR."

Dr. Holmes laughed.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"There were some more, I think," smiled Lord Eastwood. "Now, as Arthur had five pounds last week, I think it is altogether too soon for him to be out of money. I really want him to learn the value and responsibility of money."

The Head pursed his lips.

"I should advise giving him less," he remarked. "Suppose you limit his pocket-money to two shillings a week?"

"Poor Arthur!"

"Or say to five shillings—that is very liberal for a junior."

"Quite so; but—"

Lord Eastwood paused.

"The fact is," he said, "that I am thinking of trying an experiment in the matter. Instead of cutting short Arthur's money, I think I might teach him a greater sense of responsibility by placing a larger sum in his hands."

"H'm."

"I think with a larger sum to handle he might learn the lesson of frugality," said Lord Eastwood. "In my experience I have always observed that, among the poorer classes, providence is always in proportion to lack of money. The people who are most careless with money are those who have very little, and are uncertain of getting that little."

"That is true of the poorer classes, but—"

"In dealing with a poor man, the surest way to make him careful and thrifty is to give him a regular income."

"Quite true; but—"

"You do not think the same plan would answer with regard to my son? Well, I am thinking of trying it, unless you have any objection."

"Not at all," said the Head with a smile. "But surely you do not think of placing a large sum in the lad's hands?"

"Not exactly; I should not do that," said Lord Eastwood. "My idea is to give him a bank account with a cheque-book."

"Oh."

"In fact, I have already made arrangements with my bankers for the purpose," said Lord Eastwood. "I have placed fifty pounds to Arthur's credit, and I have brought a cheque-book here for him. I have an idea that, finding himself in this position, a greater sobriety in the use of money will come to him."

"I hope so."

"You do not think so?"

"Well, it will be an interesting experiment," said Dr. Holmes in a non-committal way. "At all events, if the money is wasted, it will not be used for any bad object. You can rest assured upon that point."

Lord Eastwood glanced at his watch, and rose to his feet.

"Then that is settled," he remarked. "I must hasten now, and I daresay your time is valuable, doctor. You will hand the cheque-book to Arthur, and explain the matter to him, will you not—at the same time adding any little advice you think fit."

"Certainly."

"I think the experiment will be a success—at all events, we shall see."

"I truly hope so."

Dr. Holmes rose to see his visitor out. Lord Eastwood did not go down the passage into the School House again, but Dr. Holmes showed him out by his private door. They shook hands very cordially, and the earl mounted into his car, and Dr. Holmes returned to his study with a smile upon his face. The Head of St. Jim's did not think that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's bank account was likely to last very long.

CHAPTER 4.

Gone!

"JOLLY long time!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here, Gussy, you shouldn't let your governor get into these long-winded habits," said Blake with a yawn.

"How long is he going to keep us waiting here, I wonder."

"Yaas, I wondah."

Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"We've been here a quarter of an hour," he remarked.

"Bai Jove!"

"Seems longer," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry looked round the corner into the passage. The juniors were waiting for Lord Eastwood to come back, quite oblivious to the fact that he had been shown out by a different way. The interview in the Head's study seemed to them a very long one. There was no sign yet of the noble earl in the passage.

"Well, we've got to wait," said Digby yawning.

"Better," said Herries. "We're all short of funds, and if Gussy can get a fiver, it will set the whole study up."

"Yaas, and I owe Tom Mewwy five bob, and Lowthah three—"

"What are you chaps hanging about here for?" demanded Monty Lowther, coming up with Manners. "Anything on?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gussy's governor's with the Head," said Tom Merry. "We're waiting for him. We're all going to speak to him nicely, and he's going to fork out a fiver."

"Good; I'll help!"

"What-ho!" said Manners.

And the seven juniors waited. They peeped round the corner frequently, and once Tom Merry stole down the passage and looked round the next corner towards the Head's study. But the door was closed, and he crept back.

"Hasn't come out yet?" said Digby.

"No."

"My hat! What a gift, to be able to jaw all this time, in this hot weather," said Herries. "I suppose it runs in Gussy's family."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"You chaps waiting to catch mice, or what?" asked Kangaroo—Harry Noble, of the Shell—as he came by with Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn.

"We're waiting to catch Gussy's pater."

"What are you going to do with him?" asked Glyn.

"Ha, ha! Make him shell out."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He's been with the Head twenty-five minutes now," said Blake, looking at his watch. "They're keeping it up, eh?"

"Blessed if I know what they find to jaw about."

"Oh, Gussy's sins, of course," said Lowther. "If I had a son like Gussy, I should feel awfully anxious about him."

"Weally Lowthah—"

"I should probably keep him on a chain, or in a cage—"

"Weally—"

"Yes, rather," agreed Manners. "He must be a fearful anxiety to his governor."

"My governah—"

"Must be a patient chap," said Lowther solemnly.

"I always make it a point to show gweat respect to my governah. I have only diswegarded his instnuctions in one respect. He always impwesses upon me to be vewy careful in the company I keep," said D'Arcy. "Howevah, I allow myself to stwetch a point in that respect, as I don't want to dwop you fellows—"

"Why, you ass—"

"You cheeky chump—"

"You frabjous cuckoo—"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Bump him!"

"I wefuse to be bumped—"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry, laughing. "His noble governor may be along any moment, and he mustn't find us bumping his hopeful son."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We'll let him off with a caution this time," said Lowther.

"But—"

"Hark!"

"He's coming."

Footsteps were approaching down the passage. Tom Merry dragged back Digby, who was about to put his head round the corner.

"Hold on!" he said. "Don't stare, you know. His lordship ought to happen on us here, quite by chance—"

"Ha, ha, good!"

"Quiet, then."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Order!"

"I will step out as soon as the governor appeahs," said D'Arcy. "You fellows can all step out aftah me, and back me up. All say 'good-afternoon' at once."

"Good-afternoon at once," said Lowther.

"Pway don't be an ass, deah boy. Weady?"

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CHAPTER 5.

A Severe Letter.

"Quite."

The footsteps came quickly on.

Just as they reached the corner D'Arcy stepped forward.

The juniors all stepped after him.

"Good-afternoon, sir!"

A plump face and a plumper form in buttons loomed up before the juniors. Binks, the School House page, stopped as he came round the corner, and stared at the crowd of juniors in blank astonishment.

"My 'at!" he muttered.

Tom Merry & Co. turned red.

"Binks!"

"Buttons!"

"Beast!"

"Ho!" said Binks. "I say——"

"Bai Jove! It's that wascal Binks, and not my govannah at all," said D'Arcy in disgust. "Weally, Binks, I wegard you as an inopportune ass."

And the juniors looked annoyed. They felt absurd in having wasted that concerted salutation upon so unimportant a person as Binks.

Binks grinned.

"Ho!" he remarked. "You was waiting here for Lord Eastwood, Master D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Binks chuckled.

"Ho!" he said.

"Well," exclaimed Tom Merry, "what's the matter with you, Binks? Got a pain inside?"

"Ho! No."

"Then what are you cackling about?"

"Ho! You was waiting for his nibs," said Binks chuckling again. "Ho!"

"Is he coming?"

"Ho! No."

"Well, we shall have to wait," said Herries. "Clear off, Binks."

"Sutttingly."

"Yaas, wathah! You are an inopportune ass, Binks. Pway buzz off."

"Werry well, but——"

"Oh, don't jaw, deah boy; twavel off."

"But——"

"Pway bunk."

"Ho! Werry well," said Binks. But Tom Merry caught him by the shoulder as he turned away grinning, and swung him back.

"What were you going to say?" demanded the hero of the Shell suspiciously. "What's the joke, anyway?"

"Ho! If you don't want to hear——"

"But we do want to hear. Go ahead."

"Well, then," said Binks grinning, "it ain't any good waitin' for Lord Heastwood, that's all, Master Merry."

"Wats!" said D'Arcy.

"But why isn't it any good?" demanded Tom Merry.

"He's gone!"

"Eh?"

"GONE!"

The juniors all stared at Binks. The School House page chuckled cheerfully. He evidently regarded the matter as quite humorous.

"Imposs," ejaculated D'Arcy. "We've been waitin' heah all the time."

"He couldn't have passed——" began Manners.

"Oh!" said Binks. "You see, he went out the other way."

"Oh!"

"The 'Ead showed 'im hout by his own door into the quadrangle."

"Oh!"

"How long has he been gone?" howled Blake.

"About ten minutes, Master Blake."

"On!"

"The car may not be out of the gates yet," panted Blake.

"Come on—we may catch him yet! Put your beef into it!"

And the juniors dashed helter-skelter out of the School House.

There was no sign of the motor-car in the quadrangle. But the gates were open, and the juniors tore across to them. They dashed out into the road.

Far away down the road was a cloud of dust; lingering in the summer air was a smell of petrol. From the distance came a faint sound:

Zip-zip!

Lord Eastwood was gone!

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NEXT
THURSDAY!

"THE ST. JIM'S REGATTA."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked after the disappearing cloud of dust. He adjusted his monocle and looked after it again. But Lord Eastwood was gone.

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as wotten!" he said.

"Rotten isn't the word," said Blake, in great disgust. "Fancy a chap who has a seat in the House of Lords dodging us like that! I must say that Lord Eastwood—well, I will respect Gussy's feelings as a son, and I won't say what I think."

"Same here," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "I can't call this playing the game."

"Rather not."

"Gussy had better write to him," suggested Kangaroo. "He can point out that the St. Jim's fellows don't like this sort of thing, and we'll all sign the letter."

"Good egg!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nodded.

"Yaas, wathah! I can't have the govannah goin' on like that, you know," he remarked. "I believe in a chap bem' patient with his pater, but there comes a time when he must put his foot down."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hallo, cockey!" said D'Arcy minor, as the juniors turned back into the quad. "Did you see the pater?"

"Weally, Wally——"

"He dodged us," said Tom Merry indignantly. "While we were waiting at one door, he went out by another."

Wally D'Arcy chuckled.

"Just like you chaps," he remarked. "Sorry I didn't see you, Gussy. I stopped the pater just as he was getting into the car."

"Any result?" asked Kangaroo, with a grin.

Wally held up a sovereign.

"My hat!" said Blake, with a whistle.

"Bai Jove! And I——"

"You've got nothing?"

"Nothin', deah boy."

"Well, halves," said Wally. "Let's change this sov., and you shall have half, old man. Share and share alike."

"Weally, Wally, that is wathah wippin' of you, and I will accept your ofiah, as I am stonay," said D'Arcy. "Mrs. Taggles will change it."

Two youths of the Third Form who were with D'Arcy minor stared at him blankly as he made his major that generous offer.

"You young ass!" gasped Jameson. "If you want to go halves, you can go halves with me."

"Or with me," said Curly Gibson, with equal heat. "Fourth-Form chumps are barred."

"Weally, Gibson, if you allude to me as a chump——"

"Look here, Wally——"

"You travel," said Wally. "I'm sharing this with Gus. If you chaps like to come to the tuckshop, I'll stand ginger-pop and tarts."

"Oh, all right!" said Jameson and Gibson together.

And the party adjourned to Dame Taggles's little establishment.

There the sovereign was changed, and half of it duly handed over to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; and as the weather was very warm, and the juniors thirsty, a considerable amount of it was immediately expended in ginger-pop and lemonade.

Wally chuckled over his foaming glass.

"You must have been a chump to miss the pater, Gus," he remarked. "He was in an awfully good temper, and he might have been worth a fiver or a tenner to you."

"It was weally Tom Mewwy who was to blame, you see——"

"Eh? What's that?" said Tom Merry.

"You wemembah you were waitin' at the end of the passage——"

"So were you."

"Yaas, but I was waitin' because you were——"

"Well, I was waiting because Blake was——"

"I was waiting because Gussy was," said Blake, with a grin. "Of course, it was all Gussy's fault from beginning to end."

"Weally, Blake——"

"It jolly well always is," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"We might have gone thirsty all the afternoon, but for Wally," said Digby indignantly. "Nice state of things, when we have to depend on a Third Form scallawag for a drink in hot weather."

"Weally, Dig——"

"Oh, come and get that letter written!" exclaimed

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School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.



"Good afternoon, sir!" said the juniors in unison. Binks, the School House page, stopped as he came round the corner, and stared at the crowd of juniors in blank astonishment. "My 'at!" he muttered.

Lowther. "Lord Eastwood has simply passed the limit this time, and I think we ought to point it out to him."

"Yaas, wathah; but—"

"If you're done guzzling, Gussy, come on—"

"I have had only one glass—"

"So have I," said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"It was filled several times, but it was only one glass—the same glass all the time," Lowther explained elaborately.

"Oh, don't be funny, Lowther!" implored Blake. "Not in hot weather, you know."

"Look here—"

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry, dragging Lowther away. "Let's get the letter written, and we can catch the post with it. It goes in a quarter of an hour."

"Right-ho!"

And the juniors walked over to the School House, and adjourned to the junior common-room there to write the letter.

D'Arcy sat down at the table, and drew pen and paper towards him.

He jammed his monocle into his eye, and gnawed the end of the pen-handle, these apparently being indispensable preliminaries to writing the letter.

The other fellows stood round to help.

"Go it, Gussy!" said Tom Merry encouragingly. "You ought to write the letter, you know, and we'll all sign our names."

"Yaas, wathah! But how shall I begin?"

"It's a good idea to begin at the beginning," said Monty Lowther. "It's an old-fashioned custom, but it's good."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Still, you might begin at the middle, or you might tackle it at the end if you found it come easier."

"Weally—"

"Suppose you start with 'Your affectionate son, Gustavus,' then you could get on to 'I hope the dog is quite well,' and work your way back to 'Dear Pater,'" said Lowther, in his blandest tone.

"I wefuse to w'ite the lettah if Lowthah is goin' to be funnay. The weathah is too hot for me to stand Lowthah's jokes."

"Hear, hear!"

"They muzzle dogs in this hot weather," Blake said, in a reflective way. "I wonder if we could try the same dodge with Lowther."

"Hear, hear!"

"Ass!" said Lowther. "What I say is—"

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"Piffic!"

"Look here—"

"Order!"

"Silence for the letter-writer!"

"Good! The complete letter-writer forward," grinned Tom Merry. "Go it, Gussy, and if Lowther jaws again, I'll sit on his head."

"Vewy well. I wathah think that 'Deah Patah,' or 'Deah Governah' will sound a bit too gentle," said D'Arcy, reflectively. "I think that undah the cires, I ought to be wathah stiff. I don't want to seem to come wound too easily."

"Quite right."

"At the same time, I shouldn't like to be diswepctful—that would be aw'fly bad form," D'Arcy said anxiously. "I despise a chap who speaks of his pawents diswepctfully."

"Yes, rather!"

"You ought to strike the medium, somehow," Blake remarked.

"That's it!" exclaimed Lowther. "Hit the medium, as the chap did at the spiritualistic seance, you know."

"Order!"

"Yes, shut up, Lowther, old chap. Supposing you begin 'Dear Sir'?" suggested Manners.

"Too formal," said Tom Merry.

"Well, 'Respected Sir,' then—"

"Yaas, that sounds wepctful, and at the same time it's not too chummy," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Wepctful Sir' is about wight. What do you fellows say?"

"Good!"

"First chop."

"Vewy well; that goes, then."

And the swell of St. Jim's commenced the letter with "Respected Sir." Then he stopped. He had made a beginning, at the beginning as Lowther had suggested; but the letter threatened to stop at that point.

"Well, get on," said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah; but—"

"That's not enough."

"Oh, no!" said Blake seriously. "That would be altogether too concise."

"Weally, Blake—"

D'Arcy chewed the handle of his pen and did not finish. The juniors watched him with interest. They made several suggestions, but as D'Arcy was not listening to them, the suggestions did not interrupt his train of thought.

His pen began to move at last.

Tom Merry & Co. watched him as he wrote, and read the words over his shoulders.

"Respected Sir,—I am very sorry to be compelled to call your attention to the fact that I—and a considerable number of fellows here—do not consider that you have been playing the game."

"Good!"

"Very nicely put."

"Go it!"

"On the ball!"

D'Arcy's pen was travelling over the paper now that it had once started.

"I desire to respectfully point out that I had no hand in inducing Mr. Lloyd George to bring in the Budget, and so I strongly object to my pocket money being cut short on that account. I waited to see you as you left the Head, with some of my friends, and we were greatly surprised and disappointed when we missed you. Blake thinks that you dodged us on purpose."

"Yes, rather!" said Blake.

"And Tom Merry says it isn't playing the game."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry.

"I therefore wish you to reflect on this—"

"That's what the governah always says when he gives me a lecture," said Arthur Augustus, looking up. "It sounds vewy impressive, and I suppose it's all wight."

"Right as rain."

"And upon reflection you may decide in a way calculated to afford more satisfaction to your affectionate father—"

"That's how he goes on," said D'Arcy. "It's a vewy good sentence, and only wants altewin' a little to suit the occasion."

"Ha, ha!"

"I've got an idea, though," said Digby. "Why not shove the letter into the third person, Gussy? It sounds more dignified."

D'Arcy nodded thoughtfully.

"Yaas, there's something in that. My tailah w'ites to me in the third person when he wants his money vewy bad. It sounds as if you're on your dig., and mean bizney."

"Yes, rather!"

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "Write it out again in the third person, Gussy."

"Vewy well."

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S REGATTA."

"Then we'll all sign it, and it can go by the next collection."

"Good!"

D'Arcy took a fresh sheet of paper, gnawed his pen thoughtfully, and started again. The complete letter was quite imposing:

"Respected Sir,—A. A. D'Arcy, Esquire, is sorry to be compelled to point out the fact that he, and a considerable number of fellows here, do not consider that Lord Eastwood has been playing the game. He wishes to respectfully observe that he had no hand in inducing Mr. Lloyd George to bring in the Budget, and that it is not cricket to cut short his pocket-money on that account. The aforesaid A. A. D'Arcy and the other fellows mentioned hereafter waited to see Lord Eastwood as he—Lord Eastwood—left the Head, and were greatly surprised and disappointed when he and they missed him. J. Blake, Esquire, thinks that Lord Eastwood dodged him and them on purpose, and Thomas Merry, Esquire, is of opinion that it isn't playing the game. He and they therefore wish him to reflect on this, and upon reflection he may act in a way calculated to afford more satisfaction to his affectionate son. So no more at present from

"ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY.

J. BLAKE.

ARTHUR DIGBY.

G. HERRIES.

H. MANNERS.

MONTAGUE LOWTHER.

TOM MERRY.

H. NOBLE.

CLIFTON DANE.

B. GLYN."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy surveyed the letter with considerable satisfaction.

"I wathah think that's good," he remarked.

"Jolly good!"

"Ripping!"

"Gorgeous!"

"You don't think I've been wathah too severe with him, you fellows?" asked Arthur Augustus, a little anxiously.

"Not a bit of it."

"Too gentle, if anything."

"You haven't said anything about passing the limit; and that's what he's really done, you know."

"I think it just meets the case; not too gentle, and not too severe," said Herries.

"Of course, it will make him feel a bit uneasy when he knows that a lot of fellows in the Fourth Form and the Shell here are down on him."

"That's just what we want."

"Exactly."

"Yaas, wathah; I think it will do," said Arthur Augustus, as he addressed an envelope. "I shouldn't like to be too severe on the governah, but I weally must point out things to him. This lettah is just the thing."

He sealed the letter in an envelope and looked at his watch.

"Five minutes to the collection," he remarked. "Heaps of time. I'll wun and post it myself."

And he hurried out of the School House and walked across to the school letter-box near the gates, and duly posted the letter.

Binks the page looked into the junior common-room a minute after Arthur Augustus had left it.

"Master D'Arcy here?" he asked.

"He's just gone out. He'll be back in a minute," said Tom Merry.

"The 'Ead wants him."

"Oh!"

"In his study at once, please," said Binks, and departed.

Tom Merry & Co. looked serious.

"The noble lord can't have been complaining about Gussy, surely," said Monty Lowther. "Is he in for a carpeting, I wonder?"

"I hope not."

"Looks like it, though."

"Anything w'ong, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus, entering the common-room, and observing the serious looks of his chums.

"The Head wants you in his study."

"Bai Jove!"

"I hope it's all right, Gussy!"

"I suppose the governah has been sayin' somethin'," said

ANSWERS

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D'Arcy resignedly. "I am wathah glad I've w'ritten a wathah stiff lettah now."

"We'll come and see you through," said Tom Merry.

And the whole party accompanied Arthur Augustus to the passage, and waited there while he went on to the Head's study, and tapped at the door. They heard the deep voice of the Head from within the room.

"Come in!"

D'Arcy opened the door and went in. The door closed behind him, and he disappeared from the gaze of his anxious chums.

Tom Merry & Co. listened with all their ears. It might be a lecture that D'Arcy was booked for, or it might possibly be a caning; and they listened for the voice of the swell of St. Jim's raised in anguish. But they did not hear it.

They ventured close enough to the door to hear a faint murmur of voices within the study, but that was all.

Whatever D'Arcy was getting, it was not a licking, and the juniors were somewhat relieved to know that. They wondered what it was; but in their wildest conjectures they never guessed anything like the truth.

CHAPTER 6.

The Cheque-book.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY entered the Head's study with secret misgivings. Lord Eastwood's visit to St. Jim's, and his departure without an interview with his son, boded ill. The swell of the School House made up his mind for a "wiggling," and he determined to go through with it without allowing it to disturb the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

Dr. Holmes glanced at the junior, as he stood before him with his eyes respectfully downcast, but with a stiffening of the back which showed that he guessed what was coming, and was prepared to endure it with fortitude.

"Ah, D'Arcy," said the Head. "Lord Eastwood has paid me a visit—"

"Yaas, sir."

"On your account, D'Arcy."

"So I supposed, sir. I twust my patah has no complaints to make?" said the swell of St. Jim's firmly.

"Unfortunately he has."

"About me, sir?"

"Yes."

"You are quite sure he was not wofewwin' to my younghah bwothah Wally?" asked D'Arcy.

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"I am quite sure, D'Arcy. Lord Eastwood considers you extravagant, and careless with money."

D'Arcy looked surprised.

"Bai Jove! I am weally astonished, sir. I made my last fivah last me neahly a week."

"Indeed!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir. My governah impressed upon me that I must be careful with it, and it lasted exactly six days, sir."

"H'm! Well, his lordship wishes to teach you a lesson in—in thrift and carefulness with money," said the Head. "He therefore—"

"He hasn't left a fiver with you to give me, sir?"

"Certainly not!"

"Oh! Is he going to send me one?"

"I think not."

D'Arcy looked dismayed.

"Bai Jove! Then I shall have nothin' till my allowance is due again!"

"I think your allowance will cease, D'Arcy."

"Gweat Scott!"

"Instead of that, Lord Eastwood has decided to give you a bank account and a cheque-book, hoping that this system will teach you economy and greater care of money."

D'Arcy almost jumped.

More than once he had explained to his father that a cheque account would be extremely useful to him, and save a great deal in postage-stamps.

Lord Eastwood had always smiled at the suggestion.

Arthur Augustus could scarcely believe his ears now.

"Bai Jove, sir!" he ejaculated.

"Now, D'Arcy, you will see that this is placing a great responsibility upon you," said Dr. Holmes. "You will see that you must not be careless or extravagant, and make this experiment a failure, and disappoint your father."

"Certainly, sir!"

"You must not yield to any desire to squander money, or buy things which are useless; and, indeed, to be careless of your account in any way."

"I shall be vewy careful, sir."

"Here is your cheque-book. Lord Eastwood has placed fifty pounds to your credit with his own bankers."

"Bai Jove! Fifty pounds!"

"That is the sum. You will see it entered here in the pass-book. The cheque-book contains sixty cheques—as, naturally, the cheques you will draw will be for small amounts."

"Oh, yaas!"

"His lordship did not specify any particular length of time which this money is to last," pursued the Head. "But you will understand that such a sum must last you a long time. A year at least, I should say."

"Oh, it will last an aw'ly long time!" said D'Arcy confidently. "I don't suppose I shall have spent it all by the time I leave St. Jim's."

The Head smiled.

"I hope that will prove to be correct, D'Arcy. Take care of your cheque-book, and mind that it does not pass out of your own hands. Take care of the money, and do not be reckless. You may go."

"Thank you vewy much, sir."

And Arthur Augustus left the study.

He walked down the passage as if he were walking on air.

Arthur Augustus had always had plenty of money all his life, and was seldom short of it, and then only temporarily. But he had never possessed such a sum as fifty pounds—and a cheque-book!

The cheque-book was, as he would have said, stunning.

He put his hand into his pocket twice in half a minute to feel it, and make sure that it was really there.

Tom Merry & Co. looked relieved as they saw him. The manner of the swell of St. Jim's was a sufficient indication that he had not been "ragged."

"Well?" demanded Blake.

"Well, deah boy."

"Have you been carpeted?"

"Not at all."

"Jawed?"

"No."

"Any impots?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what did the Head want you for?" demanded five or six voices together.

"Oh, only a little mattah of bizncy," said D'Arcy negligently. "My patah left my cheque-book with him, that's all."

"Eh?"

"My patah left my cheque-book with him to be given to me."

"Your what?"

"Cheque-book!"

The juniors stared at D'Arcy. He spoke quite coolly, as if he had been in possession of dozens of cheque-books from his earliest years.

"Oh, come off!" said Blake, at last.

"Draw it mild."

"Cheese it!"

"You can't pull our legs like that, you know."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Look here, what did the Head want?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"What did your pater come down for?"

"What's the row, anyway?"

"I have already informed you, deah boys. My patah came down to hand my cheque-book to Dr. Holmes."

Blake snorted.

"This isn't the first time Gussy has started in business as a funny man," he said; "but I suggest that it should be the last."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bump him."

"Weally, you know—"

"Bump the chump!"

"Weally—hands—off—yow!"

A dozen hands fastened upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He was rushed backwards to the wall, and jammed against it, and pinned there helplessly.

"Now, then, tell us the truth before we bump you!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What did the Head want you for?"

"Ow!"

Arthur Augustus wriggled desperately in the grasp of the juniors. But he could not get away.

"Answer, you ass—no rot!"

"Ow! Pway welsease me! You are wumplin' my clothes feahfully. My collah is gettin' simply cwushed."

"Then—"

"Explain."

"Bump him!"

"Hold on, deah boys. The Head sent for me to—"

"Well, to what?"

"To hand me my cheque-book."

"Why, there he goes again!" exclaimed Blake, exasperated.

"Bump him!"

"Ow—yow!"

Bump!

"Yawwoh!"

"Bump!"

"Yowp!"

"Once more!" exclaimed Digby. "Now—my word, what's that?"

The cheque-book had fallen from D'Arcy's pocket as he was bumped. Digby picked it up in astonishment.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's that?"

"A blessed cheque-book."

"My hat!"

"It's m-m-my cheque-book!" gasped D'Arcy. "You uttah asses!"

The juniors, in their astonishment, released the swell of St. Jim's, and he staggered to his feet, dusty and dishevelled and wrathful.

CHAPTER 7.

Too Late!

TOM MERRY & CO. stared blankly at the cheque-book. Digby held it aloft for all to see. There it was—a fat cheque-book, plain for all eyes to see.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, at last.

"Then, it's true!"

"Looks like it."

"It's a cheque-book."

"A real cheque-book."

"Where did you get it, Gussy?"

D'Arcy dusted his jacket with a cambric handkerchief, and sniffed.

"I have already informed you that it is my cheque-book," he said.

"But—"

"My governor left it with the Head for me—"

"But—"

"He has placed fifty pounds to my credit in the County and Town Bank."

"Great Scott!"

"And that's the cheque-book!"

"My word!"

There was no doubting it now.

It was a real cheque-book, and it really belonged to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's dusted himself down, and readjusted his collar, and put his monocle into his eye, and surveyed the astonished juniors loftily.

Digby opened the cheque-book, and turned the leaves over.

"About fifty of them," he remarked.

"Sixty, deah boys."

"And you can draw on as much money as you like?"

"Yaas, up to fifty pounds."

"My hat!"

"Well, this is ripping!" exclaimed Blake. "I must say that your governor has played up decently this time, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Sorry we bumped you; but it doesn't matter."

"I wegard it as mattewin' a gweat deal. My clothes are wumped."

"Never mind."

"My collah is quite soiled."

"Blow the collar! Look here, the best thing we can do is to get to the tuckshop, and let Mrs. Taggles have the first cheque."

"Good egg!"

"Ripping idea!"

D'Arcy nodded genially.

"Quite wight, deah boys. We—"

"By Jove," exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly, "the letter!"

"Eh?"

"The letter!"

"What letter?"

"The letter to Lord Eastwood."

"Phew!"

"Bai Jove!"

"We've accused him of not playing the game, and given him a fearful dressing, and all the time he was fixing this up with the Head!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in dismay.

"Bai Jove!"

"It's beastly unlucky," said Blake.

D'Arcy looked greatly concerned. He had forgotten the letter to his father in the excitement of getting the cheque-book.

He wrinkled his aristocratic forehead thoughtfully.

"It's wotten," he said. "The governah won't know I wote that lettah before I got the cheque-book, and he'll think me an ungwateful beast, you know."

"Sure to."

"We must get the letter back!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Blake shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

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"Too late," he said. "We couldn't fish it out of the box, anyway, and it's collected now. The collection's gone a good ten minutes."

"Bai Jove, we must do somethin'," exclaimed D'Arcy, in great distress. "It's wotten! I would give anythin' to get that wotten lettah back again."

"Yes, rather."

"The post may not have gone yet; you know, the collection's sometimes late," said Kangaroo hopefully. "If it hasn't gone, and we interview the postman, we may be able to get him to give it back."

"It's against the law," said Manners.

"Yes, but the postman knows us—knows Gussy's writing."

"Let's twy!" said D'Arcy.

And he ran off, with the rest after him, at top speed to the letter-box in the school wall near the gates.

The sight of ten juniors rushing out of the School House at top speed attracted, naturally, a certain amount of attention. Fellows called out to Tom Merry & Co. to inquire what was up, but they received no answer. Skimpole, of the Shell, tried to stop D'Arcy by catching at one of his buttons, in the objectionable way Skimpole had, but the swell of St. Jim's was not to be delayed just then.

"Pway don't stop me, deah boy!" he panted. "I'm in a hwwy."

"But—"

"Pway get out of the way."

"It's rather an important matter I want to speak about," said Skimpole, catching at D'Arcy as he ran. "You see, I'm now doing the final chapter of my book on Socialism."

"Buzz off!"

"Really—"

D'Arcy gave the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's a gentle push, and Skimpole sat down in the quad.

D'Arcy stumbled over him, and then ran on, and each of the juniors as he passed trod carefully upon Skimpole.

The genius of the Shell lay in a dazed state, wondering whether he was in the middle of a particularly severe earthquake, till the last of the juniors had passed.

Then he sat up, and blinked after them through his big spectacles.

"Dear me!" he murmured.

Tom Merry & Co., laughing as they ran, dashed on towards the gates.

They reached the letter-box.

But a glance at it told that they were too late.

The collection had been made!

They halted, panting.

"It's gone," said Tom Merry.

"We mayn't be too late to catch the postman," said Blake. "Taggles! Hallo, Taggles! Turn your beautiful face this way!"

Taggles, the school porter, turned his face towards them. It was not a beautiful face—that was Blake's little joke. As a matter of fact, Taggles was frowning.

"Have you seen the postman, Taggy?" asked Blake.

"Yes, Master Blake."

"Has he been gone long?"

"About five minutes."

"There's a chance yet!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "After him!"

The juniors dashed out into the road.

They knew that the postman went towards Rylcombe after collecting at St. Jim's, and there was a chance of overtaking him on the road. If the letter was still in his bag, there was no reason why Blagg should not hand it out. It was not as if the juniors were strangers to him. He knew D'Arcy, and knew D'Arcy's writing, and it was possible that he would stretch a point in the elegant junior's favour. At all events, the chance was worth trying.

The juniors streamed down the lane at a run.

"We'll make him give it up," grinned Bernard Glyn.

"There are enough of us to eat him if he doesn't."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hallo, here he is!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

He had caught sight of the postman.

By the side of the road, at some distance from the school, was a little hedge inn, and on the bench outside, under a big oak-tree, they could see the postman sitting. Blagg was taking a rest. The afternoon was hot, and the road was dusty, and Blagg evidently considered himself entitled to rest and refreshment.

He sat on the bench, with his legs stretched out and a foaming tankard of ale in front of him on the wooden table. His bag was not to be seen, and the juniors guessed that it was in the inn.

The crowd of juniors came up, panting.

"Good-afternoon, Blagg!" said Tom Merry.

"Good-afternoon, Master Merry," said Blagg. "It's 'ot, sir."

"I should say so," agreed Tom Merry. "I say, you



Arthur Augustus opened his cheque-book, drew a cheque, and handed it to Mellish. "I—I say, there's some mistake," stammered the cad of the Fourth as he glanced at the cheque. "You've filled in the wrong amount."

chaps, we may as well have something to drink. Who says ginger-pop?"

"Ginger-pop!" said nine voices, with singular unanimity.

"Ginger-pop it is. You don't mind us sitting at your table, Mr. Blagg?"

"Honoured, sir," said Blagg.

"Thanks."

"It's 'ot," said the Rylcombe postman, emptying his tankard, and gazing at it longingly. "You get very thirsty this weather, Master Merry."

"Yes, rather! Order the ginger-pop, Monty!"

"Right-ho!"

"And ale for Mr. Blagg. You'll drink with us, Mr. Blagg?"

"Thank you kindly; I will."

And he did.

Blagg drank ale, and the juniors ginger-pop, with great friendliness. The tankard was soon emptied, and Tom Merry ordered it to be refilled again. Blagg was in the highest good-humour by this time. The ale was good, and it had a mellowing effect, and Blagg could not have felt more obliging than he did at that moment.

It was evidently a good time to tackle him about the letter.

"I suppose you've made the collection at St. Jim's?" Tom Merry remarked, as he sipped his ginger-pop.

"Oh, yes!" said Blagg.

"Bai Jove! Did you notice a lettah among the othahs in my w'itin', Blagg?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Blagg smiled.

"There was a good many letters, Master D'Arcy," he said.

"Well, Gussy's one was there," Tom Merry observed.

"If it was there, I collected it," said Blagg. "You needn't be afraid about your letter, Master D'Arcy. It's in my bag all right."

"Yaas, but——"

"Your tankard's empty, Blagg," said Tom Merry. "I suppose you can manage another?"

"Thank you kindly."

"Now, this is how the matter stands," Blake remarked.

"Gussy, as usual, has been making blunders——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"And he's posted a letter that ought not to have been posted."

"That's bad," said Blagg, sipping his ale.

"Yes, isn't it? We thought that if we spoke to you in time, you might let Gussy have his letter back," said Tom Merry.

"Agin the law, Master Merry."

"Yes, but—"

"Letters once posted is the property of the person addressed," said Blagg, with a shake of the head.

"Yes, I know; but this letter is to Gussy's father, as you could see by the address, and it's all in the family, you know. That makes a difference, doesn't it?" urged Tom Merry.

Blagg nodded.

"Yes, perhaps so, Master Merry."

"Gussy will open the letter in your presence, and show you that it's all serene," said Tom Merry. "It's simply a case of a letter being posted in too great a hurry."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blagg looked doubtful; but the ale was mellowing him more than ever now, and he did not like to be disobliging.

"Well, you see," he remarked, "I'd like to do anything I could for you young gentlemen, but—"

"You see the whole thing's all right, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, but—"

"Then you agree?"

"Yes, but—"

"You shall see the letter opened."

"Yes, but—"

"Now, you're not going to refuse, Blagg," said several of the juniors at once, persuasively. "Don't be a cad, you know!"

"No, I won't refuse, but—"

"Well, then, fish out the letter."

"You see—"

"Where's the bag?"

"Come, Blaggy—"

"You see—"

"Come on, old man. Where's the bag?"

"It's not here," Blagg got out at last.

"Eh? What?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Not here!"

"No. You see, it was so 'ot, and the school was my last collection, and the carrier passed me on the road," explained Blagg. "I gave him my bag to carry in to the post-office."

"Oh! Then where is it now?"

"It'll be at the post-office afore this," said Blagg.

"Oh!"

"G'eat Scott!"

"Blagg, you're a careless villain!" exclaimed Tom Merry, shaking his finger at the Rylcombe postman. "You know you oughtn't to part with your bag!"

"But I've knowed the carrier all my life," said Blagg. "It's all right."

"I dare say it's all right, but it's against the law," said Tom Merry severely. "You see what comes of breaking laws! You break them to please yourself, and then it prevents you from—"

"From breaking them to please us," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Lowther!"

Blagg grinned.

"I'm sorry, Master Merry—"

"Well, it can't be helped, I suppose," said Tom Merry, rising. "The letter's gone, Gussy, and we've had our run for nothing."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's rotten, but it can't be helped."

And the juniors left the inn, leaving Blagg finishing his ale.

"I suppose I'd better send a telegwam to the governah," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "That lettah will have to be explained away somehow."

"Yes, rather!"

"Then let's get down to the post-office."

They strolled on to Rylcombe.

Three youths were standing outside the village tuckshop, which the juniors passed as they entered the village. They were three fellows of the New House at St. Jim's—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn. They were looking in at the window, and Fatty Wynn was evidently explaining to Figgins and Kerr that it would be a good thing to go in and sample the excellent things displayed there by Mother Murphy.

"That's all very well," said Figgins, as the School House fellows came by, "but the funds are too low, Fatty. It can't be did."

"I'm hungry."

"Well, let's get back to tea," said Figgins. "We shall have to tea in Hall, too. It's no good staring at the tarts, Fatty—you can't have any of them."

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"I'm awfully hungry!"

Arthur Augustus halted. His cheque-book was burning a hole in his pocket, so to speak, and the swell of St. Jim's was always generous.

"Figgins, deah boy—"

Figgins & Co. turned round and favoured the School House fellows with a steady stare.

CHAPTER 8.

The Telegram.

"HALLO!" said Figgins. "How did they come to let you out?"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Hallo, Blake! Where did you dig up that chivy?" asked Kerr cheerfully.

"Look here—"

"No fear! It worries me!"

"Cheese it!" exclaimed Tom Merry, laughing. "We are not looking for rows now, Figgy, and, if we were—"

"It would be bad for Figgins," remarked Kangaroo.

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins.

"Bai Jove! I think we ought to bump the wottahs, just to teach them to be propably respectful to the cock-house at St. Jim's," said D'Arcy.

"Good egg!"

"Bump the bounders!"

The crowd of School House fellows gathered round the New House trio. Figgins & Co. put their backs to the shop-window.

"You're forgetting the telegram, Gussy," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove, yaas!" said Arthur Augustus. "I stopped to speak to these wottahs to remark that I was standin' t'waint—"

Fatty Wynn pricked up his ears.

"What's that?" he exclaimed quickly.

"I am standin' t'waint to these chaps, as I think I will let Mother Murphy have my first cheque—"

"Your first what?" exclaimed Figgins and Kerr together.

"My first cheque."

"Off his rocker?" asked Figgins, glancing at Tom Merry. Tom Merry laughed.

"No. His pater has given him a cheque-book! Honest Injun."

"My hat!"

Fatty Wynn came a little nearer to D'Arcy.

"How good!" he exclaimed. "Your governor's an awfully decent chap, D'Arcy. So are you. I've often said to Figgins that I wished you were in the New House, because I should like to chum up with you."

"I don't remember it," said Figgins.

"Well, perhaps it was Kerr I said it to—"

"I don't remember it, either," said Kerr.

"Oh, come now—"

"Still, Gussy's an awfully good sort when he's got a cheque-book," said Figgins. "I vote that we encourage Gussy as long as the cheque-book lasts."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"House rows are bad form," said Fatty Wynn, looking round at the School House fellows. "I think it's a much better idea for both Houses to pull together, and—and promote peace and—and harmony, and all that, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you standing the feed now, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then we'll join you with pleasure."

"Yes, it's pax," said Figgins—"pax with anybody who's got a cheque-book. Pray allow me to give you my arm into the shop, Gussy."

"I've got to go to the post-office first," said D'Arcy.

"Don't you fellows wait for me, though. Begin at once."

"Good!"

"Certainly!" said Fatty Wynn, bolting into the shop.

He was giving orders in one second more; in two seconds he was beginning. The juniors crowded in after him.

D'Arcy and Tom Merry went on to the post-office. The other fellows, with Figgins & Co., took full advantage of D'Arcy's hospitality. They were beginning.

The two juniors reached the post-office, and D'Arcy took a form and a pencil, and began to gnaw the handle of the latter.

"I don't know exactly how to put it," he remarked. "Have you got any suggestions to make, deah boy?"

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

"Suppose you cancel the letter?" he suggested. "That's how you do a cheque if you don't want it to be cashed."

"But—"

"If you wire that the letter's cancelled, and that your pater is not to read it, that ought to make it all right," said Tom Merry. "Lord Eastwood'll get the telegram before the letter, see, and then he won't read the letter."

Arthur Augustus brightened up.

"Bai Jove! That's a wippin' dodge!"

His pencil scribbled over the form.

"Don't shove in the whole dictionary," Tom Merry suggested. "You have to pay for every word, you know."

"Yaas, that's all right. I have a cheque-book, you know."

Tom Merry grinned.

"That won't last for ever, Gussy, and they won't take the cheques here, anyway."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that! Nevah mind, you can pay for the telegwam, and I'll give you a cheque, deah boy."

"Right-ho!"

The telegram was written at last.

"Lord Eastwood, Eastwood House, Easthorpe, near Cleveland.—Letter cancelled. Please do not read it. Many thanks for cheque-book—Your affectionate ARTHUR."

"Think that is all wight, Tom Mewwy!"

"Right as rain!"

"Then I'll send it off."

And the telegram was despatched.

Then the two juniors strolled back to the tuckshop.

Mrs. Murphy's little shop was already pretty well filled when they entered, and there was not very much room to move.

Thirteen juniors filled up a considerable space. Some of them were sitting on the little ricketty chairs, and some on the counter, and some on the edges of egg-boxes or dog-biscuit cases. Some were standing, some leaning. But all were either eating or drinking, or both.

They greeted Arthur Augustus with enthusiasm.

"Here he comes!"

"Here's the founder of the giddy feast!"

"Take my place, Gussy," said Monty Lowther, slipping off the counter. "Here you are! Shove him up!"

"Weally—"

"There you are!"

Arthur Augustus was plumped upon the counter. A plate was placed upon his knees, and a glass in his hand. A dozen voices were giving orders at once, and Mrs. Murphy was busy in executing them as fast as she could.

It was a cheerful scene.

The rate the good things were disappearing at would have been alarming to anyone who was not in possession of a cheque-book.

But D'Arcy smiled serenely.

The feast was at its height when three or four fellows looked in at the door. Tom Merry uttered an exclamation at the sight of them.

"Look out! Grammar cads!"

CHAPTER 9.

The First Cheque.

GORDON GAY, of the Fourth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School, looked in at the door of the tuckshop, and grinned at the St. Jim's crowd. Behind him were Jack Wootton and Frank Monk, Lane, and Carboy, all of the same Form at the Grammar School. The juniors of St. Jim's were prepared for war at once, but Gordon Gay & Co. were not on the war-path. The odds were too heavily against them for that.

Gay waved his hand amicably.

"Pax!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway do not have any wows now. I wathah think it would be a good capah for the Gwammah cads to join us, in ordah to celebrate the occasion."

"Good egg!"

"Certainly!" said Gordon Gay. "We looked in for some ginger-pop, and we'll feed with anybody. We're not particular, are we, Monkey?"

"Certainly not!" said Frank Monk. "I'm quite willing. Nobody's likely to see us."

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Tom Merry. "Walk up and feed. It's Gussy's treat."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Grammarians lost no time in accepting the invitation.

The St. Jim's fellows made room for them, and they squeezed up to the counter, and Mrs. Murphy attended to their wants.

They gave their orders liberally.

"Ginger-pop!"

"Lemonade!"

"Jam tarts!"

"Currant cake!"

"Pork pies!"

"Try the jam," said Fatty Wynn, with a beatific smile on his fat face. "I can recommend the ham. I've had some."

"So we will! Ham, please!"

"Have some of the cold beef with it. I've tried it, and it's all right."

"Good!"

"The pork pies are good, too. I've tried 'em."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So are the patties. I've tried 'em."

"Go hon!"

"And the veal pies, too. I've had some."

"Anything you haven't had?" asked Gordon Gay.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Walk up, deah boys! Pway don't stint yourselves."

"We're not going to!"

"No fear!"

"The jam tarts are a bit stale," said Fatty Wynn. "The cream puffs are good. I've only had nine jam tarts; I don't care for 'em."

"My word!" murmured Gordon Gay. "How many would he have if he did care for 'em?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I asked you for some cream puffs," said Fatty Wynn reproachfully. "Mrs. Murphy, I asked you for some cream puffs."

"I gave them to you, Master Wynn."

"No; you only gave me six."

"I—I'll get some more."

"Give me a dozen marmalade tarts to go on with, then."

"C-certainly!" gasped Mrs. Murphy.

"And I'll have some more ginger-beer. And I may as well have a pot of that strawberry jam, if you'll give me a spoon. I'm fond of jam."

"Go it, Fatty!" said Figgins admiringly. "Keep up the reputation of the New House."

"I'm going to, Figgy!"

"It's a ripping feed!" said Figgins. "Blessed if I remember having one as good as this since the time we had that fig-pudding. You remember the fig-pudding, Fatty?"

"Oh, hang it all, Figgy, don't talk about that now!" remonstrated Fatty Wynn. "Don't spoil my appetite when I'm just having a good time."

"Spoil your appetite!"

"Yes, by talking about that awful fig-pudding."

"That what?"

"Awful fig-pudding."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins looked excited.

"It was a jolly good fig-pudding!" he exclaimed warmly. "I know there wasn't much of it left, anyway."

"Oh, don't!"

"You jolly well polished it off—"

"I know it nearly polished me off—"

"Look here, Fatty Wynn—"

"Oh, don't jaw now, Figgy! Can't you see I'm busy?"

"You ass—"

"Order!" said Tom Merry. "Family quarrels not allowed here. Wire into the jam tarts, Figgy, and never mind the fig-pudding."

And Figgins grunted, and wired into the jam tarts.

Arthur Augustus surveyed the scene with a pleased smile.

He liked to see happy faces round him, and there was no doubt that all the fellows were enjoying themselves.

School House and New House and Grammar School were on the best of terms now.

"This comes like corn in Egypt," Jack Wootton remarked. "We've just had a long walk, and we were feeling too hungry to walk back to school without a snack, you know."

"Try the sausages," said Fatty Wynn. "They're good."

"Have you tried 'em?" grinned Gordon Gay.

"Well, I had seven, so I know they're all right. I was going to try them, but I had some of the veal patties instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ginger-pop, Mrs. Murphy."

"Lemonade here."

"Pass the tarts."

"Cheese-cakes, please."

"And vanilla jellies."

"Mine's an ice."

Mother Murphy had never been so busy in her life. Her stock, too, showed some signs of petering out. More than once she had to reply that some particular article called for was exhausted. But the juniors were accommodating. If they couldn't have one thing, they were quite willing to have another.

As jam-tarts and cream-puffs disappeared, tins of biscuits and bottles of sweets were opened, and these were almost inexhaustible.

Gordon Gay had seen some considerable feeds, both at St. Jim's and the Grammar School, but the extent of this one surprised him.

"Did you say Gussy was footing this little bill?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Have you been robbing a bank, then?"

"Weally, Gay—"

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Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"Or have you come into a fortune?"
 "I'm wathah flush at pwesent."
 "Good! We'll soon alter all that!" grinned Frank Monk.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Oh, Gussy's all right!" said Monty Lowther. "He's olling in filthy lucre. His pater has just given him a bank account and a bank-book."
 "My hat!"
 "You're rotting!"
 "Honour bright!" said Tom Merry.
 "Let's see the giddy book."
 D'Arcy held up the cheque-book.
 "My word! Then it's true!" said Gordon Gay. "Well, must say some chaps have all the luck!"
 "I haven't dwawn any cheques so fah," said D'Arcy. "I m goin' to give Mrs. Murphy the first cheque in the book, ou see."
 "It will be a rather big chèque, I think," grinned Gordon

Gay.
 "That's all wight, deah boy!"
 "There's a crowd gathering round the shop," Tom Merry remarked, looking out of the doorway. "Rylcombe is interested."

"Let 'em look!"

Quite a crowd of village lads were staring into the shop. The continual popping of corks, and the voices and loud laughter had attracted most of the youthful idlers of Rylcombe.

Arthur Augustus recognised his old acquaintances Pilcher and Grimes among them, and waved his hand to them cordially.

"Pway come in, deah boys?" he exclaimed. "I'm standin' sweat, and there's enough for all!"

Pilcher winked at Grimes.

"That's good enough," he remarked.

"What-ho!" said Grimes.

"Come in, deah boys—all of you! Those who can't get in, give their orders, and we'll pass out the stuff!"

"Phew!" said Tom Merry.

As there were a dozen or fifteen fellows outside the shop, the order was a big one. But D'Arcy, in the consciousness of having inexhaustible funds at his command, was simply overflowing with hospitality.

Needless to say, the village lads promptly gave their orders.

Some of them could not be fulfilled, because Mrs. Murphy's stock was running out, but there was ample ginger-beer and biscuits and cake.

The feast was a royal one.

Tom Merry looked at his watch at last.

"Time we got back, or we shall be late for locking up!" he exclaimed. "Give Gussy his little bill, Mrs. Murphy, please."

"Certainly, Master Merry."

Mrs. Murphy had been keeping a rough account on a sheet of sugar paper. The hieroglyphics she inscribed there had no meaning for anyone but herself; her system of booking, like the documents that are sometimes advertised for, was of no value to anyone but the owner. She seemed to make meaning out of it, however, and after wrinkling her forehead over the sum, she at last presented Arthur Augustus with his account.

D'Arcy glanced at the paper.

"Nine pounds, eight shillings and thwepence," he remarked.

"By George!"

"My only hat!"

D'Arcy did not turn a hair. He took his cheque-book from his pocket.

"Can you lend me a pen, Mrs. Murphy?" he asked.

"Certainly, Master D'Arcy!" said the good dame, much impressed by the cheque-book. "Here it is, and the ink."

"Thank you vevy much."

Arthur Augustus filled in the cheque.

Then he marked off the amount on the counterfoil, and tore the cheque from the book, and passed it across the counter.

The juniors watched him in great admiration.

"Thank you, Master D'Arcy," said Mother Murphy, carefully blotting the cheque.

"We will now return to St. Jim's, deah boys."

"Well, good-bye, and thanks for an awfully ripping feed!" said Gordon Gay.

"Not at all, deah boy!"

"Many thanks," said Frank Monk. "I shall probably give you a call soon, Gussy. You're a nice chap to know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Grammarians went their way. Tom Merry & Co. took the road to St. Jim's, and Pilcher and Grimes and the rest gave D'Arcy a cheer as he departed, to which the

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swell of St. Jim's responded by gracefully bowing and raising his silk hat.

CHAPTER 10.

The Chance of a Lifetime.

SKIMPOLE of the Shell came along the Fourth-Form passage in the School House, and tapped at the door of Study No. 6. The chums of the Fourth were there, busily engaged upon their prep., and as they did not want to be interrupted, they took no notice of the tap. Skimpole waited a moment, and tapped again.

There was no response.

The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's opened the door, and blinked into the study through his big spectacles.

Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were seated round the table, at work, and they all looked up at Skimpole.

The amateur Socialist entered the study, and blinked at them in a rather perplexed way.

"I tapped at the door," he remarked.

"Yes, we heard you," said Blake.

"You did not tell me to come in."

"Exactly."

"Still, we'll tell you to get out, to make matters even," said Digby.

"Yes, get out."

"Outside!"

"I presume you are joking," said Skimpole. "I came here to speak to D'Arcy, on a rather important matter."

"I don't see what for," growled Blake. "We're doing our prep. Can't you go and speak to Tom Merry on a rather important matter instead?"

"Really, Blake, you are absurd! I—"

"Well, go and try young Wally," said Blake. "He's in the Third Form-room. I dare say he'd like you to speak to him upon a rather important matter."

"Really—"

"Or there's Gore, the chap in your own study. If you've got a rather important matter to speak of, you ought to give your own study-mate first chance."

"But—"

"Or try those chaps in the end study. Kangaroo would be delighted to discuss a rather important matter with you."

Skimpole blinked at Jack Blake. Blake's face was quite grave, and the amateur Socialist had not the faintest idea that he was joking.

"You misunderstand me, Blake," he said. "The matter is rather important, and it concerns D'Arcy, hence my desire to discuss it with him."

"Weally Skimmay—"

"I hear that D'Arcy has received a cheque-book as a present from his father."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! You are now in command of a large sum of money—"

"A pwetty fair amount, Skimmay, but—"

"Very good. Now, you are aware that I have written a book—a large book—on the subject of Socialism. I have practically finished the book now. It is called 'Socialism and Determinism as Applied to Modern Problems, with some Chapters on Political Economy, and Remarks upon the Grave Failings of the Modern Social System—'"

"Jolly good," said Blake, "it's those short, natty titles that sell a book."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The title does not really describe the whole contents of the book," said Skimpole. "But I thought I had better keep it short. The book deals with the whole of the modern problem. It begins with evolution, and traces the rise of the human race from a speck of jelly floating in a primeval sea—"

"Is that starting far enough back?" asked Blake anxiously. "You really begin at the beginning, you know."

"I think that is far enough back for practical purposes. Having traced the rise of the modern curse of civilisation, I proceed to show how it can be abolished, and a better state instituted in its place. The groans of the toiling mil-

lions—"

"The what?"

"The groans of the toiling millions—"

"You haven't got those in your book, surely?"

"Yes. You see—"

"Is it a book or a gramophone?" demanded Blaké.

"Blessed if I know how you're going to reproduce groans except on a gramophone record!"

"I speak figuratively. The groans of the toiling millions will reach the air through the medium of my book. I have a splendid idea—"

"Only one—in the whole book?"



"Try the ham," said Fatty Wynn, with a beatific smile on his fat face. "I can recommend the ham, I've had some."

"I am not now alluding to the book. I have a splendid idea—it flashed into my mind as soon as I heard about D'Arcy's cheque-book."

"Bai Jove!"

"It is this—that D'Arcy should stand the cost of publishing the book," said Skimpole. "I have written to several publishers, but most of them have not replied. In fact, I have had only one reply, from the publishers of the 'New Epoch,' a Socialist paper. They say they cannot see their way at present to publishing my book, but are willing to supply the 'New Epoch' to me for a subscription of six-and-six a year. It is very kind of them, but it was not exactly what I wanted."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, if D'Arcy cares to finance the publication of my book, it will be an excellent way to expend his bank account; and the profits will soon roll in, and fully repay him," said Skimpole, blinking at the swell of St. Jim's. "What do you say, D'Arcy?"

"Wathah not."

"Pray reflect. The groans of the toiling millions—"

"Pway wing off, Skimmay!"

"You see, it will be what they call poetical justice, if the

funds of a family of landowning parasites is used to propagate Socialism," said Skimpole eagerly. "I expect the publication of my book to be immediately followed by the establishment of Socialism in the country. Then the land will be restored to the people, to whom it rightly belongs, and from whom it has been wickedly withheld for so long—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Could you serve a more glorious cause?" exclaimed Skimpole enthusiastically. "My friends, Socialism is almost upon us. It is coming—it is coming—"

"And you are going," said Jack Blake, getting up. "There's the door."

"Really, Blake—"

"You see, we have our prep. to get done, whether Socialism is coming or not. You can shut up or travel."

"A sincere Socialist never shuts up."

"Ha, ha! I shouldn't wonder! In that case he gets the order of the boot," said Blake. "Now, run away and play, like a good ass."

"I have made a suggestion to D'Arcy—"

"Declined with thanks, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, turning his monocle upon Skimpole. "I wegard you as an ass."

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"Pway got out!"

"But such an opportunity as this will never recur," urged Skimpole. "Think of it! My book, consisting of three hundred and seventy-five chapters, is now completed——"

"Good-bye!"

"It waits only for publication, and then it will change the whole face of society. You had better think again, D'Arcy. I——"

"We've got to get our prep done!" roared Blake.

"Yes, but——"

"Get out!"

"I must urge you, D'Arcy, to reconsider your decision. This glorious opportunity of establishing Socialism——"

"Will you go?"

"No, Blake, I will not go. It is my duty to remain, and urge this matter upon D'Arcy until he consents——"

"Bai Jove!"

"Such an opportunity will never recur. The country may be rescued from the darkness of barbarism, in which it now wallows, and——"

"Bai Jove! I believe he's wound up."

Blake took the amateur Socialist by the shoulders, and gently twisted him out of the study. Skimpole spun round in the passage, and sat on the linoleum.

"Oh!" he gasped.

Blake slammed the door, and returned to the table.

"Of all the fearful asses——" he began.

The door opened.

Herbert Skimpole blinked into the study.

"I must repeat, D'Arcy——"

"Get out!" roared Blake.

"That this is an opportunity that will never—— Oh!"

A cushion smote Skimpole on the chest, and he was swept across the passage. There was a loud bump as he fell. Blake kicked the door shut.

Skimpole did not open it again.

CHAPTER 11.

A Small Cheque for Mellish.

MELLISH, of the Fourth, tapped at the door of Study No. 6 about ten minutes later, and put his head in. There was an agreeable smirk upon the face of Mellish—or a smirk that was meant, at all events, to be agreeable. The cad of the Fourth was on the worst possible terms with the chums of No. 6; but that did not matter to Mellish. His smile told the chums at once that he had heard the story of the cheque-book, and they eyed him grimly as he came in, almost wriggling in his intense desire to be agreeable.

"I've heard about the cheque-book, D'Arcy," he remarked.

"Weally!"

"Yes. I congratulate you."

"Thank you vewy much."

"I wanted to speak to you, you know," went on Mellish confidentially. "It happens that at the present moment I am rather short of tin."

"Go hon!"

"And if you cared to draw me a small cheque, I've no doubt Mrs. Taggles would cash it, and then——"

"Certainly, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

Blake snorted.

"Rafs! Shove that cheque-book back in your pocket, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"You know jolly well that Lord Eastwood warned you not to be extravagant."

"Yaas, but——"

"Well, we're not going to let you be extravagant," said Blake. "It would be the worst kind of extravagance to waste tin on a chap like Mellish."

"Look here, Blake——" began Mellish.

"Oh, you cheese it!"

"I think D'Arcy ought to be allowed to do as he likes with his own bank account," said the cad of the Fourth. "If I were D'Arcy, I should refuse to be dictated to."

"Would you weally, deah boy?"

"Yes, rather," said Mellish emphatically. "I would lend a friend a small cheque if he wanted one."

"But you are not my friend, Mellish."

Mellish smiled a sickly smile.

"Well, I've always tried to be, D'Arcy. I always liked you."

"Yaas, but——"

"Perhaps other fellows have misrepresented me to you," said Mellish, with a venomous look at Blake. "I've always tried to show that I liked you."

"My hat!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove, have you weally?" said D'Arcy. "Were you twyin' to show how much you liked me when you twod on my foot yesterday afternoon in class?"

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"T-t-that was an accident?"

"I pwesume you were merely displayin' fwriendship at the time you put the tweacle in my Sunday toppah."

"Well, you see——"

"And it was out of pure wegard that you put the soot in my collar-box."

Mellish tried to grin.

"T-t-that was a joke."

"Oh, I see, just a fwriendly joke!"

"Exactly."

"I should wathah advise your not keepin' up that sort of joke with your fwriends," said D'Arcy. "It might lead to misunderstandin'."

"Ye-e-es, but——"

"I wemebah I punched your nose about the soot——"

"I—I don't mind."

"I hope your nose is all wight now."

"Yes, thanks, it's—it's all right now."

"Vewy good, Blake, deah boy, I weally think you must have misjudged Mellish. He has come here affah havin' his nose punched to pwoffah me his fwriendship in a weally hearty way."

"Quite hearty," said Mellish.

Blake sniffed.

"He's after the giddy cheque-book, you ass!"

"Nothing of the sort," said Mellish. "It's like Blake to attribute mercenary motives to others. I should feel exactly the same amount of fwriendship towards D'Arcy if he had no money at all."

"I've not the slightest doubt about that," grinned Blake; "but you wouldn't be trying to humbug him."

"Look here, Blake——"

"Weally, Blake, pewwaps you are wathah too wuff on Mellish."

"Oh, rats!" growled Blake.

He did not understand D'Arcy at all.

He knew that Mellish was making up to the elegant junior from the most sordid of motives; and, innocent and unsuspecting as D'Arcy usually was, it was surprising that he could not see it himself, for he had never trusted Mellish.

Between Mellish, with his caddish and treacherous ways, and the open-hearted swell of the School House, the antagonism was indeed keener than between Mellish and Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I wegard wats as a diswespectful expwession," said Arthur Augustus. "I fail to see any weason why I should not give Mellish a small cheque."

"Certainly not," said Mellish.

"Oh, do as you like!" grunted Blake. "You're an ass——"

"I wefuse to be called an ass——"

"And a chump——"

"I decline to be chawacterwised as a chump, Blake. I wegard the expwession as most oppwobwious."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"That is a merely unintelligible wemark, and I disdain to wply to it. I think I will give Mellish a small cheque, exactly pwoportioned to the fwriendship he feels for me."

And the swell of the Fourth opened his cheque-book, and drew a cheque, and blotted it, and handed it across to Mellish.

"Thanks, awfully!" said Mellish, as he took the cheque.

D'Arcy waved his hand in a lordly way.

"Not at all, deah boy."

"Well, now cut off, Mellish," said Blake curtly.

But Mellish did not stir.

He held the cheque in his hand, and he was standing looking at it with an expression of amazement on his face.

"I—I say, there's some mistake," he stammered. "You—you've filled in the wrong amount, D'Arcy."

"The w'ong amount, deah boy. Imposs."

"Yes; look here."

Mellish held out the cheque, and the chums looked at it. Then they laughed. The order to the banker read off: "Pay to P. Mellish, the Sum of One Penny.—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy."

D'Arcy adjusted his monocle carefully, and looked at the cheque. Then he turned the eyeglass upon Mellish.

"Well, what's w'ong with that cheque, deah boy?" he asked.

Mellish stared at him.

"It's for a penny," he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But—but——"

"It's a small cheque, deah boy," explained D'Arcy. "You asked for a small cheque. That's a small one."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake, and Digby, and Herries.

Mellish's face was almost green.

"I—I say, I suppose this is a joke," he said.

D'Arcy nodded serenely.

"Exactly, deah boy; it's a joke."

"But—you're—going—to—to change this for a bigger cheque."

"Not at all."

"But—"

"I said I would make the amount of the cheque exactly proportioned to the amount of friendship you feel for me," said Arthur Augustus. "I am only afraid that I have made the cheque weally wathah too large."

Mellish looked daggers at the swell at St Jim's. The others roared. The cad of the Fourth crumpled the cheque in his fingers.

"You—you rotters!" he muttered.

D'Arcy shook an admonishing finger at him.

"If you had come to me and said that you would like a loan, although we had always been on bad terms, that would have been all wight," he said; "but to come here with a wotten pretence of friendship—"

Slam!

Mellish had left the study, leaving the cheque—the small cheque—in fragments on the floor.

CHAPTER 12.

Binks is Made Happy.

THE next day Arthur Augustus D'Arcy found himself the most remarkable fellow at St. Jim's.

A junior who possessed a cheque-book, with a sum at the bank which seemed inexhaustible to fellows who seldom had more than a few shillings at a time, was a novelty at St. Jim's, and they were all interested in him.

There was no "swank" about Arthur Augustus, and that made him all the more interesting, and prevented any feelings of ill-nature or envy from cropping up.

The swell of St. Jim's had generally had plenty of money, and the others were used to that; and his manner did not change now that he was permanently flush.

He had rather an airy way of taking his cheque-book out and drawing a cheque, that was all; but that really excited only admiration.

D'Arcy borrowed a fountain pen from Monty Lowther to carry about with him for convenience in drawing cheques when wanted.

During the first day several cheques, some of them for good amounts, were drawn in favour of Mrs. Mible at the school tuckshop.

The juniors all considered that a fellow with a banking account was good for unlimited feeds; and D'Arcy was far too generous and far too thoughtless in money matters to deny any claimant.

Impecunious juniors developed a sudden and remarkable attachment for D'Arcy, and he could have held quite a court if he had chosen.

Even Upper Form fellows heard about the cheque-book, and asked D'Arcy to let them see it, and honoured him by accepting small cheques.

To decline a loan to a senior was difficult when he knew that there was the money to be had, and D'Arcy drew cheques for Sefton, of the New House, and Knox, the prefect, and several more seniors, the money to be repaid at some time in the hazy future.

Among his own chums, of course, his generosity had no bounds.

Fortunately for him, his own chums were by no means inclined to plunder him, or sponge on him in any way, or they might have done it to their heart's content.

That the rich youth should stand unlimited feeds was only right, but that was as far as it went.

"Well, what does it feel like being a giddy millionaire?" Tom Merry asked D'Arcy, when he met him after afternoon school.

D'Arcy smiled.

"I wathah like it," he replied. "It's a wippin' good ideah of the governah's. Nothin' like givin' a chap a decent sum of money to make him feel a sense of responsibility."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Are you looking after your money?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Keeping a careful account of every cheque you draw?"

D'Arcy hesitated.

"Well, I did at first," he said. "I began by entahin' the full amount, and so on, on the counterfoil, you know. But I forgot some of them; and, upon the whole, it's wathah a bore. The bankah can do that just as easily as I can."

"The banker."

"Yaas. What's a bankah for if he doesn't keep your accounts for you?"

"But you won't know when all the money's gone."

"Oh, I expect the bankah will let me know."

"Ha, ha! I rather think he will!" grinned Tom Merry.

"But what I mean is, you won't know how the money's going, and it will come to an end all of a sudden, and leave you on the beach, perhaps."

"Oh, that's all wight," said D'Arcy confidently. "Fifty pounds is an awful lot of money, and I mean to make it last all this term and next."

"But—"

"I shall send in my pass-book at the end of the term, and then I shall see exactly how I stand."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy turned his monocle inquiringly upon the hero of the Shell.

"I weally fail to see any weason for laughtah, Tom Mewwy," he remarked.

"I was thinking that there mayn't be any money left at the end of the term, that's all, at the rate you're going on," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, wats! There's heaps, you know. Besides, if the bankah wants any more money, I can send him a cheque for it."

"Eh?"

"I've got sixty cheques in the book, you know, and I've only used six or seven. I can always keep one for the bankah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, Gussy, you ought to be the head of a big bizney in the City," almost sobbed Tom Merry. "You ought, really. You'd make such a ripping business man."

"Well, as a mattah of fact, I wathah fancy myself as a business man," said D'Arcy. "I fail to see what amuses you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry staggered away to relate D'Arcy's intentions to Manners and Lowther. The swell of St. Jim's looked after him with a puzzled expression.

"I wegard Tom Mewwy as an ass," he murmured. "I suppose the bankah would accept a cheque on his own bank—he would know that was all wight. I wegard that duffah as a howlin' ass."

And D'Arcy strolled away. He was debating in his mind whether he should purchase a new bicycle now that he could draw a cheque to pay for it, and he strolled under the elms to think it out. Three fags of the Third Form followed him. They were Wally, Jameson, and Gibson. The scamps of the Third were on the track of the cheque-book. Wally had divided his sovereign tip with his major, so it was only fair that Arthur Augustus should share out his good fortune; so Wally thought, at all events.

D'Arcy stopped as he walked into the shadow of the trees.

He did not observe the Third-Formers in the distance. It was the sound of a gulping breath, suspiciously like a sob, that made him stop.

He glanced round through his monocle.

"Bai Jove, Binks!"

Binks, the School House page, was standing under one of the elms, the picture of misery. Binks's face was not very clean, and a couple of big tears rolling down it had made a whitish furrow. He blinked at D'Arcy.

"What's the mattah, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy, touched at once.

"Oh, Master D'Arcy!"

"Has Goah been waggin' you?"

"Oh, no, Master Gore never rags me now."

"Vewy good. Then what's the mattah?"

"I—I—I've lost my money," said Binks. "It was a sovereign. It's gone."

"Bai Jove!"

"It must 'ave slipped through a 'ole in my pocket," said Binks miserably. "I was goin' to the post-hoffice, and when I got there it was gone."

"The post-office was?" asked D'Arcy, in astonishment.

Binks grinned through his grimy tears.

"No, Master D'Arcy; the sovereign."

"Bai Jove, it's wathah weckless of you to have holes in your pockets, Binks!" said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. "You can't afford to lose soveveigns, you know. But what were you takin' a soveveign to the post-office for?"

"To get a postal-order, Master D'Arcy," groaned Binks.

"Oh!"

Arthur Augustus understood. Binks, the buttons of the School House, was a curious youth in many respects, with a fervent desire to start in life in the Rocky Mountains as a masked highwayman. But his heart was in the right place, and some of the fellows knew that he sent home the greater part of his wages to his mother to help in the maintenance of a horde of smaller Binkses.

D'Arcy felt for his cheque-book and the fountain-pen.

"It's all wight, Binks," he said.

"How is it, Master D'Arcy? I—"

"I've got a cheque-book," explained D'Arcy. "I'll give you a cheque for the amount."

"Oh!"

"Dwy your teahs, deah boy. It's all wight."

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Binks turned scarlet.

"Oh, Master D'Arcy, I—I didn't mean that—I never thought—I didn't know you could give away a sovereign."

"That's all wight, deah boy."

D'Arcy rested the cheque-book on his knee, and wrote out the cheque. He handed it to the astonished page.

"There you are, Binks."

"Oh, thank you, Master D'Arcy! I'll save up and pay it back."

"Wats! You won't do anythin' of the sort. Go and get it posted."

"Thank you so much, Master D'Arcy."

"Wats! Buzz off!"

And Binks buzzed off, with his face bright and his heart lightened. D'Arcy slipped the cheque-book back into his pocket, feeling quite satisfied. Doubtless, he had wasted a good deal of the money placed to his account by Lord Eastwood; but he had done at least one good deed by means of his cheque-book.

CHAPTER 13. Another in Trouble.

"Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus turned round as the heroes of the Third came up. He adjusted his eyeglass, and stared at them.

"Weally, Wally, I wish you would put on a clean collah!" he exclaimed.

"Why, this was a clean one this afternoon!" exclaimed Wally indignantly.

"Bai Jove, it's a soiled one now!"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Look here, I didn't come here to talk collars," said Wally. "I'm hard up. One good turn deserves another. Savvy?"

"I wegard that as a vulgah expression."

"I could do with a pound," said Wally.

"If you are in want of money, deah boy, I shall be vevy pleased to dwaw you a cheque," said D'Arcy, and the cheque-book came out again.

Wally grinned.

"That's exactly how the case stands," he said. "Make it a pound. Mrs. Taggles will cash it."

"Oh, I say," exclaimed Curly Gibson warmly, "what's the good of a pound! He's just given young Binks a pound. I saw him."

"Shut up, Curly."

"Sha'n't!" said Curly. "Look here, make it a fiver."

"Weally—"

"Well, say, two pound ten," said Jameson. "That's better, Wally. May as well make hay while the sun shines, you know."

Wally shook his head.

"We're not going to plunder Gussy," he said. "I let Gussy have a half-sov. out of my tip. He's going to give me a whole sov. That's all right."

"Look here, make it two pounds."

"Rats!"

"It's a waste," said Jameson indignantly. "I don't approve of wasting money. Make it two pounds, Wally."

"More rats!"

"Look here—"

"Shut up, Jimmy. Make the cheque for one pound, Gussy. I dare say I shall come to you for another later, but that's enough for now."

"Vevy well, Wally."

And Arthur Augustus drew a cheque for a pound for his minor.

Wally took it with a grin. Jameson and Gibson were looking wrathful. To have a major with a cheque-book, and not ask him for more than a pound, seemed to them the extreme of folly. They were very much inclined to turn upon their chum and bump him.

"Come on," said Wally.

"You ass!" said Jameson.

"You frabjous chump!" growled Curly.

"Rats! Are you coming to the tuckshop?"

That was an invitation it was impossible to resist. Jameson and Gibson swallowed their wrath, and followed Wally to Dame Taggles's little shop, where the good dame cashed the cheque with great willingness, and the greater part of it was immediately expended in eatables and drinkables.

Arthur Augustus went to cricket practice, and soon forgot all about the scamps of the Third. But he was not yet done with them.

As he went back towards the School House a little later, he heard the sound of a loud sob close at hand.

He glanced round in surprise.

"Boo-hoo!"

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S REGATTA."

Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

A diminutive form was on one of the benches under the elms, and it had its face buried in its hands, but D'Arcy recognised Gibson of the Third.

The fag was weeping bitterly.

Arthur Augustus, with his tender heart touched at once, came towards Curly Gibson, and tapped him on the shoulder. The fag gave a start, as if in surprise, and looked up.

"Boo-hoo!"

"What's the mattah, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy sympathetically.

"Boo-hoo!"

"Are you hurt?"

"No. Boo-hoo!"

"What is it, then? I'm sowwy to see you like this," said the swell of the Fourth. "I twust no one has been bullyin' you. If anyone has, tell me who it is and I'll give him a feahful thwashin'."

"It isn't that. Boo-hoo!"

"Then what is it?"

"M-m-m-my grandmother!" sobbed Curly.

"Bai Jove!"

"Boo-hoo!"

"What's the mattah with your gwandmothah, deah boy? I sincerely twust that she is not dead?" said D'Arcy.

"N-no! Boo-hoo!"

"Bai Jove! I suppose you're not cwysin' because she's not dead?"

"Ow! Boo-hoo!"

"What's the mattah with her, Curly?"

"She—she—she's— Boo-hoo!"

"Yaas?"

"I was going to—send her a—postal-order," sobbed Curly. "She's poor, you know—awfully poor, and—and I was going to send her a postal-order."

"That was vevy decent of you, Curly."

"I—I—I—"

"Anythin' happened to the postal-ordah?"

"I—I—I've lost it!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Boo-hoo!"

"How weally wemarkable! The same thing happened to Binks. It is vevy unfortunate that you lost the postal-ordah. How much was it for?"

"A—a-p-p-pound."

"How cwivious! It was a pound that Binks lost. It is weally a most wemarkable coincidence."

"Boo-hoo!"

"Pway don't cwiy, deah boy. I'll give you a cheque for a pound to send to your gwandmothah," said D'Arcy.

Out came the cheque-book and the fountain-pen. Curly Gibson bestowed a wink upon the pigeons in the quad, but as D'Arcy glanced at him, he became grave again.

"Better make it payable to me," he said. "M-m-my grandmother is an old woman, and—and won't understand cheques. I'll cash it, and—send her a postal-order."

"Vevy well. Mrs. Taggles will cash it for you."

"Right-ho!"

"Curly! Curly!"

Curly Gibson looked alarmed. It was the voice of Wally, calling through the elms. D'Arcy was writing out the cheque in his leisurely manner. He never did anything in a hurry.

"Curly!"

"That is Wally callin' you," said D'Arcy, pausing with the fountain-pen.

"Yes; that's all right—buck up!"

"Yaas, but—"

"Have you finished?"

"Yaas—"

"Gimme the cheque, then!"

"All except signin'—"

"Oh, buck up!"

"Curly! Oh, here you are!"

Wally came upon the scene, looking rather red and breathless. He stared at Curly Gibson and Arthur Augustus.

"I've been looking for you, you ass!" he exclaimed.

"Jameson's waiting, too. What the dickens are you doing here?"

"Oh, buzz off!" said Curly hastily. "I'll join you!"

"You'll come with me now. You've got to cook the herrings."

"You get the frying-pan ready, and—"

"Rats! Come on!"

"Here you are," said Arthur Augustus. "It's wct. Cawwy it in your hand till it's dwy, unless you've got some blottin'-papah."

Wally stared at the cheque.

"What on earth's that for?" he exclaimed.

"It's all wight, Wally—"

"What are you giving Curly a cheque for?"

"It's all right," said Curly. "Come on."
 Wally jerked the cheque from his hand.
 "It's not all right," he said. "I told you Gussy wasn't to be plundered. I tell you I won't have it."
 "Weally, Wally—"
 "Don't you be an ass, Gus."
 "It's for Curly Gibson's gwandmothah—"
 "Eh?"
 "His gwandmothah is vevy poor, and Curly has lost a postal-ordah he was goin' to send her, so it's all wight. Give him the cheque."
 Wally stared at Arthur Augustus, and then at Curly Gibson. The face of the latter became very red. Wally tore the cheque into fragments.
 "Here, hold on!" exclaimed Curly. "That's my cheque."
 "Bai Jove, Wally—"
 "You ass!" ejaculated Wally.
 "Weally, Wally—"
 "You chump!"
 "I wefuse to be called a chump!"
 "You frabjous burler!"
 "I wogard those expressions as diswespectful, Wally. I twust you will wemembah that I am your majah."
 "You burbling ass!" said Wally. "Can't you see that Curly has been rotting? He hasn't a grandmother!"
 "I have," said Curly. "I've got two."
 "You don't send 'em postal-orders, then. Can't you see that he's been pulling your leg, Gussy, you ass? He heard Einks yarning to you, and he's yarning to the same tune to squeeze a sov. out of you."
 "Weally, Wally, I wefuse to believe anythin' of the sort. I—"

"Look here, you buzz off, Wally," said Curly Gibson. "If Gussy likes to give me a cheque, why shouldn't he? You cut!"
 "No fear!" said Wally; and he seized his comrade of the Third by the shoulders. "You young spoofer! Now, then—"
 "Ow!"
 "Confess!"
 "Yaroo! Leggo my n-neck!"
 "Were you going to send a postal-order to your grandmother?"
 "Yow! Yes! Yaroo! No."
 "Get off!"
 "Yowp!"

"Don't you be an ass any more, Gussy," said Wally severely. "Blessed if I know what'd become of you if you hadn't me here to look after you."
 "Weally, Wally—"
 "Leggo!" gasped Curly Gibson, in a stifled voice. "Leggo! You're chook-chook-choking me! Leggo, Wally, or I'll land you one!"
 "You get off! If I find you spoofing Gus again, I'll squash you! Gus is my major, and nobody's going to spoof him but me!"
 "Look here—"
 "Weally, Wally—"
 "Oh, don't you begin, Gus! Off you go, Gibby!"

And Wally helped Curly Gibson to start by planting his boot behind him. He started, and Wally followed, still kicking, as if he meant to dribble Curly Gibson like a footer across the quadrangle. Curly broke into a run, and Wally did the same, and they disappeared through the trees at a great speed.
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle in his eye, and looked after them in great astonishment, and ejaculated: "Bai Jove!"
 Then he put his cheque-book and the fountain-pen in his pocket, and took his way to the School House, looking very thoughtful.

CHAPER 14.

Overdrawn.

THERE never was a more generous fellow than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, and he proved it amply during the next few days.

Any fellow who wanted a small loan had only to mention the matter to D'Arcy, and out came the cheque-book.

Blake tried to point out to him that, at this rate, the fifty pounds Lord Eastwood had placed to his credit would not last long; but D'Arcy smiled superior.

D'Arcy knew what he was about.
 "You see, deah boy, you don't undahstand biznay," he remarked.

Blake jumped.
 "Bizney! Do you mean to say that you're scattering your loot like this on business principles?" he demanded.

"Well, not exactly, but bankin' is a wonderful system," said D'Arcy. "You know that the population of the world is divided into two classes—those who have money and those

who haven't. And bankin' is a system invented to keep your money gwowin', you see. You get intewest on money in the bank, and compound intewest, and so forth, and you weally nevah know how much money you have."

"You don't get intewest on a current account, duffer."
 "I wefuse to be called a duffah. I suppose I am gettin' intewest on my money. I should decline to have no intewest."

"Ass!"
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "And even if you were getting two and a-half per cent., that wouldn't mount up quick enough to cash all the cheques you're drawing," said Blake.

"You don't undahstand biznay, deah boy."
 "Chump!"
 "Weally, Blake, I must decline to be called a chump! I wogard it as an oppwobwious expression! There is no dangah of my ovah-dwawin' my account. Why, I have more than forty cheques left!"

"Eh?"
 "Weally, Blake, I twust you are not gwowin' deaf."
 "What good are the cheques if there's no money to meet them?" roared Blake.
 "Weally, Blake—"

"If you draw a cheque, and there's no money in the bank to meet it, it's fraud," said Blake. "You're liable to prescution."

"Weally, deah boy, you don't undahstand bankin'," said D'Arcy patronisingly. "There's heaps of money in the County and Town Bank, Limited. My govornah says it is one of the oldest and safest banks in England."

"But the money there isn't your money."
 "Weally, Blake, I must wemark that you are wathah dense. As soon as I find my account wunnin' low, I can always weplenish it by dwawin' a cheque in favah of the bank managah!"

Blake gasped, as Tom Merry had done.
 "Gussy—"
 Words failed him.
 "Well?"

"You're too good to be true!" gasped Blake. "You ought to be stuffed and put in a glass case. You ought really."

"I wefuse to continue the discuss., if you are goin' to make personal wemarks," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"Now, look here—"
 "I decline to do anythin' of the sort. I—"
 "Let me explain—"

"My deah fellow, you can't tell me anythin' about bankin'. I'm quite up to that subject, you know; I wathah fancy myself at figures."

"But—"
 "Let the mattah dwop, deah boy. Now, I was thinkin' that we'd bettah have new curtains and a new squah of carpet in the studay."

Blake shook his head.
 "Carpet and curtains cost money," he remarked.

"I didn't expect to win them in a waffle," said D'Arcy. "I am quite aware that they cost money. I have, as a mattah of fact, already ordahed them."

"Ordered them?"
 "Yes."
 "But where's the tin to come from?" demanded Blake.

"Oh, I'll dwaw them a cheque!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I fail to see any cause for this diswespectful laughtah, deah boy," said D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass freezingly on his hilarious chum.

"Oh, all right, Gussy, you can go ahead with the cheques!" said Blake. "When the cheque comes back unpaid, we can raise the money to pay the bill!"

"Weally, Blake—"
 "And if you get arrested for trying to spoof tradesmen with dummy cheques, we'll stand by you and bail you out," said Blake affectionately.

"Weally, you know—"
 "So go ahead with the carpet and curtains."

Digby and Herries grinned when the carpet and curtains came home. But they agreed that if the cheque-book was burning a hole in D'Arcy's pocket, it was best to give him his head, as Blake expressed it.

The study certainly looked much nicer.
 D'Arcy looked round the room when it was finished, and there was a smile of approval upon his aristocratic features.

He nodded with much satisfaction.
 "I wogard this as a great impwovement," he said.

"So it is," said Blake.
 "Yes, rather!" agreed Digby. "It's ripping. The only trouble about refurbishing a place is that the things have to be paid for."

"That's all wight, deah boy; I've given the chap a cheque."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"It's all right, for the present, anyway," grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Is there any othah little improvement you could suggest, deah boys?" said Arthur Augustus. "My cheque-book is absolutely at the disposal of the studay, you know."

The three chums looked thoughtful.

"Well, we might have a set of gilt fire-irons," suggested Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"I should like a diamond-studded collar for Towser," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"And we might drink pearls in our coffee, like Cleopatra," said Blake. "I rather think that would be a ripping wheeze."

"If you cannot be sewious, deah boys—"

Binks put his head in at the door.

"Letter for Master D'Arcy."

"Thank you vevy much, Binks."

Arthur Augustus took the letter.

It was addressed to him in a clerky hand, and on the back of the envelope was printed "Town and County Bank."

"It's a letter fwom the bank, deah boys," said D'Arcy.

The chums exchanged a grin.

"Good!" said Blake. "I expect there's news."

"Pewwaps!"

D'Arcy opened the letter.

He read the missive inside, and then carefully adjusted his eyeglass, and read it again. Then he looked perplexed.

"Bai Jove!"

"Well?" demanded three voices.

"Listen, deah boys! Or, wathah, you wead it out, Blake,"

said D'Arcy, tossing the letter across to Blake. "I wegard the thing as wank impertinence."

Jack Blake took the letter and looked at it. He chuckled, and read aloud the following communication:

"Master D'Arcy, School House, St. James's Collegiate School, Sussex.

"Dear Sir.—We are to inform you that your account with us is now overdrawn to the extent of £4 5s. 11d.—four pounds five shillings and elevenpence. Awaiting your instructions, we remain,

"Yours faithfully,

"THE TOWN AND COUNTY BANK, LTD."

CHAPTER 15.

Arthur Augustus Knows How to Settle It.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY looked at his chums, and they looked at him. The three were grinning, but D'Arcy was quite serious, and a little perplexed.

"Well, deah boys?" he said, at last.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to excite mewwiment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway be sewious, deah boys. Can you tell me whom that lettah is fwom? Surely the managah would not w'ite in that impertinent stwain!"

"It's from the chap who looks after your account, I suppose," said Blake. "A bank always lets a chap know when his account is overdrawn. You've gone ahead a little too quickly, you see. The money's gone—and I dare say there are half a dozen cheques not presented yet, too."

"Yaas, but—"

"You'll have to go slower," grinned Digby. "You see, fifty pounds won't last for ever."

"The lettah seems to me to be impertinent in tone."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And what instwuctions do they want? I suppose it means with wegard to payin' out for the west of the cheques."

"It's a polite way of putting it," explained Blake. "They mean you're to send them the balance due to them, and stop drawing cheques till you've got some more money there to meet them."

"Oh!"

"The best thing you can do with the cheque-book now is to shove it on the fire."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Now, that's good advice!"

"You uttah ass! You don't know anythin' about bankin'."

"Eh?"

"I shall have to make up this four pounds five shillin's

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and elevenpence," said D'Arcy. "There are also some more cheques out, amountin' to somethin' like fifteen pounds, or twenty, or somethin' like that. I don't wemembah exactly. I shall have to send them enough to cover all that, also to keep in hand against future cheques dwawn on them."

"But you haven't got any money!"

"Money is not necessawy, deah boys. I've got the cheque-book."

"Oh!"

"I am goin' to send them a cheque for thirty pounds—or, wathah, I may as well go the whole hog. I'll make it a hundred pounds."

"What?"

"That will see me cleah for a long time."

"You ass—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

"But if you send the bank a cheque on itself for a hundred pounds, what money is to meet the cheque?" howled Blake.

"My dear chap," said D'Arcy, in a tone of explanation, "you don't undahstand bankin'. Why, the Town and County Bank has a weserve fund of half a million."

"You chump—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, carry me away, somebody!" sobbed Digby. "It'll be the death of me. I know he will!"

"I wegard you as an ass, Digby!"

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"Weally, Blake, what the dickens is a weserve fund for, then?"

"Oh, you ass—"

"Once for all, Blake, I decline to be called an ass. I—"

"You can't send that cheque—"

"You don't undahstand bankin', deah boy. Leave mo alone, and I assure you it will be all wight."

"But—"

"Oh, don't wowwy, deah boys! I assure you there is vevy little in the science of bankin' that I don't undahstand."

Blake collapsed into a chair. He was almost weeping.

"Do you mean to say that you're going to send that cheque?" he gasped.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you won't take advice?"

"Certainly not," said D'Arcy. "I undahstand bankin', and you don't."

"Oh, my word!"

"Pway shut up, deah boys, while I w'ite to the bank," said D'Arcy.

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked at one another. D'Arcy sat down at the table, and opened his cheque-book.

They watched him draw the cheque.

"Pay to the Town and County Bank, Ltd., the sum of One Hundred Pounds. ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY."

Then he wrote the letter.

"Dear Sir,—Thank you very much for your communication. Please find enclosed cheque for One Hundred Pounds (£100), to be placed to credit of my current account.—Yours truly,

A. A. D'ARCY."

The juniors stood in silence while D'Arcy tore the cheque from the book, folded it inside the letter, and placed the letter in an envelope, which he addressed to the Town and County Bank, Wayland Branch.

Then the swell of St. Jim's looked up.

"I wathah think that settles it all wight," he remarked. Blake gasped.

"You think that settles it?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah."

"My hat!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You're going to post that letter?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went out of the study with the letter in his hand. The chums crossed to the window, and watched him emerge from the School-House, and walk over to the school letter-box.

"He's posted it," said Digby.

"My hat!"

"What will the bank chaps think?" murmured Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"My only hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry looked into the study as he passed. He stared at the three Fourth-Formers, doubled with mirth.

"Wherefore this thushness?" he demanded. "What's the jokelet?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy's heard that his account's overdrawn—"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Already!"

"Yes—and he's sent the bank a cheque on itself to make it up."

Tom Merry roared.

"Good old Gussy! Ha, ha, ha!"

And he staggered away to tell Manners and Lowther.

CHAPTER 16.

The Testimonial.

"D'ARCY!"

"Yaas, deah boy."

"He's here," said Reilly, turning round from the door of Study No. 6, to the crowd of fellows behind him. "It's all right!"

It was twenty-four hours after the incident last recorded. D'Arcy had not yet received an answer from the bank, but he had not given that any thought, for he had not the least doubt that that matter was satisfactorily settled.

D'Arcy was alone just now in Study No. 6.

Blake and Digby had gone down to Rylcombe after afternoon lessons, and Herries was at the kennels looking after his bulldog. D'Arcy was seated at the open window, polishing his Sunday silk hat—an occupation of which he hardly ever seemed to tire.

He glanced round as the shaggy head of Reilly was thrust into the study.

A look of surprise came over his face as the juniors crowded in.

There were Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers in the crowd, and more than a dozen of them altogether.

"What do you want, deah boys?" said the swell of St. Jim's, adjusting his eyeglass and looking at the newcomers. "Weally, I am wathah busy at the pwesent moment, you know. What is the mattah?"

"Oh, we've come to see you, you know," said Reilly affably.

"Weally, Weilly—"

"We've come to see you," said Kerruish, of the Fourth.

"It's a rather important matter."

"Yes, rather," said Hancock. "Very important."

"Awfully important," said Gatty.

"Bai Jove!"

"The fact is," said Reilly, who seemed to be the spokesman of the party, "we admire ye very much, D'Arcy, and we've been thinkin' of gettin' up a sort of testimonial."

"A testimonial?"

"Faith, and that's the idea!"

D'Arcy laid down his silk hat.

"Weally, you are vewy kind," he remarked. "I feel vewy much flattahed, you know; but I weally don't know wheehah I could accept a testimonial."

"Oh, that's all right," said Kerruish. "As the most popular fellow with a cheque-book—I—I mean the most popular fellow in the house, you're entitled to a testimonial."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old D'Arcy!"

"Weally, you know—"

"We've decided on the testimonial," said Jones minor.

"That's settled."

"Yaas, but—"

"Faith, and we've thought it over very carefully!" went on Reilly. "We thought first of an illuminated address, but we decided against that."

"Costs money," said Roberts.

"Shut up, Roberts!"

"Order!"

"Then we thought of a gold cup," said Reilly unblushingly. "But we didn't happen to have any gold cups lying about, so we gave up that idea."

"Weally, Weilly—"

"Finally, we thought of an excellent scheme," went on Reilly. "Now, this is the idea, and I think you're bound to approve of it."

"Of course that's very important," remarked Hancock. "If D'Arcy doesn't approve of it, we shall have to think of a new scheme."

"Faith, of course!"

"D'Arcy knows what's what, you know. If he doesn't approve of the thing, it shows that the thing's no good," remarked Kerruish, with a solemn shake of the head.

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I must say I think you're wight, deah boys. I wegard myself as bein' a fellow of tact and judgment, and in a case of doubt you can genevally depend on me to point out the pwopah thing to do."

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, this is the idea," said Reilly. "We thought it would be a good idea to stand you a big feed, you know, as a mark of appreciation."

"That's the dodge."

"You are weally vewy kind—"

"Not at all. Do you approve of the idea?"

"Yaas, I suppose I must accept, as you are so kind—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Faith, and he accepts!"

"Bravo!"

D'Arcy rose to his feet, and put down the velvet pad; for a moment forgetting even his silk hat, which he had placed on a chair beside him, so much moved was he by this mark of appreciation on the part of the School-House juniors.

"Weally, deah boys," he remarked, "I must say I am gweatly touched by this—this desiah on your part to show your good-feelin' towards me."

"Hear, hear!"

"I wegard it as a gweat honah, and I shall be vewy pleased to accept."

"Bravo!"

"Jolly good!" said Reilly. "The honour's on our side."

"Vewy well put indeed, Weilly."

"There is only one small difficulty in the way," went on Reilly. "Standing a feed costs money; but, of course, we can't allow vulgar considerations of that sort to enter into a matter like this."

"Bai Jove! I should hope not."

"And as we're short of tin, an' can't stand the feed, it's really only a matter of form who pays for it—the mark of appreciation is just the same in any case," said Reilly in a hurried manner. "So if you drow a cheque to pay Mrs. Taggles—"

"Bai Jove!"

"I suppose that's all right, D'Arcy?"

"Oh, that's all right," exclaimed Roberts. "There's nothing mean about D'Arcy."

"I'm sure D'Arcy wouldn't allow vulgar considerations of money to enter into a matter of this sort," said Kerruish.

"Oh, rather not."

"Faith, and sure ye're right!"

D'Arcy looked at the juniors through his eyeglass in a rather perplexed way. To be asked to pay for a feed stood to himself by his admirers in the School House was a little extraordinary. But, as Roberts said, there was nothing mean about D'Arcy; and, after all, was not the mark of appreciation just the same, whoever paid for the feed?

"Well, what do you say?" said Reilly. "We've admired you for a long time, D'Arcy, ever since you—"

"Ever since you had a cheque-book," said Roberts.

"Shut up, Roberts!"

"But—"

"You ass!"

"Silence!"

"Ever since you came to St. Jim's, D'Arcy," said Reilly, with a withering look at the unlucky Roberts. "We've admired you no end, and this testimonial is the only way we can think of to show all the school how we really regard you."

"Hear, hear!"

"You are quite right to scorn vulgar considerations of money, D'Arcy," Reilly continued. "We admire you for that more than for anything else, don't we, chaps?"

"Yes, rather."

"Hear, hear!"

"So you accept the testimonial, D'Arcy?"

What could D'Arcy say?

"Yaas, wathah!" he replied. "I must remark that it is a wathah peculiah kind of testimonial, you know. But I accept it with pleasure."

"Hear, hear!"

"Come on, then," said Reilly, linking his arm in D'Arcy's. "Nothing like striking the iron while it's hot. Come on!"

"I was just polishing my hat—"

"It's beautifully done," said Hancock, picking up the silk hat and putting it on D'Arcy's head. "There you are!"

"You ass—you've put it on backwards!"

"My mistake."

D'Arcy reversed the silk hat, and allowed himself to be marched from the study. In the midst of an enthusiastic crowd, the swell of St. Jim's walked out of the School-House.

CHAPTER 17.

Let 'em All Come.

THE scheme for presenting the owner of the famous cheque-book with a testimonial had evidently been much discussed, for as Reilly & Co. marched out with D'Arcy in their midst, they were joined by more juniors from all sides. Quite a little crowd poured out into the quadrangle, and there, too, they were joined by more recruits. D'Arcy's shining silk hat, like the white plume of Navarre of old, was a rallying point for all. There were twenty or twenty-five fellows crowding round Arthur Augustus as he crossed towards the tuckshop with his graceful walk. Blake and Digby came in at the gates, and caught sight of the crowd, and the well-known topper in the midst of it.

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Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S REGATTA."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "There's something on!"

"Gussy's being ragged, I suppose."

"Come on!" said Blake hastily.

They dashed forward, and ran into Tom Merry, and knocked him flying. The hero of the Shell jumped up wrathfully.

"What the——" he began.

"Sorry," gasped Blake, "Gussy's being ragged; can't stop!"

Tom Merry burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! It's all right; he's not being ragged—it's a giddy testimonial."

But Blake and Digby had rushed off, and could not hear. They dashed to the rescue.

The two juniors burst upon the crowd round D'Arcy like a thunderbolt. Unless their elegant chum was being ragged, there seemed no reason to Blake and Digby why he should be marched across the quad, in a shouting crowd, and they rushed to the rescue without stopping to inquire.

"Give 'em socks!" gasped Blake.

"Go it!"

Biff—biff—biff!

Reilly gave a roar as he rolled over under Blake's right, and Hancock yelled as Digby floored him.

The rescuers reached D'Arcy's side in a moment, hitting out furiously.

There was a roar round them.

"What the dickens——"

"What the——"

"Who the——"

"You ass!"

"You fathead!"

"Get out!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "What's the mattah, deah boys? What are you hittin' Weilly and Hancock for?"

"Eh?"

"What's the wow?"

"The row! We're rescuing you!" exclaimed Blake indignantly.

D'Arcy stared at him.

"Wescuin' me?" he ejaculated.

"Yes, you ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass! I——"

"Sock it to them!" gasped Hancock, struggling to his feet.

"Bowl 'em over! Bump them!"

"Hold on——"

"It's all wight, deah boys——"

"Look here! Aren't you being ragged, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Are you being ragged or not?" roared Blake.

"I should wefuse to be wagged!"

"Then you're not?"

"Certainly not!"

"Well, of all the chumps——"

"Pway don't go for my fwends, deah boys!" said D'Arcy pacifically. "Blake is wathah an ass, but it's all wight!"

"All right, is it?" roared Reilly, clapping his nose, from which the claret was flowing redly. "I'll show the spalpeen if it's all right!"

"Weally, Weilly——"

"Faith, and sure I——"

"Pax, deah boys! I twust you will not make a wow! You have been wathah too hasty, Blake. I was not bein' wagged. This is a testimonial."

"A which?" gasped Blake.

"A testimonial."

"A tes-tes-testimonial?"

"Yaas, wathah! These fellows are standin' mo a feed as a sign of their appreciation," said D'Arcy. "You chaps can come, too."

"Oh!" ejaculated Blake.

"My word!" said Digby.

"Oh, let's get on!" said Kerruish. "Don't make a row now, Reilly, on an occasion like this."

"Look at my nose!"

"Never mind your nose! Think of the feed."

"Faith, and I——"

"Oh, come on!"

"Pax!"

"Get along there! We're waiting for you, Gussy."

"All wight, deah boys!"

Blake and Digby joined the crowd. If there was a feed going, there was no reason why they shouldn't be in it, but they hardly understood as yet. Blake felt a tap on the shoulder, and looked round, to see the Terrible Three grinning at him.

"I told you it was a testimonial," said Tom Merry. "It's a rather ripping idea of Reilly's, isn't it?"

"Oh, it's Reilly's idea, is it?" said Blake.

"Yes."

"All these fellows going to the feed?"

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"Looks like it."

"And who on earth's footing the bill?" demanded Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy, I suppose."

"Eh? Is Gussy standing himself a testimonial, then?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy, you ass——"

"Did you address me, Blake?" said D'Arcy, turning round in the doorway of Dame Taggles's little shop.

"Yes, chump——"

"I declino to be called a chump."

"Shut up, Blake!" said Hancock. "We won't allow you to address Gussy in a disrespectful manner. Order!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Who's standing this feed?" shouted Blake.

"These chaps are," said D'Arcy. "They're standin' it to me as a testimonial."

"But who's footing the bill?"

"Oh, that's only a mattah of form. I shall give Mrs. Taggles a cheque."

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

"My only hat!" gasped Lowther. "Oh, Gussy is getting too funny! Gussy, old man, you are being done! Can't you see that your noble leg is being pulled?"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"They are pulling the wool over your noble eyes, Gussy!"

"Weally, you know——"

"Oh, get in!" said Reilly hastily. "You chaps shut up! If you want to join in the feed, join in; but don't interfere, and don't jaw."

"Hear, hear!" said Fatty Wynn, elbowing his way into the tuckshop. "Don't you bother, Blake, but make way for a chap's that hungry."

"New House rotter! Kick him out!" rose a cry.

"Rats!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn warmly. "Don't I want to take part in a testimonial to a chap I admire like Gussy? Haven't I admired him immensely, and as much as anybody, ever since he had a cheque-book——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Wynn——"

"I—I mean ever since—ever since I admired him," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm going to have a hand in this testimonial as—as a sign of appreciation from the New House."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quite wight, Wynn!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway join us!"

"What ho!"

And Fatty Wynn did. He had determined to have a share in that testimonial—as a matter of fact, he had a lion's share. All the juniors did themselves well, but Fatty Wynn really distinguished himself.

"It's all right, Blake!" said Tom Merry, patting the rather excited junior on the back. "Don't worry! The cheque-book won't last much longer, and the fellows are making hay while the sun shines."

Blake burst into a laugh.

"Oh, all right! Mine's ginger-pop."

"Mine's lemonade."

"Jam tarts, please."

"Ham patties."

"Vanilla ices."

"Cream puffs."

And the testimonial was soon going very strong.

CHAPTER 18.

A Business Call.

THERE was a letter for D'Arcy on the following morning. He found it when he came downstairs with his chums, and opened it carelessly enough. It was from the bank, as he knew by the inscription on the back.

"It's all wight!" he remarked. "Only an acknowledgment of my cheque, I suppose."

Blake chuckled.

"Something more than that, I imagine," he remarked.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Well, look."

D'Arcy unfolded the letter and glanced at it. A folded cheque fell out. Digby picked it up. It was a cheque for one hundred pounds, signed with D'Arcy's name—in fact, the cheque he had sent to the bank to renew his account.

The juniors read the letter over D'Arcy's shoulder. It was brief, but very much to the point.

"Dear Sir,—We return your cheque herewith, and remark that we do not understand your object in sending it to us. Your account is overdrawn, as we have previously advised you, and we have been compelled to decline to honour several cheques since presented to us.—Yours faithfully,

"THE TOWN AND COUNTY BANK, LTD."

D'Arcy's face was a study.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured.

Blake roared.

"What did you expect, Gussy?" said Tom Merry, with a grin.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for laughtah. I wegard this as a piece of wank impertinence on the part of the bank managah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The chap has wafused to honah a cheque dwawn on his own bank. I wegard that as a pwoof that the bank is in a woeky condish."

"Oh, Gussy!"

"I shall wite to my governah, and warn him that the bank is woeky, so that he can look aftah his money there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As for this chap's impertinence in weturnin' my cheque, I shall call on him this aftahnoon, and speak to him vewy plainly."

"You—you're going to the bank?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But—but—" gasped Tom Merry.

"I wegard it as my dutay to keep this bank managah chap in his place," said D'Arcy firmly. "I cannot allow impertinence of this kind to pass unweppwimanded."

The chums shrieked

"Oh, let him go!" gasped Blake. "I think we'd all better go with him and see the fun."

"Good egg!"

"Nothin' of the sort, deah boys! You chaps don't undahstand bankin' or biznay methods, and I could not take you with me on a purely business call."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Besides, you have tweated the whole mattah in a wibald spiwit."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, there's the cricket this afternoon, too," said Tom Merry. "But I should awfully like to see Gussy's interview with the bank manager."

"I will tell you all about it, deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know—"

But the juniors roared—they could not help it. D'Arcy crumpled the letter into his pocket and walked away, with his nose very high in the air.

It was a half-holiday that afternoon at St. Jim's. There was a junior cricket match on between the Shell and the Fourth, and D'Arcy's name had been put down for the Fourth Form team, but Reilly was quite willing—and able—to take his place. As the swell of the Fourth explained, his business with the bank at Wayland would not wait. If his cheques on the bank were not being paid, it would cause trouble—an opinion in which his chums fully concurred. They were expecting trouble!

When the cricketers went out to play, Arthur Augustus, in gleaming collar and shining hat, walked down to the station, and took the train for Wayland Junction.

The swell of St. Jim's was in a determined mood.

He was not going to stand any nonsense from the bank manager. His aristocratic features wore a quite grim expression when he stepped out of the train at Wayland.

The bank was at the corner of the High Street, and Arthur Augustus was not long in reaching it from the station.

He entered the bank, making quite a handsome picture as he stood in the dull place—like a fragment of Bond Street transported bodily into the quiet building in the old-fashioned country town.

A young gentleman upon a stool ceased for a moment gnawing a pen, and glanced inquiringly at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Pway, can I see the managah?" asked D'Arcy.

"H'm! Mr. Wix is engaged just now, I'm afraid," said the clerk. "What name, please?"

"D'Arcy—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy."

The clerk grinned. His grin showed that D'Arcy's cheques had caused a certain amount of hilarity at the bank, as well as at St. Jim's. The elegant junior frowned.

"Pway inform the managah that I wish to see him," he said loftily.

"Certainly, sir."

The clerk disappeared into an inner apartment for a moment or two, and then reappeared and conducted the swell of St. Jim's into the manager's private room.

A stout, pink-complexioned gentleman of middle age rose to meet D'Arcy. His face was serious, but there was a twinkle in his eyes which seemed to indicate that he was carefully suppressing a desire to smile.

"Ah, Master D'Arcy!" he exclaimed, shaking hands with the junior. "One of our clients! I am very glad to see you! Pray sit down!"

"Thank you vewy much."

Arthur Augustus sat down.

"You were in Wayland, and you thought you would give

me a call," remarked Mr. Wix. "That was very kind of you."

"As a mattah of fact, my deah sir, I have called upon a mattah of business," said D'Arcy.

"Yes! You wish to pay in something to your account?"

"Not at all."

"No!"

"I wish to know what this lettah means?" said D'Arcy, laying the crumpled letter from the bank upon the table.

The manager stared.

"Ahem! Surely that letter is plain enough?"

"You have weturned my cheque."

"Ye-es."

"And dishonoured some cheques I drew on the bank?"

"Ye-es. There have been several more since the letter was sent you, too. You see, we had no resource. I communicated with Lord Eastwood on the matter, informing him that your account had been overdrawn, and he replied that on no account were we to allow it to be further overdrawn. You see, therefore, that we had no resource but to decline to pay the cheques that were presented to us."

"But I sent you a cheque to place to my account."

"Eh?"

"A cheque for one hundred pounds!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "Do you mean to say that the bank has no funds to meet it?"

"But—but—"

"You state on your published balance-sheet that you have a wervefe fund of half a million, sir. Yet you have weturned my cheque."

The manager stared.

"Really, my dear lad, you—you hardly seem to understand the rules of banking," he murmured faintly. "You are not allowed to draw cheques on our reserve funds—really."

"Weally, deah boy—I mean, my deah sir—"

"Ahem! You hardly understand, but—"

"I undahstand perfectly cleahly now," said D'Arcy, rising. "But I weally think that it would be more fwank on your part to make that statement on your balance-sheet."

"But—but, really—"

"Undah the cires, this cheque-book will be no furthah use to me," said D'Arcy loftily. "I will leave it here. Bai Jove!"

His hand came empty out of his pocket.

"Gweat Scott! I must have droppet it!"

Mr. Wix looked concerned.

"Dear me! This is serious!"

"Well, it wasn't much use, as you decline to cash my cheques," said Arthur Augustus, with some sarcasm. "I weally do not see that it mattahs much."

The bank manager coughed.

"Well, if it falls into bad hands we shall have the numbers of the cheques, so forgery will hardly be practicable," he said. "However, I hope it will be recovered. You are going?"

"Yaas. I think I should wemark to you—it is only fair—that I intend to warn my governah of the woeky state of this bank."

The manager hid a smile with his hand.

"Very well, Master D'Arcy. I dare say Lord Eastwood will understand. Good-day!"

"Good-day!" said D'Arcy loftily. And he left the bank.

The manager sat down in his chair and laughed for three consecutive minutes—which did not look as if he were very nervous about the result of Arthur Augustus's threatened report to Lord Eastwood.

CHAPTER 19.

Many Creditors.

"D'ARCY!"

"Where is D'Arcy?"

"Anybody seen D'Arcy?"

Jack Blake had just come off the cricket-field, with his bat under his arm—out! He glanced round inquiringly as the excited voices called for D'Arcy.

"What's wanted?" he demanded.

"D'Arcy!"

"Who wants him?"

"Three or four people," said Jones of the Fourth, with a grin. "There's Gorman, the grocer, of Rylcombe—"

"And Whippet, the tailor—"

"And Tucker, the gingerbeer merchant—"

"And Thompson—"

Blake looked bewildered.

"My hat! All Rylcombe coming to visit D'Arcy?" he asked.

"Looks like it," said Kangaroo, coming up. "Where is Gussy?"

"He's gone out."

"Just like Gussy—when he's wanted."

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"He's gone over to the bank at Wayland," said Jack Blake. "What the dickens do they all want with him?"

"Cash."

"What?"

"They've all got cheques that the bank won't pay."

"Phew!"

"Poor old Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "The cheques are coming home to roost at last!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, this is jolly serious!" said Blake. "I'll cut off and see them!"

And he ran towards the School House.

Binks met him in the doorway. Binks was looking concerned. He liked D'Arcy, like everybody else, and he saw that there was trouble in the air for the swell of St. Jim's.

"Oh, Master Blake," he gasped, "there are six people here asking for Master D'Arcy!"

"Where are they?"

"I've shown them up into Study No. 6," said Binks.

"I—I thought I'd better get them out of sight, Master Blake, so that Mr. Railton or the Head wouldn't see them—not till Master D'Arcy comes in, anyway."

Blake slapped the page on the shoulder.

"Good for you, Binks! You're a giddy jewel!"

Blake ran up the stairs.

A fat, red-faced man stood in the doorway of Study No. 6, and other visitors could be seen within. Mrs. Murphy had a shawl over her shoulders, and she was looking worried; but all the men in the party looked excited. Digby had dashed after his chum, and Tom Merry followed him, and they reached the study a few seconds after Blake. What was to be done, they had no idea, but they meant to back up Jack Blake in any way they could.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the fat gentleman, whom Blake recognised as Mr. Gorman, the grocer. "Where is he?"

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Gorman," said Blake politely.

"Where is he?"

"Fine weather for cricket, ain't it?"

"Where is he?" roared Mr. Gorman.

"He? Who?"

"D'Arcy! The young villain who has been giving us waste-paper instead of our money!" roared the excited Mr. Gorman, waving a cheque in the air. "They won't take this at the bank! It's for three pun ten!"

"And look at this!" howled Mr. Whippett, brandishing another cheque. "Fifteen pounds ten and ninepence! They won't pay it!"

"And this!" murmured Mrs. Murphy.

"And this!"

"And this!"

"Young swindler, I say!" said Mr. Gorman.

Blake turned red.

"If you mean to say that my friend is a swindler, Mr. Gorman, you'll get into trouble," he said. "If you don't want to go out of the house on your neck, you'd better mind what you say."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry.

Mr. Gorman nearly exploded.

"Where's my money, then?" he roared.

"Oh, that's all right!"

"All right, is it? Three pun ten! Where is it?"

"D'Arcy's word is as good as his bond," said Tom Merry.

"You'll be paid all right. Don't get excited."

"Fifteen pounds ten and ninepence!" said Mr. Whippett.

"Two pun five!" said Mr. Thompson.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom Merry. "You'll be paid, if we have to pawn our exercise-books and pen-wipers to make up the money!"

"Ha, ha! That's right!"

"Where is D'Arcy?"

"He's gone out."

"Gone out—to avoid his just creditors," said Mr. Whippett.

"I don't believe it!" roared Mr. Gorman. "Trot 'im out! Where is D'Arcy! Produce D'Arcy, or I'm going to the Head!"

"So am I!"

"And I!"

Blake exchanged a hopeless look with Tom Merry. The visitors to Study No. 6 had cause for their exasperation, for the cheques being dishonoured led them to the not unnatural suspicion that D'Arcy had been spoofing them with cheques that did not belong to him. They had a right to be angry and uneasy, but it would never do for them to go to the Head.

That would lead to too much trouble for D'Arcy. Blake racked his brains for a "dodge," but he could not think of one. What was to be done?

"Now, then," roared Mr. Gorman, after a pause to take breath, "are you going to trot him out, or do I go to the Head?"

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"Look here," said Tom Merry. "Keep your wool on! As soon as D'Arcy comes in he'll make some arrangement with you to pay the money. Until then——"

"How long will he be?"

"I don't know, but——"

"Then I'm going to the Head!"

And Mr. Gorman made a movement to leave the study. Blake's eyes gleamed.

"Wait a minute!" he exclaimed. "Hold on a few minutes, and I'll see what can be done."

Mr. Gorman took out a big gold watch.

"I'll wait five minutes," he said—"five minutes, and not a second longer."

"Oh, all right!"

Blake beckoned to Tom Merry and Digby to follow him from the study. They went out into the passage, Blake whipping the key from the lock in passing. The next moment the door was shut and locked on the outside.

Tom Merry gasped.

"My hat, Blake, you've locked them in!"

"They're not going to the Head," said Blake grimly.

"Phew!" said Digby.

"It's the only way."

"Yes, I suppose it is."

There was a terrific pounding on the inside of the study door. Mr. Gorman's bull voice was heard bellowing through the keyhole.

"Hopen this door, you young willain!"

Blake put his mouth to the keyhole to reply.

"Rats!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Hopen the door!"

"I'll have the law of you!"

"Rats!"

The juniors walked away. A terrific uproar from the crowded study followed them. As they went downstairs the voice of Binks was heard below.

"Yes, sir, Master D'Arcy is out at present, sir. Shall I show you to his room, sir, where you can wait for him, sir?"

Blake groaned.

"Another of 'em!"

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "This is getting interesting."

A very red-faced gentleman was standing in the hall. Tom Merry recognised him as Mr. Sanders, a person who supplied cricket-bats and such things to the juniors of St. Jim's. Mr. Sanders was looking very excited, and he held a cheque in his hand.

"This cheque has been refused by the bank!" he exclaimed, as he saw Tom Merry. "If D'Arcy is not here, I shall take it to Dr. Holmes."

"He will be back soon, sir."

"Nonsense! I will not be eluded like this," exclaimed Mr. Sanders. "I will go directly to the Head. Kindly show me to the head-master."

"Come this way, sir," said Tom Merry. "I think we can arrange the matter on behalf of D'Arcy, sir."

"Oh, very well; I have no objection to that, of course. The cheque is for seven pounds fifteen shillings."

"My hat! This way."

Mr. Sanders followed the juniors upstairs. He started as he entered the Fourth Form passage, and the pounding in Study No. 6 burst on his ears.

"Dear me! What is that noise?" he exclaimed.

"This way, sir."

Tom Merry led the way to his own study, and showed Mr. Sanders into it with great politeness.

Mr. Sanders sat down. Tom Merry stepped out of the study, and Blake jerked the door shut and locked it.

Tom Merry wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"This is getting warm," he murmured.

There was a crash on the door from inside.

"Open this door immediately, you young rascals!"

They exchanged a rueful grin with Binks as they met him at the bottom of the stairs.

"Any more of 'em?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, Master Merry," said Binks. "If they come——"

"We'll wait here in case they do."

"Ah! Is Master D'Arcy indoors?" asked a voice at the door.

"Here's another!" grunted Tom Merry, swinging round. Then he uttered a sharp exclamation. "Lord Eastwood!"

CHAPTER 20.

D'Arcy is Quite Satisfied.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY looked a little down-hearted as he walked in at the gates of St. Jim's. He felt that the bank manager at Wayland had proved himself a very unreliable person, and that there

would be trouble when the cheques came in. D'Arcy could not blame himself, but he felt that there was something very wrong with the system of banking.

He came towards the School House, and two or three juniors came down the steps to meet him.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Blake.

"At last!" said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon them inquiringly.

"Anybody been to see me, deah boys?" he asked.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Only about half Rylcombe," he replied.

"Bai Jove!"

"And your governor."

"Gweat Scott!"

"He's only just come in," said Tom Merry. "It seems he's heard from the bank, and has come down to see about it. How did you get on at Wayland?"

"Wotten! The bank managah is a wotten, unbusinesslike person."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ah! Is that you, Artbur?"

D'Arcy raised his silk hat to Lord Eastwood.

"Yaas, wathah, dad!"

"I wish to speak to you," said the earl, in a severe tone. "I have heard from the bank in connection with your over-drawing your account. I will come to your study."

"Certainly, fathah."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in alarm. "The study's hardy in order for his lordship, Gussy. Better—or—talk somewhere else."

"Vewy well; we'll go to your studay, deah boy."

"N-n-no, mine isn't in order either," said Tom Merry, turning red, as he felt that Lord Eastwood's eyes were curiously turned upon him. "You—you see—in fact—"

"That's how it is," said Blake.

"Weally, deah boys—"

There was an echo of crashing and banging from above. Lord Eastwood must have noticed it, though he made no remark.

"I undahstand there are a lot of visitors for me," said D'Arcy. "Where are they?"

"They're—they're waiting," murmured Blake, making signs to D'Arcy to drop the subject—signs quite lost upon the swell of St. Jim's, but which Lord Eastwood perceived perfectly well.

"Bai Jove! Where are they waitin', deah boy?"

"You—you see—"

"Arthur must attend to his visitors first," said Lord Eastwood. "Where are they, Blake?"

"In—in my study," said Blake reluctantly.

The voice of a prefect was heard on the stairs at that moment.

"If you don't stop that row in No. 6, Blake, I'll come and see you about it."

"Bai Jove!"

Blake gave a sickly smile.

"Dear me! What does this mean?" said Lord Eastwood.

"Oh, that's Knox," said Blake. "That—that's Knox's little joke, you know."

A little man in a frock-coat came bouncing up the steps of the School House. The juniors suppressed a groan as they recognised Mr. Topton, the hatter of Wayland. They guessed that he was another of D'Arcy's creditors, especially as he was holding a slip of paper in his hand, easily recognisable as a cheque.

"I want to see D'Arcy!" he exclaimed. "Oh, you are here! Master D'Arcy, this cleque has been returned from the bank. They refuse to pay it. I must ask you to hand me seven pounds eighteen shillings and sixpence immediately."

"Ahem!" said Lord Eastwood. "This is a little more of your carelessness, Arthur."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"It is not my fault, sir. I have called on the bank managah, and he wufuses to listen to weason. I can't help his wufusin' to pay my cheques."

Lord Eastwood smiled.

"You may send in your account to me, my friend," he said to Mr. Topton, and the hatter—all politeness at once—bowed almost to the floor. "Blake, are my son's other visitors on the same errand as this gentleman?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Take me to them at once, please."

Blake gave Tom Merry a hopeless look, and led the way. Lord Eastwood looked astonished as he approached Study No. 6, and heard the terrific din therein.

"Whatever does this mean?" exclaimed Lord Eastwood.

"You—you see, sir," explained Blake, quite crimson, "they—they wanted to go to the Head, so—so we locked them in."

Lord Eastwood tried to look stern; but he failed lament-

ably. His face worked helplessly for a moment, and then he burst into a laugh.

"You young rascals!" he exclaimed. "Open the door at once!"

Blake obeyed. There was a yell within.

The excited occupants of the study started back at the sight of Lord Eastwood, cool and composed again now.

Blake went quietly along to the next study, and then to Tom Merry's, and unlocked the doors. Mr. Sanders came rushing along the passage, but he, too, quieted down at the sight of the earl.

"Gentlemen," said Lord Eastwood, "I am truly sorry that you should have been put to this—or—this inconvenience. And you, madam, pray accept my profound regrets. Any cheques my son may have given you are fully worth the money they are drawn for; you may send in your accounts to me, and they will be paid in full at once."

The earl's speech was like oil on the troubled waters.

The raging lions became meek lambs at once. Even the ferocious Mr. Gorman protested that he knew it was all right all along, and went away quite subdued. When the last of the excited visitors was gone, Lord Eastwood stepped into the study, and turned a long and steady look upon his son. Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass, and returned his lordship's stare with a look of affectionate interest.

"I'm vewy glad to see you lookin' so well, dad," he remarked; "and I'm awfully sorry about that lettah we sent you—the one we cancelled, you know!"

Lord Eastwood coughed.

"Arthur, how much do the combined accounts amount to which you have accumulated in this reckless manner?"

"Oh, not vewy much, sir; about sixty pounds, I think, ovah the ewiginal fiftay," said D'Arcy.

"What! And there is money at the bank to meet them?"

"Yaas, there's heaps of money, unless the bank is in a wocky state," said D'Arcy. "Only the managah is such an extremely unbusinesslike person."

"H'm! I will pay these accounts for you, Arthur, and you will promise me to draw no more cheques under any circumstances whatever," said Lord Eastwood severely.

"Certainly, sir."

"I am afraid you are, after all, hardly old enough or wise enough to have a bank account."

"Weally, dad—"

"We will revert to the former system of a money allowance," said Lord Eastwood.

"Vewy well, dad. A cheque-book is wathah a wowwy, aftah all," said D'Arcy. "Pewwaps the old system is weally bettah. What do you think, Blake?"

"Oh, yes!" said Blake.

"What do you think, Tom Mewwy?"

"Heaps better!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Vewy good! Let us wewert to the old system by all means, dad," said Arthur Augustus. "By the way, I twust you have a fivah for me now."

"What!"

"I am stenay bwoke," explained D'Arcy. "As we are wewertin' to the old system, I should be vewy glad of a fivah just now."

Lord Eastwood looked at his son very expressively for some moments, and then silently, as if overcome, drew out his pocket-book, and handed Arthur Augustus a five-pound note.

THE END.

(Another long complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., entitled: "The St. Jim's Regatta," by Martin Clifford.)

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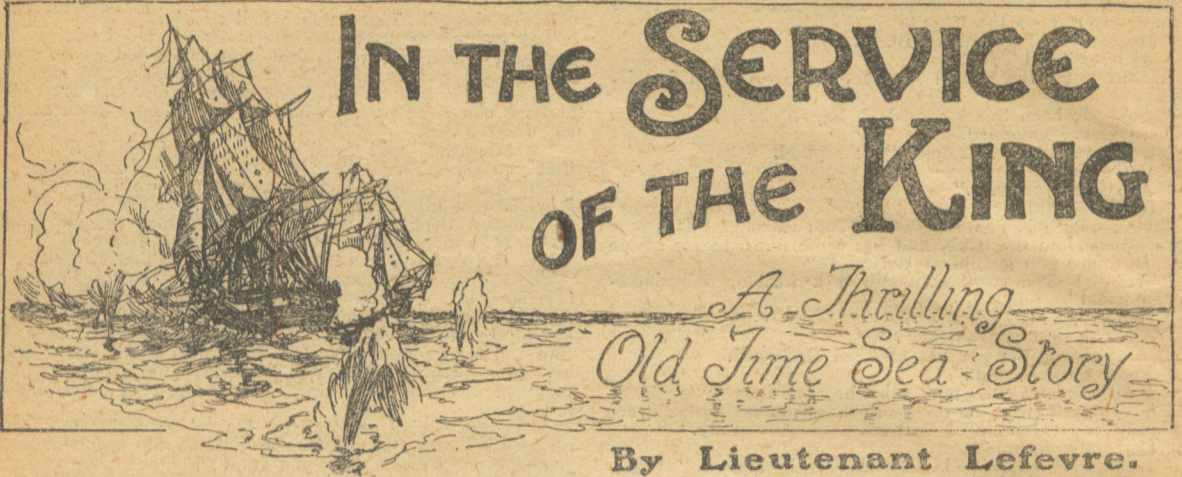
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Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S REGATTA."

The First Chapters of a Splendid Serial Story.



READ THIS FIRST.

Oswald Yorke, a youth of eighteen, joins the Navy under peculiar circumstances, becoming a midshipman aboard the frigate *Catapult* under the name of John Smith. The frigate is wrecked, and only a mere handful of survivors are picked up by a slaving-brig. The brig is subsequently scuttled by her own crew, who have captured a British gunboat, the survivors of the *Catapult* being turned adrift in an open boat.

Captain Burgoyne has a narrow escape from drowning, being rescued with great difficulty by Oswald.

The latter becomes unconscious, and wakes to find himself and his comrades installed in the house of a friendly planter.

Oswald learns for the first time that the captain of the slaving brig was the notorious pirate, Kester.

(Now go on with the story.)

A Pair of Villains.

"Never heard of Kester," said Oswald. "A pirate! I thought he was a slaver!"

"Oh, he reformed! Got tired of leading a bad life, I suppose, and settled down as a respectable slaver. But he lost his cargo; and he and that beastly, ugly nigger, who they say was a sort of partner of his, decided to go back to the old life, so they plotted to capture the Government schooner that was lying off the shore. It appears that the lieutenant in charge was on shore here, at a party Mr. Wilson was giving, with a half a dozen of his officers and men, and that villain Kester was here, too; but he slipped off early. They say that a boat was waiting for him on the shore, and he pulled off to the *Rattler*. That's the name of the lost schooner. You know, the boat from the brig joined company with him, and they boarded the schooner, whose people had evidently mistaken him for Lieutenant Hope and his party. The villains must have murdered every man of the ship's company. Half a dozen bodies have been washed up during the day, and each one has its throat cut from ear to ear. Lieutenant Hope is nearly wild with grief and rage, for, you see, he can't do anything. The other schooner has gone, too. There's no doubt about it, but that this Kester and the captain of the other schooner were confederates. And, what is more, they are inclined to suspect that Mr. Wilson knows something about it, though they haven't got any proof against him so far."

And then Oswald told Maxwell what had befallen him since leaving them in the boat.

"It was a party of niggers out fishing who picked you up," Maxwell explained.

With the exception of Lieutenants Hope and Fife, Mr. Dick Davis (midshipman), and three seamen, who had formed the boat's crew, the entire crew of the *Rattler* had perished. For two days the sea washed up terrible mutilated bodies on the foreshore; and it seemed to them that Lieutenant Hope, who had been in charge of the *Rattler*, would go out of his mind. He was of an excitable disposition, and the shock that he had suffered preyed on his mind to such an extent that Lieutenant Fife, who had been with him on the *Rattler*, told off two of the men to follow their superior officer about,

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S REGATTA."

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and keep their eyes on him in case he should try and do himself some mischief.

A period of enforced inactivity followed. There was no means of leaving the island except by canoe, which was not to be thought of. Nothing could have exceeded Mr. Wilson's hospitality. He seemed anxious to prove in every possible way that he had in no way assisted in the stealing away of the schooner; but his very anxiety to ingratiate himself did much to arouse suspicion against him. He swore that he had never seen Captain Hutt, of the *Albatross*, before in his life, that he had only touched at the island two days before the Government schooner. As for Kester, he said that he had called several times at the island to take in water, and that twice when he called at the island on his return voyage to Kingston in ballast, he had consented to ship a cargo of cotton that Mr. Wilson wished to send to that port.

"This is all I know about the two men!" Mr. Wilson swore most emphatically. "I did not even know that they knew each other. If they did, they hid the fact from me. I can only say that I would sooner lose half I possess in the world than that this thing should have happened off this shore."

Joseph Wilson, his son, a beetle-browed, heavy-faced young man, corroborated all that his father said; and yet, although they both told the same story, and stuck to it most manfully, there was something about the two men that aroused suspicion.

Dr. Telford watched them with his keen little eyes. "Father and son looked a pair of rascals!" he confided to Lieutenant Fife. "Of course, you haven't got the smallest shred of evidence against either of them; but I should watch them very carefully. There is no knowing but they may betray themselves yet, for all their confidence."

"If the pair of them are hung up for their part in the business, I don't see that it will help poor Hope. The man's career is ruined. He will never get promotion now. And yet it is a thing that might have happened to any man. There's not a better sailor in the Service!" said Lieutenant Fife moodily.

"I believe the pair of them, father and son, are as deep in it as Kester himself was," Maxwell tells Oswald.

But though the guests under Mr. Wilson's roof, at San Andrades, had no great regard for their host and his son, there was one member of the family that none of them would have dreamed of saying a word against. This was Miss Norah Wilson, the planter's niece, a young girl of between sixteen and seventeen years of age. She was unusually pretty, with dark, flashing eyes, and hair that was really brown, but which looked like spun gold in the sunlight. She was tall and slim, and as graceful as a young fawn.

"That girl doesn't look as if she came of the same stock as the Wilsons," Dr. Telford said. "She looks a lady. There is breeding in her, from the crown of her head to the points of her shoes. And the Wilsons, father and son, are a couple of clods!"

Maxwell and Dick Davis, the middy of the lost *Rattler*, shared the same opinion about Miss Norah, and they fought their differences out in the cotton-field behind the house, to the satisfaction of themselves and a group of interested darkies, who forgot their work in the excitement of the combat.

That day Maxwell turned up to luncheon with a black eye, and Davis had a bruise on his forehead the size of an apple.

Captain Burgoyne had quite recovered by the third day, and soon fell back quite naturally into his usual habits. Mr. Wilson kept a good cellar, and very soon he and Captain Burgoyne and Mr. Brabazon were all on the best of terms with each other.

"I wouldn't give those two twenty-four hours of life if Yellow Jack lays hold of them!" said Dr. Telford to Mr. Pringle.

"Mr. Wilson said that there has never been a case of fever on this island since he took up his residence here," Mr. Pringle observed.

"I dare say not. But we shall not stop here all our lives, I suppose?" said Dr. Telford. "Good gad!" he added, as a thought struck him. "What a pretty report we shall have to give to the admiral when we do reach Kingston. The frigate and the schooner both gone, mutiny and piracy, and only a handful of men left alive from the crews of both vessels!"

"Burgoyne and Hope will both be court-martialled, I suppose?" said Mr. Pringle.

"I dare say; and the result will be the captain of the Catapult will get off scot-free, while the other—"

Dr. Telford broke off suddenly, for, unknown to him, Lieutenant Hope had entered the room.

The young officer's face had grown white and drawn-looking during the past few days. He ate scarcely anything, and spent most of his time wandering along the shore, watched by his faithful bluejackets.

"I heard what you said, doctor," he said, in a hollow voice. "The captain of the Catapult will get off scot-free, while the lieutenant of the Rattler will be disgraced for ever. Yes, yes, I know, and I shall but get my deserts. I should not have left my vessel. I should not have put faith in this man Wilson. I feel assured now that he is a scoundrel, and was in league with those villains. The entertainment here that night was a blind, a pretext to get me to desert my ship."

So far he had talked coolly and rationally; but now he rose and began to pace the room with hasty strides, swinging his arms, and talking in a loud, excited voice.

"I cannot stand it much longer!" he cried. "Day and night I seem to see the faces of my murdered crew. Their eyes are open and seem to be fixed on me full of reproach. 'This is your doing!' their white lips seem to say. I tell you, Telford, it is driving me mad. It is not the thought of my disgrace, it is the thought that but for me those men might have been living now. I go down to the shore and watch the sea, and presently the water parts, and a ghastly dead face appears for an instant above the surface. At night dim shapes form around my bed. Now, I can see them now—dead faces—dead faces everywhere!"

He stood with his back planted against the wall, and his hands held out as though to ward off some unseen enemy, while the look in his face was one of intense horror and fear.

Dr. Telford rose and went over to him.

"My dear fellow, you are nervous and fanciful. You have let this thing prey on your mind. How can the fault be yours? You did not dream of treachery. Cæsar was slain by treachery; but none can say the fault was his."

"There can be no possible blame attached to you," added Lieutenant Fife.

But Mr. Hope seemed not to hear them. He stood with his hands still outstretched, then suddenly rushed out of the room.

"The sooner we can get off this island the better he will be," said Dr. Telford.

"The sooner we get out of this hole the better we shall all be," said Captain Burgoyne, who lurched into the room at this moment.

He had been drinking as usual heavily, and his blotched face was flushed, and his voice thick and unsteady.

"How much longer are we to stop here kicking our heels?" he demanded.

"Until some vessel comes to take us off, I suppose," said Mr. Fife coolly.

"It's my belief that this man Wilson wants to keep us here," said Burgoyne, with an oath. He had been quarrelling with his host over their cups, and his mind at this moment was filled with animosity against him. "It's my belief that this Wilson and his rascally son are a precious pair of scoundrels. I believe that they were in the plot to murder the crew of the Rattler!" shouted Captain Burgoyne.

Mr. Fife gripped him quickly by the arm.

"Hush!" he said, in a low voice, for through the open door behind Captain Burgoyne's back, he could see the tall form of Norah Wilson.

"Confound your impertinence! Take your hand off!" shouted Burgoyne, with an oath. "Who dares tell me to

be silent? I tell you that Wilson helped to murder that ship's crew as surely as if he had held the knife in his own hand!"

Mr. Fife rose hastily and closed the door; but too late!

Interrupted—A Sail—Oswald Hears News—Rest at Last.

With a look of horror on her white face, the girl passed out on to the verandah, and sank on to a seat, burying her face in her hands.

She knew that her uncle had lied to the officers about Kester. She knew that he had been here, not twice or three times, but twenty or thirty times, and that there had been strange business, and strange doings during his visits. She knew, too, that Captain Hutt, of the Albatross, had been here often before, and that he and Kester had met often.

She was sitting near the open door that led into her uncle's private sitting-room, from which presently there came sounds of voices. Her uncle's, husky and thick; her cousin's, loud and angry.

"Do you want to swing for it?" cried the younger man. "Haven't you sense to keep away from it while those brutes are here? They suspect you already, and, if you drop a hint or blab, they'll have irons on you for your share in the business, and you'll hang for it on Kingston Quay as sure as my name—"

The girl rose hastily from her seat, her worst suspicion confirmed. She wanted to hear no more. She had never cared for her uncle and cousin, never respected them; but now— Her dress caught in the prickly leaves of a cactus, bringing down the plant and the pot in which it was set, and the next moment her cousin, with a white, scared-looking face, came hastily to the window.

"Oh, it is you, is it? Spying on us, I suppose?" he cried, in a furious voice.

"I was not spying. I was going, that I might not hear more," she answered.

"More? Then you have heard something?" he said, in a low voice. With a stride he had reached her side, and caught her hand in his. "Now, then, what have you heard?" he muttered between his teeth. "Tell me!" he added, with an oath. He gripped her arm tightly, so that she winced with the pain.

"Be careful," he whispered—"be careful. We've risked so much that we don't mean to risk any more. You understand? What have you heard? Out with it, or—"

He raised his fist with a threatening gesture, but the girl stood firm, looking him in the eyes.

"You coward!" she muttered.

"If trouble comes through you," he muttered, in a furious voice; "if anything happens, then—"

The threat was never finished.

"Take your hand off that young lady!" demanded a cool voice.

Joseph Wilson swung round and found himself face to face with Oswald.

"You hear!" said Oswald sternly.

"I hear!" replied the other, gritting his teeth together.

"But what is it to you, you cub?"

"I give you one second to release that young lady!" said Oswald, striding forward and laying his hand on young Wilson's shoulder.

With an oath Wilson tried to fling off his hand, and at the same time force Norah in through the open window of the room.

But Oswald's passion rose. Slipping his hand from Wilson's shoulder to his throat, he shook him like a rat, and, gasping for breath, the ruffian was forced to let go his hold on the girl.

He staggered back; then, with a hoarse cry of fury, he rushed at Oswald with clenched fists.

In spite of all that he had gone through, Oswald had not lost his cunning. Slipping quickly aside to avoid the blow Wilson aimed at him, he sent his right fist crashing into his opponent's face, then followed up the first blow with another from his left.

Cursing freely, and spitting blood, Wilson stumbled backwards. Then, with a howl of rage, and murder flaming in his eyes, he rushed at Oswald again.

This time Oswald did not attempt to dodge the blow, but parried it with his left, and, putting forth all his strength, he drove his right fist into the young ruffian's face.

With a gasp and a groan, Wilson went down like a log, just as the elder Wilson, still fuddled with drink, staggered out on to the verandah.

"What's this—what's this?" he cried thickly.

Then, seeing the body of his son lying on the ground, he raised the thick stick that he had been carrying, and rushed at Oswald.

The girl shrieked aloud, and started forward with arms outstretched, as her uncle brought down the stick with a

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tremendous blow, which he aimed at Oswald's head; but, leaping nimbly aside, Oswald caught the stick as it descended, and in a moment had wrenched it out of the man's grasp.

For a moment the pair stood glaring at each other; then, with a contemptuous laugh, Oswald sent the stick whirling away into a dense clump of grass.

"If you were a few years younger, I would serve you the same as I served your son," he said.

But by this time the noise had alarmed everyone within hearing.

Dr. Telford, Maxwell, Mr. Pringle, and Mr. Fife came rushing out, followed in a few moments by Captain Burgoyne.

"Good heavens, Smith!" cried Mr. Pringle. "What's the matter? What has happened?"

"I knocked that cur down," said Oswald coolly, "and his father wanted to revenge him, that's all."

"That's all, is it? That's all, you young villain!" roared Captain Burgoyne. "And this is the way you treat people who have shown you hospitality, is it? By thunder, I'd have you put in irons, if I could!"

Dr. Telford had, meanwhile, been examining young Wilson.

"He is not much hurt—just stunned," he said quietly. "How did it happen, Smith?"

Oswald stood silently, and, meanwhile, Captain Burgoyne's fury rose.

"I may have lost my ship; but, by thunder, I haven't lost all my men! Fid! Fid!"

Old Fid appeared in a few minutes in answer to his name.

"Call up a couple of negroes and get a cane!"

"What are you going to do?" demanded Dr. Telford sharply.

"I am going to show Mr. Smith that I have some authority still, though I have lost my ship, thanks to the cursed bungling of you and the rest!" retorted the captain.

"You are going to flog that boy?" said Dr. Telford.

"Yes!"

"He saved your life, and this is the way you are going to prove your gratitude. I dare say he had good reason in doing what he did."

Captain Burgoyne slunk back abashed at the contempt in Dr. Telford's eyes.

Just then Mr. Wilson came up.

"If you want help, Burgoyne, my hands are all at your service."

Oswald stood leaning against the wooden railings of the verandah, with his arms folded across his chest.

Old Fid stood looking one to another, turning the quid over in his cheek.

"Cane! What'd I want with a cane?" he muttered. "I ain't no schoolmaster."

"I shall expect you to punish this man severely, Captain Burgoyne!" said Wilson, with all the dignity he could muster up. "After our hospitality—"

He paused, and the unpleasant silence that followed was broken most opportunely by young Davis, who came rushing up, shouting excitedly:

"A sail—a sail to the north-east! She looks like a full-rigged ship, and I think she is shaping this way!"

"A sail, is it?" yelled Fid, springing out from the verandah.

In a moment excitement reigned, and the quarrel between Oswald and the Wilsons was apparently forgotten.

The distant sail was still a very long way out at sea; but, as Davis had said, she was evidently shaping her course in the direction of the island. So all through the afternoon a little group was gathered on the shore, eagerly watching the ship as she came nearer and nearer.

Davis's sharp eyes had not deceived him. She was a full-

rigged ship, and proved to be, when she came fully into sight, a frigate of considerable size.

"If she had only come a few days earlier!" muttered Mr. Fife.

"Even now it may not be too late. She may have seen something of the Rattler," said Mr. Pringle.

"I hope so—I hope so," replied the other.

Meanwhile, Oswald was on the verandah with Norah Wilson. Father and son had disappeared; the latter, no doubt, to bathe his face and make himself presentable before the arrival of the frigate.

"I can't bear to think that we are going, and that you will remain with those—with your uncle and cousin," said Oswald.

"Oh, if you knew how I long to get away from here!" the girl cried. "How I hate this life. I do not know why they keep me here. They do not care for me, either of them."

"You don't mean to say they ill-treat you?" cried Oswald.

"If—if I thought that—"

"No, they do not ill-treat me. It is not that; but—Oh, I cannot tell you! Only if—if I could only get away!"

Oswald clenched his hands and unclenched them.

"What can I do?" he muttered. "If I were the captain of this frigate, I might help her; but I am nobody. And yet to leave her behind with that brute!"

"Why don't you ask the captain of this frigate to take you to Kingston? Have you friends there, or anywhere?" Oswald asked.

She shook her head.

"I have no friends in the world but my uncle and cousin."

By this time the frigate had entered the little bay. They saw the anchor go over her side and send up a white cloud of foam, as it went rushing down through the green depths.

Then the white pyramid of canvas melted away like snow in the sunshine, and a few moments later the noble vessel was riding at anchor under her poles.

A boat was lowered from her sides, manned, and in a few moments was coming quickly to the shore.

"They will take you on board. You will go, and—and perhaps we shall never see each other again, Mr. Smith," Norah Wilson said. "Good-bye!" She held out her hand, and Oswald took it in his.

"Good-bye!" he said huskily.

She was gone the next moment, and he turned away and walked down towards the shore, where the boat's crew had already landed.

"This is very ill-news, Captain Burgoyne," said a tall man, with a pair of epaulettes on his shoulders, who was walking slowly up the hill beside the captain of the Catapult.

"I know it, Garvin," replied Burgoyne. "There will be an inquiry held, of course; but I have nothing to conceal. I shall court an inquiry."

"Of course—of course!" replied the captain of the frigate, who had proved to be a former acquaintance of Burgoyne's. "Of course, the crew mutinied, you say—the rascals! Have you any idea why?"

"They were incited to it by my first officer. My only regret is that the scoundrel is dead, and that I cannot bring him to justice," said Burgoyne.

"I thought that Fryer had sailed with you as first lieutenant," said Captain Garvin.

"He did. It was he!" cried Burgoyne.

Captain Garvin started and looked keenly.

"Fryer dead!" he muttered. "And you bring this accusation against him. I cannot believe it. He was one of the best officers in the Service," he said shortly. Then, without another word to Burgoyne, he fell back and joined Dr. Telford and Lieutenant Fife.

(Another instalment of this thrilling serial will appear next Thursday.)

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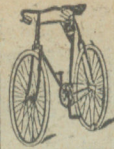
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