

"The Terror of St. Jim's!"

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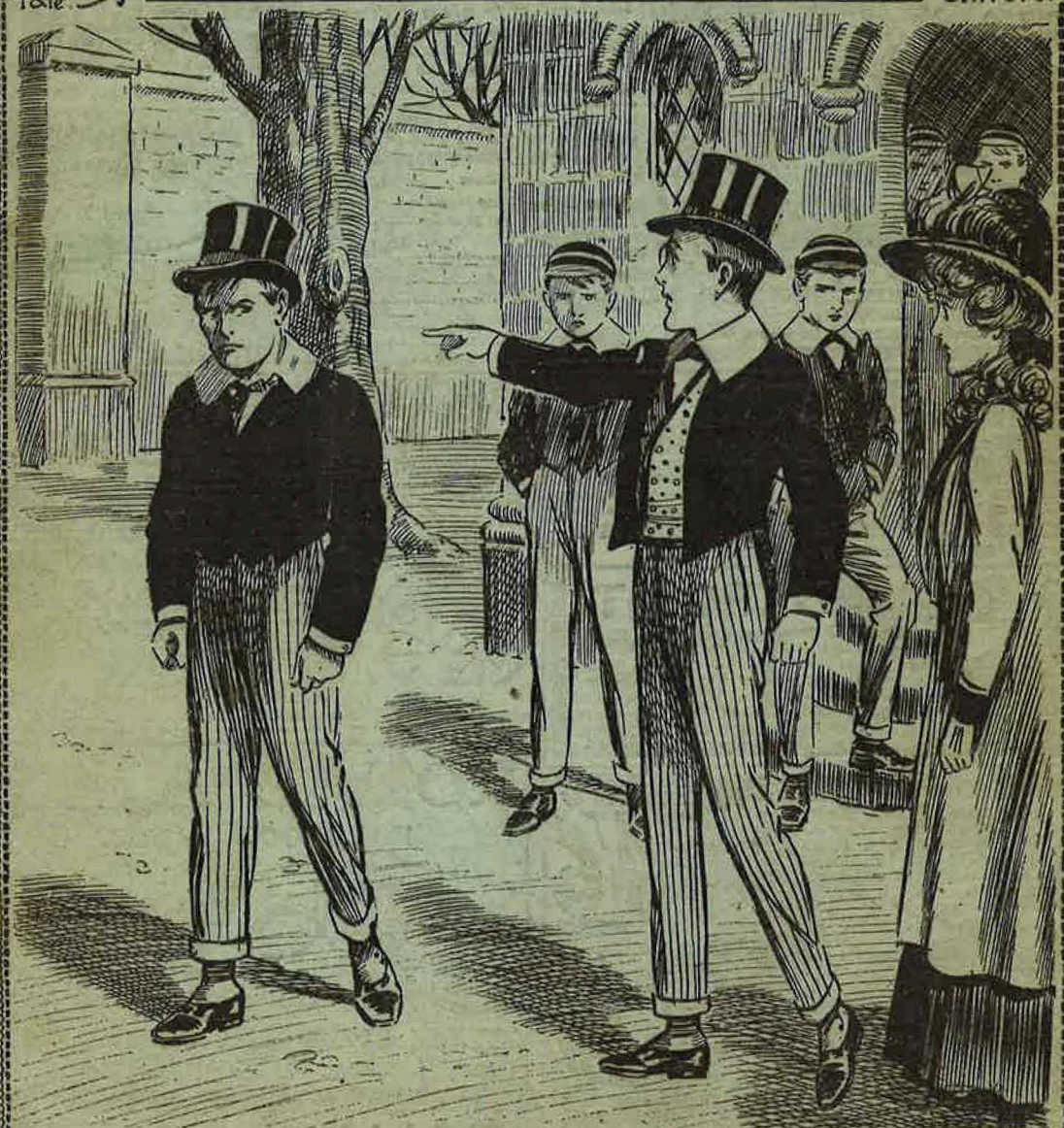
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VOL. 4.

Grand Long
Complete
Tale.

A Tale of the Terrible Three.

by
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.



ARTHUR AUGUSTUS GETS ANGRY!

"I wofuse to wə-
cognise you as a
membah of St.
Jim's!" he said.

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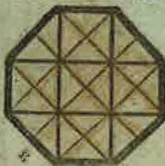
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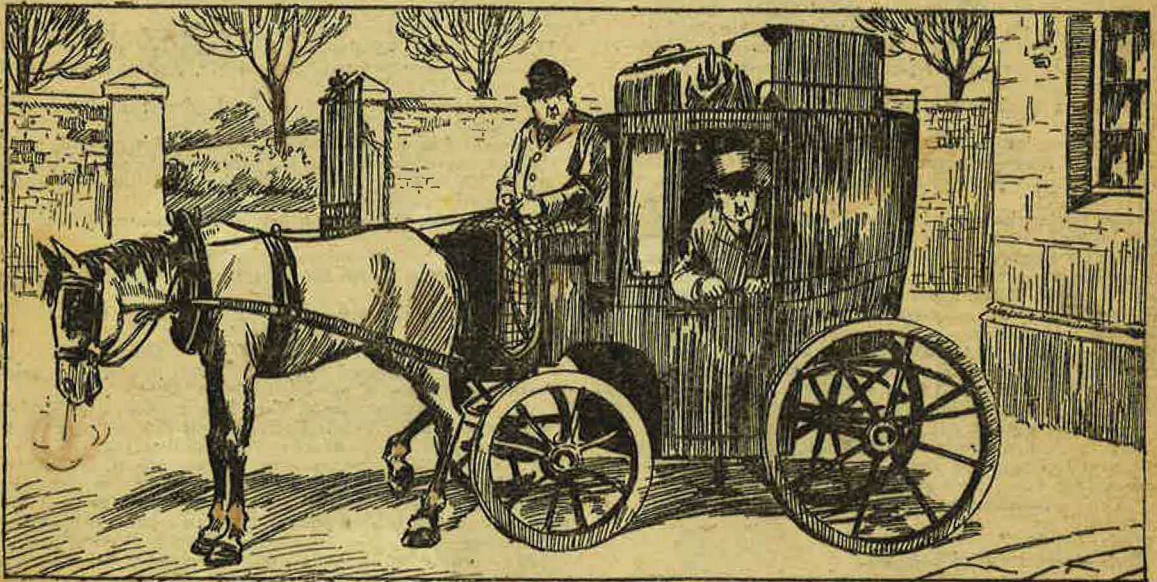
THURSDAY

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THE **TERROR OF** OF **ST. JIM'S.**



A Grand, Long, Complete School Tale of TOM MERRY & CO.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.

The Coming of 'Erbert Arding-Smith.

"Is this St. James's College?"

The ramshackle old station fly pulled up with a creak and a feeble jerk at the big entrance hall of St. Jim's, and an old gentleman with a pair of podgy shoulders, loose, flabby cheeks, and a grey top hat, thrust the upper half of his portly form through the cab window and fired his question at a little group of juniors standing on the top step. It was early morning.

For a moment all eyes rested on the stranger in amazement.

"Here, you boy, is this—"

A bright-faced junior stepped forward.

It was Tom Merry, chief of the Terrible Three, and editor of "St. Jim's Weekly."

"Yes, sir, this is St. Jim's," he replied, raising his cap politely.

"Is the 'Ead in? Don't be all day about giving me a reply!"

A suppressed titter came from the group of boys behind Tom Merry.

"I wonder what it is, Dig?" muttered Jack Blake, in a low voice. "Looks to me something like a cross between a German sausage and an American millionaire. My eye! Look what's behind it in the cab!"

Digby looked, and so did Figgins & Co., of the New House. Peering over the shoulder of the owner of the grey hat was a face, a youthful counterpart of the snappy old gentleman's.

It was not a particularly attractive countenance, and the impression made upon the members of the Fourth and the Shell was not improved by the look of half impertinent, half patronising inquiry expressed in the small, close-set eyes.

"I believe it's a new kid!" grunted Manners, in disgust. "Looks just about as cheeky as the old chap is grumpy."

The old gentleman refused to wait for Tom Merry's reply, but wriggled back into the cab, and thrust out a white, fat hand covered with huge diamond rings.

The hand grasped the handle of the cab door, and the juniors watched it with fascinated eyes.

The old gentleman tugged and pulled, but the door refused to budge.

Unmindful of the stranger's rude form of address, Tom Merry ran to his assistance.

"Why couldn't you do that before?" snapped the old gentleman, as the junior wrenched the handle round and held the door open. "Send somebody to tell the 'Ead Mr. Arding-Smith wants to see him at once! Come along, 'Erbert!"

The pair, father and son, stepped out of the cab. Tom Merry retired to the top of the steps again. There

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 108 (New Series).

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was an angry sparkle in his eyes, and he looked as if he had had more than enough of Mr. Arding-Smith's hectoring ways.

"Disagreeable old bounder!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Hallo! He's having a row with the cabman now!"

The station cabby was rather a favourite with the chums of St. Jim's, and this further evidence on the part of Mr. Arding-Smith of his own peculiar ways, did not improve their opinion of him.

"I say it's a piece of rank extortion!" declared the old gentleman loudly. "The very ideal Half-a-crown from the station here! I refuse to pay! I object to being robbed!"

"Pretty strong that!" declared Manners. "I can't stand this; let's get in."

"May as well see it through," said Jack Blake grimly. "Let him alone."

"I shall give you two shillings," shouted Mr. Arding-Smith; "and," he went on, waving his bedecked hand, "there is my card!"

The wrinkled old cabdriver took the two shilling-piece, and dropped the piece of pasteboard to the ground. He made no further protest, but gathered up the reins.

"Half a tick, Harris!" shouted Jack Blake, taking a flying leap down the stone steps. "Here's the other sixpence. This—this gentleman has made a mistake."

Harris looked doubtful, but he took the coin and drove off. Jack Blake turned to rejoin his companions.

"Boy!"

"Did you speak to me, sir?" inquired the leader of Study No. 6.

"You—you impertinent rascal!" roared Mr. Arding-Smith angrily. "How—how dare you insult me in this fashion? I say, how dare you? I shall report you! I will have you expelled!"

Jack Blake shrugged his shoulders, and eyed the angry man coldly. Jack Blake was never guilty of rudeness, but the unfair treatment of old Harris roused his temper; and he mentally described Mr. Arding-Smith in one expressive word of three letters; and let it be said that the leader of Study No. 6 was pretty correct in his summing up of the stranger's character.

The best thing that could be said about Mr. Arding-Smith was that he had made money—piles of it. For the rest—well, he was a cad, and bullied his way through the world. When he couldn't bully he paid, and, his purse being a long one, he usually got his own way.

'Erbert Arding-Smith followed in his father's footsteps, and now he lumbered heavily forward and thrust his pug nose within two inches of Jack Blake's.

"Yah!" he observed lucidly. "You want your 'cad punched!"

"Ha ha, ha!"

Tom Merry laughed outright.

Mr. Arding-Smith swung round and glared angrily at the row of grinning juniors.

Jack Blake flushed, and drew back with his left fist clenched.

"Yah!" repeated Arding-Smith, junior, capering round the leader of Study No. 6. "Yah! I'll show yer! Come on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake deliberately turned his back on the terrifying spectacle, and slowly mounted the steps.

Arding-Smith junior made as if to follow, but changed his mind. Perhaps he was not altogether sorry, for the leader of Study No. 6 had looked as if once he started there would be trouble.

"Come with me, 'Erbert," ordered Mr. Arding-Smith. "Come at once! I shall demand to see the 'cad-master. Don't take any notice of these unruly boys."

The pair passed through the crowd of juniors in silence, and as they entered the great entrance-hall, 'Erbert turned round and made a grimace at Tom Merry.

The juniors stared at each other in astonishment, and they all began to speak at once.

"Well, I'm blest!"

"Like an unlicked Third Form kid!"

"What an extraordinary chap!"

"He's about sixteen!"

"Dressed in Eton's, too!"

"I bet he's never been to a public school, though!"

"Beastly vulgar!"

"A rank outsider!"

"A would-be bully!"

"Surely he's not coming to St. Jim's!"

"My eye!"

"My aunt!"

"Can't be!"

"We shall have a lively time if he does!"

"My word we shall!"

"What a lucky escape for Jack Blake!"

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"Hallo, he's at it again!"

The sound of Mr. Arding-Smith's voice could be heard, raised in angry tones, and there was the unmistakable sound of another voice.

"By jingo, it's Gussy!" cried the leader of Study No. 6.

"Look out!"

A confused mass of legs and arms came whirling out of the hall.

It was Arthur Augustus and Arding-Smith junior in a close, if distinctly unaffectionate, embrace.

The pair came to the ground with a crash, and the swell of St. Jim's bumped his head on the cold, hard stone.

"Wow!"

Tom Merry and Jack Blake sprang to the rescue, but a portly form intervened, and a wildly whirling umbrella caused them to jump back hastily.

In a few seconds that umbrella did its work—did it well, and it was lucky for Arthur Augustus that he chanced to fall beneath 'Erbert.

Such a scene had never been witnessed before at St. Jim's. Dusty, dishvelled, and with an angry scowl on his face, Arding-Smith junior scrambled to his feet.

Arthur Augustus sat up, gasping for breath.

Utterly bewildered, he groped for his monocle.

Up went the umbrella again.

"No, you don't!" cried Tom Merry, jumping over D'Arcy's legs. "We're not going to stand that!"

"Get out of my way!" roared Mr. Arding-Smith. "Get out, or—"

The angry man broke off, and glared at Tom Merry ferociously.

The chief of the Terrible Three stood his ground, and he did not stand alone for long, either, for before D'Arcy had got to his feet, Mr. Arding-Smith found himself faced by nine sturdy youngsters.

'Erbert executed a flank movement, and stood behind his father.

Attracted by the noise of the scuffle, another crowd of juniors, mostly Third-Formers, had gathered in the hall doorway.

They stared in open-mouthed astonishment at the two strangers.

"What's the row?" whispered Curly Gibson.

"Dunno!" muttered Wally, the swell of St. Jim's minor.

"Dun— My eye, my brother's in it!"

Arthur Augustus pushed Tom Merry aside, and if his tie was awry and his hair all rumpled, it did not prevent him from maintaining his usual aristocratic bearing.

"I don't know who you are," he exclaimed, still panting a little with excitement, "but I request an immediate apology. I have been most wuffly assaulted by that uttah boundah hidin' behind you, and I shall administah a feahful thwashin—"

Mr. Arding-Smith puffed out his cheeks, but abandoned his militant attitude.

"Rubbish! What a pack of nonsense!" he cried. "You pushed into my boy, and— Serve you right! I will have you all expelled!"

The swell of St. Jim's turned very red.

This was a direct imputation that he was telling a lie.

"You'll pway excuse me," he exclaimed, trying to speak calmly; "it was nothin' of the kind. That howwid boundah bumped into me, and—"

"What is the meaning of this?"

"Railton!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with almost a sigh of relief.

The House-master strode forward, and the Third-Formers scattered like chaff before the wind. Mr. Railton had a habit of awarding to the over curious impositions that kept their noses to their desks for longer than they fancied.

The members of the Fourth and the Shell also retreated a little, leaving a group apart composed of the two Arding-Smiths, Mr. Railton, and the swell of St. Jim's.

The latter looked indignant, while 'Erbert Arding-Smith bore a half surly, half impudent expression on his lumpy face.

The House-master regarded the two boys in silence, and although his face remained unchanged, he summed up 'Erbert in a flash.

Meanwhile a curious alteration had taken place in the attitude of Mr. Arding-Smith himself. His truculent attitude had changed with the arrival of Mr. Railton, and he smiled ingratiatingly. He was the first to speak, and his pompous tone of voice was conspicuous by its absence.

"Are you the 'Ead?"

The House-master started.

Certainly, the speaker had not the bearing of a gentleman, but his clothes and general appearance of wealth did not quite fit in with the absence of the "h."

"No, I am not the head-master; but is there anything I can do? There seemed to be some slight disturbance just

Read about GORDON GAY
the Schoolboy Actor.



"Bai Jove!" muttered the swell of St. Jim's, "I shall wefuse to wecognise the boundah."

now. Perhaps you will explain the matter, D'Arcy," concluded Mr. Railton, turning to the swell of St. Jim's.

"It was nothing, my dear sir," cried Mr. Arding-Smith, before Arthur Augustus could speak—"nothing of any importance, my dear sir; a mere trifle. Just boyish spirits. We have been boys ourselves, you know!"

"Quite so!" replied the House-master drily. "We have, but—"

"I beg you to let the matter drop," went on Mr. Arding-Smith. "Boys will be boys, you know, and I am sure there is no ill-feeling. My son will get on like a—like a—"

For want of a word, Mr. Arding-Smith waved a fat, white hand.

Mr. Railton looked surprised, and the juniors stifled a groan.

So this was a new boy! There was no longer any doubt about the matter.

"My hat!" muttered Jack Blake. "My only hat!"

"A new scholar?" said the House-master.

"Yes, my dear sir," went on Mr. Arding-Smith. "I have, after careful consideration, decided to place my son under the care of—er—er—your head-master, Mr.—"

"Dr. Holmes," suggested Mr. Railton.

"Yes, yes, Dr. 'Olmes. I have no doubt he is a very

capable man. I wired him this morning. Expense is no object, my dear sir."

Mr. Arding-Smith was getting pompous again, and a twinkle of amusement came into the House-master's eyes. He gave a gentle cough.

"Well," he said, "Mr.—"

"Arding-Smith—Mr. Arding-Smith," said the old gentleman. "Proprietor of Arding-Smith & Co.'s Patent Suet. I dare say you know the name. What?"

"I'm afraid I must plead ignorance," replied the House-master. "Perhaps the housekeeper or the cook—"

Mr. Arding-Smith opened his little eyes wide. The sarcasm was quite lost.

"What, d'you mean to say you've never heard of my suet? Why, my dear sir, I spent over ten thousand pounds last year in advertising, and I'm proud to say, my dear sir, that I've made my pile. In fact, I may say I can write seven figures after my name. A millionaire, sir—a millionaire! And all made out of suet. Suet, my dear sir!"

"Quite a bit of fat!" muttered Tom Merry.

Jack Blake stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth.

Mr. Railton turned his back rather sharply and blew his

nose.

The juniors were convulsed with silent laughter, and Jack

Blake grabbed the swell of St. Jim's by the arm and dragged him away.

Arding-Smith junior stuck his tongue in his cheek, and favoured them with a disagreeable scowl as they went out into the sunlit quad.

The House-master seemed to be troubled with a most persistent cough, but at last he turned and addressed the millionaire. His face was grave, and his voice showed no signs of his sense of the ludicrous.

"If you will follow me," he said, "I will take you to Dr. Holmes' study. Doubtless he is expecting you."

Mr. Arding-Smith took the House-master's gravity as a tribute to his own greatness, and with a "Come along, 'Erbert!" proceeded to follow Mr. Railton; but it was a very different sort of man the Head interviewed a little later to the one that had descended from the cab in the quad.

Mr. Arding-Smith, despite his money, was very anxious to get his son into the college, and to the head-master he was urbanity itself.

Needless to say, he did not enlighten Dr. Holmes on a very disgraceful particular. He made no mention of 'Erbert having been expelled from his last school, although he made a great deal of the fact that his son had been accustomed to the care of private tutors.

That interview was one of the rare occasions when the Suet King neither bullied or unduly vaunted his wealth, although 'Erbert was booked for more "extras" than could have been crammed into his thick head during ten years.

The roll of banknotes lying on the doctor's desk at the conclusion of the interview proved at least one thing—that Mr. Arding-Smith could afford luxuries, although if the Head had known what was to be the result of his acceptance of 'Erbert as a pupil, he would have cheerfully dropped them in the fire, and shown the Suet King the door.

Classes were in progress when the interview closed, and 'Erbert walked with his father across the deserted quad to see him off from the gates.

The Suet King had decided to walk back to the station, rather than send for a cab and pay the extra sixpence.

"Now, 'Erbert, my boy," said Mr. Arding-Smith, "don't you get up to no more tricks, and you'll be all right."

'Erbert grunted an inaudible reply.

"What was that?"

"All right, pater!"

At this the Suet King looked pleased. Since he had made his fortune, 'Erbert had been taught to say "pater," the word "father," in the opinion of Mr. Arding-Smith, being considered "no class."

"That's right, my boy! You'll be all right, and I dessay you'll be hobnobbing with duke's an' bearl's sons when you go to Hoxford or—what's that other place?—Cambridge. I shouldn't be surprised if that young swell you bumped into in the 'all was a somebody; 'e looked it. You'd better be careful. There's a lot of big pots' sons at this school."

'Erbert looked as if he didn't care if D'Arcy proved to be the Prince of Wales; but as the Suet King was jingling some gold coins in his hand, 'Erbert thought it politic not to vent his own opinion.

"Now, I reckon you're set up!" exclaimed Mr. Arding-Smith, as 'Erbert placed the money in his pocket. "I must 'urry back!"

The Suet King departed, quite oblivious of the fact that there was one small item in which he had failed to equip 'Erbert, and it was not long before the chums of St. Jim's were to have ample reminders that 'Erbert had not as much gentlemanly instinct as the poorest ragamuffin.

Left to himself, 'Erbert looked about him with an air of distinct disapproval. He eyed the grey old building of St. Jim's with an expression of contempt.

"What a mouldy old show!" he muttered. "May as well 'ave a look round, though; the old codger can wait."

The old codger referred to was Dr. Holmes, and it did not suit 'Erbert's book to return just yet to the library, as he had bidden, for examination.

CHAPTER 2.

'Erbert is Cornered.

TAGGLES was digging in the head-master's garden, and, strange to relate, was so busily engaged that he failed to observe the approach of a rather heavily built youth.

Perfectly regardless of the notice "Private" on the little gate, 'Erbert was prospecting, and he came to a stop behind the bent figure of Taggles.

For a moment he watched in silence, then he stooped and quietly picked up a large worm that was vainly trying to find a refuge, after being turned out of its domicile by Taggles' spade.

That worm found a resting-place down the back of Taggles'

neck, and the school porter speedily became aware of the fact that something was wrong.

He straightened his back with a jerk, grabbed at his neck-band, and then at the small of his back.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Laughter!

Taggles whisked round, and stared at 'Erbert with a wrathful glare.

"Wat—how—wow—g-r-r-r!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Taggles postponed further remarks, and confined his attention to the middle of his back.

First with one hand, then the other, he tried to touch the spot. He squirmed and twisted, and at last his fingers touched something cold and clammy.

"Ugh! B-r-r-r-r!"

"Ha, ha, ha! What a lark!"

'Erbert was capering about at a safe distance.

Taggles shuddered, flung the worm away, and started to run.

He looked in a rare rage, and 'Erbert Arding took the hint and to his heels.

Long before Taggles had reached the gate the Suet King's son had disappeared round a corner of the college.

The porter slowed down, and finally gave up the chase.

"Young varmint!" he muttered. "Tain't one of our lot. 'Ow'd he get in 'ere? Let me catch 'im again, that's hall! I'll know his hugly face out of a million! Ugh!"

Grunting and growling to himself, the porter returned to his spade, and spent the rest of the morning in a state of nervous tension lest another worm should find its way down his back.

'Erbert himself did not run far.

Directly the sound of the pursuing footsteps ceased he dropped to a walk, and lounged along with his hands in his pockets. He also kept a wary eye roving around, but he was looking for masters, not worms, and his previous experience at his late school stood him in good stead.

'Erbert was a duffer for work, but he was sharp enough for any under-handed trickery. He passed the Head's window by keeping close to the wall, and managed to arrive at the back of the school house unobserved.

Here a long building caught his eye.

It was the shed where the juniors kept their cycles and their pets.

D'Arcy minor's favourite, Pongo, was chained up at one end and Herries's bulldog at the other, near the door.

'Erbert pressed his snub nose against the little window in the side of the shed.

Pongo immediately began to bark.

"Shut up, you little brute!" hissed the boy. "Shut up! I'll wring your neck if you don't!"

Pongo only barked and growled the louder.

'Erbert beat a hurried retreat.

"Little beast!" he muttered. "He'll bring somebody out! Ah, he's stopped now, has he? I'll give him bark!"

'Erbert had now reached the door at the end of the shed, and his next movements were decidedly curious.

He glanced round, as if looking for something.

An old broom, standing in a corner by the back of the school, caught his eye. He promptly secured it, and then, with stealthy step, crept back to the door of the shed.

He cautiously pushed the door open.

Pongo remained undisturbed.

There was a pile of boxes between him and the door, and he was curled up on his rug quite unconscious of 'Erbert's kind intentions with the broomstick.

Not so Towser, Herries's bulldog.

At the first touch on the door he woke up and cocked his head inquiringly on one side.

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He did not bark.

Towser, after the habit of his kind, seldom did. Sometimes he growled, but that was usually in play. In business hours he generally growled—after his teeth had gripped something.

The door opened a little further, and 'Erbert peered in through the crack.

Towser sat up on his haunches and sniffed suspiciously, and the short hair on his back began to bristle, but otherwise he remained perfectly still.

'Erbert pushed a foot inside and gently edged in.

His little eyes gleamed in the gloom with malice, and he grasped the broomstick firmly.

Towser's teeth began to show, but still he did not move.

Long practice had taught him the length of his chain to a nicety, and the intruder's leg was not yet within reach.

A low growl came from Pongo's corner, and 'Erbert, anxious to reach the dog before he had time to bark, strode forward.

Then he jumped, and let forth a fiendish yell.

Sixty pounds of bulldog hurled itself to the length of its chain and buried its teeth in 'Erbert's trouser-leg.

Another yell and a blind leap forward, and Towser was left with a jaw full of black cloth.

'Erbert, terrified out of his wits, plunged headlong among the bicycles.

A veritable cascade of ironwork seemed to fall around the young rascal, and he fairly howled with fright.

"Bow-wow-wow!"

Pongo barked furiously.

Towser strained at his chain, and jumped again and again, until 'Erbert, clammy with terror, managed to extricate himself from the machines.

He found himself between the devil and the deep sea.

Forward, he could not move for the bulldog.

Rearward, the Irish terrier was waiting for his little bite.

Then came the sound of boys' voices from without and the running of feet.

Rescue was at hand, but 'Erbert felt as if he would have preferred to slink out unobserved. Explanations would arise, and 'Erbert feared the complication that might arise before he could conjure his added brain to think.

He crouched down behind an overturned box—he remembered it was recreation time.

CHAPTER 3.

The Terrible Three's New Study-mate.

"WHAT'S up, Towser, old boy?"

The shed door flew wide open, and Herries peered anxiously at his bulldog.

Towser wagged a stumpy tail.

Then another figure appeared in the doorway.

Pongo was still barking furiously.

"Hallo, Pong!" cried D'Arcy minor. "What's up? Get your big feet out of the way, Herries! There's something the matter with Pongo."

Wally pushed his way past the Fourth-Former.

The first thing he did was to go sprawling over one of the fallen cycles. The next was to give a yell of surprise.

His left hand grasped something soft.

It was 'Erbert's nose!

"Leave go!" roared Arding-Smith. "That's my nose!"

Wally gave a whoop.

"What the dickens is this?" he cried, peering up at 'Erbert, who had risen to his feet. "What are you doing here? Who are you? Herry!"

Herries came in, and stared at the new boy.

"Why, it's the chap that came this morning!"

"What chap?" demanded Wally. "What! You don't mean it's the bounder that cannoned into Gus?"

"It is!"

Wally looked at 'Erbert suspiciously.

"What were you doing here?"

"Mind your own business!" grunted 'Erbert.

"Tis my business. I believe you were after Pongo."

"Get out of my way, you cheeky brat!" cried the new boy angrily. "Who wants a beastly little cur like that? Why, for two pins I'd—"

"You'd what?" shouted D'Arcy minor.

"Never you mind what I'd do. Get your ugly brute out of the way. I want to get out."

Herries flushed angrily.

The disparaging reference to his pet bulldog got him on a tender spot. He eyed 'Erbert with a resentful eye.

"Sha'n't!" he declared. "You got in of your own accord; now get out!"

Arding-Smith junior began to bluster.

He was pretty nearly as heavy as Wally and Herries put together, and he tried to bully his way.

"You'll see what I'll do if you don't make that brute lie down!" he threatened darkly. "I'll—I'll tell my pater!"

Wally gasped.

This was something quite new to him.

Herries smiled.

"Right-ho!" he said easily. "You can tell him when you get out! Coming, Wally?"

"No, I'm not!" said Wally decisively. "I'm not going to leave this bounder alone with Pongo—not me!"

'Erbert stretched out a hand to seize the Third-Former, but Wally was too old a bird to be caught. He stepped back towards the door.

Towser thrust his head between the junior's legs and eyed 'Erbert with a pair of bloodshot eyes.

Herries grinned cheerfully.

"It's your face!" he said. "Towser's rather particular, you know. If I were you I should turn it to the wall. His chain's not very strong."

"I'll punch your head!" said the bigger boy angrily. "You wait till I get you out of here! You'll see!"

"Certainly!" replied Herries. "Certainly; but you mind Towser doesn't get you first. Hallo, what's that?"

The Fourth-Former pointed at 'Erbert's leg.

"My eye!"

"That beast did that!" shouted 'Erbert. "You'll have to pay for it, too!"

Herries looked anxious.

"I hate Towser to bite things like you!" he said pointedly.

"He's a valuable dog, and he might get hydrophobia or something. What the dickens d'you mean by allowing him to bite a chunk out of your trousers like that for?"

Arding-Smith junior snorted.

Wally chuckled delightedly.

"Don't you go near him again!" went on Herries severely. "You shall have a kennel of your own presently!"

"And a muzzle!" added Wally. "I say, Herries, we'd better let this—this object get out, don't you think? You never know, you know! Another bite, and poor old Towser might have to be shot!"

Herries nodded, and pulled the reluctant bulldog back into his corner.

'Erbert, with one eye on Towser and the other on the door, sidled past.

"What an out-and-out cad!" muttered Herries, as the new boy darted through the door. "We'll keep this place locked in the future."

"Not half!" assented Wally. "I couldn't think of allowing that chap to be near Pong. I wonder what he came in here at all for?"

"Goodness alone knows," replied the Fourth-Former. "I think he's half dotty, if you ask me."

"Not half so dotty as you'd think," said D'Arcy minor seriously. "I believe he was up to some nasty trick or other. I'm jolly glad we came along. I say, what happened after Mr. Railton came along this morning? Did Gussy lick him?"

"Who? Railton?"

"No, fathead! Old Smiff, or whatever his name is."

"No; he didn't get a chance."

"Hard luck!"

"Yes; he and his pater, as he calls him, went before the Head."

"Pr'aps the Head won't have him at the coll.?" said Wally hopefully.

Herries shook his head.

"No such luck! Come on, kid, out of it. I'm going to lock the door."

The two left the shed, and parted company.

Sympathy and a mutual feeling had drawn them together for a brief spell, but a chasm divides the Third from the Fourth, and Herries went off to find his chums.

Wally joined a group of Third-Formers, and the tale he had to tell lost nothing in the telling. It ended in a general scrimmage, but that was nothing unusual.

Jack Blake and the rest of the Co.'s, including the Terrible Three, Figgins & Co., and Cornstalk & Co., were in conclave under the budding elms at the end of the quad.

Herries rushed up, bursting with the news.

"Have you seen him?" he cried.

"Seen who?" demanded Jack Blake.

"Why, what's his name, Smith-Arding, the new kid!"

"Oh, you mean bladder-of-lard, the Suet King's minor!" cried Tom Merry, with a laugh. "Yes, we've seen him. Railton got hold of him just now and led him to the slaughter—to the Head, I mean. What's he been up to?"

He had a great lump out of his trouser, and he was covered with dust.

Herries looked important.

"Get it off your chest!" shouted Jack Blake. "You know something or other."

"I do!" said Herries, with an air of mystery.

The juniors crowded round eagerly.

"Tell us!"

"What is it?"

"Be quick!"

"We'll bump you if you don't buck up!"

"We found him in the shed!" exclaimed Herries, in a hurry.

"Who's we?"

"Wally and I."

"Well?"

"Towser—"

"You don't mean to say he's been bitten!" cried Tom Merry, in alarm. "That dog of yours is not safe!"

"He's as gentle as a lamb!" retorted Herries indignantly.

"Myes!" drawled Jack Blake. "What sort of a lamb, I wonder? But get on with it. You found him in the shed. And after?"

"Oh, nothing!" replied the owner of Towser crossly.

"That's all. We found him hiding or doing something or other, and—"

"Did you bump him?"

Herries looked aggrieved.

"No, I didn't. I was thinking about Towser, and—"

"You let him go?"

"Well, you see—"

"You let him get off scot free?"

"Well, but—"

"Look here!" exclaimed Digby. "You let him go. Is that it?"

"Yes."

"Chump!"

"Fathead!"

"Silly ass!"

The juniors swarmed round Herries, and roared in his ears.

"Joking apart, though," cried Tom Merry, "this is a serious matter."

"Rather!"

"Not half!"

"We've got to put a stopper on the King of Suet. He'll be the terror of St. Jim's presently."

"What shall we do?"

"Order!"

"Chair!"

For a moment there was a lull in the storm.

"We shall have to do something," said Piggins.

"Bravo!"

"Bright idea!"

The juniors thumped the long-legged member of the New House on the back.

"Surely you didn't think that out all by yourself, did you, Figgy?" inquired Manners.

"Piggins has been thinking. Look out, you chaps!" shouted Monty Lowther.

"Oh, do be careful, Figgy dear!" exclaimed Reilly, who had just come on the scene. "You'll be after doing some damage to you're topknot if you're not careful. What are ye after doin' to the new chap?"

"We'll send him to Coventry!"

"We'll frog's march him!"

"Give him to Towser!"

"Look how he went for Gussy!"

"And Jack Blake!"

"Supposing we demand an apology?"

All eyes were turned on Tom Merry.

"Not a bit of good, old son," said Jack Blake. "He's too much of a bouncer. I can't make out how he got here."

"In a cab!" said Monty Lowther literally.

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "I know that, ass! Didn't I fork out sixpence?"

"But you said—"

"I know I said," interrupted the leader of Study No. 6 impatiently. "There's the bell now, and we've done nothing but jaw. If you'd listened to me now—"

"Rats!" cried Tom Merry. "You cackle enough for six!"

The crowd of juniors sprinted across the quad, and poured into Hall as the last bell went.

The Terrible Three made for their class-room.

Binks, the boot-boy, stopped Tom Merry in the door.

"Dr. Holmes wants yer!" he said.

The chief of the Terrible Three looked surprised, but there was no time for argument. Manners and Monty Lowther had already entered the class-room, so he followed the boy to the head-master's study.

Erbert Arding-Smith was standing in front of the head-master's desk when Tom Merry was shown in.

The new boy favoured the chief of the Terrible Three with a scowl.

Dr. Holmes was gazing at his blotting-pad with an air of abstraction. Arding-Smith, junior, in the brief exam. that had taken place, had proved himself a colossal dunce, more fitted for the Third Form than the Fourth. Yet it was obvious that a boy of his age and bulk could be nothing

but the laughing-stock of the whole school as a Third-Former.

"Ah, Merry!"

The Head looked up at last.

"This is a new boy, Tom Merry—er—Herbert Arding-Smith, and—"

Dr. Holmes paused, and "son of the Suet King" flashed across Tom Merry's mind, and he nearly laughed outright.

"And I want you to take him under your wing and show him round a bit. For the time being Arding-Smith will have to share your study, and he will have a bed in the same dormitory."

The leader of the Terrible Three gulped, and tried his best to stifle his horror at the unexpected turn of events.

Could anything have been worse?

"For the time being only," went on Dr. Holmes, not unaware of the consternation he had caused. "You may go. Oh, and by the way, Arding-Smith, before you go let me request you not to lose your way again. You will find it advisable on future occasions to come promptly when I happen to send for you."

Tom Merry led the way from the study, and Erbert followed with a curious sidelong walk. He had invented some yarn about losing his way, to account for his absence, and he was at some pains to hide the mark Towser had left near the calf of his leg.

He gave a grunt of relief when he reached the corridor undetected.

"Did him that time!" he grunted.

Tom Merry stared at the new boy in astonishment.

"Did what? Who?"

"Why, the 'Ead, of course!"

Tom Merry looked disgusted.

"Who're you turning your nose up at?" demanded 'Erbert. "Me?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" snapped Tom Merry tartly.

"You're a howling rotter!"

Arding-Smith gave vent to his usual expression.

"Yah! I suppose you think you're everybody!" he jeered.

"I am a few," replied the chief of the Terrible Three, with a calm that 'Erbert, had he known better, would have recognised as a dangerous sign. "What do you mean by making that idiotic noise?"

"Yah!"

Tom Merry stopped short, and clenched his fists.

"You're asking for a thick ear," he said slowly, "and you'll get it!"

'Erbert leered into Tom Merry's face.

"And who's going to give it?" he inquired. "Ow!"

The new boy was not left long in doubt on that point, and he clapped his hand to the side of his face.

It had been a lightning blow, not particularly heavy, but it stung, and came quite unexpectedly.

Tom Merry's patience had run to its limit, and he stood ready for the bigger boy's reply.

Truth to tell, he felt rather sorry that his temper had got the better of him, but the new boy's glee over his deception of the Head had been the last straw, and Tom Merry had let fly without thinking of Dr. Holmes' recommendation.

'Erbert, however, made no move to retaliate. He wanted revenge for that left-hander, but in his own way and time; besides, Tom Merry's attitude and flashing eyes suggested that he might possibly bite off more than he could chew.

"I only did it for a lark. What a funny chap you are!"

Tom Merry dropped his hands, and looked puzzled.

A chap that could tell a lie for a lark and take a blow without retaliation was something new to him, and he gave up the riddle.

He led the way in silence to the study.

'Erbert followed in silence.

"This is the study," said Tom Merry shortly, throwing open the door of the cosy little room.

"What, this?"

"Yes."

'Erbert looked round superciliously. "Don't think much of your furniture," he observed.

"Pretty cheap!"

The chief of the Terrible Three turned red.

"Look here," he cried hotly, "you keep your beastly rude remarks to yourself."

The new boy put on an air of injured innocence.

"What d'you mean? Keep your hair on! It's a fact, ain't it? Don't get ratty. Have a cigarette."

"Keep your beastly cigarettes!" shouted Tom Merry, with the light of battle gleaming in his eyes. "I don't smoke, and you're not going to, either—at least, not here."

"Well, you are a soft!"

"Dry up, or I'll sling you out on your neck!"

'Erbert slipped his showy cigarette-case back into his pocket.

"What a 'ot-tempered chap you are!" he said. "Never mind; I don't bear no malice. Come and 'ave a feed. I suppose you've got a tuckshop in this mouldy old show? What's the matter now?"

Tom Merry's eyes flamed.

"You howling cad!" he roared. "You take that back!"

The slighting reference to the coll. had drawn him effectively, and he jumped at Arding-Smith with a suddenness that sent the latter, heavy as he was, reeling against the wall.

"Old 'ard!" he gasped. "I didn't mean anything!"

"What did you mean, then?" cried Tom Merry in exasperation. "You're a rotter!"

'Erbert smiled. He did not seem to mind in the least, but inwardly he was filled with a longing for revenge; but he wanted to establish some sort of a footing before classes were over. He tried a new tack.

"Say, look here!" he said, with another leer. "Let's you an' me be chums. I've got plenty of tin. Look!"

'Erbert displayed a handful of coins.

"You put me up to all the wrinkles, and I'll give you a quid."

Tom Merry gazed at the new boy. He was petrified with amazement.

"You—you must be mad!" he said at last.

"Not a bit of it!" cried 'Erbert. "I know my book, don't you worry. Here's half a quid to go on with."

"You beast!"

Tom Merry fairly hissed out the words. He sprang to the table, and flung the half-sovereign out of the window.

'Erbert gave a malicious chuckle.

"Ere," he shouted, "that's my money! I want my half-quid. You've stolen—'Ere, leave go!"

The leader of the Terrible Three was white with anger now, and he hurled himself at the new boy.

'Erbert closed.

The pair reeled across the study, and fell with a crash into the fender.

Luck was with 'Erbert, for he fell uppermost, and Tom Merry was pinned for a moment beneath the heavier boy.

'Erbert was roused to a coward's pitch of rage.

He raised his clenched fist, and brought it down on Tom Merry's mouth.

The chief of the Terrible Three's lips were stained with blood.

"You cad!" he shouted, literally throwing the new boy off his chest with a powerful heave of his body. "You out and out cad! I'll teach you to hit a chap when he's down!"

"Yah!"

'Erbert bolted for the door.

He ran full-tilt into Manners, Lowther, and Jack Blake & Co.

"Stop him!" yelled Tom Merry. "Hold him!"

In the twinkling of an eye 'Erbert was surrounded.

"What's up?" exclaimed Jack Blake. "What's the matter with your mouth?"

"That—that cad hit me when I was down," panted Tom Merry. "Lug him in! I've stood quite enough of this!"

Jack Blake gave a grunt of disgust.

"Shove him along, chaps!"

"I won't go!"

"Come along, you beauty!"

"I—I—G-r-r-r-r!"

"All together!"

"I'll tell the 'Ead!"

"Heave oh!"

'Erbert squealed and struggled frantically, but the juniors heaved him into the door.

Here he broke free for an instant, and braced himself against the sides of the doorway with hands and feet.

In their anxiety to push him into the study the juniors got in one another's way, but a combined charge shifted 'Erbert with uncomfortable suddenness, and he shot into the middle of the room.

He landed on all fours, and before he could get up Tom Merry and Jack Blake pounced upon him, and dragged him to his feet.

Arthur Augustus turned up his cuffs.

"Pway allow me, deah boys, to chastise this wottah!"

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to—"

"Dry up!"

"Wefuse the pwisonah!"

"Sit on Gussy's chest, somebody!" shouted Jack Blake.

"Let me go!" howled 'Erbert. "Let me go! I'll—"

"Get a piece of soap, Dig!" cried Jack Blake. "We'll jam that in his mouth if he won't stop squealing!"

The new boy was silent.

"Now then, Tom Merry, what's been the row?"

Tom Merry told his story.

The juniors boiled over with indignation.

"The idea of insulting the old coll.!"

"Bai Jove! The oppwobious boundah!"

"Rank outsider!"

"Cad!"

"Coward!"

"Fancy the beast trying to bribe Tom Merry!"

"My eye!"

"And hitting him on the ground!"

"My hat!"

Arthur Augustus took off his coat, and carefully laid it over the back of a chair.

"Leave this to me, deah boys!"

"Rats!"

"I wefuse, I—"

"Dry up!"

"This is not a case for a stand-up fight."

"No, rather not!"

"He wants boiling in oil!"

"Let's bump him!"

"He's got to be taught manners."

"Rather!"

"Pway allow me, deah boys!"

"Oh, do dry up, Gussy, there's a good chap!" cried Jack Blake. "Don't I keep telling you this is not a case for a stand-up dust up? For the honour of the old coll.—"

"Hear, hear!"

"We must bump him!"

"Six times!"

'Erbert started to struggle again, but it was useless.

He was bumped on the floor with a right good will.

"I think that will do, chaps!" cried Tom Merry. "That's six! Oh, I say, I forgot!"

"What?"

"The Head's put him in this study!"

"What?"

"I'd have bumped a bit harder if I knew!" shouted Manners. "This is awful! Besides, there's no room!"

"Let me go! I don't want to stop here!" hooted 'Erbert.

"Don't you be too impulsive, old son!" cried Jack Blake.

"You'll get chucked out right enough when the time comes. Hallo, there's the dinner gong! Now we shall be able to see if this new worm knows how to use a knife and fork."

"Here, Smith," exclaimed Tom Merry, relenting a little as he trooped out into the corridor, "you'd better get a change. I suppose your box is up in our dormitory. I'll show you the way. Besides, the Head asked me to show you round, although you are a bouncer."

'Erbert scowled, and growled something in reply, but Tom Merry took no further notice.

CHAPTER 4.

Barred by the Terrible Three.

"SILENCE!"

That afternoon Mr. Linton took the Fourth and Shell Forms combined.

Greatly to the swell of St. Jim's annoyance, Herbert Arding-Smith occupied the seat next to his own.

The Suet King's son grinned affably at Arthur Augustus. He had discovered during the dinner hour that the swell of St. Jim's was the son of Lord Eastwood, and his priggish little soul rejoiced.

"I say," he whispered.

Mr. Linton rapped sharply on his desk.

"Who was that talking?"

The short-sighted master peered in the direction of 'Erbert.

"Dear me! Of course, a new boy. I trust it was not you speaking?"

"Not me!" replied 'Erbert glibly, and lying with an effrontery that caused Arthur Augustus to jump with astonishment. "I wouldn't do such a thing, sir!"

Mr. Linton beamed over his glasses.

"I am glad to hear it, my boy. Who was talking?"

Naturally there was no reply.

"Beastly little sneak!" muttered Tom Merry. "Why, I heard him my—"

"Take fifty lines, Tom Merry!" said Mr. Linton.

The chief of the Terrible Three shut his mouth tight.

'Erbert turned round and grinned with joy.

"You rotter!" muttered Jack Blake. "I'll—"

"Blake! You, also, will take fifty!" snapped Mr. Linton.

Jack Blake subsided, and kept his eyes turned away from the new boy. He could feel that the latter was delighted. He had no need to look.

For a while all went well, and every head in the classroom was bent over book or exercise paper.

The only idle one was 'Erbert, and after a quarter of an hour he found things rather monotonous.

He joggled his elbow into D'Arcy's side.

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The swell of St. Jim's frowned, and edged away.

'Erbert slipped along the form.

He smiled ingratiatingly; at least, so he fondly believed, but in reality the result had quite a reverse effect on Arthur Augustus.

Jack Blake grinned at the little pantomime.

"Poor old Gus!" he murmured to himself.

It was very hard on the swell of St. Jim's. The new boy was close to him, and breathing heavily through his nose.

Arthur Augustus was divided between a desire to smite him and his dread of calling the master's attention.

The swell of St. Jim's would have been branded with hot irons rather than have done anything to invoke the aid of Mr. Linton to rid him of his unpleasant neighbour.

'Erbert grinned, and breathed persistently.

"Don't be uppish!" he muttered at last.

Mr. Linton was busily engaged at the blackboard, but either his ears were unusually keen, or the new boy's harsh whisper carried far, for he whirled round in an instant.

"Who was that talking?" he demanded.

Dead silence.

"Who was that talking in class?"

No reply.

All eyes were involuntarily turned on the culprit.

Mr. Linton also fixed his gaze on Arding-Smith.

To the surprise of all, 'Erbert stood up.

"If you please, sir—"

"Yes!"

"You have a black on your nose!"

The master blinked in amazement.

"What?"

"A black, sir! I was about to call your attention to it."

Mr. Linton hurriedly pulled out his handkerchief and rubbed his nose.

"Er—thank you, my boy!"

The success of the lie and the cool cheek of the new boy fairly took the wind out of the juniors' sails.

The Suet King's son was evidently a master in the art of deception; but he had had a narrow escape, and during the rest of the class he refrained from forcing his attentions on Arthur Augustus.

At last the bell went, and the juniors poured out of the class-room.

They were free at last, and the Terrible Three and Jack Blake & Co. managed to get clear before 'Erbert had a chance to join them.

Figgins & Co. joined the Co.'s in the upper corridor, and the ten of them crowded into the Terrible Three's study.

Tom Merry looked desperate.

"Blest if I know what to do!" he cried.

There was no need for particularising.

All present knew what he meant.

"No good trying to snub him!" said Manners dolefully.

"He's such a crawly beast!"

"And a sneak!"

"A miserable worm!"

"He won't fight!"

"All he thinks about is his money!"

"Look how he tried to make up to Gussy!"

"By Jove! Wathah!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly. "I shall refuse to recognise the boundah!"

"The worst of it is," said Tom Merry, "the Head has sort of given him into the charge of this study."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle about, Jack Blake!" shouted the chief of the Terrible Three fiercely. "How would you like it?"

"Not a little bit, old son; but it's jolly funny, all the same. I'm off!"

The study door was opened, and 'Erbert came in.

Jack Blake and Figgins & Co. promptly bolted.

Friendship was one thing, but the toleration of 'Erbert was another, and the Terrible Three were left to deal with their "bete noir" on their own.

The new boy's one idea seemed to be money—his money, with Tom Merry. He had found his half-a-sovereign laying in the quad; and he was shrewd enough to guess that if he could pacify the three's feelings, he might get at D'Arcy.

With the swell of St. Jim's as a chum, his father was good for a handsome tip.

In fact, 'Erbert had already planned what he would do with the hypothetical fiver.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther set about their preparation for tea.

'Erbert seated himself in the armchair.

The Terrible Three appeared not to notice his presence.

"I say, you fellows!"

Tom Merry eyed the new boy coldly.

"Well?"

'Erbert scowled.

"What's the good of a well without any water?" he

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grunted. "Look here, I'm willing to be pals if you are. I don't bear no malice; and I tell you what, if you three will be chums, I'll—I'll stand the grub for a week!"

The new boy's one idea seemed to be money—his money, and he imagined that with that he could do anything.

Manners sniffed indignantly, and Monty Lowther nearly scalded his foot.

Tom Merry determined to squash 'Erbert once and for all. At least, he meant to try.

"Look here!" he said slowly. "Just you get into your thick head this fact. We don't want your beastly money. We can afford to pay for our things, and—and when we can't we sha'n't come to you. Since the Head had put you in this study, you can have your tea here—when we've finished, but we bar bouncers like you at the same table! So now you know what to do!"

"You can take it on the mat!" suggested Manners.

"Or in the bicycle shed!" added Monty Lowther.

"Oh, very well, then!" shouted the new boy. "I'm not anxious, I can tell you that much. I can get a jolly sight better feed by myself at the tuckshop."

"By all means," said Manners sweetly. "Don't you think you'd better go now?"

"I shall go when I'm ready!"

"Hurry up, then!"

"Sha'n't! You can't make me!"

'Erbert tried to force a quarrel, but the Terrible Three refused to be drawn.

"We bar cads who hit a chap when he's down," said Monty Lowther. "Besides, I've just washed my hands!"

"Yah!"

"I've heard something like that noise in the monkey house at the Zoo," said Manners, as Tom Merry poured out the tea. "I wonder what's happened to its keeper?"

'Erbert flushed a dark crimson.

"Look here!" he howled.

"Would you mind shutting the door as you go out?" said Tom Merry, as they sat down to tea. "Thanks awfully if you will; and oh, you needn't trouble to come back unless you like, you know!"

This was too much, even for 'Erbert's thick skin, and he marched to the door and slammed it behind him.

"Thank goodness!" said Manners. "He's gone at last!"

"Jolly good job, too!" growled Monty Lowther. "I was afraid he'd stick here all the time."

"It took some doing, though," said Tom Merry, with a laugh. "By Jove, he can stand a good deal!"

CHAPTER 5.

'Erbert Finds a Toady.

"BAH! Stuck-up lot!" muttered 'Erbert Arding-Smith, as he walked down the corridor. "I'll get even with 'em. Hallo! I wonder who's in 'ere?"

'Erbert stopped at a door, and listened to the sound of merry voices. He stooped down, and applied his eye to the keyhole.

It was Study No. 6.

"Pals of Merry!" he muttered. "I dessay they'll be glad of a feed. There ain't much on the table. A good chance to pal up with Lord Eastwood's son."

The new boy opened the study door without knocking.

"Hallo!"

Jack Blake looked up in surprise.

"Get!" he said briefly.

"Er—I—"

"Get!"

"But I want to stand a feed. I—"

"Are you going?" roared the leader of Study No. 6, getting up from his chair.

'Erbert retreated to the passage.

"I want to speak to his lordship!" he shouted.

"Oh, dry up!" cried Jack Blake roughly. "Get out, and crawl somewhere else, or Gussy will do more than speak. Worms are not admitted here. No; you sit still, Gus."

'Erbert found the study door shut in his face, and the key turned in the lock.

He shook his fist at the door, and slunk off with hunched shoulders. At the top of the stairs he encountered Mellish.

Mellish was also on the prowl, trying to borrow some money.

His face lit up when the new boy came along.

The sneak of St. Jim's was not at all particular, and he had heard that 'Erbert was rolling in wealth.

"Hallo!" he said pleasantly.

"Ugh!" grunted 'Erbert.

He was now in a very bad temper, which is not to be wondered at.

"Who are you staring at?"



"All together!" shouted Jack Blake. "Heave oh!"

Mellish stepped back a pace.

This was a bad beginning.

"I—I wasn't staring. I was looking for you," he blurted, on the spur of the moment.

"Looking for me?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

Mellish eyed the new boy cautiously before he answered.

'Erbert himself provided an idea.

"Took a special fancy to me, I s'pose?" he sneered.

Mellish took his cue promptly.

"Well, to tell you the truth," he said, with an assumption of frankness, "I thought you looked a decent sort of chap; but, of course, if you'd rather—"

'Erbert fell an easy prey to the blatant piece of flattery. It was balm to his injured pride and conceit, and he also reflected that he might make some use of Mellish.

"Come to the tuckshop!" he grunted

Mellish accepted with a nicely-gauged air of reluctance.

"Thanks, I will. Aren't you having tea in the study?"

"No, I'm not!" snapped 'Erbert. "I can't stand those three."

"Neither can I," agreed Mellish promptly.

'Erbert looked pleased. There was a chap after his own heart.

"Why don't you like them?" he inquired, as they crossed the quad.

"Oh, they're so—so mighty clever and—and stuck up!" replied the sneak of St. Jim's.

Mellish went up in leaps and bounds in 'Erbert's opinion, and before they reached Taggles' little shop, Tom Merry & Co. had been mutually described in the most unflattering terms.

The porter was behind the counter when the two walked in. He started when he caught sight of 'Erbert's face. Taggles had not forgotten that worm. Here was his enemy!

Without a sign of recognition, the new boy flung down a sovereign.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"FIGGINS & CO'S PLOT."

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By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The porter curbed his rage on the instant. This looked like a good customer.

Mellish congratulated himself, and with justice, for the new boy was so pleased with the sneak's tales and ill-natured remarks about practically every inmate of the college that a good fourth of that sovereign was expended on cakes and ginger-ale.

After their feed, the pair retired to a corner in the shrubbery to indulge in cigarettes, and it was after dark when they slunk into the college again.

The sneak of St. Jim's was feeling very wobbly and sick, but he managed to get away to his own room without betraying his condition to 'Erbert.

Half an hour later, in the seclusion of the bath-room, Mellish suffered for his sins.

Ginger-ale, pork-pies, tarts, almond-rock, and cheap cigarettes are a bad mixture.

'Erbert, however, was in good spirits—he was accustomed to that kind of thing—and he bounced into the Terrible Three's study.

Tom Merry sniffed, and looked up from his prep.

"Open the window, Manners!"

Manners promptly obeyed.

Monty Lowther also flung open the door.

"We can't have our study flavoured like a third-class smoker."

'Erbert turned red.

"I suppose you think you're clever?" he muttered.

"What if I have been having a smoke?"

The Terrible Three made no reply.

Three pens scratched away industriously, and that was all the satisfaction 'Erbert got.

Bed-time came, and Tom Merry & Co. totally ignored the new boy. He was sent to Coventry!

CHAPTER 6.

'Erbert Oversteps the Mark.

IN silence 'Erbert went to bed, but there he made up for lost time, for he snored abominably until the second bell had gone in the morning.

Then he got up, and seemed to take an unusual interest in the swell of St. Jim's toilet.

During breakfast he was in a thoughtful mood. After the morning meal was over, 'Erbert went straight to the headmaster, and, under the pretext that some of his things had not arrived, obtained leave to go down to the village.

Half an hour later he returned, with a large brown-paper parcel under his arm, and went up to the dormitory.

He was chuckling to himself. The contents of the parcel proved interesting.

'Erbert laid a new silk hat, a brilliant yellow tie, a pair of patent shoes, and a gorgeous waistcoat on the bed.

From his pocket he drew a bottle of hair-oil.

"I'll make 'em sit up!" he muttered, as he proceeded to array himself. "His 'igh and mightiness ain't the only one as knows what's what. This'll knock 'em!"

It did.

Just before class, Jack Blake burst into the Terrible Three's study.

"My only aunt!" he gasped.

"What the dickens is the matter?" shouted Tom Merry.

"Off your rocker?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake leaned against the mantelpiece, and roared with laughter.

"What's up?"

"A new wheeze?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Haven't you seen it?"

"Seen what?"

"The new kid. Your prize lump of suet!"

"No."

"Where?"

"Why?"

"What's up?"

Jack Blake went to the door, and peered down the corridor mysteriously.

"He's gone potty!" muttered Tom Merry.

The leader of Study No. 6 beckoned frantically, and tipped down the passage.

The Terrible Three followed.

At the end of the corridor, Jack Blake stopped and peeped round.

"Look!" he whispered.

The Terrible Three looked, and nearly collapsed.

'Erbert was coming along, arrayed in all the glory of his new purchases.

"My hat!"

"There's Gussy!"

This was the best show, and the juniors howled with glee as the swell of St. Jim's came in an opposite direction.

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ON SALE:

Arthur Augustus turned crimson, but did not deign to look as 'Erbert passed him with his nose in the air.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

The juniors ran after their chum.

"What-ho, Gussy?" cried Jack Blake. "Your star has set, old son! 'Erbert has stolen your laurels! You'll have to take a back seat after this!"

"Wubbish!"

"That's why he was watching you so this morning," cried Manners. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Gussy!"

"Did you see his tie?"

"And his boots?"

"And waistcoat?"

"My eye! You're done!"

"I fail to apprehend youab meaning," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I pvesume you do not class me with that uttah boundah?"

"No fear!" cried Jack Blake. "You're not in it!"

"Nowhere near!" exclaimed Tom Merry seriously. "Why, you'll never be able to beat that waistcoat!"

"You must be waving mad!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Why, it was in most tewwible bad taste! I wondah if that wottah was trying to take a wise out of me?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall wequest an explanation."

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Listen!"

A roar of voices came from the quad.

The juniors rushed to the nearest study window.

'Erbert was the centre of a yelling, cheering mob.

The applause was ironic, but he was quite unconscious of the fact.

Clang!

The uproar subsided, and there was a general scramble for the school entrance.

'Erbert took his seat jauntily in class, and smiled at D'Arcy.

Mr. Railton, who was taking the math. class that morning, stared hard at the new boy's strange get-up, but he made no remark.

At eleven o'clock an expectant crowd of Third-Formers waited for 'Erbert.

"Here he comes!"

"Hooray!"

Remarks of a personal kind began to fly round as 'Erbert strolled along in what he fondly imagined to be a correct imitation of D'Arcy.

Wally began to whistle:

"Where did you get that 'at,

That collar, and that tie?"

Fifty youngsters took up the ditty, and the new boy began to look savage.

In his excitement, Wally, who had Pongo on a chain, let it drop.

Pongo had a good memory and an Irishman's temper.

He made straight for 'Erbert's legs.

The new boy saw him coming, and launched out with his foot.

It was a cruel kick, and Pongo gave a yelp of anguish, but he came on again pluckily.

Wally made a wild dive and grabbed the chain trailing from the dog's collar.

He was just in the nick of time, and, so far as Pongo was concerned, 'Erbert was safe.

But his evil temper was roused, and he drove a second kick at the dog.

In an instant he was down, and about twenty juniors piled on top of him.

"Sock into him!"

"The cad!"

Wally's shrill voice rose above the rest.

The young ruffians descended on 'Erbert like an avalanche.

Tom Merry & Co. rushed to the rescue.

Jack Blake & Co. would have followed, but just at that moment a girlish figure came through the gates.

It was Cousin Ethel, the chums girl chum.

She gazed at the unusual scene in surprise.

"Why—"

The swarm of Third-Formers parted, and Tom Merry & Co., with 'Erbert between them, appeared.

The new boy was purple with rage.

He made straight for Arthur Augustus.

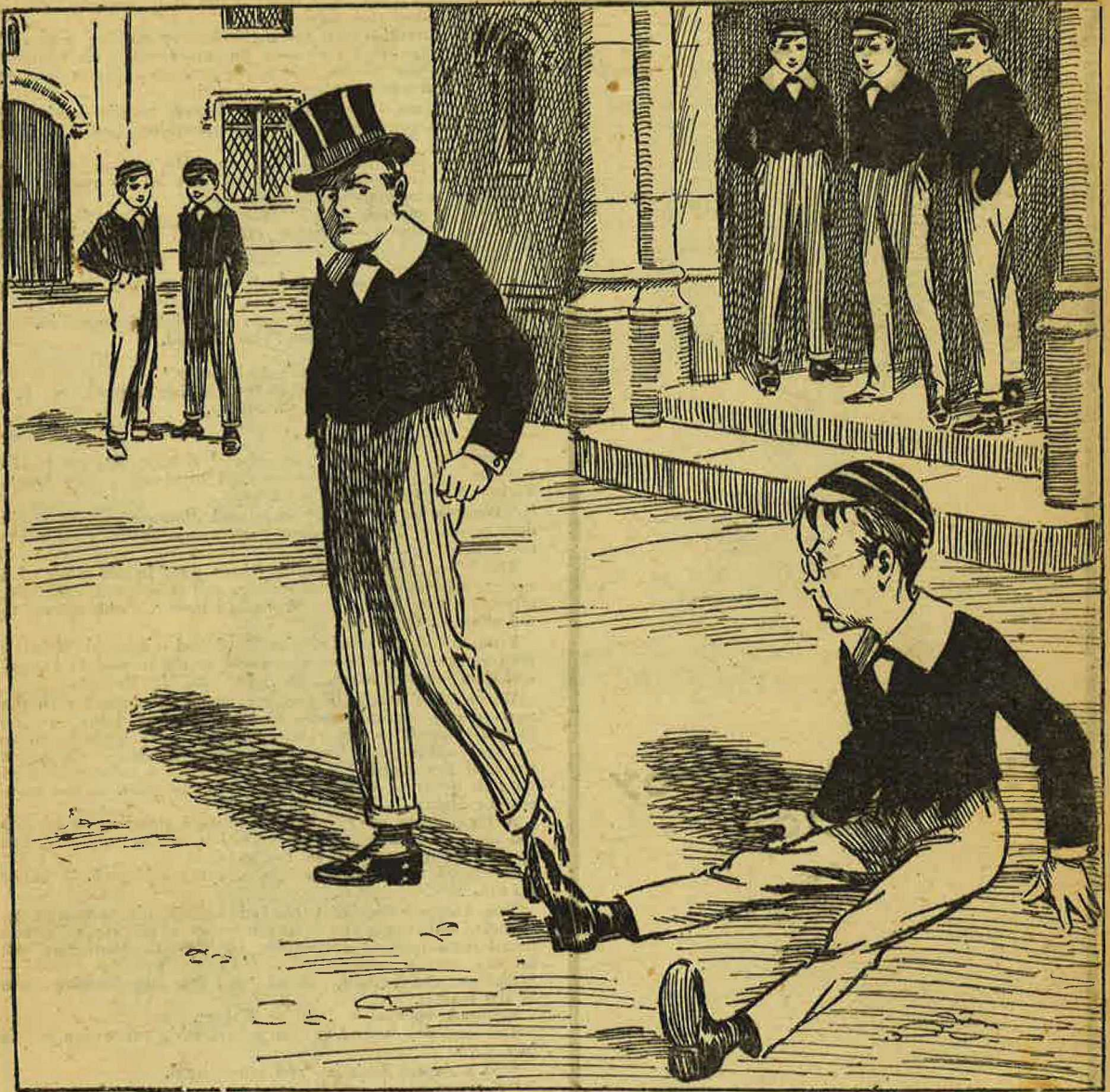
Cousin Ethel drew back in alarm.

'Erbert shook his fist in the swell of St. Jim's face.

Perhaps he was in too great a temper to notice the presence of a girl, but even if he had, it is not certain that it would have made any difference.

"I'll be even with that little brute of a brother of yours!" he shouted.

The swell of St. Jim's drew himself up with dignity.



"A what?" roared 'Erbert, emphasising his remark with a savage push, and the amateur socialist landed on the ground with a bump!

"I refuse to recognise you as a member of St. Jim's!"
 "I don't care! I'll—"
 The rest of what 'Erbert had to say ended in a gurgle, for, with no gentle hands, Tom Merry and Jack Blake grabbed him, and, stockily built as he was, they ran him up the steps and flung him into the hall.

Muttering to himself, 'Erbert picked himself up and retired.

He had had enough to last him for a while.

From that moment he was barred by the whole school excepting Mellish, and even he dared not speak to the disgrace of the college openly.

CHAPTER 7.

The Terror of St. Jim's

"THE wottah!"

Bubbling over with indignation, Tom Merry and Jack Blake walked to the quad, but their anger was as nothing compared to the outraged "dig" of Arthur Augustus.

He had already apologised to Cousin Ethel about six times, and when Tom Merry and Jack Blake also started to express their regrets the girl burst out laughing.

"Why, you couldn't help it; but what a funny boy he must be!"

"A bit too funny for our liking!" grunted Jack Blake. "He's too funny for words!"

"Very well, then," exclaimed Cousin Ethel brightly, "he is, and we won't talk any more about him! What about this afternoon—is it to be postponed? Hallo, Figgins!"

The long-legged member of the New House blushed like any Third-Former as he shook the dainty, gloved little hand. Somehow, he always did when Cousin Ethel was on the scene.

"Rather not!" cried Jack Blake. "We'll get our bikes and meet you in the quad, at two. I believe it's going to be fine, and we can ransack Codicote Woods for all the violets and—"

"And now we'd better scoot!" interrupted Tom Merry. "There's the bell a-clanging out its warning sound."

For the remainder of that morning the juniors were on their best behaviour. They had long planned the coming excursion with the swell of St. Jim's cousin, and they took good care not to run any risks of reaping a crop of impots for that "half."

Luckily, 'Erbert was in a sulky mood, and kept to himself.

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"FIGGINS & CO'S PLOT."

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

GAY

The Schoolboy
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After lunch there was a rush for the study, and the Terrible Three furnished themselves up.

Arthur Augustus was in the dormitory making a careful toilet. Always spick and span, he considered it his bounden duty to pay special attention to his personal appearance when Cousin Ethel was about.

Even Figgins, over in the New House, usually careless as to ties, was engaged in selecting something special for the occasion.

Suddenly Tom Merry looked up. He was polishing his boots with Manners's handkerchief, but in the rush of the moment the incident passed unnoticed.

"I say!" he exclaimed. "Where's tin whiskers?"

"Tin whiskers? Who d'you mean?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"'Erbert."

"Oh, I don't know and don't care! Hallo! What's the matter?"

The study door was flung open and Digby bounced in.

"Good news for you chaps!" he shouted.

"What?"

"The new kid's got a study to himself!"

The Terrible Three stared at the member of Study No. 6.

"Honest injun?" cried Tom Merry.

"Fact!"

"How did you find out?"

"Didn't!" said Digby promptly. "Kildare told me to tell you, in case you might worry your little selves, you know. Ta-ta! I've got to clean my bike."

"What a bit of luck!" exclaimed Manners, as the study door closed. "It seems to me there's more in this than meets the eye."

There was, but the Terrible Three were in too much of a rush to speculate upon the matter, and it was not until long after that they heard that there had been a silent witness to the affair in the quad.

From his study window the Head had witnessed 'Erbert's progress and his actions subsequent to the arrival of Pongo, and then followed a brief interview with Mr. Railton.

When, after lunch, 'Erbert was made acquainted with the news that a separate room had been provided for him, he plumed himself on his own importance. He quite failed to see that his removal from the Terrible Three's study was a mark of the Head's disfavour, and, after a brief survey of his new quarters, he strolled out into the quad, on the lookout for Mellish.

A little party of Third-Formers were standing under the old elms, but they paid no attention to the new boy, but another figure appeared on the scene.

It was Skimpole, and he was carrying a huge book under his arm.

The amateur Socialist blinked behind his spectacles at 'Erbert, and, being the brainy member of St. Jim's, he had heard little or next to nothing of 'Erbert's character. All he saw was a possible convert to his favourite "ism"—Socialism, the equality of all, and the downtrodden state of the masses.

Skimpole stepped in front of 'Erbert.

The new boy looked at him with a surly expression on his face.

"As a sincere Socialist," he commenced.

"Get out of my way!"

"But I insist!" went on Skimpole. "I believe you come from a plebeian family, and—"

"A what?" roared 'Erbert, who had not the faintest idea what plebeian meant. "Get out, or—"

The new boy emphasised his remark with a push, and the amateur Socialist was left sitting on the ground.

Decidedly the ways of a propagandist are hard.

'Erbert slouched towards the gates.

At that moment Cousin Ethel appeared from the gate leading to the Head's house.

She looked round for her chums, and catching sight of the new boy turned her back and passed into the lane.

'Erbert made after her.

Just as he, too, passed out of the big gates, Tom Merry crossed the quad, in the direction of the bicycle shed.

His quick eyes noted the two figures.

'Erbert had started to run when he had passed the gates.

Tom Merry stopped short.

Surely the new boy was not going to speak to Cousin Ethel. The junior made for the gate.

Sure enough 'Erbert was following the girl.

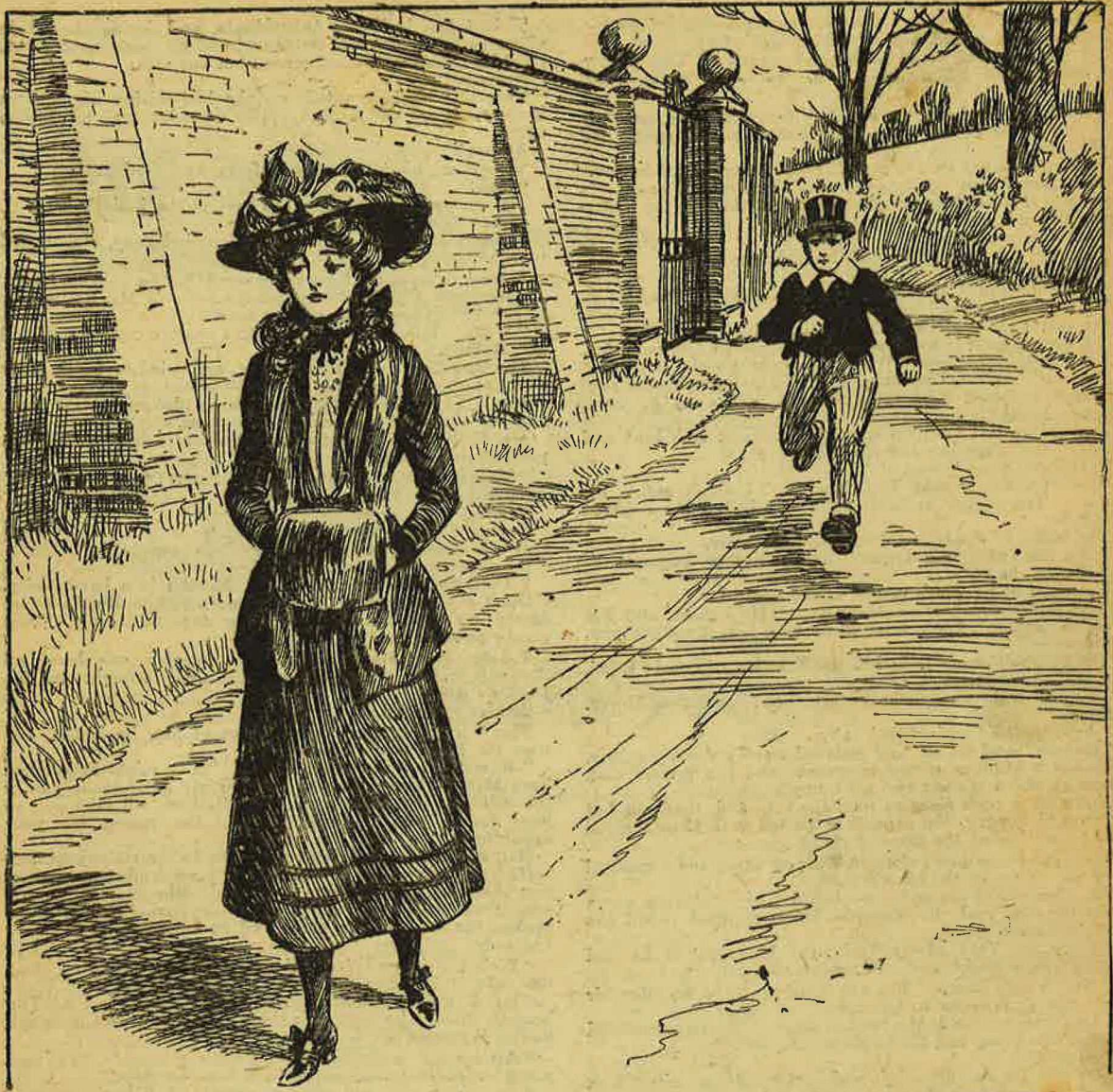
Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

He sprinted after the new boy.

Cousin Ethel was now walking rapidly down the lane. She was anxious to avoid 'Erbert, but he was gaining on her.

It became a race between the chief of the Terrible Three and the new boy.

The latter won by a good twenty yards, and he was too



"Stop!" shouted the terror of St. Jim's! "I've something to say to you. Stop, I say!"

intent on his designs to hear Tom Merry's feet pattering after him.

For a second or two 'Erbert walked level with the girl. "Stop!" he muttered roughly at last. "I've something to say to you! Stop, I say!"

Cousin Ethel walked on without replying. She was unaccustomed to being spoken to in this way.

"You've got to stop!" grunted 'Erbert, catching hold of the girl's arm. "I want to tell you what I think of that there cousin of— Oh—wow!"

'Erbert felt something catch him by the collar and swing him round.

Tom Merry had arrived.

His face was pale, and he was breathing heavily.

Cousin Ethel gave a little cry of relief.

"Oh, I'm so glad! He—"

"Yes, I know!" interrupted the chief of the Terrible Three. "I tried to catch up with you. Now, I think if you'll go back to the coll. this—this chap and I will follow presently. Come along, Smith!"

'Erbert did not want to come along, but he had to, for Tom Merry linked his arm in the new boy's and unostentatiously applied a little ju-jitsu.

For a moment Cousin Ethel hesitated, but there was nothing for her to do, and she took the junior's advice.

"Leave go of my arm!" growled 'Erbert. "What d'you mean by it? I ain't done nothing to you! I—"

"I'll show you what I mean!" replied Tom Merry, propelling his unwilling prisoner along. "There is a nice little wood here, and we can have a comfy little chat."

"But I don't want—"

"Can't help that! Come along!"

The new boy tried to wriggle free, but the effort was a painful one, and he had to give in.

Just off the lane the pair came to a small clearing.

"Now," said Tom Merry grimly, as he released his grip and stood in front of 'Erbert, "put them up!"

'Erbert retreated in alarm, and tripped over the root of a tree.

He sat on the ground and glared at the junior.

"Up you get!" cried Tom Merry sharply. "I can't fight you sitting on the grass!"

"I'm not going to fight!"

Tom Merry gasped.

This was something he had not reckoned for.

"You're not going to take it standing, then!" he cried.

"Then I'll thrash you as you are! This'll do!"

"This" was a supple little branch lying on the ground.

The junior brought it down sharply across 'Erbert's shoulders.

"Oh—wow!"

The new boy yelled, and scrambled to his feet.

"I thought that would fetch you!" muttered Tom Merry, as 'Erbert came at him with a rush. "Ah, you would, would you?"

Tom Merry had thrown his stick away, but the new boy had no notion of fair play. He kicked out savagely, and landed on Tom Merry's shin.

The junior's left shot out, and 'Erbert staggered sideways. Tom Merry only got in one more blow, on the new boy's nose, and then 'Erbert bolted. He crashed through the undergrowth as if a mad bull was after him.

Tom Merry grinned.

This was the funniest dust-up he had ever had.

"Tom Merry!"

"That's Blake!" said the junior to himself. "Coming!"

Tom Merry sprinted to the lane.

He found the assembled Co.'s waiting for him.

"I brought them to meet you," exclaimed Cousin Ethel.

"I thought, perhaps— Why, where's that awful boy?"

"Gone!" replied Tom Merry. "And judging by the pace he went I should think he's about a mile away by now!"

Thanks, Blake!"

Jack Blake had brought Tom Merry's cycle with him, and he whispered eagerly as he handed it over:

"Did you wipe him up?"

"No, I didn't!" said Tom Merry. "I didn't get a fair chance. The beggar wouldn't fight. He bolted like a scared rabbit."

The leader of Study No. 6 sniffed disgustedly.

"We will track him down!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's peered at the ground.

"No we won't," cried Manners. "He's gone, and I'm sure we shouldn't know what to do with him if we got him. Besides—"

The Fourth-Former looked in the direction of Cousin Ethel, and the rest understood.

"Right! Well, we'll make a start, then!" said Tom Merry.

"Ready?"

"Yes!" cried Cousin Ethel gaily.

The little band set off, and pedalled merrily down the lane.

It was a glorious spring afternoon, and the juniors soon forgot all about 'Erbert and his funny ways.

Not a hitch took place to spoil the fun, and, tired out but happy and hungry, the expedition parted with Cousin Ethel four hours later at the gates of the college.

They got home just before lighting-up time, and a general rush was made for the bicycle shed.

The prospect of tea and toast before their study fire was a tempting one, and the Terrible Three sprinted round the quad, at record speed.

"Buck up, Tom Merry!" shouted Manners, as he and Lowther flung their machines against the wall.

"Half a tick, chaps! I'm not going to leave my bike for every clumsy bouncer to fall over!"

"Can't stop!" said Monty Lowther. "We'll go on and get the fire going and the kettle on the boil."

"Right-ho!"

The two juniors departed, and a few minutes later Tom Merry emerged from the shed and locked up.

He was whistling cheerily, and quite unconscious of any impending danger.

He was not to know that a pair of close-set eyes peering from behind a corner of the School House had eagerly scanned each of the juniors as they had passed.

'Erbert had had time to meditate, and during the whole afternoon his spleen had fermented and his resentment grown until his unbalanced mind carried but one idea.

Revenge!

That was all he wanted, and he had during his half an hour's wait gripped a heavy piece of wood until his fingers ached.

At last!

'Erbert set his teeth. Tom Merry was coming.

Crash!

The weapon descended on the back of the junior's head.

With a faint cry he collapsed.

The new boy flung his improvised cudgel away, and started to run.

A faint moan came from the ground, but he paid no heed.

Then came a startled cry, and the voice of Mr. Railton.

'Erbert had run bang into the master!

"What! Who's this? I thought I heard a cry!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

The new boy trembled violently, and tried to break away as a figure came tottering out of the gloom.

It was Tom Merry. He was holding his hand to his head, and was too dizzy to speak for a moment.

Mr. Railton, still unconsciously keeping a hold on 'Erbert, peered into Tom Merry's face.

"You are hurt! Whatever's the matter?"

'Erbert broke into a whimper.

"Surely—"

Suspicion dawned on the house-master.

Was it possible that the new boy was responsible?

"I didn't mean to hurt him! I—"

"That will do!" exclaimed Mr. Railton in a harsh voice. "Don't say any more. Can you walk to the Head's room, Merry? This is not a matter," he went on sternly, "that can be passed over."

Taking Tom Merry's arm, and keeping one hand on 'Erbert's collar, the house-master went straight to the Doctor's study.

'Erbert confessed.

The whole story was dragged out of him by inches, and then the Head-master spoke:

"Wretched boy!" he said sternly. "You might have killed Tom Merry. You will go at once. I will not tolerate you in the college a minute longer. Mr. Railton will take you to your father, and he will tell him the reason for your expulsion."

Half an hour later 'Erbert was taken to the railway-station.

Had he been older he would have landed in another sort of station, but his years saved him, although, as it turned out, Tom Merry was not severely injured. His cap had broken the force of the blow, and he was allowed to go to his study.

"Well I'm blessed!" exclaimed Manners, when the story was told. "Expelled! And serve him jolly well right!"

"So I should think!" cried Monty Lowther. "The bouncer started by behaving like a cad! Now he's gone the limit! We must tell the others he's gone!"

"After tea," said Tom Merry, with a laugh. "I'm not going to let the toast spoil for a biff on the head."

After tea it was, and when the story of 'Erbert's revenge was recounted in the studies there was not a single sympathiser.

All agreed that it was a lucky thing that it had been no worse, and that they were free of the terror of St. Jim's.

THE END.

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BRITAIN'S REVENGE

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS ARE:

AUBREY VILLIERS, nicknamed Sam Slick. A lad who has performed wondrous service for his country in her time of need, during the terrible invasion by the Germans.

STEPHEN VILLIERS, his brother. He is Sam's companion in all his exploits.

The two boys form part of the crew of the *Condor*, a wonderful airship invented by John Carfax. The *Condor* is commissioned by Admiral Frobisher to destroy a German steamer bringing floating mines down the Elbe. The enterprise is successful, the mine-ship being blown up by a shell from the airship; but the force of the explosion plays havoc on board the *Condor*, Hugh, one of the crew, being killed, and Stephen Villiers being wounded. Carfax brings the *Condor* down at the graveyard of a little English church at Elmshorn, and there Hugh is buried, with Carfax and Sam acting as mourners, and the English chaplain officiating. The *Condor*, with the rest of the crew, whirrs off out of sight again, to wait.

(Now go on with the story.)

Ambushed!

With their own hands Carfax and Sam filled in the grave. Then they slowly left the churchyard with the chaplain.

Carfax thanked him gratefully for the service he had rendered, and left with him a large sum of money, begging him to use it for his various charities, and another sum, which he asked might be expended on a fitting tombstone for Hugh's grave, and left in the chaplain's hands the inscription he wished placed upon it.

The little man, much touched, asked them to come to his house, but they explained that duty called them away.

Sam and Carfax, after a last look back at Hugh's resting-place, set out to walk to the little hill where they were to be picked up.

Somehow Sam felt now that Carfax had been quite right to do what he had done.

Neither of them spoke for some time. They left as quietly as possible, and took a by-path leading to the hill; Carfax looked at his watch just before they reached the place.

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"We were quicker than I thought we should be," he said—"remarkably quick. It still wants five minutes to the half-hour."

"I hope the *Condor* won't break down and leave us in the lurch," said Sam, with a faint smile.

"Not likely. Did you ever know her break down? Well, yes, once, when we brought the naval guns from Dunkirk. But she won't to-day. Not in sight yet, though. It's very quiet about here, luckily."

"Did you perceive that big German staring at us over the wall of the churchyard during the funeral?" asked Sam.

"No. Why? Who was he?"

"I don't know. I looked up once, and noticed him. I remember thinking he was watching us pretty queerly. Then he went away suddenly and disappeared."

"It doesn't matter much," said Carfax. "Even if there was any trouble, we should be picked up before it reached us. There are no troops about here."

"And yonder comes the old *Condor*," said Sam, pointing to a speck rapidly growing larger in the western sky. "They've had us under with the big glasses, though we haven't seen them. Well, I shall be glad to get aboard. It's a dreary bit of country, this."

"I told them to keep well off," said Carfax; "but Kenneth's punctual to the second."

They were close upon the crest of the little hill. Several half-built houses were there—country villas apparently—but there was no sign of folk about.

The war seemed to have stopped all building operations, and the place seemed curiously desolate and deserted.

"I wonder," said Carfax, with a grim smile, "if your big friend who looked over the wall is riding off full-pelt to warn the nearest troops, or the police."

"A wasted journey for him," said Sam, laughing for the first time that day. "I think I see German police matching themselves against the *Condor*, sir—eh! But the man I saw—good heavens!"

The exclamation was wrung from him involuntarily, for from behind a wall of one of the half-built houses the very man himself stepped out and confronted them, not ten feet away.

"Halt, there!" he cried harshly, in German.

In each fist he held a heavy six-shooter of the German

Service pattern, and the instant he appeared he levelled them at the heads of Carfax and Sam.

Sam's first thought was to drop his hand to his own; but he saw it was useless. The man had "the drop" on them both.

Their lives were held in the crook of his forefinger, and he warned them that at the slightest movement he would fire.

He held the revolvers steadily as rooks; but there was a curious, wild light in his eye as he glared at the two Britons.

"Well," said Carfax, with perfect coolness, in the man's own tongue, "what do you want?"

For all his calmness, he recognised that they were in deadly danger. Even science itself is helpless before a revolver-bullet in the hands of a good shot.

The German held them completely at his mercy. He answered the aeronaut's question with another.

"You are the Herr Carfax?"

"I am."

"Of the British airship Condor?"

The question needed little replying to. The Condor answered herself, for she was now in full view, and coming up with a rush.

But she stopped dead all of a sudden, fully eight hundred yards away, and behind the German.

Sam's heart sank, and he wondered if she had broken down. Not another foot did she advance.

"Yes, Herr Carfax, of the Condor, which is now in sight of you," said the aeronaut, as coolly as before.

"So I supposed," said the German grimly. "That is all I wanted to know. I recognised you at the English churchyard—was sure I must be right. Prepare yourselves to die, for I am going to kill you here and at once!"

"One moment," said Carfax suavely. "You say you saw us at the churchyard. It is true. We were burying a comrade there. Let me remind you that in war a truce is allowed while either side buries its dead. Therefore, under the commonest law of nations and of decency, you cannot fire on us."

"Gewiss!" said the German grimly. "Quite so. I have allowed you time to bury your comrade, and now I consider you to be on active service again. There will be not one fresh grave in the English churchyard, but three."

He glared ferociously at the two Britons. "I should allow no consideration, burial, or no burial, to deprive me of the pleasure of killing you," he said. "By making an end of you, I shall be doing my country the greatest service that any man could render it. I am not fool enough to give you any chance to draw a weapon, but I shall shoot you down, Herr Carfax, like a dog, and your companion too!"

Sam saw the savage gleam in the man's eye, and measured the distance for a desperate spring, hopeless though it was, for he saw the German's fingers about to tighten on the trigger.

Plut!

There was a heavy, splashing thud, and the German sprang into the air with a shriek, a rifle-bullet through his back and breast.

A sharp, distant crack rang through the air a fraction of a second later, the man fell dying upon the turf, and the Condor came up with one swift rush, and alit beside him.

Stephen rose from her fore-deck, where he had been lying, a smoking rifle in his hand.

The Aerial Fleet.

"It was you, then, Steve!" cried Sam. "My word! I thought we were done for that time!"

"Neat shot, wasn't it?" said Stephen complacently, though his face was twisted up with pain. "The kick of the rifle gave my shoulder gyp. Luckily, I didn't have to fire from the wounded side."

"Well done, Stephen!" said Carfax admiringly. "I'll own up that I was at my wit's end a minute ago, and didn't expect to get aboard here alive. I was depending entirely on your carbine." He picked up the German's two revolvers that had fallen from the man's grasp. "This fellow found out who you were, and held us up. He got the drop on us most thoroughly, for we weren't looking out as we should have been."

"We saw him stop you as we were coming up," said Stephen. "I was in a stew, I can tell you. At first we thought of trying to barge right in and bowl him over; but I knew we couldn't do it from that distance before he'd spot us and pull his triggers, so I called to Kenneth to stop her dead, and give me a chance for a shot. I'd got the rifle handy."

"So that was it," said Sam. "I thought she'd broken down. But you were absolutely right, young man, and I was a fool!"

"I saw what you were about as soon as the vessel stopped," said Carfax; "so I did my best to make the fellow talk, and gain time. He did it. If he hadn't stopped to gloat over us and make speeches, we should both be dead by now. Lucky he had his back to you."

Carfax stepped aboard the Condor, and set her mounting at a steady pace.

"Sam and I owe our lives to your skill with the rifle, Stephen, and I've never known you fail with it."

"It was easy, sir. Kenneth held her dead steady, and it was a straight eight-hundred-yard shot. I'd have been quicker, only I had to shift a bit, because the way we were at first I should have plugged one of you as well as the German. These bullets'll go through three men, you know, at that range."

"We're all well out of that," said Kenneth. "Is it all right about poor old Hugh, sir?"

"Perfectly. The chaplain saw us through," said Carfax, with feeling. "I'll get that fellow made a bishop one day, if I've any influence. He behaved splendidly. And poor Hugh has a white man's grave."

"You're lucky not to need a place beside him now, sir."

"Oh, I wish for nothing of that sort for myself," said Carfax. "If a stray bullet make an end of me any time, lads, you are to lay me in the nearest trench with the other dead men. That will be as much honour as I shall care for. It's to the lads of my crew that I feel I owe all I can do when they fall in my service and the country's. Well, our duty's done here. Set her southward, and let's get into the thick of it again."

The crew breathed easier when the Condor quickened her pace, and surged away to the southward again. It was a relief to hear the deep hum of the great fans, and feel the airship doing her steady sixty miles an hour.

The grim, ugly northern coast was left behind, and the inland plains and forests were passed over rapidly.

The Condor was short handed now; and Sam, who had made himself thoroughly at home with her engines, had to help Kenneth from time to time. Stephen went forward, and cleaned and tended the guns.

"It'll be pretty awkward if we're called on to use these now, sir, won't it?" he said to Carfax, when he had done.

"We shall take Marten and Dudley aboard when we reach Blake's army," said Carfax. "They have been with him since the Eaglet was blown up. Marten is a good hand with a Maxim, and Sam will stick to the bomb-guns."

"I'd forgotten Marten and Dudley, and that's a fact," said Stephen. "Dudley'll help Kenneth in handling the guns, of course. Have you got any more experts at home, sir?"

"I am training certain young men, who will in time man a fleet of Condor's that will make Britain mistress of the world from pole to pole," said Carfax quietly. "But the time for that is not come yet."

"By James, I'd like to see it when it does come!" said Stephen. "I say, sir, isn't that some kind of air-craft out to the eastward?"

All the Condor's crew turned sharply to stare at a strange-looking vessel that suddenly came into sight not more than three or four miles away, a good deal lower than the Condor, but mounted rapidly.

Stephen's keen eyes saw it first; but soon all the field-glasses on board were directed at it.

"It's an airship!" exclaimed Sam. "But not like the other ones we tackled. It's a new type."

The airship, whatever it was, hovered high over a large town that lay among the wooded hills.

The glasses showed it to be an immensely long, narrow gas-bag, like a fish in shape, with flanges, or fins, running all along each side, evidently to give it steadiness.

From the gas-bag hung a framework that supported a long car, or platform, that seemed to be well furnished with machinery and guns.

Hardly had the Condor's crew sighted her than she turned, and took to flight. Carfax set his vessel to her utmost speed, and at once gave chase.

"She's a German vessel, and a precious powerful one at that!" he exclaimed.

"Can't she move, too?" added Sam, watching her eagerly. "We don't gain on her any too fast. She's a very different sort to the Parseval and the other gas-airships we've tackled."

"Yes, and greatly superior to them as well," said Carfax, whose brows were knitted as he scanned the strange craft. "I don't understand this. They must have been keeping her up their sleeve all this time."

"Unless she's only just been completed," added Stephen. "Look, sir! Isn't that another one farther to the south?"

It was a mere speck on the skyline that Stephen pointed to; but a glance through the telescope showed to be a second gas-airship, very like the first.

They had no time to watch it, however, for they were bent

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Read about GORDON GAY

the hero of the story.

on overtaking the one in front, which was skimming away like a swallow.

"Guns, or no guns, she prefers running to fighting," said Carfax. "Stand by your weapon, Sam. We'll let her have it directly she's in range. It won't do to have these things knocking about the skies. We claim the empire of the air for Britain alone."

"No Germans need apply," said Sam, his hand on the breech-lever of the middle bomb-gun. "We're catching her, but not very fast."

"We've the legs of her by a good ten miles an hour," said Carfax; "but for a gas-airship she's a marvel."

"If her framework will stand the shock of her own guns, she'll be pretty hot stuff to tackle, even for us," Kenneth remarked. "They can steer her, too! Look at her dodgin'!"

Sam was just about to ask if he should try the Maxim on her at long range, for the Condor had dropped considerably, and was following her on a level, when the German suddenly swooped down and swerved round a range of high hills crowned by forests and rocky spurs.

The Condor followed a minute or more afterwards.

"Where the dickens is she?" exclaimed Stephen, staring all around.

The German airship had completely vanished. She was nowhere to be seen. A large town lay just beyond the slope of the hills, and all around was open country.

It did not seem possible that so huge a thing as the German vessel—she was four times the Condor's size, with her huge gasbag—could conceal herself anywhere; but it was very sure there was no sign of her on the earth or in the sky.

The Condor sailed straight on over the town, her crew sweeping with their glasses in all directions.

It was a complete puzzle. Suddenly a couple of guns spoke from some fortifications on the outskirts of the town, and the Condor found herself under fire.

One shell passed so close that the wind of it was felt, and a second struck the fore-starboard corner of the platform, and carried a yard or two of metalwork completely away, cutting it off as if with a knife.

The Condor, very nearly caught napping, had to get out of it with all possible speed, and Carfax sent her whizzing upwards till she was ten thousand feet above the ground, and there steadied her.

Saying little to each other, her crew scanned the now distant town and its surroundings with the greatest care, using the powerful telescope.

But after a long cruise to and fro they could discover no sign of the German airship, nor any building, nor natural shelter where so large a thing could be concealed. Even Carfax was at a loss for once.

"She's gone to ground like a rabbit!" said Stephen wonderingly. "Where on earth could they manage to hide her?"

"Hide her? Might as well try to hide a cathedral," said Sam. "She must have sailed away clean out of sight."

Carfax shook his head.

"That's impossible. She'd be in view for half an hour, whatever her speed up in the air. It beats me for the present. We had a narrow shave of being smashed up by that fort, too."

"D'you think she was leading us into a trap, sir?" asked Kenneth. "It looked a bit like it."

"I don't believe it. We happened on her accidentally, and she was badly frightened. They've got quarters for her somewhere about here, and she hurried home to them."

"The other one I saw a long way off isn't in sight now, either," added Stephen.

"I wish I could get to the bottom of it," returned the aeronaut. "How a huge thing like that could get into cover is a mystery. However, it's no good guessing at it, and we can't delay any longer. It's full time we pushed on and joined Blake, for there's no saying how badly we may be wanted."

The Condor got on her course again, and forged away southwards at her best pace. For a good while she travelled without seeing anything of importance, and the day was fast drawing to its close.

"By George, Blake must have forced the pace!" said Carfax. "We ought to have sighted his army before now. He's got an amazing long way south."

"His troops are fit as fiddles—those that aren't wounded," said Stephen. "And he is a terror for forced marches. But we're getting on towards Wittenberge, and I didn't think he could have got as far as this. But I can hear the sound of firing somewhere ahead!"

"An' not far off, either!" said Kenneth, listening intently. "The wind's blowing strong with us, and the sound wouldn't carry far. The light's failing, and it's hard to see anything at this height in the wooded country yonder."

"It is Blake's army, right enough!" said Sam, who had mounted the big telescope. "I can make out his main corps, and he's engaged the Germans!"

"They're within striking distance of Berlin!" exclaimed Kenneth. "What do you think of it, sir?"

Carfax looked graver, then, they had yet seen him, as he replied:

"I'll tell you," he said. "I think that the final struggle of this great campaign is close upon us. Britain and Germany will soon be at death-grips, and either the Eagle or the Lion will come out of it broken and defeated. Within a few hours we shall be fighting as we never fought before!" He paused a moment in silence. "And I think," he added quietly, "that Germany has got something up her sleeve, and that the issue may depend on the Condor. Clap on all the power she'll carry, Kenneth, and let us join Blake at once!"

A Message from Harrington Carfax.

Down came the Condor, descending gradually as she neared the position of General Blake's army, which was still there or four miles ahead. Her crew, whom Carfax's words had deeply impressed, were keeping a sharp look-out to see how things were going with the rival forces.

"They're easing off now, because of the darkness," said Stephen, for the sound of artillery fire was much less heavy. Only an occasional shot, and the scattered popping of musketry could be heard. Not very much could be seen on account of the twilight.

"I don't think it's that," said Kenneth, his glasses to his eyes. "I believe Blake has whopped 'em!"

"That's more like it," Sam agreed, sweeping the plain with his binoculars. "I can see a lot of troops scuttling through the gap in the hills there, and hoofing it over the flat country beyond. Yes, and there are four batteries of guns galloping off, out on the left!"

The Condor was approaching so rapidly that they soon saw Sam was right, and a cheer went up from the four aeronauts. The British were in a strong position, and had evidently been fighting hard, while beyond, a huge mass of German troops, in very broken order, was retreating as fast as it could to the southward, harassed by pursuing parties of cavalry and a galling fire from rifle regiments that had pushed up on the crest of the hills. Some Prussian batteries, short of guns and horses, were making off as fast as they could to the left.

"It's another victory!" cried Stephen, waving his glass. "Blake's jolly well hammered 'em! They're getting it hot all the way. Hang it all, we're too late for the fun!"

"We shall get fun enough of that sort before we're much older!" said Carfax. "You greedy young rascal, will nothing satisfy you? We can't be in two places at once. "Yes," he added, as the Condor sped closer, and the whole scene of the battlefield was clear in view, "there's been a still bigger fight here than the one at Oldesloe."

"Trust Blake to stretch 'em out," said Sam. "This is a splendid score. Those big fights aren't much catch to be in, though. Give me something sharper, where you can see what you're doing. The Condor for me! Blake's got some strong reinforcements, though," he added, scanning the lines, "and a lot more guns."

"There's Sherstone's brigade, of course—the one we rescued."

"He's got a lot more than that. I can see two whole fresh divisions there," said Sam. "Yonder's a big corps of Colonial horse, too—New South Wales troops, I think. Wonder what route they came by?"

"From Hanover, I expect," said Carfax. "There's the general's staff waving to us. Hark at the troops cheering! Stand by to bring her down."

It was a fierce fight, indeed, that had been waged on the plain of Wittenberg, as the Condor's crew could plainly see. The British were strongly entrenched, and the slopes, where the Prussians had advanced, were strewn thick with bodies, horses, and wrecked machine-guns.

The ambulances and fatigue-parties were out in full force, and the troops themselves were resting and taking a hard-earned meal after the fierce battle, for they had fought for long on empty stomachs.

The shouts that greeted the Condor's arrival rolled from regiment to regiment like thunder. She came quietly to the ground just beside the place where the general's staff was placed, and Blake himself came quickly forward and greeted Carfax and his crew.

"You've licked them again, then, general!" said the aeronaut, as he grasped the old soldier's hand.

"Very much so. They've had their gruel!" said Blake emphatically. "The men have been simply splendid! I've had to bucket 'em along at an awful pace to get here—you can see for yourself what a march we've made—and they were pretty well worn out. But they fought a fight on top of it all that will give us the key to Berlin!"

Brimming with enthusiasm for his men, and speaking of himself scarcely at all, the general gave a brief account of the fight, which had been short, but furious while it lasted.

"Why, it was as hot as the battle of Oldesloe, sir!" said Sam, his eyes sparkling.

"Ah, not so hot, lad, from our point of view!" said Blake. "A much bigger affair this time, for numbers engaged, but we've lost less men. Oldesloe was dearly bought, and but for the Condor would have been far worse still. We had a grand position here, caught the Germans at a disadvantage, and we've simply wiped the country with them. They've lost over 25,000, as far as can be judged now."

"Good heavens!" said Sam, aghast. He had hardly realised yet the numbers engaged. "And you've a lot more troops, haven't you, sir?"

"We're immensely stronger. Two whole divisions joined me to-day at noon, with six batteries of heavy guns. Our fleet holds the Weser River, and the transports have been landing men there for three days. General Faucett was in charge; he fought and won one engagement near Bremen, and pushed right across to join me. I have over 100,000 men under me now," added Blake.

"Another talon clipped from the German Eaglet!" exclaimed Stephen. "We must be nearing the end!"

"You succeeded at Hamburg, of course?" said Blake to Carfax. "What did Frobisher want?"

The chief told him of the destination of the mine-steamer that threatened the squadron off the Elbe, and of the loss of Hugh.

"Poor young fellow!" said the general. "He died a Briton's death, none the less. Your first loss. You have wonderful luck, Carfax—skill, I should have said. It's often puzzled me how you haven't all been wiped out. And those two airships you speak of—that's a strange thing!"

"I wish I could get to the bottom of it," said Carfax.

General Faucett reported seeing one on his march from Bremen, and his description answers to yours. It didn't molest him, but hurried out of sight just as the ones you saw did, and—Confound it, what a fool I am not to have mentioned it at first! There's a message for you. Here, orderly, go and ask the telegraph staff officer for a despatch for Mr. Carfax!"

"How did it come?" asked the aeronaut.

"By wireless to Bremen, and General Faucett brought it on with him. It's in cipher, and unreadable—except, of course, to you."

The missive was soon brought, and Carfax, taking it to the Condor, worked it out with the cipher key.

"It's from Harrington," he said, "and, by Jove, it explains everything! He knows more in Hampshire than all three armies can learn in field. Listen to this, lads!"

He read the message out.

"Keep sharp look-out for seven German airships of formidable type, heavily armed."

"Phew!" muttered Sam. "Seven!"

"Germany has constructed them with great rapidity and secrecy," continued the message. "Been preparing for a month. Housed the pits in ground, roofed over with low sheds that lift to allow exit."

"That's why we couldn't find them. They must have been nippy in getting in," muttered Carfax.

"Each airship ninety feet long, side flanges, gasoline engines, speed fifty-five miles. Carries six-pounder gun. Two carry twelve-pounders. Seven ships if not more. Believed chiefly north-east of Berlin."

"Object of them, destruction of Condor before British troops reach Berlin. Only just completed. Intend surround you, and force battle. Be careful."

The message ended with those two words. The Gold Master knew how serious the news was, or he would not have added them in a missive to his brother.

"Forewarned is forearmed," said Carfax, folding up the message. "Good old Harrington! He's worth a dozen secret services. We're going to have a hot time of it!"

"We shall come out on top, sir!" said Stephen.

"We have to," returned Carfax quietly. "Now, of all times, the Condor is needed to do her work. If she were destroyed, and could not retaliate, I firmly believe these airships would throw the treaties to the winds, and wipe out the armies of the Allies by raining explosives from overhead. They dare not do it while we are in commission."

"I'd trust the Germans as far as I could throw them!" said Sam. "But these will be hard nuts to crack, even for us, sir!"

"They're sure to tackle us. We have the speed of them, but only by ten miles an hour at a pinch. If the seven of them bring us to action, we must destroy them all, as the survivor would finish us. But I doubt if they'll be able to come to the scratch in the way the Germans think they will," added Carfax. "I'll back my aeroplane against twenty gas-airships, however formidable!"

"A single shot will finish any one of them!" said Stephen confidently. "Get 'em in the gasbag, and they're done!"

"And a single shot will do for us, too, if it lands in the right place," said Sam. "They know that. Germany won't care if all seven of them are smashed up, if they get that one shot home. There's only one Condor."

"And she'll be enough," said Carfax, with a nod. "Though what you say is true enough, Sam. Six and twelve-pounders are long-range weapons, too, and our bomb-guns only throw at close quarters. However, we shall see!"

"It's Germany's last and biggest card," said Stephen, "and she'll play it for all it's worth!"

"It might give her the game yet, and lose it for us and for France, if it's played well," said Kenneth, under his breath. "Hallo, here comes Marten and Dudley, sir!"

The two young aeronauts who had so efficiently handled the Eaglet, came hurrying forward. They had been over the hills with a sharp-shooter corps when the Condor arrived. Both were delighted to be back with their famous chief again; but their grief was deep when they heard of poor Hugh's death.

"You'll sail with me to-morrow," said Carfax, when he had explained Harrington's message to them, "and we shall have need of you, too. Here's the general."

Blake rode up just then, and Carfax, taking him aside, told him the news. The general looked very grave.

"If that aerial fleet does turn up, Carfax," he said, "I believe that the fate of Britain will depend entirely on you and your crew!"

"Have no doubts about the result, general," said the aeronaut.

"It's a relief to hear you say that. You've never made a mistake yet, and I don't believe you can. I shall be anxious, all the same. If you can rid us of those seven airships, I believe the victory will be ours, and Berlin will fall. Besides the French, we have 250,000 regulars, and 300,000 Colonial and Irregular troops, allowing for losses. Scarcely an able-bodied man in the Empire who can shoot and ride has failed to come to the scratch."

"The Germans outnumber all the Allies still, general?"

"Not now. Their losses have been enormous, and the numbers are a little to advantage. The Allies have won another great victory in the south, and are not farther from the capital on that side than I am on this. The Germans are demoralised, but they will make one last great stand, and are hopeful of victory. What do you propose to do, Carfax?"

"To help you in every possible way in the final advance. I shall let the German aerial fleet take care of itself, and not trouble about it till it comes—if it ever does."

"Your help in the advance will be a huge advantage, Carfax. To-morrow we strike at Berlin!"

The Seven Airships.

The Condor's crew, now full strength once more, spent two hours in repairing and making her thoroughly fit for service—frame, engines, and guns. Then they took advantage of their secure position to get a thorough rest and sleep, for none knew when they would have the chance again. Carfax himself said he would work them till they dropped.

Long before dawn the great army was up and moving. In excellent order, with a long advance, and its flanks well guarded, it pushed on towards the German capital, and, with the first streaks of dawn, sharp skirmishing began along the line of march.

But the main defence of the Germans lay a long way ahead, near the outskirts of the city. They were mustering for their last stand, as Blake had said, but sharpshooters and riflemen harassed the invaders all the way. What gigantic strength of men and guns was in front, only Blake knew.

With dogged British courage, paying no attention to the galling attacks by the route, the men went ahead to the business in hand, never halting or checking. The pace was such as only the fittest troops could stand.

All along the march the Condor rendered the greatest service, and but for her the advance would have been much less rapid. She spied out every ambush from overhead, and signalled its whereabouts, so that a detachment of light guns and mounted infantry could be sent to wipe it out.

She sped ahead twenty miles to the very confines of Berlin, and returned at full speed to report on the preparations made there. To Blake she was like an extra pair of eyes, that could see a day's march ahead.

"Whew!" said Stephen, as they came speeding back from their visit to the Berlin outposts. "Blake and the Allies have got a tough nut to crack there!"

"They'll do it!" returned Sam confidently. "You could hear Sainte Croix's guns hammering away to the south of the city already just as we turned back. Blake'll get the first entry, though, I believe."

"We shall know by night-time. How long is the siege of Berlin likely to last if we drive the Germans back into it?" asked Stephen.

"It's not reckoned that there'll be any siege," Carfax put in. "Once we defeat them, and get our guns in position, Blake believes the city will surrender, and Germany will sue for peace."

"Hope so!" said Stephen. "But the Germans generally fight to the last."

"We've not beaten her yet," said Sam. "She's a thundering big nation. Isn't that Blake's staff signalling to us, sir?"

The Condor came to the ground close to where General Blake was riding with his staff, and the latter at once pulled aside to consult with Carfax.

"I signalled you," he said, "because I'm unable to hear anything of General McLeod's army, which is advancing across country, and was at Brunswick two days ago. He should be within a few hours' march of me now, and it's immensely important he should join me."

"We've seen nothing of him from aloft," said Carfax. "His line of advance is now to the westward," said Blake. "I can hardly believe anything would stop McLeod. He's a Scotsman, and a nailer to cut his way about. But it's just possible a big German force may have intercepted and delayed him for the time."

"You want me to go and see?"

"Yes; and if he's fighting his way through, let me know when he expects to arrive. Grand fellow, McLeod! We can't do without him and his men."

"You shall know within an hour," said Carfax; and away went the Condor on her errand.

A short, swift journey, over the range of hills to the westward, brought General McLeod's army into view, and Carfax, to his relief, saw that all was well. The troops looked war-worn and battered, but not a gun nor as much as a baggage-waggon had been lost. The Condor came down, and her chief greeted General McLeod—a fine, stalwart old Highlander.

"You're Mr. Carfax, of course?" he said. "It's a grand thing the two armies have you on their side this day, man! Yes, tell Johnny Blake I'll be there as soon as he is. We've had to dish up the Hanover battalions twice before we could get through; but all's well."

"Right! You'll find the way clear ahead of you, except for skirmishers, right up to the Berlin outposts," said Carfax. "See you later, general. We hope to meet at the Stadthaus very soon, and change the flag on it!"

Away went the Condor on her journey back to convey the news to Blake. She rose to a height of some 2,000 feet, and was expecting to make a rapid passage of it, when a strange thing happened.

The Battle in the Clouds.

Just after the Condor had passed over the small town of Nauen, a huge object showing dimly through the smoke that hung over the place, rose slowly above the houses, and then shot up to a great height, on a long slant, with surprising speed. It was a large aerostat, and might have been a twin sister of the one the boys had seen the day before.

As if timed by clockwork, two more appeared almost simultaneously a few miles to the north, and another pair rather nearer to the south.

"They're after us!" cried Stephen. "Harrington's warning has come true!"

"Yes, by George!" exclaimed Sam, springing to his guns. "It's the German aerial fleet! See, there's one right ahead now, in our path!"

"And yonder comes the seventh!" Kenneth added, pointing to the north, where a single one, much farther than any of the others, was travelling at full speed to join them.

Carfax took them all in with one sweeping glance. Then he slowed the Condor down, and let her mount steadily up and up.

The threatening fleet of airships were all around him in a huge ring, over ten miles in circumference, and closing upon him as fast as they could travel. It was easy to see they were bent on the Condor's destruction. Her crew, with one accord, looked to their leader for orders. A child could have seen that, menaced by those seven armed monsters, nearly equal to himself in pace and power, the Condor's peril was extreme.

Never before had she met her match while cruising the skies; and every minute the great aerostats came nearer, their guns manned.

"I could escape them," said Carfax, half to himself, "if I chose, and go ahead. We have only to rise, and travel at forced draught for a spell. We can show them our heels, all seven."

"Shall I clap on the power, and drive her, sir?" asked Kenneth.

"No, we shall not run; we shall fight. They've challenged us, and we'll take the lot of them on, for there's no safety for the Allies while that fleet exists. We've got to wipe them out, or Germany will triumph yet. Guns, there, forward!"

"Now for a fight to the death!" said Stephen grimly, for he needed no telling how big a task they had before them.

"A fight to the death it is," Carfax replied, with a meaning nod. "But if we're destroyed, all will yet go well with the flag, provided we can only take those vessels to ruin along with us." He took one rapid glance at the airships. "They will soon be in range. Now, listen to me."

"The bomb-guns will take the two to the right, and the Maxim must do its best with the other. You hear, Marten? Stephen and Dudley, fix the sabre beneath us, and lock it fast in the catches. As to the guns, you must let the Germans have it in the gasbags—that's their weak spot. Slap it into those, and they're done."

"Right, sir!" said Sam, throwing back the lever of the bomb-gun.

"You will have to be quicker than you've ever been before. One false move, and they'll get us. Don't waste time firing at the cars; attend to their gasbags only. We must keep above them, so direct your barrels downwards. There they go!"

Bang! went the six-pounder of the nearest airship at extreme range. The shell sang past, dropping slightly short and well underneath.

"They're trying to follow us!" said Sam. "They've not quite got the speed for it," replied Carfax quietly. "If they had, we should be smashed to match-boxes in less than a minute!"

The Condor was steadily rising, and the German airships were mounting also, at their best pace, trying to keep level with her. Had they done it, as Carfax said, they could have poured in a direct fire with their guns, and made short work of her.

But she was still by far the quicker manoeuvrer, and in that lay her salvation. She kept far above them, and though three rapid shots were fired, they passed under her still. Moreover, the aerostats could not fire upwards, except at a very wide angle—their gasbags were in the way. They were far better designed for this than were the earlier aerostats the Condor had beaten; but there was no getting over the gasbags.

Berlin at Last.

The Condor's crew, with nerves and muscles tense as steel, awaited the opening of the fight. Carfax had told them how extreme the danger was, yet he looked as cool and confident as they had ever seen him, and he met Stephen's anxious glance with a smile.

"Don't concern yourselves too much," he said. "In spite of all I said, we shall make a scrap heap of that fleet. Now watch!"

It was a merry dance the Condor led her enemies. Once well up, she dashed away as if bent on escaping altogether. This made the aerostats exert themselves desperately to follow after her, and in doing so they came well together. It was exactly what Carfax wanted.

Back came the Condor, right over them. The six and twelve-pounders opened with a furious rattle, and the farther vessels were able to use their guns. A shell zipped along the outer edge of her deck platform and exploded at the far end, shaking her terribly. Another carried away the signalling bar, and three more missed her by a hairbreadth.

Then came Carfax's turn. With one mighty swoop the Condor descended on the outermost of the aerostats, and there was a hissing rush and a roar of gas as the great sabrelike blade under her deck platform rent the enormous gasbag from end to end. The moment she was clear of the gas, Sam let fly with his bomb-gun, first to the right and then to the left, flinging the high-power shells right into the long, fishlike envelopes.

The result was appalling. With a mighty roar the gas in the great containers caught fire, and down went the two German vessels, like flaming comets, slowly at first, and then with terrible speed.

The rattle of Marten's Maxim was hardly heard amid the noise of the heavier weapons, but it rent and riddled the container of a fourth aerostat, and she began to settle rapidly with a hiss of escaping hydrogen from fifty bullet-holes. Then the Condor went swooping up again like some great hawk that had dealt a death-blow at its quarry.

Stephen could hardly tell what was happening, so swift were the manoeuvres, and so deafening the noise of that fearful battle in mid-air. The Condor's move could not avoid exposing her again to the fire of the remaining vessels,

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and the air seemed full of the scream of shells as the German quick-firers rattled and banged at her.

Her pace saved her from destruction, for many went behind; but one shell slapped clean through the bullet-proof plating, and cut through the roof, barely missing the little engine-house by a short yard. By good luck it failed to burst on its way, like so many of the German shells; but a hurtle of small shrapnel immediately afterwards screeched through the Condor's inner space as she turned.

The scattered lead rattled over the steel plates like hail. Sam had his sleeve ripped up from wrist to shoulder, and Carfax staggered back from the steering-wheel with the blood running down his face.

Dudley sprang to the bridge with a cry; but the chief waved him back, and, dashing his hand across his eyes, caught the wheel again. Round came the Condor in a circle, back she swooped, and Sam hurled his bomb into the vast oiled-silk body he saw beneath him. The Maxim whirred at the same moment, and two of the German vessels were crippled, and dropped fast towards the far-distant earth.

"The last one!" cried Sam to Martan. "Let her have it there with the Maxim—my gun's jammed!"

"No need," Carfax's voice called quickly. "She's done it for us!"

The seventh airship, just as the Maxim was slowed towards her, suddenly gave a lurch, and up-ended with a crashing report. In her desperate attempt to bring her gun to bear on the Condor, she had shot too far forward, and the shell had ripped open the skin of her own gasbag. Stephen could hear the harsh shout of her crew as she collapsed, and began to hurtle downwards swiftly, turning helplessly round and round like a tectotum as she sped to her doom.

"So ends the aerial fleet," said Carfax hoarsely. "We're kings of the clouds yet!"

Sam drew a long breath. A feeling of silent awe came over the Condor's crew. They were victors; but the sight of the dropping wrecks, and the utter annihilation of the aerostat squadron almost overcame them, deadly as the struggle had been.

"Poor brutes!" muttered Stephen.

The last of the German vessels struck the ground ten thousand feet below, and there was no need to ask the fate of her crew.

"Brave men," said Carfax quietly. "It took no weaklings to tackle the Condor like that. Doubtless they thought they had us at their mercy. It's well they're destroyed. There would have been no quarter for the British Army if one of them had survived us."

Kenneth turned to him quickly.

"You're wounded, sir!"

"Only a flesh cut," said Carfax, deftly binding a band of white linen round his head; "a shrapnel bullet ploughed my temple. Spoil my beauty, such as it was. Any of you hurt?"

"No, sir!"

"Then away we go, lads! Blake's waiting for our message. The Allies have no more to fear from overhead, at any rate. We look pretty well riddled," he added, glancing at the framework; "but the wounds are like my own—nothing to stop for. We're not hit in any vital place, thank goodness!"

Silence fell on the Condor as she winged her way back to the British columns. The struggle she had just been through had taken it out of her crew more than any engagement they had ever taken part in. Yet it was the master-brain of Carfax that had brought them out of it as victors, and he felt the effects less than any of them.

They soon became alert again when they neared the British columns, however, for the nearness of the coming struggle, when the Union Jack and the Lilies of France were to face the mighty German Eagle in a final death-grip, kept them at the keenest fighting-pitch. One or the other, they knew, must go under before many hours were out. If the Allies were beaten off, it might well mean complete disaster for them.

So fast had General Blake pushed on, and so much had the Condor been delayed, that his advance-guards were already almost in touch with the outer defences of Berlin. Carfax descended within speaking distance of Blake, who reined up anxiously to hear the news.

"General McLeod will be abreast you within two hours!" hailed Carfax. "Horse, foot, and guns!"

"Good!" said Blake. "That's what I hoped for. I guessed he'd never fail me. But what of those confounded airships—any news of them?"

"They no longer exist. We destroyed all seven of them half an hour ago," said Carfax. "If we'd been a few miles nearer you'd have had a good view of it. But they're wiped out!"

"Thank Heaven for that!" exclaimed Blake fervently. "I'd have given ten years of my life for that news. Now

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NOW **"THE EMPIRE LIBRARY."**

we fight level below here. Are you fit to go on? You're wounded, I see!"

"Perfectly. Only a few shot-holes and a chip on the head."

"Then let me know how far Sainte Croix and our army to the south has got. We shall be engaged on all sides by ten o'clock."

With a quick nod Carfax sent the Condor skywards again, and this time she made for Berlin itself.

"Now," said Carfax, "we shall see the armies spread under us like chessmen on a board—the nations at each other's throats. Look, yonder are the French legions under Sainte Croix!"

They passed over Berlin, looking like a toy town below, and Carfax halted the Condor and held her poised.

The Victors!

It was a wonderful sight that the boys looked down upon. The city was the centre of a fifty mile ring, that marked the limits to which the eye could see. The scurried hosts of Germany lay out beyond the confines of the great town, legion on legion, trench on trench, battery on battery, placed as only military genius could place them. Huge as the German losses had been during the campaign, her strength still seemed gigantic.

"My word," muttered Stephen, "surely they could hold out against anything!"

"Look beyond," said his brother. Over the whole field of view to the south the plains and hills seemed moving with men. The armies of France—infantry, cavalry, and guns—were moving in perfect order upon the waiting city.

There seemed no end to the legions of foot and the countless squadrons of light and heavy horse. The eye was lost in trying to calculate their numbers. There were something over a million fighting-men under the French colours alone—men of the race that had once made itself master of Europe from end to end, save only of England.

Now, the ancient enemies, who had fought and respected each other's qualities so long, were friends to the death, and were moving against the common foe. Britain's colours marched side by side with the tricolour of Marechal Sainte Croix.

But it was to the north and west that the soldiers of Britain were in real force. The sturdy, compact lines of khaki-clad warriors—the lines that no foe could break—were moving in at a still swifter pace than the French. These were the men whose island home in the North had been ravaged and laid waste by the Kaiser's legions. They were due to take their revenge at last. Germany's very heart lay in front of them behind the lines of guns.

A puff of white smoke spurted from General Blake's first heavy battery as it came into position with his Army, and at the same time McLeod pushed forward from the west, and opened fire. The roar of the German siege-guns answered, and the last great battle had begun.

The boys had seen the great conflicts on British soil during the invasion, and the battles of the rival fleets at sea. They had seen the fight at Epping, and the bombardment of London by Von Krantz's guns, but this mighty assault of the armies of two nations upon the German capital was more stupendous than all that had gone before.

There were two armies to one, it was true; but there was little difference in the odds. At the outset of the campaign Germany had had a huge advantage in men.

Now, after being driven backwards for three weeks, her hosts still equalled those of France and Britain put together; but the Allies had the advantage of a series of victories behind them. They were fighting a winning fight.

Once the bombardment of the German defences was started, the roar and crash of the guns was continuous.

All round the great plain it was like one rolling boom of thunder. Sainte Croix's artillery bombarded from the south and east, and the two great British forces from the north-west and north.

The German fortifications flashed all round the lines with the reports of their big siege guns.

From her lofty station far above the city, three thousand feet in the air, hanging stationary, with her fans spinning, the Condor had a magnificent view of the whole scene of operations.

Back she went to General Blake with all the information he needed, and then to her place again. The battle was now at its hottest, and the issue was a long time in doubt.

"By glory," exclaimed Stephen, utterly overcome as he gazed down on the bewildering spectacle, "all we've seen is a flea-bite to this! It's simply awful, isn't it?"

"It's the last blow," said Carfax. "Whichever way it goes, the world will be at peace when it's over. And time enough."

Read about **GORDON GAY**
the Schoolboy Actor.

"But we've got to win!" cried Sam.

"You need have no doubts," said the chief quietly.

The day seemed a year long as the vast circular battle progressed. Musketry fire from countless thousands of rifles added itself to the din. Hour by hour the Condor went back and forth, four times visiting the French marshal to the southward, and still the fight continued.

The aeroplane took no part in it herself. But for her the armies would never have been where they were; and now that they were at death-grips, it was but fair that she should stand aside and watch.

Yet, though she did not fight, she was the eye and brain of the Allies, the link that held Britain and France together.

She let each know how the other was progressing, and when to strike the shrewdest blows.

It seemed as if the fight must last for ever, for after some hours the senses became dulled. Sam and his brother felt as if the whole world was a pandemonium of roaring cannon and musketry, and had never been anything else—never would be anything else.

Yet the end was coming. As Carfax had said, the day would see the end of the conflict. Slowly the Allies began to gain, here a point, and there a point.

One after the other, the German fortifications began to fire less furiously, and then to grow silent. Their guns were being dismounted, and their redoubts wrecked by the converging fire of the besiegers.

Here and there the British and the French pushed in to follow up an advantage, and the machine-guns and rifles came more and more into play.

Never was a harder fought fight. Blake and Sainte Croix were both losing heavily, and the slaughter was terrible, as it was bound to be when two determined enemies, armed with the most deadly weapons known to science, faced each other in a struggle for life.

But where the Allies lost a man or a gun, the Germans lost two.

Steadily the fight went against the Kaiser's forces till three in the afternoon.

"Now," said Carfax grimly, "the end is sure! We've got them in the hollow of our hand!"

A long-distance signal was made from Blake's position, which was carefully kept under observation all the time by Kenneth with the telescope, and the Condor went back to him.

While Carfax and Blake were quickly conferring, Devine, of the Fusiliers, came by, and called to the boys.

"We're near on the assault now," he said. "We're going to drive their infantry back on this side through the suburbs. There'll be some sharp street fighting before we get 'em cooked!"

"How's it to be done?" asked Sam eagerly.

"By rifle fire and a rush. Then a corps of galloping Maxims will follow, and take and hold the main streets."

"By gum!" exclaimed Sam. "If I could only be in it! I want a hand in the fight. I'm sick of looking on like a beastly umpire. Couldn't you get me a gun?"

"The commandant of the Maxim Corps'd be only too glad to have you, I'll bet. We know what you can do with a galloper. Shall I fix it for you?"

"Do, and I'll be eternally grateful to you!"

It was arranged at once, and General Blake at a word gave permission to Sam to go.

He looked at Stephen as he sprang off the deck platform, and hesitated, loth to leave his brother behind.

"I'm no good with guns," said Stephen despondently.

"I want you with me, my lad," said Carfax; "but you shall lower Germany's standard with your own hands when the time comes."

Away went the Condor again, bearing Stephen with her. Sam hurried to where the galloping Maxims were stationed, awaiting the order to go. He was allotted a gun at once, with a fine, spanking, black Flemish horse.

"We shall get the pick of the fun when it comes," said the young gunner next him. "And we're very glad to have you with us."

The whole of the Maxim Corps were eager as hounds in the leash to be allowed to go. Once down among them, Sam could see little of the battle, but the reports came to them every now and then of how things were going.

The German guns had been silenced, and fortifications stormed, and the final assault was expected.

Presently the Maxims were moved forward, and then forward again. There was a great deal of rapid musketry firing, and then both battalions of the Fusiliers dashed in and carried the outer streets of the suburbs nearest them.

"They'll let us go now," said the gunner next to Sam.

The word came, and away went the Maxims like a whirlwind. Sam had been given exact instructions, and made for the street that had been indicated to him.

Each of the Maxims branched off, and took a different

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"FIGGINS & CO'S PLOT."

direction, and with each one rode a party of our mounted infantry.

Sam urged the black horse along at a furious pace. Dead men lay about the road and pavements, and the roar of the struggle round the outskirts was heard on every side.

The way had been partly cleared, and Sam's mission was to hold it. He and his escort dashed up the street just as a company of Prussian infantry were hurrying forward to bar the inner end, and the bullets began to whistle along between the houses.

He hurried on to take up his place at the end. Then came two sharply, deadly fights before the position was thoroughly his own and held safe.

Once he had won his place, up came a second Maxim to support him, and a squad of riflemen.

"The British and French guns have been brought up," said the subaltern of the Rifles, "and now the enemy's artillery's done for, ours has got absolute command over the city. The victory's ours! A despatch has been sent in to say that if Berlin is not surrendered, it will be bombarded and utterly destroyed."

"I hope to goodness the Germans see reason!" said Sam earnestly. "They're broken, and there's no hope for them."

Eagerly the Allies waited for the word. Sam and his comrades stood to their guns for an hour or more, waiting and watching. Then came the rumour, running from street to street and throughout all ranks like wildfire—Germany surrendered the city, and asked for terms of peace.

Cheer upon cheer rang round all the miles of frontage where the Allies watched, and the news was repeated, and the signals were made that confirmed it.

Down from the sky circled the Condor, sweeping low over the city. Over the tops of the tallest buildings she sailed steadily towards the Royal palace, where the German imperial standard floated from the staff on the tower, and there she halted.

Stephen Villiers stepped out from the deck platform, and a thousand pairs of field-glasses watched him as he went to the flagstaff and cast loose the halyards.

With one quick run the German standard fluttered down, and the Union Jack went proudly up in its place, and floated above Berlin.

A few words will tell the rest, great though the result was. The terms of the Allies were presented to Germany within ten hours.

The German Government tried its utmost to get them reduced, and even attempted to appeal to other nations.

But the Allies were inexorable, and not a gun was moved till the terms were accepted exactly as they stood. The Kaiser's Government had to give way, for there was no choice. The terms were as follows:

Germany to cede all her African colonies to Britain, thus completing King Edward's domination over that continent, and linking up British territory from the Cape to Cairo.

The surrender to Britain of all Germany's foreign coaling-stations. Heligoland, commanding the mouth of the Elbe, to revert once more to Britain. These two concessions were of more value to the British Empire than any that could have been devised.

Germany to retire entirely from the Netherlands, and abandon all claims outside her own native territory.

Alsace and Lorraine to be given back to France, together with eight hundred square miles of Bavarian and South German territory, and an indemnity of thirty million pounds paid to the French Government.

Britain contented herself with the additions to her Empire, and asked no money indemnity of Germany, not needing to press too hardly on the German poor, since Harrington, the gold master, placed the power of money entirely in Britain's hands.

On the day the treaty was signed, and peace declared, the Condor bade farewell to the allied armies, mounting into the air, and sped back to England.

There she and her crew received such an ovation as was beyond the memory of mortal man, and the highest honours the nation could bestow were promised to her commander and her crew.

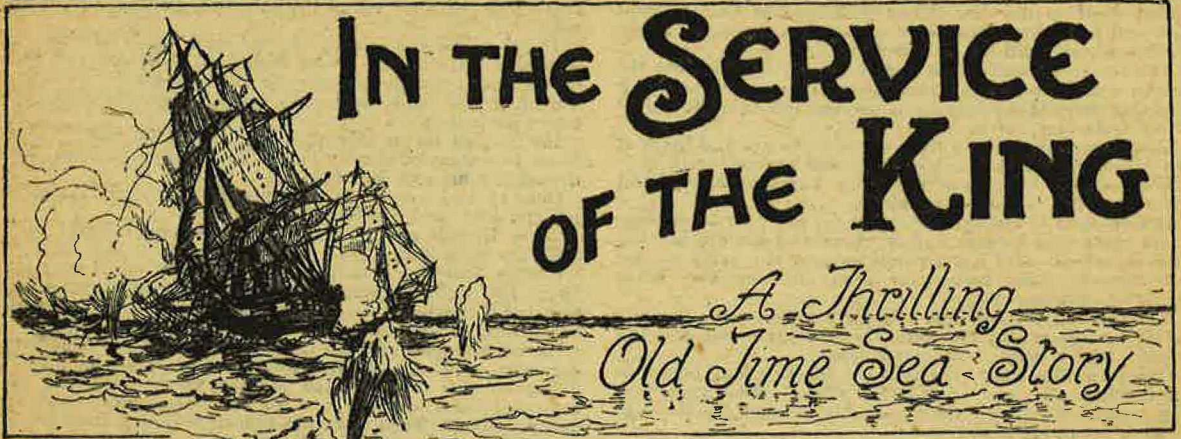
"It is ended," said Carfax. "The hand is played, and the victory is with the right. I owe as much to Sam and Stephen Villiers as to Kenneth and my crew. But if Britain's need ever arises again—if any living nation, or all the nations of the world, contest the supremacy of our flag—then the Condor shall show them that she holds them in the hollow of her hand, for ours is the Empire of the Air!"

THE END.

(Now read the splendid opening chapters of "In the Service of the King," which commences on the next page.)

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The First Chapters of a Splendid Serial Story.



By Lieutenant Lefevre.

The Admiral and the Highwayman—The Tables Turned—Captain and Captives.

The carriage stopped with a suddenness that jerked its occupant off his seat, and sent him reeling on to the opposite seat on face and hands.

"Confound it!" gasped the admiral. "What in the name of— Great Scott!"

The latest exclamation was wrung from him by the sight of a tall, mounted figure, outlined against the deep indigo sky, and the moonlight glittering on the barrel of a pistol which was levelled at his own head.

"Great Scott!" repeated the admiral, too amazed to think of resistance.

"Up with your hands, sir, or I shall be obliged to let this off!"

The voice was imperative, clear, and ringing. "Up with your hands!" repeated the horseman.

Admiral Sir Sampson Eastlake had won his present proud position through merit and indomitable pluck. There was not in all His Majesty's Navy a braver man than the admiral, but the levelled pistol which caught and reflected the moon's rays, and the cool, commanding voice had their effect, and the admiral's wrinkled hands went slowly up.

"Believe me, I am sorry to inconvenience you, sir," continued the horseman coolly; "but needs must, you know, when a certain person drives. Keep your hands well up, sir, or—"

"You infernal young rascal!" gasped the admiral. The horseman laughed—sharply and mirthlessly.

"Lower your left hand slowly well before you, so that I can see it. Now turn the handle of the door—so! Step out into the road, sir!"

"I'll see—" began the admiral. "You are wasting your time and mine—and mine is too precious to be trifled with!"

"Do you know who I am, you rascal?" roared the admiral. "I neither know or care. If you were the King himself, or the Pope of Rome, it would be the same to me. All is fish, sir, that comes to my net!"

Trembling with wrath, the admiral slowly descended from the carriage, and stood in the roadway. Before and behind, as far as the eye could pierce, the road stretched like a thin white thread across dusky landscape.

It was a desolate spot, and one well suited for the scene that was being enacted now. To the right and the left stretched a wide expanse of common, dotted with the dark shadows cast by clumps of furze above. The white moon sailed in a cloudless sky of indigo-blue.

The admiral took a hasty glance around. He had been asleep at the moment the carriage came to a standstill, and now he glanced quickly in the direction of the box, where the coachman sat with his hands held high above his head, and on his face a look of idiotic terror.

"I hope you will accept my apologies for causing you this trifling inconvenience. Believe me, if you are reasonable,

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there is no need why your journey southward should be delayed more than a very few moments, sir."

"Confound your excuses," said the admiral. "Confound you altogether. What do you want with me?"

"Only your purse, sir. A trifle, you see, after all."

"Trifle, be hanged, you young scoundrel! If you had not taken me so completely by surprise, you would have found that you had met your match in old Sam Eastlake!"

"Are you Admiral Eastlake? I—I—" The highwayman hesitated, then went on in a cold, level voice: "As a gentleman, answer me one question. Are you armed?"

"No, I am not. My pistols are in the carriage."

"Under these circumstances, sir, you will place your left hand in your pocket, produce your purse, lay it upon the ground there in the moonlight, after which you will be free to continue your journey."

"You are an exceedingly cool customer," said the admiral. "One has to be when one's neck is in jeopardy!" replied the other.

"Ah, you realise that, then, you young fool!" burst out the admiral.

"How long do you think this life will last? How long do you think it will be before the gallows gets its due, my lad?" he went on earnestly. "For, judging by your voice, you seem little more than a lad. Put your helm down before it is too late. There are reefs ahead, and your craft will go to pieces on them, and—"

"Your money, and not your advice, is what I need," said the highwayman coldly. "Come, sir," he added impatiently, "you are wasting time and breath. Your purse!"

"You shall have it, confound you, and—"

Bang!

A bullet whistled by within an inch of the admiral's nose.

For one man to keep a tight watch on two, and keep them both covered with one pistol, is a decided impossibility when the two are stationed at different points of the compass.

The coachman, seeing the highwayman closely occupied with the admiral, reached for a blunderbuss, and let fly at the highwayman; but, in the excitement of the moment, came near to killing his master.

But the sudden report was not without its effect. The mettlesome animal the highwayman was bestriding reared suddenly. For a moment he pawed the air with his fore feet, and then, losing his balance, horse and rider fell together to the ground. The pistol that had been pointed at the admiral's head was jerked out of the highwayman's hand, and fell almost at the admiral's feet. And in a moment, before the fallen man had time to disengage himself from his horse, the admiral had grasped the weapon.

"Get up, young sir!" said the admiral grimly. "The tables are turned, you see. Up with your hands!" Then, as the highwayman obeyed in silence, the admiral raised his voice: "Grimes, a rope or a strap. Secure this vagabond's arms."

"One moment, sir!" cried the highwayman quickly. "I am in your power. You are going to bind me and carry me a prisoner to Portsmouth?"

Read about GORDON GAY the Schoolboy Actor.

"You have guessed my intentions exactly," said the admiral.

"And there you will hand me over to the law."

"And the law will hang you!" quoth the admiral. "Three minutes ago I warned you. Now it is too late!"

The coachman, who had been responsible for this turning of the tables, descended heavily from his box with a length of cord in his hand.

"Sir," cried the culprit, in an eager voice, "you are a brave man and a generous one, if report speaks truly. Will you do one thing for me—one great favour?"

"Let you go free, you mean—go free to make yourself a terror and a nuisance to all peace-loving—"

"I do not ask for my liberty. The punishment for my crime is death. I have earned my punishment. But death at the hands of the hangman! If you have one grain of pity in your heart, spare me that! The pistol you hold in your hand is loaded. See, I stand in the moonlight. Shoot now! For Heaven's sake, do not refuse me this boon! Shoot straight to the heart, and I will bless you!"

The pistol trembled in the admiral's hand.

For a moment he stood and looked the younger man straight in the eyes.

"Take off that mask!" he said, at last, in a quiet voice of command.

The other obeyed, disclosing a handsome, boyish face, white now to the lips.

"Enter the carriage!" ordered the admiral.

"Then you will not grant me that favour. You will—"

"Hold your tongue, sir, and do what I tell you."

"I ask you to do this for the sake of those on whom the shame of my death would fall heavily. Spare them, and kill me now!"

"Enter that carriage!" repeated the admiral, in a stern voice.

Slowly, reluctantly, the young man obeyed.

Then the admiral turned to the coachman.

"Grimes, my service suits you?"

The man gaped at his master. The question seemed so irrelevant.

"My service suits you? You are content to remain with me?" said the admiral sharply.

"Lord! yes, your honour."

"Then see that you keep a silent tongue in your head. You understand, Grimes, an incautions word, and you and I part for good. Not a word about this business to a living soul, as you value your place. That rope you have in your hand will do to secure the black horse. Moor him to the stern of the carriage. So. That will do, Grimes. Now, then, weigh anchor!"

And as he spoke, the admiral jumped into the carriage as nimbly as a schoolboy.

For some moments after Grimes had whipped up the horses, capture and captive sat opposite one another in silence.

"How old are you, boy?" demanded the admiral suddenly.

"I am in my eighteenth year," replied the other, in a low voice.

"And how long, sir, have you been a—a knight of the road?"

"A highwayman? A thief, you mean, sir! Scarcely a month. They say," added the young man bitterly, "that a highwayman's is a short life and a merry one."

"It's short enough, Heaven knows, but I know nothing of its merriment."

"Your name?"

For a moment the young man did not reply. Then in a low voice he answered:

"John Smith."

"A poor invention, young sir. You have no imagination," said the admiral grimly.

"The name is good enough to—hang with."

"Too good!" said the admiral, with a chuckle.

Then suddenly he leaned forward and placed his hand on the other's knee.

"John Smith, my trade is the sea, and in his gracious Majesty the King's service. I am not a thief-taker. You are young, strong, courageous, for you can look death in the eye and not flinch. The King needs such as you."

"The King needs honest men to fight his battles," replied the young man moodily.

"True. But a man may do much to atone for a mis-spent past by taking arms and fighting for his king and country. Do you care to make such atonement?"

The captive looked up quickly, to see the old admiral's eyes fixed on him searchingly, yet with a kindly twinkle in them.

"You mean—" he asked breathlessly.

"That to-morrow his Majesty's frigate *Catapult* sets sail for the French coast. I have with me the despatches for her captain. Will you sail with her?"

"You mean that you will give me a chance to atone for the past—that you will not—"

"Hand you over to justice?—no! Have I not told you that I am no thief-taker? Come, lad! Despite your calling, I like your face. It is a strangely honest one for a highwayman. Do you accept my offer? Will you agree to sail to-morrow in the *Catapult*, and go and fight the King's enemies?"

"My life is forfeit to the laws of my country. You give it to me back, and it shall be spent in his Majesty's service. You will never have cause to regret the clemency you have shown to me, and—Heaven bless you for it, sir!"

The young man broke down. When he looked forward to no better fate than the hangman's rope his demeanour was calm and cold—he showed no trace of agitation; but now that he knew that he was safe—that his life was spared to him—he broke down, and, seizing the admiral's wrinkled hand, pressed it to his lips in a passion of gratitude.

"There, enough, lad!" said the old man huskily. "Enough! It is not thanks in words I want. Prove to me that you are grateful by putting the past behind you for ever. You are young; the world lies before you. In these stirring times a brave man may carve out a name for himself. The day may come when yours will be honoured and respected instead of held in execration and horror. I do not ask for your confidence. You may tell me as much or as little of your past as you wish," he added.

"I will tell you, sir. My name is Oswald Yorke. My father is a wealthy and respected man—a baronet—with large estates in the Midlands."

"And yet—" interrupted the admiral.

"And yet his son is a thief," said Oswald bitterly. "It is a strange story that I have to tell, and one that few would believe in. I will tell you all briefly. In the village where my father's estate lies lives a man—a mean, greedy, grasping usurer—a man whose wealth has been wrung from the poor, who has robbed the widow and orphan, and yet who is guiltless in the eyes of the law. This man lent small sums to poor people, demanding from them huge interest. He was a vampire, who sucked the life-blood of his victims, and never left them till he had taken from them all they possessed."

"There are many such—curses on them!" cried the admiral warmly.

"Many were the terrible tales that had been told to me of this man's doings, and I was filled with passionate hatred and loathing of him—not I alone, but my friend, Dick Leslie, the son of a neighbouring gentleman, who had been my schoolfellow and playmate since childhood. Often did we talk of that monster Maydew, and resolve that, if the time ever came, we would revenge those who had suffered at his hands."

"One day Dick came to me and unfolded a plan he had made. Maydew had gone to a neighbouring town to collect his rents and interest due to him on the loans he had made. He would return by night to the village, and Dick's plan was we two should disguise ourselves, and, with masks on our faces, stop Maydew's coach. Our intention was to give the man a fright, for he was a terrible coward. As for the money he had with him, we thought at first of taking it from him and distributing among the poor, but afterwards we gave up that idea, and resolved not to touch his money at all, but to content ourselves with giving him a fright. We knew him to be so cowardly that we did not count on any resistance from him for a moment; and, lest there might happen an accident in the excitement of the moment, we resolved that the pistols with which we should threaten him should not be loaded. That night we waited for Maydew's carriage by the cross-roads—Dick on one side and I on the other."

"Presently the carriage came into sight, whereon we dashed into the road, and, in feigned voices, called on the postillion to pull up. The man did so. Riding to the window—Dick on one side, I on the other—we thrust our pistols in and called on Maydew to alight. But, to our surprise, the man was not alone. Two others accompanied him—one his nephew, a captain in the Navy; the other a naval officer also. With an oath the former snatched out his pistol and fired point-blank at Dick's head. I heard my comrade utter a groan, and saw him reel in his saddle. He had been shot through the brain, and dropped lifeless to the ground."

"Horried and dismayed, I drew back, and as I did so my mask fell from my face. I heard the money-lender shriek out my name, and the next instant one of the others leaned out of the window and fired at me. The bullet seared my cheek like a hot iron. My horse now took fright and bolted down the road, and it was long before I could pull him up. When I did so I found myself near to my father's house. There is little more to tell, sir. I knew the man Maydew had recognised me—I knew that he would pursue me with relentless fury—I knew that he would brand me as a thief and a highwayman."

"Before an hour had passed the officers came to search the house for me; but for my sister's help I should have been

captured. When the men had gone, I sought my father to tell him the whole truth, but, to my horror, he would not believe me. He called me thief and scoundrel, cursed me, and bade me leave the house and never dare to set foot in it again.

"Stupefied by the calamity that had fallen on me, I would have given myself up to the authorities and told the truth, no matter what the consequences might have been, but my sister, who alone believed in me and helped me, besought me not to do so. She said that Maydew would leave no stone unturned to gain my conviction; she said that he would bribe witnesses to swear against me, and I knew that it was true. I knew that there would be no justice for me, and I fled like the thief that men thought me.

"I came to London and sought work, but found none. One night I was recognised by a man from our village, the hue-and-cry was raised, and once more I had to take to flight. Then I resolved that I would become even what they accused me of being. My little money had gone—it was twenty-four hours since I had tasted food; and when I saw the lights of your carriage I resolved to stop it as I stopped Maydew's coach that accursed night. But to-night I was in earnest. I was a desperate and a starving man, and the pistol I held in my hand was not empty."

"A strange tale!" muttered the admiral.

"A hard one to believe, perhaps, sir," said Oswald Yorke.

"And yet I do believe it. I can tell when a man lies or speaks the truth. I believe it, lad. It was a fortunate chance that made me take the road through the common to-night. The workings of Providence are strange, but Heaven is merciful and just, and it has saved you from a life of shame and dishonour. To-morrow you will be on the blue water—an honest man, in the service of the King, ready to do your master's work, and, if needs be, to lay down your life for him and for your country."

"Ready to give my life willing for him and for you!"

For some time they continued onwards in silence. Then presently the admiral, leaning forward, looked through the window.

"We are nearing the town—Portsmouth. Ever entered it before?"

"Never."

"So much the better, then. It is unlikely that anyone will recognise you. Still, I have been thinking it will be better that you call yourself by the name you gave me first of all—John Smith."

"You have been very good to me, sir. My gratitude is too deep for words. Yet I dare to ask one more favour."

"What is it, boy?"

"That you will convey a letter to my sister, so that she may know that I am safe, and that I am on the way to leading an honest life."

"You shall write your letter to-night, and I promise that it shall be delivered safely. Indeed, in a little while I shall be in the Midlands, and will give it myself into her hands. More, I will see your father, and will tell him that he has misjudged you."

"Ah, if he would only believe that!" Oswald murmured.

Captain Burgoyne—Recognised—On Board the Catapult.

It was early morning, but though the sun had scarcely risen Admiral Eastlake was already at work in his sitting-room in the Royal George Hotel.

He looked up from the table, which was littered with papers and despatches, as a servant entered the room.

"Captain Burgoyne is waiting below to see you, sir."

"Ah, the captain of the Catapult. Ask him to come up," said the admiral.

As the servant went out of the room Oswald entered it. Seen in the morning light, with no disfiguring crape on his face, he was the picture of a handsome and healthy young Englishman—tall, broad, with the shoulders of a Samson, deep-chested, and stout of limb. The admiral gazed at him for a moment with approval.

"I have brought the letter, sir," Oswald said, laying it down upon the table.

"It shall be faithfully delivered," said the admiral, as he took it up and thrust it into his breast-pocket.

At that moment a heavy step sounded on the stairs.

"Stay! The captain of the Catapult's here. It is the ship that you sail in. Remain here, and I will commend you to him."

Oswald bowed without speaking; and the next instant Captain Burgoyne entered the room.

He was a tall, loosely-made man, slovenly in his dress, and with a heavy, intelligent face, in which was set a pair of small, shifty, blue-green eyes.

He bowed low to the admiral, a salute which the admiral acknowledged with an inclination of the head.

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"You are in readiness for sea, sir, I understand?"

"Quite, sir! I am awaiting only your instructions," said the captain quickly.

"They are here," said the admiral, tapping a bundle of papers with his fingers. "In brief, they are as follows: The French frigate *Amadee* attacked and made a prize of the East India Company's ship *Bombay Castle* on the thirteenth of this month. We are advised that *Amadee*, with her prize in tow, is making for the port of Havre. Your instructions are to make all sail, and endeavour to intercept the Frenchman before he arrives in port, engage him, and retake the *Bombay Castle*."

Captain Burgoyne bowed again.

"I shall endeavour to carry out the instructions, sir. And if I fail?"

The admiral frowned. He did not like to hear a man talking so glibly of failure.

"If you fail," he said shortly, "you will find your further instructions here."

And he handed over his papers to the captain.

"There is one other matter I wish to speak to you on, sir," said the admiral. "It is my desire that you give Mr. Smith here—he waved his hand towards Oswald—a rating on the *Catapult*."

Oswald started.

The utmost he had expected was that he would be taken aboard the frigate as a common seaman. That he would receive his rating as a midshipman he had never dared to hope.

"As you wish, sir!" said the captain ungraciously.

Then he turned and glanced at Oswald, and gave a sudden start.

"This is Captain Burgoyne, under whom you will sail, Mr. Smith," said the admiral.

Oswald bowed; but the captain hardly returned the salute. There was a perplexed look on his face, and keen suspicion in the little eyes that he kept fixed on Oswald's face.

"Have we not met before, sir?" he said, in a harsh voice.

Oswald looked the man squarely in the face.

"Never, sir, to my knowledge," he said.

Certainly he had never seen Captain Burgoyne's face before; yet there was something strangely and unpleasantly familiar in the tones of the man's voice. Oswald had noticed it the moment Captain Burgoyne spoke, and he wondered where he had heard the harsh, rasping tones before.

"At what hour will the tide serve, captain?" asked the admiral.

"At four o'clock, sir."

"Good! Then I will come on board myself before that hour, and Mr. Smith will accompany me."

The admiral rose as he spoke, and made a slight bow as a hint that the interview was at an end.

But Captain Burgoyne did not take the hint. For a moment he stood shuffling his feet on the carpet and glancing from the admiral to Oswald.

"I think that is all," said the admiral.

"Might I beg the favour of a few moments' conversation in private?" asked Captain Burgoyne.

The admiral frowned.

"If you wish it," he said coldly.

Then he turned to Oswald.

"Will you return when Captain Burgoyne has gone? There are several matters I wish to see you about," he said in a kindly voice.

Oswald went out, and for a few moments silence reigned. At last Captain Burgoyne cleared his throat and commenced hesitatingly.

"This—this Mr. Smith—" he began. "I am afraid,



sir, that you have been duped by that young man. He is not what he professes to be. His name is not Smith at all," said Captain Burgoyne.

"How do you know what he professes?" asked the admiral sharply.

Captain Burgoyne laughed harshly.

"I dare swear he professes to be an honest man; but he is not. He is a thief—a rascally highwayman!"

It was with a desperate effort that the admiral prevented his face from betraying the start that the man's words gave him.

"This statement is a very extraordinary one, sir."

"It is true, nevertheless," said the captain doggedly.

"It is nothing of the sort. You must have taken leave of your senses!" said the admiral sharply.

"Call that young man in, and ask him if his name is not Oswald Yorke!" said the captain boldly.

"If I were to do so, Mr. Smith would think that I had taken leave of my senses! I have very good reason to know that his name is John Smith. His father is a very worthy and honest gentleman."

"You know his father—his family?" cried Captain Burgoyne, in surprise.

"Certainly!" said the admiral. Then to himself he muttered: "May Heaven deal lightly with me for this falsehood!"

The look of blank astonishment on Burgoyne's face gave way to one of confusion.

"It is a most extraordinary likeness," he muttered. "I only saw the man Oswald Yorke for a moment—and then it was almost dark—but I could have sworn that the young man who was here just now was he. I could have sworn it on my oath!"

"You admit that you saw this—this Oswald Yorke but for a moment, and then but indistinctly; yet you accuse an honest man of being a thief and a highwayman. It is fortunate for Mr. Smith that I have complete knowledge of his family. It should also be a lesson to you, sir, not to be too ready to swear away a man's character—and Heaven knows, even his life, perhaps—because he bears some chance resemblance to a man whom you have scarcely seen! That will do, sir," continued the admiral. "You may withdraw. I shall be on board the Catapult early in the afternoon, and will bring Mr. Smith with me."

He touched the bell as he spoke, and, as the servant entered, he bowed to Captain Burgoyne.

"Show Captain Burgoyne out," he said.

Captain Burgoyne's confusion had given place to fury by the time he reached the street.

"Smith or Yorke," he muttered, as he thrust his hat down upon his head, "the young hound shall suffer for it when I have him on board the Catapult! And—and if it should turn out after all that he is Yorke, then"—he gritted his teeth together—"he need expect little mercy from me, the dog!"

Meanwhile, in the admiral's sitting-room, Oswald was standing before his patron listening, with whitened face.

"Captain Burgoyne recognised you. Fate has played us both a scurvy trick, after all, my boy. He told me to call you and ask you if your name was not Oswald Yorke!"

"He—he knew?" gasped Oswald. "Yet to my knowledge I have never seen his face before. Where can he have seen me?"

"He said he saw you but for a moment, and then it was nearly dark. He—"

"Good heavens, I remember! His voice was familiar to me. I remember now! He is Maydew's nephew—the man who was in the coach with him—the man who shot Dick Leslie!"

For a moment silence followed. Then Oswald went on:

"He will go to the authorities and give information about me. Sir, you have been very good to me, but, after all, fate has been against me. Let me go now, before I bring trouble upon you. It would be but a poor return after the kindness I have received at your hands."

"Captain Burgoyne will not go to the authorities," said the admiral quietly. "I—I—Heaven forgive me, I told a most outrageous lie. I told him that I knew both your father and your family, and that his suspicions against you were groundless and absurd. I also rated him soundly for bringing such an accusation against you because you bear a chance resemblance to a man he scarcely saw. Depend upon it, Captain Burgoyne will not refer to the matter again."

"My debt of gratitude grows larger to you," said Oswald.

"If you feel gratitude, prove it by your deeds. That is all I ask. Prove it by becoming a brave servant of the King!"

"I will. But—but shall I sail with Captain Burgoyne now?"

"Yes, of course. It would be madness now to alter the plan. He would at once suspect. Nothing will disarm his

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"FIGGINS & CO'S PLOT."

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

suspicion more than your going on board the Catapult. But come. Time grows short, and there is your kit to get."

Oswald flushed to the roots of his hair.

"I—I have no money, sir!" he stammered.

"Do you think I have forgotten that? Your outfit shall be my parting gift to you. Lad, when I look into your face something tells me that my trust in you will not be betrayed."

The admiral kindly, laying his hand on Oswald's shoulder. "I would suffer death rather than betray your trust. One day, sir, I will prove to you the gratitude that now I cannot utter!" cried Oswald warmly.

It was early in the afternoon when Admiral Eastlake and Oswald entered the boat from the Catapult that was waiting for them at the jetty steps.

The Catapult herself lay out by the mouth of the harbour—a fine frigate of eighteen tons. The admiral, in full rig—cocked hat, laced coat, and all the rest of it—sat in the stern-sheets, Oswald beside him, dressed in the uniform of a midshipman in the service of his Britannic Majesty King George.

It was a strange metamorphosis, and little did the blue-jackets dream that the distinguished person and the smart-looking middy sitting in the stern-sheets had enacted very different roles only a few hours ago.

It is not every midshipman who comes out to join his ship in the society of and under the direct patronage of a rear-admiral of the Fleet, and as Oswald ascended the side of the Catapult several curious glances were cast in his direction by his future messmates.

The captain, in full uniform, was waiting to receive the admiral, and a file of Marines was drawn up on deck as a guard of honour.

Following the admiral, Oswald looked about him with wonder and delight. It was the first time in his life he had set foot upon a ship, and what he saw was a revelation to him. Decks of snowy whiteness, brasswork that glittered like burnished gold, exquisite order and neatness visible on every side, everything in order and everything in its place; the men—fine, stalwart, sun-browned fellows—as spick-and-span as their ship; the Marines, in their red coats and snowy-white pipeclayed harness; and over it all a golden sun shining in a brilliant sky, and below the dancing blue waters, curling crisply and breaking into milk-white foam.

Oswald saluted Captain Burgoyne, who favoured him with a scowl in which suspicion, dislike, and a certain amount of respect were curiously blended.

"Mr. Babbington," he said, calling up a young middy, "take Mr.—er—Mr. Smith down to the cockpit and introduce him to his mess."

The admiral turned to Oswald.

"Here we part, my boy," he said in his kindly voice. He held out his hand and Oswald grasped it, as the tears came into his eyes. "Good-bye!" said the admiral. Then his voice dropped to a whisper so low that only Oswald heard: "Remember, I trust you!"

Then, with a kindly smile of farewell, he turned, and, followed by Captain Burgoyne, went below.

For some moments after he had disappeared from view, Oswald stood gazing in the direction he had gone, his heart filled to overflowing with love and gratitude for the man who had befriended him—who had been to him an angel of deliverance in his shame and need.

It was the voice of the small midshipman Babbington that recalled him to himself.

"Ai-ai-ai-in't you cer-er-er—"

Oswald looked round quickly in amazement at the boy, who was staggering about the deck and beating the air with his hands in a fierce endeavour to get the words past his stammering tongue.

"What's the matter? Ain't you well?" asked Oswald, looking round.

None of the men standing by betrayed the slightest anxiety on account of Babbington's health. As a matter of fact, they took not the slightest notice of him.

"Of o-o-e-course I'm well!" said Babbington. "Wha-wha-what d-d-d'ye think—think—think's the matter?"

"I beg your pardon," said Oswald. "I didn't know."

Then, to his infinite perplexity, Babbington suddenly struck up the tune of "God Save the King," but substituted his own words in place of the usual ones.

"Ain't you coming down below?"

The skipper told me to

Take you down

And in-tro-du-u-uce you

To-o-o the mess!"

It was not until afterwards that Oswald discovered that Babbington had an unfortunate impediment in his speech, which, however, did not affect him when he sang, so the middy usually carried on his conversation to the tune of "God Save the King," which was the only tune he knew.

If Oswald had expected to find the regions below-decks in the same exquisite state of cleanliness and neatness that the vessel was above-board, he was woefully disappointed. The cockpit was an evil-smelling hole, so poorly lighted that even in the brightest sunshine only a dingy twilight illuminated the place. A wooden bulkhead divided off the midshipmen's quarters, and here Oswald discovered four young gentlemen busily engaged devouring some unwholesome-looking pastry which one of them had bought ashore, and sucking the jam off their fingers.

"Oh, crikey! Here's my lord the duke!" said one, starting up and making a grotesque bow.

"Your lordship's humble and obedient!" said another, making a flourish.

Oswald looked from one to the other in amazement. "What did you say the noble earl's respectable name was, Babbington?" asked the first speaker.

"I di-di-di—"
"Hi-diddle-diddle? That's a good sort of a name—the Duke of Hi-diddle-diddle!"

"I didn't say his name was anything, but it's Smith!" sang Babbington.

"Smith! His name is Smith! And yet he comes on board in the tow of an admiral! Confound it all, what's the Service coming to?" said one of the mids.

Oswald sat on a chest and swung his legs.
"Go on!" he said quietly. "Have your little jokes out. I like to see people happy, especially when they are young—very young!"

His coolness rather disconcerted the middies. One who had not hitherto spoken got up, wiped his hands deliberately on Babbington's back, and came over to Oswald.

"How do you do?" he said, holding out his hand. "My name's Maxwell. Did you say yours is Smith?"

"I didn't say so, but it is!" said Oswald, laughing.
"Let me introduce you to your messmates. This one is Wickens."

Wickens came up, and, after wiping his hand on Babbington's coat, gravely offered it to Oswald.

"This is Hunter, and this Ticehurst," said Maxwell.
The two boys came up; and, after cleaning their sticky fingers with the help of Babbington's jacket, they shook hands with Oswald.

"Your first ship?" asked Maxwell.

"Yes."
"Ever been to sea before?"

"Never," said Oswald.
"I'm sorry for you, then," said Maxwell.

"Why?"
"Because—"

At that moment the purser's mate—a little, fat, round-faced man—popped his head round the bulkhead.

"The skipper desires to see Mr. Smith in his cabin. Admiral's gone ashore."

"To see me?" said Oswald, starting up.

A feeling of dread and uneasiness came over him. What did Captain Burgoyne want him for? Was he going to question him—try and force the truth from him? And the admiral had gone ashore! His friend had gone and left him with his enemy, for Oswald already counted his captain as his foe!

"Step lively!" said the purser's mate. "This way, Long-legs!"

"Are you talking to me?" suddenly demanded Oswald, swinging round and confronting the little man.

"Oh! Ah, only—only my joke!" stammered the purser's mate, taken aback by the fierce look in the new midddy's eyes.

"Jove, that young cub wants licking into shape!" said Mr. Rumbold, the purser's mate, when Oswald had gone.

"The job shall be yours. You will enjoy doing it. He's only six feet high, and has a fist like a leg of mutton! You'll be proud of your work when you have done, if you are still alive!" said Maxwell.

Meanwhile Oswald was making his way to Captain Burgoyne's cabin, his heart beating fast with anxiety and dread, and with hatred too, for it was by this man's hand that Dick, his friend, had died!

Captain Burgoyne is Not Convinced—Mr. Fryer—A Flogging and a Threat.

Captain Burgoyne was seated at a table littered with the despatches that the admiral had handed to him, a perusal of which had evidently not been to his satisfaction, judging from the look of gloomy discontent on his face.

Beside his elbow stood a bottle of brandy and a glass, from which he occasionally took a long draught with evident relish. He had taken off his coat, which lay in a heap at one end of the cabin, and sat in his shirt-sleeves, a very different sort of officer from the one who had waited on Sir Sampson Eastlake.

"A curse fly away with old Sam for his interference!" he muttered angrily, drumming on the table with his fingers. "It's his doing—this confounded Amadea business! Bah! What fools they are! They send out a little frigate like this to cut off a line-of-battleship, and, if I fail, give me as a reward five years on the Jamaica Station. And if I don't fail, what then? Why, I take my prize home to England, and get the five years in the West-Indies all the same."

Captain Burgoyne relieved his feelings with a long and loud oath, and then drained the glass beside him, which he filled again from the bottle. The despatches which had given him such dissatisfaction read:

"Should the Catapult fail in its attempt to head off and recapture the East India merchantman, now in possession of the French line-of-battleship Amadee, her captain will instantly proceed to Kingstown, Jamaica, and there report himself to the port admiral."

"Come in!" growled the captain, as someone tapped on the door.

"Ah!" he muttered, in an undertone, as Oswald entered. For some time he took no further notice of the boy, for it was one of his habits to show an utter disregard for the feelings of those of lower rank than himself.

"You sent for me, sir," said Oswald, after some minutes of silence.

Captain Burgoyne looked up with a scowl. "I am aware of that," he said shortly, "and it would be well for you, Mister—er—er—"

"Smith," said Oswald, flushing.

"Ah, yes, Smith! It would be well for you to understand that I exact obedience and respect from my officers, as from my crew. When I send for anyone to come to my cabin, that person has to await my convenience. Shut that door, and do not interrupt me again until I am ready to attend to you!"

Oswald closed the door quietly, and stood awaiting the pleasure of the captain.

Captain Burgoyne leaned back in his chair, and pretended to be deeply immersed in the despatches, which he had already read through; and while his superior was thus engaged Oswald glanced around the cabin.

The place was thoroughly in keeping with the slovenly appearance of its owner. The floor was littered with clothes, swords, and papers; the air was thick with the fumes of tobacco-smoke and liquor. A couple of empty bottles reposed on the bunk at the end of the cabin, upon which also lay curled up a very small black boy, who was sleeping soundly.

Oswald did not suspect that while he was taking stock of the cabin the captain was taking stock of him over the top of the paper he was pretending to read.

"If that isn't the scoundrel who stopped Uncle Maydow's coach, I'm a Dutchman!" muttered Captain Burgoyne, with an oath.

Suddenly he laid the paper down on the table with a bang.

"According to the wish of Admiral Sir Sampson Eastlake, you are rated as midshipman on board this frigate, Mister—er—"

"Smith," said Oswald.

"Exactly, Smith," said Captain Burgoyne, with a sneer. "I understand," he went on, "that Admiral Eastlake is well acquainted with your parents—has, in fact, known you for a good many years?"

"Yes, sir," said Oswald, in a low voice. He was lying, and he was painfully conscious of it. His cheeks flushed, and his eyes sought the floor at his feet as he spoke, and, noting his confusion, a malicious smile crept up into Captain Burgoyne's face.

"Were you ever at Wiminster, in Warwickshire?" he asked, fixing his eyes keenly on Oswald's face.

"No," said Oswald firmly. Again he lied, for Wiminster was the town near the village where his father lived. And yet how could he tell this man the truth? He knew that by lying, and only by lying, was he safe from an ignominious death, and be permitted to live and serve his King and country like an honest man.

"You have never been there?" repeated Burgoyne, still keenly watching him. "And you have never in your life met a young man named Oswald Yorke?"

"Never, sir," said Oswald. And this time he looked Burgoyne squarely in the face.

The captain's eyes dropped beneath Oswald's, and he fumbled nervously with the papers on the table before him.

"It is an unfortunate thing for you," he said, "that you

ANSWERS

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might get blown from the mast-top into the sea, as in all probability he would. Knowing this, and that it would be an utter impossibility to heave-to to pick him up if he should go overboard, Mr. Fryer begged him off his punishment.

Brabazon could do nothing but give in as gracefully as he could, which was not particularly so.

"You're in luck!" muttered Maxwell. "Fryer's a trump! Take my tip, and sheer off. Brab's a brute, and he'll have his knife into you again the moment Fryer's back is turned."

The two lads hastened away aft, while the luckless sailor was escorted down below, and put into irons for drunkenness and insubordination.

Later on in the day, when the wind had dropped somewhat, the man was brought up on to the deck again.

"You don't mean to say that they are going to thrash him?" asked Oswald, as he watched the preparations that were being made.

Maxwell nodded.

"Yes; Brab ordered him a dozen!"

"Then it's a burning shame, and a sin! I saw it all; it was an accident! There is no justice in it!" said Oswald hotly.

"My dear chap, it isn't a question of justice at all. Brab's second luff, and discipline must be maintained. If he says this chap is to have a dozen—why, he'll have them, and that's all about it!"

They stripped the coat and shirt from the poor cowering wretch's back, and lashed his wrists together, and made them fast to the mainmast, high above his head, so that he had to stand upon his toes to avoid being suspended by the cord.

"A dozen, Mr. Fid, and lay them on smartly!" said Mr. Brabazon to the burly boatswain.

All hands had been mustered on deck for punishment, not a man there but knew that the punishment was unjust and undeserved; but it mattered little to them. They had grown callous and brutalised, for such scenes as they were about to witness were common enough in the Service in those brave days of old.

Mr. Fid, the bo'sun, flung off his coat and bared his brawny arm. He was a short, thick-set man of gigantic strength, and the cat, with its nine tails, sang shrilly in the air.

The first blow brought out great red weals on the white skin. The victim uttered a faint cry, and shivered as the lashes fell upon him.

The second blow raised the flesh into ridges, but this time the man uttered no sound.

At the third Oswald turned away, sickened and disgusted. Eight times the merciless cat rose and fell, while Mr. Brabazon stood by, counting the strokes callously, with a look of real enjoyment on his face.

Then suddenly the body of the victim became limp, his legs seemed to give way under him, his head lolled forward on his breast, and the whole weight of the body was suspended by the bound wrists.

Still the bo'sun, after a look towards Mr. Brabazon, was about to complete the sentence, when the doctor came forward.

"That will do!" he said sharply. "Take the man down! No more of that, Mr. Fid!"

He was a tall, fine-looking man—the doctor—with a handsome face, and a pair of keen eyes, which rested for a moment, with a look of undisguised contempt, on the face of the second-lieutenant.

Dr. Telford was one of those officers who considered that such exhibitions as these were degrading to those who suffered by them, and degrading to those who ordered them.

The man was taken down, salt was rubbed into the lacerated back, then his clothing was huddled round him, and he was carried down below deck and left to recover at his leisure.

Oswald's face was white, and his eyes were bright with anger.

"It's a vile, blackguardly shame!" he said hotly.

"Hush," whispered Maxwell, "or you'll get yourself into hot water! You'll soon get used to it. It turned me up the first time I saw a man flogged; but you get hardened to it in time!"

"I never shall!" said Oswald. "The man who orders another to be flogged like that is a brute and a cur! By heavens, if any man ordered me to be flogged, I'd kill him! I'd shoot him—kill him as I would a rat or any other vermin!"

In his excitement and horror of what he had seen Oswald spoke loudly and clearly. Maxwell gripped his arm.

"Be careful!" he whispered. "Shut up, or—"

But it was too late. Mr. Brabazon was scarcely half a dozen feet behind the two lads, and Oswald's voice fell clearly and distinctly on his ears.

"Whoever he might be, I'd shoot him dead!" Oswald said defiantly.

Then, feeling Maxwell's grip upon his arm, he turned quickly, and found himself face to face with the second-lieutenant.

There was a very queer look in Mr. Brabazon's little pig's eyes as they wavered over Oswald's face. Then, without a word to either of the boys, he hurried past them, and vanished down the companionway.

Maxwell broke into a laugh.

"Crikey! Did you see Brab's face?" he asked. "Smith, you've put him in a blue funk! The man looked absolutely terrified! You've frightened him out of his wits!"

"A good thing, too, the brute!" said Oswald.

And then, following Maxwell's lead, he descended to the cockpit, neither knowing nor caring that of the Honourable Archibald Brabazon he had made an enemy for life.

The excitement attendant upon Oswald's boarding the frigate for the first time in his life, followed by his interview with Captain Burgoyne, and his horror and disgust of the punishment allotted to the seaman, had served to occupy his mind to such an extent that it was only now that he became conscious of the fact that he was feeling very ill.

"You'd best get into your hammock," said Maxwell sympathetically. "You'll be all right presently. Keep your pecker up!"

"It—it seems to me that the trouble will be to keep things down!" muttered Oswald mournfully. "I—I say, I haven't got to get into that thing, have I?"

"What! Your hammock? Of course you have, unless you'd sooner sleep on the deck. Now, what you've got to do is to make a spring, and plump down fair in the middle, and you'll be as comfortable as an owl in an ivy-bush."

Oswald summoned up his energies, and made a spring, but overshot the mark. Round swung the hammock, and down went Oswald with a crash on to the floor.

"What are you kids howling for now?" asked Rumbold, the master's mate, putting his little bullet head in round the bulkhead.

The middies were shrieking with laughter at Oswald's discomfiture, and Rumbold came in to see the fun.

"Confound it all!" said he, with mock indignation. "Upon my soul, anyone would imagine that you youngsters had been brought up in the gutter! You have no manners at all. Mr. Smith, I sincerely trust that you are not hurt? Please take no notice of these ill-mannered cubs! Will you allow me to assist you into your hammock? I am a little stronger than our young friend Maxwell!"

"It is very good of you," said Oswald, who was feeling wretchedly ill.

"Now, lean on me—so! That's it! Now, a little spring—one, two, three, and up she goes!"

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