

The Third-Formers' Raid.

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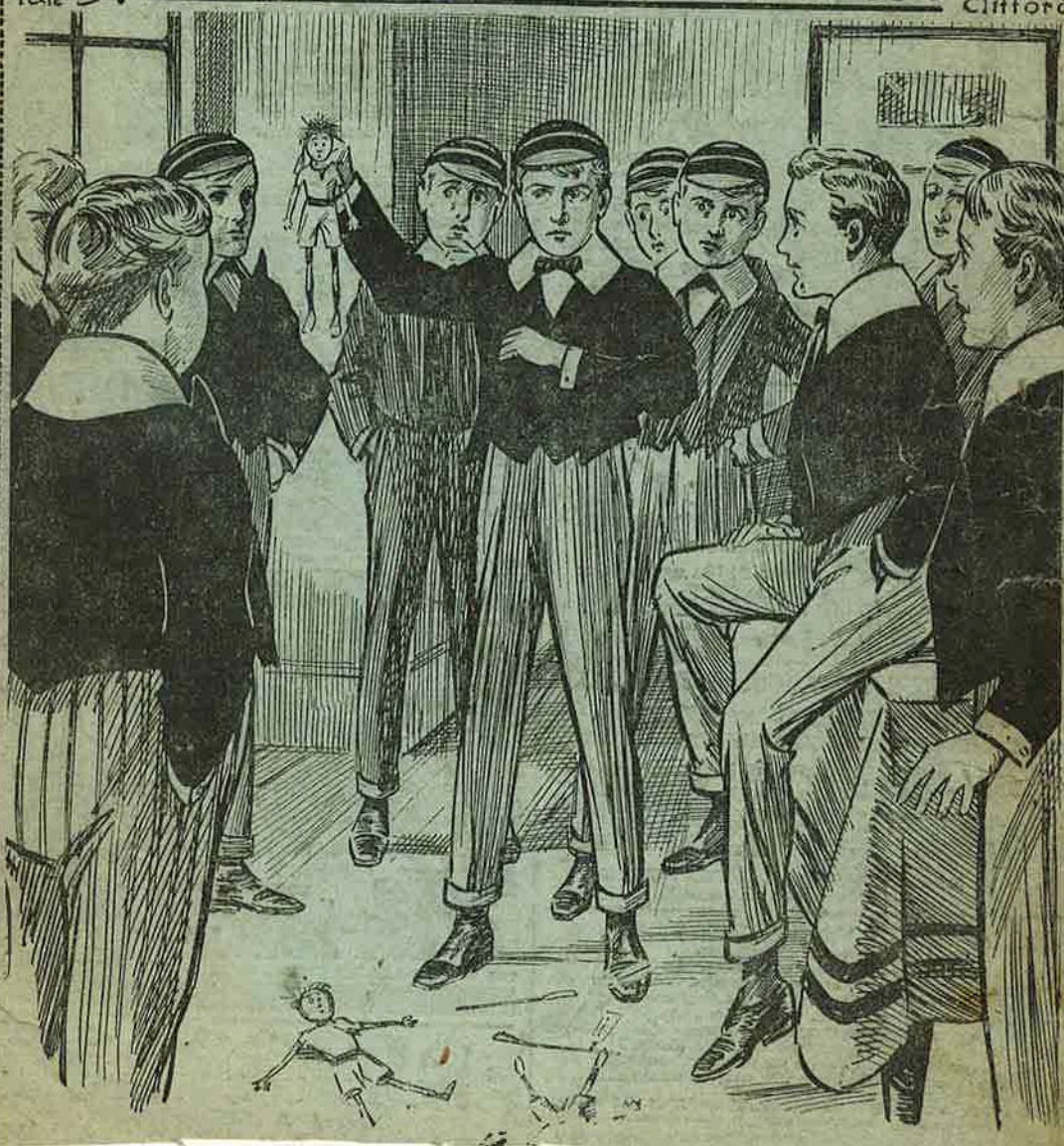
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A Tale of the Terrible Three.

by
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.



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THE THIRD- FORMERS' RAID.

A Tale of the Chums of
St. Jim's.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER I.

Jack Blake's Postcard.

"BLEST if I can make it out, kids!"
Jack Blake, chief of Study No. 6 of the School House of St. Jim's, spoke slowly, a puzzled expression on his good-looking, cheery face.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy screwed his monocle in his eye and also stared solemnly at the object which was puzzling his chums—a picture-postcard.

"Heah, heah, deah boy!"

"What's here, hero, ass?"

"Nothin', deah boy; only I agwee with you. The affair is beyond me, bai Jove!"

"Oh, I see! What do you make of it, Hewies?"

"It must be a rag of some sort."

"Bai Jove, yaas! I am wathah inclined to agwee with Hewies, that it is a wag of sorts—"

"A rag! Where's the rag? Where does the laugh come in?"

"Bai Jove! Yaas, Blake, I agwee with Digbay. Where does the laugh come in, deah boy?"

Jack Blake shook his head.

The whole thing was beyond him, and he was ready to admit it.

"A silly ass trick which has misfired, I suppose," he said.

"Blest if I can see any point in it all!"

"I wathah fancy there isn't a point, deah boy."
"Then why did some ass take the trouble to send the thing, duffer?"

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah! I nevaht thought of that."

"Well, think of it now, and ring off cackling!" exclaimed Digby. "Have a look at the postmark again, someone!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that e wippin' ideah, Dig, deah boy! Bai Jove!"

"What's up?"

"Can you read it, Gussy?"

"Not the name of the post-office, deah boy; but I wathah fancy the card awaived by the four o'clock post."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Howwies—"

"Dotter!"

"Bai Jove, Digbay—"

"Duffer!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "We know that, don't we? Of course the card came by the four o'clock post; I took it from the postman myself. Can't you get the hang of the name of the post-office with your eyeglass, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove, that's wathah an ideah, deah boy!" answered the swell of St. Jim's, taking his monocle from his eye. "Bai Jove!"

"Can you read it, kid?"

"I can read a little. S—E—F—T—"

"My hat, it must have come from Softon, then!"

"Yaas, wathah! The last letch in the word is 'N', deah

boys. I wathah think there's no doubt about it bein' Sefton."

Jack Blake nodded.

"It's Sefton right enough."

"Do you know anyone there, Jack?"

"No, Dig. I know the place—a little town about twenty miles from here, down the river, you know."

"Do any of you know people there? My hat!"

"What's the wheetze?"

"Why, there's that cocky private school—the 'University School,' they call it!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "You remember, the gang we massacred at footer early on in the term."

"Bai Jove, yaas, wathah!"

Horries grinned.

"It wasn't much of a massacre, if I remember rightly," he said. "We got the odd goal in five, didn't we?"

"Something like that; and their fellows were rather ratty because they had had the cheek to challenge Kildare's first team. You know, they wouldn't fix up a return match on their ground—gassed a lot of rot about having no open dates or something."

"My hat! Yes, they were pratty ratty."

Jack Blake still looked puzzled.

"But, say it was one of their kids who sent this thing!" he exclaimed. "What on earth could have been the giddy motive?"

"For a wag, deah boy."

"But what should they want to rag us for, Gussy?"

"Because we won ovah them at footah."

"Ass! That all happened in October. You don't mean to tell me this card has anything to do with a footer match which has been in its grave six months?"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that! And the card doesn't refer to footah, weally, when you come to considah the mattah."

"Of course it doesn't!"

Jack Blake picked up the picturo-postcard again, and looked at it with a still more puzzled expression in his eyes.

The card was addressed to "Master Jack Blake and the Occupants of Study No. 6, St. James' College." There was not another written word.

The picture on the reverse side was of an alleged humorous nature, the subject being a crew of oarsmen in racing attire taking a boat up the river.

It was quite obvious that none of the oarsmen had ever had a scull in their hands before, and some of the attitudes were really laughable. The figures of the wet bodies, too, were not very athletic in appearance, the most massive of them being little more substantial than a stout prop.

Below the picture were printed in large letters the words, "Fine hauls of crabs are caught in this neighbourhood."

That was all, and the reason for the joke was puzzling the chums of Study No. 6 in an exasperating manner.

Jack Blake suddenly threw the postcard down on the table.

"There can only be one explanation," he exclaimed, "and that is, some of our kids must have made asses of themselves on the river, and the University School goats must have seen them."

"Bai Jove, yaas, wathah! I considah that can be the only explanation myself."

"I don't see how it can be that, Jack."

"Why not?"

"Because we haven't had a whole holiday for an age, and there aren't many fellows in St. Jim's who can row forty miles in an afternoon."

"Ass! Couldn't some of the U. S. fellows have been down here?"

"Yaas, wathah! You nevah thought of that, did you, Digbay, deah boy?"

Digby grinned, then looked thoughtful.

"That must be it. Some young ass has been goating about on the river, and tumbled in. Gussy, do you know anything about this?"

"About what, deah boy?"

They all turned and looked at Arthur Augustus severely.

Jack Blake got down from off the table.

"Gussy, have you been tumbling in the river in your spare time?"

"Weally, Blake, deah boy, I wathah think I'm not in the habit—"

"It looks suspicious."

"I refuse to regard it as lookin' suspicious at all, deah boy."

"Well, don't let it occur again, kid."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Yes, really. We can't have you tumbling about in the river when you want to, and getting us ragged by a lot of cocky young tadpoles like the U. S. kids."

"No, wathah not; but in the present cires—"

"You'll have to be more careful in future, Gussy."

"Pway listen to me, deah boy."

"Don't excuse yourself. I don't suppose you did it on

purpose, kid. It isn't likely he tumbled into the river just to rag himself, is it, Dig?"

"There's no saying with Gussy. You'll have to be a lot more careful in future, kid."

"Weally, Digbay, deah boy—"

"I suppose you caught a crab, Gussy?"

"Weally, Howwies, nothin' of the sort—"

"Humph! Scull slipped out of the rowlock, then? Better have them tied in with some string in future."

"Weally, Blake, I shall refuse to entertain the ideah of havin' my wowlocks tied up with string or any othah wotten material, and if you will heah me out—"

"Well, something will have to be done."

"I should say so."

"We can't have postcards like this coming to the coll. just because Gussy goes playing the young goat on the river."

"You wottahs!"

"Will you give me your word to be more careful, Gussy?"

"You w'etched boundahs!" shouted Arthur Augustus

wrathfully. "I haven't been on the wotten wivah for weeks!"

"Eh?"

"I haven't had a wow for an age."

"What's that?"

"And I am not in the wotten habit of tumblin' into the wivah! I nevah tumble into the wivah—"

"My hat!"

"Why didn't you tell us it wasn't you before, kid?" grinned Jack Blake. "You've been wasting our time, lass."

Arthur Augustus scowled his monocle into his eye again and viewed his chums with a lofty stare.

"I wegard you as wagging wottahs," he said, with dignity. "You make it a difficult mattah for me to considah you in the light of Iwields."

"But it was your own fault, Gussy. You should have told us before," said Jack Blake severely.

Arthur Augustus glared at him in silence for a moment or two, then turned to the door.

"In the cires, Blake," he said coldly, "I shall have to refuse to clean up this mattah of the postcard for you. I wegwet havin' to leave you in a cornah, but your w'etched behaviour leaves me no othah course."

And Arthur Augustus walked to the door.

He put his hand firmly on the door knob, then he turned it. The next instant he uttered a wild shout.

Just as the swell of St. Jim's had been in the act of opening the door, someone from the passage had also opened it, and that someone had used about ten times the force Arthur Augustus had used.

"Wow! You wottah!"

The door had brought up against Arthur Augustus' aristocratic nose with a sounding thump.

"You wottah! Bai Jove!"

"Dear me, what has happened?"

"You uttah wuff bwute—"

"Good gracious, what is the cause of this commotion? Have I hurt you in any way, D'Arcy?"

"You weekless wuffian!"

"Dear me, how very excited and absurd you are this evening," exclaimed Herbert Skimpole, coming further into the room.

"In opening the door did I knock you?"

"You wavin' lunatic, Skimmay! Bai Jove, my w'etched nose is bwoken!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Blake, I fail to see what there is to laugh at in the fact of D'Arcy breaking his nose."

Jack Blake, Digby, and Horries rolled about on their chairs, until it looked as if they would finish up by rolling about on the floor.

Arthur Augustus was dancing from one leg to the other in a manner which almost convulsed them. His nose was not bleeding, but it was very painful.

After a moment or two he stopped dancing about, and glared at the three.

"I wegard you as a w'etched set of wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I look upon you as outsidahs of the first watah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Skimmay I considah in the light of a waving lunatic," added Arthur Augustus, feeling his nose gently. "I shall wegard you all as stwanganahs in the future."

And the swell of St. Jim's strode from the room.

CHAPTER 2.

Skimpole's Warning.

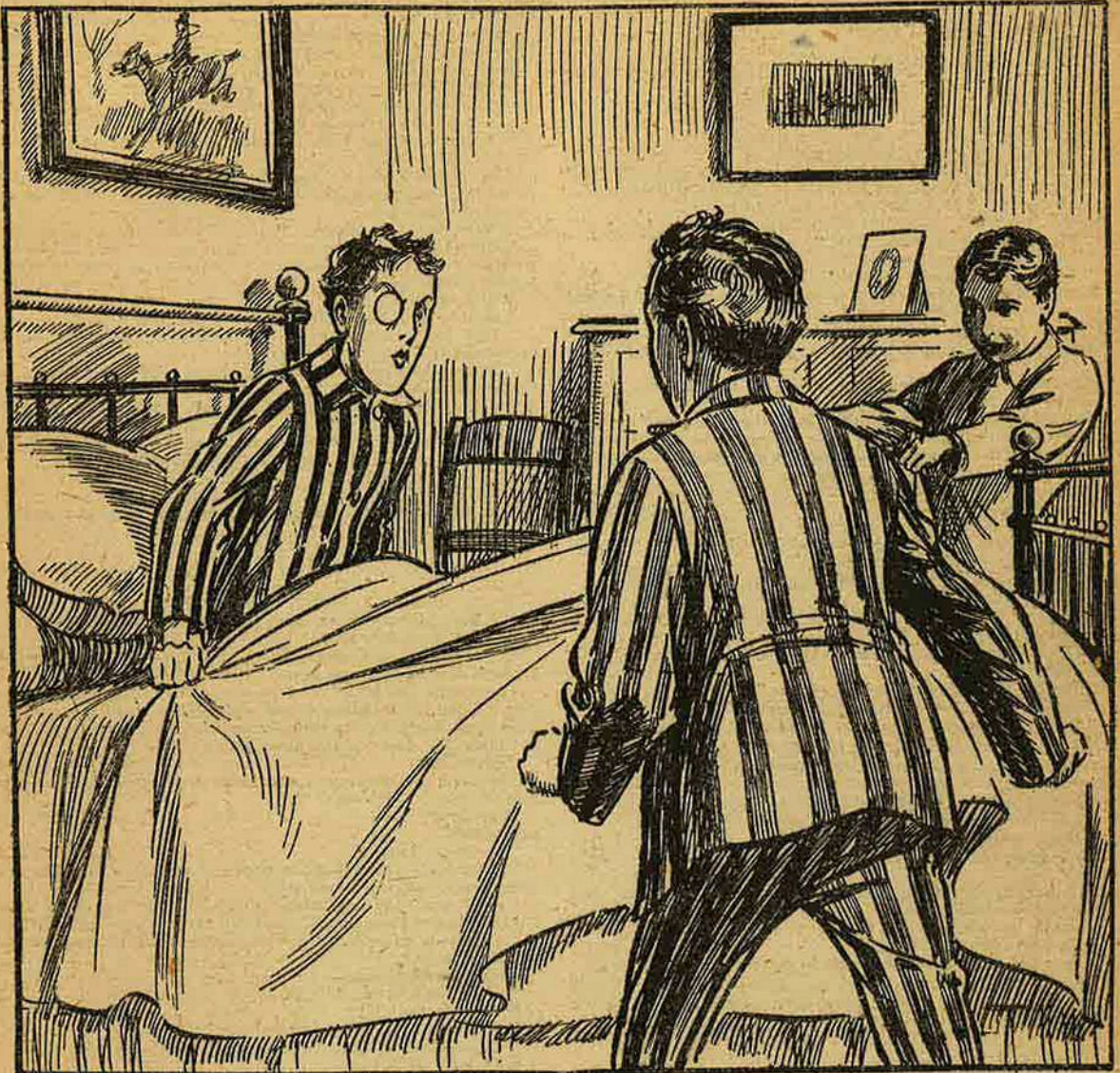
"DEAR me!" Skimpole stood looking at the door which Arthur Augustus had just closed, a puzzled expression on his curious face.

Jack Blake grinned.

"What's the matter now, Skimmay?"

"Nothing is the matter, only it appeared to me that my

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"I refuse to submit to the cold pig, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, sitting up in bed with a start. "It isn't nearly time to wise yet. Go away, you howwid wurrian."

friend D'Arcy was upset about something," exclaimed the brainy man of the Shell, blinking through his enormous spectacles. "Did I really knock him, Blake?"

"My only Aunt Jane, I should say so!"

"Then I fail to see why you should laugh. But it does not matter."

"Doesn't it, kid?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ask Cussy whether it matters or not, Skimpole."

Skimpole looked at each of the speakers very deliberately.

"I mean, it will not interfere with the great thing which is about to happen at St. Jim's," he said slowly. "Nothing can matter to that."

Jack Blake stopped laughing and stared at the amateur Socialist, and amateur every other known and unknown-ist in the world.

He was well used to Skimpole's wildness, but there was something about his manner now which demanded attention.

"What's up, Skimpole?"

An impressive pause followed.

"I," said Skimpole. "I am about to stagger mankind."

"Good egg!"

"That's the style, Skimpole!"

Skimpole looked puzzled. He never could see a joke.

"I fail to follow the drift of your observations," he said.

"You do not seem to grasp what I am telling you."

"What are you telling us, ass?"

"That the reign of injustice is over; that——"

"It's come at last, you chaps!"

"Exactly, Blake," exclaimed Skimpole. "How did you guess?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat! Yes, it's come at last. Send for a cab, Dig!"

"Dear me! A cab!"

"And ring up the asylum people."

"The asylum people! Dear me, Blake, your remarks are becoming more and more unintelligible!"

"Put some ice down his neck to keep him cool."

"And dot him on the nose for being a young ass."

Skimpole glanced from one to the other, then he rose to his feet.

"I am sorry for you, Blake——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am sorry for you all, because you are missing a great

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"GLYN'S GREAT WHEEZE!"

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

chance of being prepared for what must follow to-morrow's great event."

"What event, ass?"

"The event."

"You shrieking duffer!"

Skimpole shook a skinny fist in the air.

"And that is how my warning is greeted, by ridiculous remarks, devoid of all sensible meaning!" he exclaimed.

"Very well. To-morrow, remember to-morrow—"

"Rather! It's a half-holiday, kid."

"It's the beginning of the world's holiday, you mean, Blake."

"Do I, ass!" exclaimed Jack Blake, looking at Skimpole in astonishment.

"Now, let's hear what you mean."

"Yes, Skimmy. What on earth are you cackling about?"

"Throw it off your chest, kid!"

"I am simply warning you."

"Warning us about—what?"

Skimpole had walked across to the door by now, and he had his hand on the knob.

"I am warning you about the event. You do not understand! No! I hardly expected you would—o-oh! Dear me! Oh!"

Skimpole's impressive tones had, at one sudden jump, changed into a despairing squeak.

Just as he had opened the door in Arthur Augustus' face, so someone had now opened the door in his. One of the panels had caught the amateur Socialist on the chin, and he had bitten his tongue.

"Oh, dear me! O-oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh!"

"Gweat Scott! What has happened, deah boy?"

Jack Blake yelled with laughter.

"My only aunt, if this isn't the limit, Gussy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, I fail to see the cause for wibald laughtah. Skimmy is in pain—"

"Of course he is, ass! You've banged him in the face with the giddy door."

"Ha, ha, ha! Just as he banged you."

"Gweat Scott, how wemarkably funny!"

"Funny!" gasped Skimpole. "You call it funny?"

"I mean, how wemarkably funny that I should bang the wretched door in your face three minutes aftah you banged it in mine!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "I wegwet the occurrence, but it has its funnary side, deah boy."

"I fail to see it, D'Arcy; I really fail to see it."

"Yaas, wathah! So did I when you opened the wotten doah! Hah, hah, hah! Pway excuse me laughin', deah boy!"

Skimpole blinked thoughtfully, adjusted his spectacles, and turned to the door again.

Then he left Study No. 6 without another word.

Jack Blake chuckled loudly.

"Poor old Skimmy, he's always in the wars!"

"I wonder what silly ass trick he's up to now, Jack?" said Digby thoughtfully. "He looked even wilder than usual."

"I say, deah boys—"

"Blest if I know! You never can tell with Skimmy."

"No, that's a fact."

"I say, deah boys—"

"It may only be a plot he has on to kidnap the doctor and make Railton pay his ransom, or again it may be something really wild."

"I say, deah boys—"

"The event, he called it, didn't he? Silly young ass!"

"I say, deah boys!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "Pway wing off. I have somethin' important to say."

All three turned and stared at Arthur Augustus. Jack Blake looked surprised.

"But you told us not to address you, Gussy; you told us not to, yourself."

"Yaas, wathah! But, undah the circs., I have decided to change my mind."

"Change your what?"

"Mind, deah boy."

"Oh!"

"Yaas, wathah! You see, I considah that it is wemarkably wotten that we should be waggid in this w'etched mannah by the University School outsiders. I considah the mattah ought to be taken up."

"Hear, hear!"

"Take it up, then, Gussy. In fact, you can have the post-card to keep."

"Don't wot, Hewwies, deah boy! Pway be sewious. I considah that we ought to go to Tom Mewwy and see if he can thwow any light on the affair. How do we know that one of them mayn't have been fallin' in the wivah?"

"My hat!"

"You wegard my ideah as a wippin' one, Blake?"

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"I say, you chaps, I wonder if Skimmy knows anything about this?"

Digby and Herries looked thoughtful. Skimpole had never been found guilty of anything approaching the nature of a wheeze in his life, but did they know this was a wheeze?

There might be some mystic meaning about the affair. There probably was if Skimpole had had anything to do with it.

"But I don't think he has," said Jack Blake after a pause. "Skimmy isn't the bird, somehow. His giddy event hasn't anything to do with this."

"No, wathah not, although I wegwet to say I do not undahstand what you ar' talkin' about, deah boys. But with wegard to my wproposal."

"What was that, Gussy?"

"Gweat Scott, what a wotten memowry you have, Blake! I wproposed that we go and make inquiries in Tom Mewwy's studay, deah boy."

"Right-ho!"

"May as well, although I don't see the good."

"Tom Merry doesn't know anything about this, you can be certain of that."

"No, wathah not; but he may know who has fallen in the wivah, deah boy."

"And if he doesn't," grinned Digby, "there may be some tea going. I consider Gussy's ideah great."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it gweat myself, and undah the circs., I wathah think I had bettah do the talkin'."

Jack Blake nodded.

"Get on with it, then!" he said.

And the three followed Arthur Augustus along the corridor at a lazy saunter.

CHAPTER 3.

Tom Merry's Boat.

"IS Tom Mewwy there, deah boys?"

"Yes, dear ass."

"Open the doah, then. It's only Blake, Hewwies, Digby, and myself, you know."

There came the sound of whispering voices through the closed door of the Shell study, a hasty slamming of a cupboard, then Tom Merry's voice rang out carelessly.

"Open the door for the kids, Monty!"

"Right-ho!"

The door was unlocked, and Arthur Augustus led the way into the snug little room.

Tom Merry was sitting in the easy-chair, his feet on the mantelshelf.

"Cheer-ho, kids!"

"Cheer-ho! Gussy's got a postcard he wants to show you, Tom Merry," grinned Jack Blake. "Fork it out, Gussy!"

"S-sh, deah boy! I want to discovah whethah they know anythin' about the mattah," said the swell of the School House in an anxious whisper. "I wathah think the wpropah plan is to pump them."

Jack Blake grinned.

"Fire ahead, then!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry eyed the pair suspiciously.

"What's the wheeze? What's up?"

"Nothin', deah boy."

"Well, what postcard are you talking about? Let's have a look at it."

"A little latah on, deah boy. Wathah a wippin' day—isn't it, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ass!"

"Weally, deah boy, I must request you not to address me in that wuff-and-weady mannah. Howevah, have you been on the wivah lately, deah boy?"

Tom Merry got up very slowly, a tense expression on his usually cheery face.

"What's that, Gussy?"

"Have you been on the wivah, deah boy? Or, wathah, have you been in the wivah?"

"How much do you know about this affair, kids?"

"Ah, Mannabs, deah boy, so you have had somethin' to do with it! Which of you tumbled into the wivah, Tom Mewwy?"

"Tumbled into the river?"

Tom Merry stared at the swell of St. Jim's in amazement. Manners and Lowther also rose to their feet.

"If it's a rag, Blake, you'd better say so."

"A rag, kid?"

"Yes, a beastly rag, my son."

"Bai Jove, I wathah think we don't quite undahstand, deah boys! Howevah, that can come aftah. The point is, which of us tumbled into the wotten wivah?"

"Tumbled into the river?"

"Yaas, wathah! I have requested you to explain thwice times, and—bai Jove!"

"Out with it, Gussy!"

"Collar him!"
 "What do you know about the matter, kid?"
 "Wesecue me, deah boys! You are wumplin' my collah—weseue me instantly or I shall have to administrah a feahful thwashin'!"

"What do you know about it, Gussy?"
 "Pway weseue me! Weseue, deah boys, weseue!"
 Jack Blake looked astounded.
 "What's the idea, Tom Merry? Trying to tie the one and only into a knot?"

Tom Merry dropped Arthur Augustus' arm and flung open the cupboard door. Then he brought out a small toy rowboat which was extremely old and dirty, and, in addition, possessed a number of holes in the bottom evidently made by a red-hot poker.

Tom Merry threw the boat down on the table.
 "What do you chaps know about that?" he said briskly.
 The chums of Study No. 6 stood staring at the boat in amazement. Arthur Augustus uttered an exclamation.

"Bai Jove!"
 "You do know something about it, then?"
 "Yaas, wathah! It's the wottenest boat I evah saw, deah boy! If you wequire a boat, my youngah bwothah Wally has one, and—"

"Ass!"
 "Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy!"
 "Howling, shrieking, cackling ass!" growled the hero of the Shell. "Of course I don't want a boat. What I want to know is who sent me this thing."

"My only aunt, was that thing sent to you, Tom Merry?"
 "Of course it was; came by the four o'clock post."
 Jack Blake was on his feet in a flash.

"The postcard, Gussy. Where's the postcard, kid?"
 "Heah, deah boy!"
 Jack Blake flung the postcard across the table to Tom Merry and rammed his hands in his pockets. The Shell fellow took up the card and whistled.

"My hat, did someone send you this, Blakey?"
 "Someone did, my son—by the four-o'clock post."
 "Phew!"
 Manners and Lowther were leaning over Tom Merry's shoulder, when suddenly Manners made a dash for the waste-paper basket. He was back at the table again in a flash, a piece of brown-paper in his hand.

"This is what the boat came in; compare the postmarks, Tom Merry."
 "Yes, that's the game!"
 The seven juniors crowded round the table as Tom Merry straightened out the paper.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, I believe they are the same!"
 "They are!"
 "Certain?"
 "Rather, Blake! Just you have a look."

Jack Blake picked up the brown-paper wrapper and the postcard.
 Whatever difficulty there had been in reading the postmark on the postcard, there was none at all in the case of the brown paper wrapper.

"Yes, it's Sefton Post Office right enough."
 "Bai Jove, what do you considah it can mean, deah boys?"
 "Blest if I know," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Of course, it may only be a rag on the part of the New House kids."
 Jack Blake shook his head.

"I don't see that there can be any point in it in that case," exclaimed Jack Blake. "It isn't as if any of us have cut up badly on the river or anything, and how on earth could Figgins have sent the things from Sefton?"

"No, wathah not; I considah your idea won't hold wathah, Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"
 "No, neither will this boat by the look of it," murmured Lowther, the humorist of the Shell.

The fellows stood looking at one another, astonishment showing in all their faces. Jack Blake suddenly squared his shoulders.
 "This thing must be nipped in the bud."
 "Yaas, wathah!"

"Dry up, Gussy! We must look into this, Tom Merry, or there's no saying where it will end. I'm going to slip across to the New House to see Figgy."
 "Right-ho, Blakey!"
 "Yaas, wathah, deah boy! I will come with you."
 "Good!"

"Dig and I'll come as well!" exclaimed Herries. "Shall we leave the card here?"
 "Yes, and bring Figgins back with you if he hasn't had a hand in it."
 "Yes, that's the game. Sha'n't be two minutes!"

Jack Blake was out of the Shell study in a flash, and Digby, Herries, and Arthur Augustus were not far behind him.
 Tom Merry sat down and stared at the boat.
 Tap!

There was a gentle tap at the door, but none of them heard it. They were all staring at the boat.

Tap!
 The gentle knock was repeated, and the effect was the same. Not one of the Terrible Three heard.
 "Dear me, perhaps there is no one in the study," murmured a voice. "I—ah, you're in here after all, then, Merry!"

Tom Merry started.
 "Is that you, Blake?"
 "No, it is I," exclaimed Skimpole quickly. "I wish to see you, Merry."
 And Skimpole came into the room and sat down.

The Terrible Three removed their eyes from the boat and fixed them on the brainy man of the Shell.

CHAPTER 4.

Cornstalk & Co.'s Present.

"YES, Merry," repeated Skimpole, "I wish to see you on a very important matter. In fact, I must see you at once."

"Can't you see me, then, Skimmy?"
 "Dear me—"
 "Get nearer the window, Tom Merry; perhaps you are in the shade."
 "Dear me, Lowther, what an absurd observation to make! Of course I can see Merry distinctly."

"Good! Then you can go now, can't you?"
 Skimpole got up.
 "I have something to tell you, something which you must know."
 "My hat!"

Tom Merry had seen Skimpole in many moods, including some of his most enthusiastic, but there was something about his manner now that beat all previous records.
 Jack Blake had noticed the same thing in Study No. 6 not ten minutes before.

"What is it, Skimmy?"
 Skimpole blinked at them solemnly.
 "To-morrow the great event takes place, the world-shaking moment arrives."
 Tom Merry grinned.

"Good!"
 "Please do not interrupt me. I wish to warn you that to-morrow—"
 "That's awfully decent of you, Skimmy!"
 "Dear me—"

"Excellent!" grinned Tom Merry, laying a hand on Skimpole's shoulder. "You cannot think how we thank you for your generosity in coming here to explain. But now that you have explained there really is no need for you to waste your time here any longer."

"Dear me, Merry, you entirely fail to understand! Merry! Dear me!"
 To his utter amazement Skimpole found himself in the passage outside and the door closed behind him. He even heard a click as Manners turned the key.

Skimpole thought for a moment or two, then he turned on his heel.
 "To-morrow," he muttered mystically. "Wait until to-morrow!"

Then the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's vanished round the corner of the corridor.
 As Manners locked the door, Tom Merry chuckled and dropped back in the easy chair.

"That's got rid of Skimmy, anyway."
 "Ha, ha, ha! He blinked like an old owl at us!"
 "Wonder what on earth the young ass was talking about, kids?"

Tom Merry shook his head.
 "There's no telling with Skimmy, Monty. Hallo!"
 "Open the door, asses!"
 The speaker was thumping on the door excitedly, his voice breathless.

"Open the door, dufters!"
 "Yaas, wathah; open the doah, deah boys!"
 Tom Merry recognised the voice of Arthur Augustus instantly and turned the key. In a flash fellows began pouring into the study in all stages of excitement.

First there were the chums of Study No. 6, whom the Terrible Three had expected; then Figgins & Co. of New House fame, whom they had half expected; and, to wind up, Cornstalk & Co., whom they had not expected at all.

Jack Blake rammed his hands in his pockets and sat down on the table.
 "My aunt, we've run up against something this time and no mistake!"
 "What's happened, Blake?"
 "Bai Jove—"

"Ring off, ass! What's up, Blake?"
 "Woally, Tom Mewwy, I must weseue to be chawactahwised
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 By
 MARTIN CLIFFORD.

in that wuff-and-weady mannah. However, in a few words

"Oh, do ring off, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake!"

"Ring off!" roared Jack Blake in a tone which made Arthur Augustus start violently. "That's better. Now, Tom Merry, what do you think of this—"

"Nothing, Jack Blake—"

"Ass! Show him, Figgy!" exclaimed Blake, and Figgins fumbled under his coat.

The next moment the long-legged leader of the New House juniors threw a set of eight neatly-carved wooden oars of the racing eight pattern, each about two inches long.

Figgins threw them down quite vigorously, and followed Jack Blake's example in putting his hands in his pockets.

"Came by the four-o'clock post," he said briefly. "Post-mark, Sefton."

"My only Aunt Jane!"

Manners picked up one of the miniature oars and gazed at it in blank astonishment.

"Painted in our colours, too."

"Bai Jove, so they are! I nevah noticed that."

"Phew! Blake, what on earth does this mean?"

Jack Blake looked up wearily.

"Oh, we haven't finished yet, kid!"

"What do you mean—"

"Fire ahead, Noble!" interrupted Jack Blake, turning to the Australian junior.

"Yaas, wathah! Fiah ahead, Kangawoo, deah boy!"

And the junior from Australia rummaged in his pocket excitedly. A moment or two later he began hauling out the most extraordinary-looking objects.

"Came by the four o'clock post," he grinned.

"My aunt!"

Manners and Lowther could scarcely believe their own eyes. The objects Harry Noble was taking from his pockets were small dolls, made of rag and neatly dressed in rowing-shorts and racing-vests.

"What on earth are they?"

"Can't you see, kid?"

"No; my aunt!"

Tom Merry picked up one of the dolls. It had inked on the white vest "No 3." The hero of the Shell hastily snatched up another.

Across the vest in this case was written the word "stroke."

Jack Blake sighed.

"Yes, and there's another one labelled "bow," and all the others have numbers up to six; but there are nine altogether."

"Nine?"

"Yaas, wathah; nine, deah boy, only I wathah think there is no need to show the ninth," exclaimed Arthur Augustus hastily. "As a mattah of fact—"

"Fork it out, Kangaroo!"

The Australian junior grinned.

A moment later he laid the ninth doll on the table. Across its chest was written the word "cox," and it wore a monocle made of white paper in its right eye.

Arthur Augustus went crimson.

"I considah that exceeds the limit, deah boys!" he exclaimed. "In fact, I considah that it bordahs on wank bad form—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, I fail to see any cause for laughah, Tom Mewwy!"

"Don't you, kid? It's as like you as your own photograph."

"What wot?"

"What—what? So you noticed it yourself, Gussy?"

"On the contwawy, deah boy, I was wathah wiled about the mattah. I considah it wank bad form!"

"Oh, stop rotting, you two!" exclaimed Jack Blake testily.

"What on earth do you make of it, Tom Merry?"

The thirteen juniors—a crowd which packed the small study in sardine fashion—stood staring at their presents.

Not one of them could even begin to answer Jack Blake's question.

CHAPTER 5.

A Matter of Personal Dig.

DESPITE the number of fellows in the Shell study, there was silence for quite a long time. Arthur Augustus was the first to speak.

"Bai Jove, there's one thing, deah boys—"

"There're a good many things, ass!"

"Yaas, wathah; only there's one thing in partic. I wathah fancy the sendah of these wotten pwesents meant us to meet togethah just in this mannah."

Figgins looked up quickly.

"What makes you say that, kid?"

"Why, deah boy, because our wespective pwesents, though wags in themselves, become gweatsh wags when added togethah."

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"My hat!"

"What's the mattah, Tom Mewwy, deah boy?"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"Weally, Blake, deah boy, what's the mattah?"

"Phew!"

Figgins gasped loudly.

Arthur Augustus looked from one to the other in mild surprise. "Has anythin' occkwed, deah boys? Is my necktie cwoked, or my collah untiday?"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Mannahs, I must wefuse to be chwactahwised—"

"There's something in what the one-and-only says, kids—actually something in what he says!"

"Yaas, wathah; of course, there is somethin' in what I say, Lowthah!"

"Yes, I know; that's what has upset us."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

Arthur Augustus did not finish his sentence, but glanced witheringly at the humorist of the Shell, instead.

Jack Blake looked up quickly.

"If you fellows would only drop goating, we might be able to get the hang of this affair!" he exclaimed. "Gussy is right enough; whoever sent these things meant us to compare boats."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The boat, Kangaroo's crew, and Figgy's set of oars were meant to bring you fellows together, and our postcard the same for us."

"Yaas, wathah; I considah there can be no doubt about that, deah boys."

Jack Blake jumped to his feet.

"Then it comes to this, you chaps," he exclaimed; "the junior forms of St. Jim's are being ragged about their rowing!"

"Yaas wathah; though why they should wag us about our wovin', when none of us have wowed for evah so long—"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to dwy up, Tom Mewwy!"

"Ring off, then—anything so long as you'll stop cackling!" returned the Shell fellow quickly. "As you say, Blake, we're being rotted for our rowing. Why?"

"Blest if I know!"

"We're being rotted about something we haven't done."

"Yaas, wathah, that is so; unless Tom Mewwy or Figgy have been fallin' into the wivah."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Idiot!"

"Weally, Figgy—"

"Oh, do lie down, Gussy!" exclaimed Blake. "Then there's the other point: who is ragging us?"

"One of the Sefton fellahs, deah boy."

"We don't even know that for certain."

"Not foah cert., pewhaps; but I wathah think there can be no one else."

Tom Merry nodded.

"All the postmarks are Sefton, you say, Blake?"

"Yes, and the blessed parcel's directed in the same hand-writing."

"Then it must be a Sefton fellow. None of us know anyone in Sefton village, I take it?"

"No, that's so."

"As a mattah of fact, I have only been to Sefton once for a wun wound on my bicycle."

"Same here."

"Then it's agreed the bird who sent these things must be a Sefton U.S. kid?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Can't be anyone else."

"Good!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "The only thing to do now is to find out who it is."

"Bai Jove, how shall we manage that, deah boy?"

"Yes, how's that going to be worked, Tom Merry?"

"By spending to-morrow afternoon cycling over to Sefton, kids," said Tom Merry promptly. "It's a half, you know, and a half at the Sefton U.S., as well, I expect."

"I weally believe it is, deah boy."

"Good! Then we'll just scout round and find things out! How many of us are ready to spend to-morrow afternoon cycling to Sefton?"

The answer came in a volume:

"I am!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"That's the ticket," he said; "all thirteen of us are game!"

"Rather!"

"At two-thirty at the school gates, then," added Tom Merry.

"My hat, after all the scouting we've done, if we can't find out the bird who sent these parcels, you can put me in a home when Gussy's time comes!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, deah boy—"

"Yes, really, Gussy! Funny, isn't it?"

"Bai Jove, I don't want to administah a feahful thwashin', but—"

"I am!"

"I am!"

"I am!"

"I am!"

"I am!"

"I am!"

"I am!"

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"You admit you are a silly ass—I understand, Gussy."

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy——"

"There goes the bell for prep., you chaps!"

"Bother!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I must wequest you to take back your remark concernin'——"

"Coming, kids?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Two-thirty to the minute to-morrow, Figgy."

"Right-ho!"

"Tom Mewwy, Tom Mewwy, I wequest, as one gentleman to another, to stop and settle this mattah of personal dig. I Tom Mewwy——"

But Tom Merry had gone, and with him Manners and Lowther. Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries were only a few yards behind, while Figgins & Co. were already out in the passage.

Arthur Augustus rushed to the door.

"Tom Mewwy—Tom Mewwy, you wottah——"

Harry Noble pushed past him with a grin.

"Hard cheese, Gussy! Thrash him when you see him after prep.!"

"Yaas, wathah; but I may have cooled down by then, and I like to get these mattahs of personal dig. ovah at once, deah boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Kangawoo, I fail to see any cause for wibald laughtah, because your school-fellow has shown the white feathah!"

"My only hat!"

"Weally, Glyn——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, Dane——"

Then Cornstalk & Co. vanished down the corridor. They had to visit their study to get their books, and there was no time to waste.

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle in his right eye and looked after them loftily; then he stalked away towards the Fourth Form class-room.

Cornstalk & Co. continued their way to the end study at a run.

CHAPTER 6.

The Nationalisation of Skimpole.

"MY aunt, we shall have to seud for it!" Harry Noble uttered the remark, as he led the way round the bend in the corridor. He judged that most of the fellows had already assembled in class for preparation, so there was not a minute to lose.

With a thud the young Australian sent the door of the end study flying open, and raced into the room. Then he stopped dead.

Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn, who were behind him, promptly thumped into the small of his back.

"Ass!"

"Why didn't you tell us you were going to stop, duffer!"

"Silly young burbler——"

Then Clifton Dane stopped speaking in astonishment.

"My aunt, look what the tide has left in our room, Glyn!" Cornstalk & Co. stood still and stared at someone seated in the easy-chair.

It was Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell, and he was busily engaged in writing a note.

"Is that you, Noble?" he exclaimed, without looking up.

"I am writing a note to you."

"Of all the blessed cheek——"

"Dear me, Noble, I fail to understand you. Why do you describe my writing a note to you as—as cheek?"

"I wasn't referring to your note-writing, ass! You can write as many epistles as you like, provided I don't have to read them! But what the dickens are you doing in our room?"

"Yes, what are you doing in here?" demanded Glyn, suspiciously glancing round at his store of insulated copper-wire. "Look here, you haven't been sneaking any of my tackle, have you?"

"Really, Glyn, I fail to follow the drift of your remarks!"

"Have you been sneaking my tackle again?" demanded the young inventor wrathfully. "I had an electric bell somewhere—my hat, if you have sneaked that, Skimmy——"

Skimpole waved his arm loftily.

"I have not seen your electric bell, Glyn, though, of course, if I required it for the common good, I should have a perfect right to take it. In the near future all electric bells will be nationalised——"

"Ass!"

"Dear me, Dane——"

"Howling young lunatic, what are you doing in here?"

"Yes, that's it. What do you mean by coming in here to do your writing? Of all the blessed cheek——"

Skimpole waved his arm again.

"Pray do not be so absurd, Noble. In the near future—the very near future—all studies will be nationalised. I shall have a perfect right to come in here whenever I like——"

"My aunt!"

"I shall have a perfect right to use or borrow anything from Glyn's excellent electrical outfit whenever I please——"

"Oh, will you?"

"Yes, Glyn; and Dane's splendid fishing-rod will be as much mine as it is Dane's. But that is not what I wish to talk to you about. I have something to say which is of great importance."

Harry Noble grinned.

"Congratulations, Skimmy."

"Dear me, in what way have I merited——"

"Heartiest congrats., Skimmy, old ass!"

"I fail to follow the drift of your observation, Dane."

"I congratulate you, Skimmy—I congratulate you with all my heart. Now perform a graceful retire," exclaimed Glyn. "I'm not having you in the same room where I keep my insulated wire."

"Really, Glyn——"

"We have congratulated you, Skimmy," said Harry Noble severely; "surely you cannot expect us to fall on your neck and weep, as well?"

"Certainly not, but—but I fail to see why you are congratulating me. Of course, a man of my intelligence——"

"Exactly! My heartiest congrats., kid."

"On—on my great intelligence?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me!"

"My aunt! Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Noble chuckled loudly.

"You said you had something of great importance to tell us!"

"Yes, that is so."

"Then we congratulate you."

"Dear me! But you have not heard what it is I have to say."

"No; we congratulate ourselves as well, of course. Ont with him, kids!"

"Dear me, Noble——"

"Turn the young ass out!"

"A moment, Glyn. All studies will be nationalised. I have a perfect right to play football in the Doctor's study, if I were foolish enough to play games——"

"Yes, that's so. And all Skimmies will be nationalised."

"Rather!"

"Don't be so absurd, Dane. How can a human being——"

"Who's talking about human beings, ass? Skimmies, I said—not human beings. Under Socialism all Skimmies will be nationalised."

"Hear, hear!"

"Rather! And if it's for the good of the community at large that all Skimmies be bumped——"

"Dear me! Don't be so ridiculous."

"Then it's our bounden duty to bump as many of the freaks as come our way."

"Rather!"

"No doubt about that!"

"Bump the young ass for the common good, then, you chaps," grinned Harry Noble. "This is Socialism, Skimmy."

And Skimpole gasped loudly. He was being bumped on the passage floor. They were gentle bumps, because Skimpole was liked by all, in spite of his strangeness; but the bumps were severe enough to jerk his spectacles to the end of his curious nose, and make Cornstalk & Co. roar with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that how you like it done, Skimmy?"

"What price being nationalised?"

"Dear me! Pray cease. Dear me!"

"Good!" chuckled Bernard Glyn. "Now we've nationalised the young ass, lock the study door. So long, Skimmy!"

"Dear me—stop! I have something of great importance to tell you; something affecting the future—the very near future——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You laugh—you actually laugh, when we stand on the brink—— Dear me, where are my spectacles?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole got up, found his spectacles, then seized Harry Noble's arm.

"You refuse to listen to me—you refuse to take my warning."

"We've nationalised you; we can't do more, Skimmy."

"We'll nationalise you again after prep., if you like."

"Don't be so ridiculous, Glyn," exclaimed Skimpole, blinking in astonishment. "However, it really does not matter to the world a very great deal how ridiculous you are, because you are degenerate in mind if not in body. I have a note for you, Noble."

"Hand it over, kid."

"Dear me, but I fear I have mislaid it. Did you see where I laid the note I had for Noble, Dane?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's that on the floor, young ass?"

"Ah, yes, that is the note. Read it carefully, Noble—read it very carefully."

For an instant the young Australian's mind reverted to the curious presents he and the others had received by the four o'clock post, so he took the note, then he led the way down the passage at full speed.

It was a question now whether they would be able to slip into their places for preparation without incurring the wrath of the master on duty for lateness.

They just managed it, however, and with a gasp of relief Clifton Dane dug Noble in the ribs.

"What's the note about, Kangaroo?"

"Anything to do with the Sefton wheeze?"

"Something to do with Skimmy's insanity, I expect," grinned the Cornstalk. "My hat!"

"What's up?"

"My aunt!"

"Ass! What's up, Kangaroo? Does Skimmy know anything about the Sefton rag—phew!"

Harry Noble had flattened the note out on the desk before him, and his two chums were leaning across. All could read Skimpole's message quite distinctly.

"Warning! A great change is about to take place in St. James' College; the long waited-for event is about to take place. To-morrow!"

That was all; and it was worded so very much unlike Skimpole's usual style that Cornstalk & Co. looked at it in amazement.

"My hat! Skimmy has just gone over the limit this time, kid."

"The burbling young ass!"

"Warning—The event—What on earth can the frabjous young ass mean?"

"Blest if I know!"

Glyn picked up the note suspiciously, and turned it over and over.

Skimpole was, as he often informed them, a sincere Socialist. He firmly believed that he had a perfect right to use any other fellow's belongings if he wished, just the same as he would have been perfectly willing to let another fellow use his. But Skimpole's belongings were few.

Glyn growled.

His belongings were many, and of a nature which appealed to Skimpole. Bernard Glyn had suffered a good deal in the past from Skimpole's perfectly sincere nationalisation of property.

"The young ass!" muttered the junior from Liverpool.

"We haven't nationalized him enough, that's what it is."

"What's he mean by the event, kids?"

"Blest if I know, and blest if I care!" said Glyn under his breath. "The door was locked securely, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Good! Then the event can happen when it wants to. I don't care what Skimpole does so long as he doesn't get near that new lot of insulated wire. Skimpole has been dead nuts on my insulated wire lately."

Harry Noble grinned.

"Oh, Skimmy's a bird," he whispered. "Pass the note along to Tom Merry, Dane, and tell him to let Blake & Co. see it afterwards."

"Right-ho! Look out!"

"What's the matter?"

"Cave!"

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was looking their way.

CHAPTER 7.

Skimpole Warns Arthur Augustus.

"WAKE up, ass!"

"Rouse yourself, Gussy, or——"

"Wetiah from my bedside, you wottahs! I wufuse to wouse myself. It isn't nearly time to get up. G-r-r-r!"

"Of all the burbling young asses——"

"He'll get gated for being late, and won't be able to come with us to Sefton this afternoon," exclaimed Digby. "Shall we cold pig him?"

"Yes, that's the game!"

"Gather round, you chaps; we're going to cold pig Gussy."

"Gussy's going to be cold pigged, you chaps!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus sat up in bed with a start.

"I wufuse to submit to the cold pig, Blake!"

"Get up, then."

"I wufuse to get up. It isn't nearly time to wise yet, and as we have a long cycle wide to Sefton—— Go away, you howwid wuffian, Digby!"

"Are you going to tumble out?" demanded Digby, holding a well-soaked sponge aloft. "Are you going to tumble out, kid?"

"I wufuse to tumble out. It isn't nearly time to wise yet, and as we have a long wide—— Go away, you howwid wottah! Wetiah instantly, or I shall have no othah course but to administah a feahful thwashin'——"

"For the third and last time, are you going to tumble out?"

"I wufuse—— Wow, you wottah! You uttah wuffianly outsidah, Digby! O-oh!"

Digby had thrown the sponge. It had caught Arthur Augustus between the neck of his pyjamas and his chin, and the cold water was trickling down his chest.

He was out of bed in a flash.

"You weckless duffah, Digby!" he gasped. "You uttah w'etch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus found his monocle, and glared at Jack Blake.

"I wegwet to say, deah boy, that your laughtah leaves me no othah course but to administah a feahful thwashin' all wound. I shall have to thwash Digby first."

And Arthur Augustus rolled back the cuffs of his pyjamas in business-like fashion. He looked round aggressively.

"I must wequest you to defend yourself, Digby. It is a mattah of personal dig, with me, and—— Bai Jove!"

Digby was not where Arthur Augustus thought he was. In fact, Digby was not to be seen at all.

"Bai Jove, has the young wottah wun away?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause for wibald laughtah, Hewwies. Digby has shown the white feathah, and has wun away——"

"My hat!"

"Hasn't he wun away, then? Is he undah the bed, deah boys?"

Arthur Augustus glanced under the long line of beds, then stared loftily at Jack Blake.

Jack was chuckling loudly.

"He has escaped you, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah; but only for the time bein', deah boy. I shall administah a feahful thwashin' when we meet latah. I considah you are all w'etched wottahs!"

And Arthur Augustus turned to the dressing-table. He glanced at his watch, and uttered an exclamation.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's up now, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove! It's awfully late, deah boys, and I wegwet to say I have some vewy wotten Fwench to pwepare."

"Oh, Gussy, you're a back-sluder!"

"I wufuse to be chawaetahwised as a back-slidah. As a mattah of fact, I hadn't time to do the Fwench last evenin', and so I had to let the mattah stand ovah to this mornin'. Blake, I wegard it as anythin' but fwiedly of you not to have woused me befoah this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In fact, I considah——great Scott!"

Jack Blake chuckled, as he struggled with a refractory collar-stud.

"What's happened now, ass?"

"I wufuse to be chawaetahwised as—in that wough and weady mannah, Blake. Howevah, I have just wead Skimmy's lettah to Kangawoo, and I considah it remarkably funny."

"Didn't you read it last night, kid?"

"No, I hadn't time, deah boy. Ha, ha, ha! I wondah what the uttah duffah means by the event."

"Perhaps he has invented a new pattern for neckties, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus shuddered. He didn't like to think of a necktie that could be invented by the brainy man of the Shell.

"No, I hardly think it can be weally an important mattah, deah boy!" he exclaimed. "I wegwet to say I shall have to dwess in a vewy great hurwy, because I haven't pwepared my Fwench. Howevah, I can wetiah to the dorm, again aftah bwekkah and complete my toilet. Bai Jove, how the time flies, deah boys!"

"Original remark by Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah! Most of my womarks are owwiginal when you come to think them ovah. Bai Jove, I shall have to hurwy at great speed."

Never in his life had the swell of St. Jim's dressed so quickly. He was ready to leave the room a few minutes before Jack Blake, in fact, although Blake had some minutes' start.

He hurried for the door.

"Pway excuse my leavin' you, deah boys, but——"

"Don't you want a waistcoat, young ass?"

"I must wequest you not to address me in that extwemely wough mannah, Hewwies. No, I do not require a waistcoat, thanks, deah boy, because I intend wearin' a fancy one. I have several in the studay."

"Several hundreds, you mean," grinned Jack Blake. "Never saw such a young ass for waistcoats."

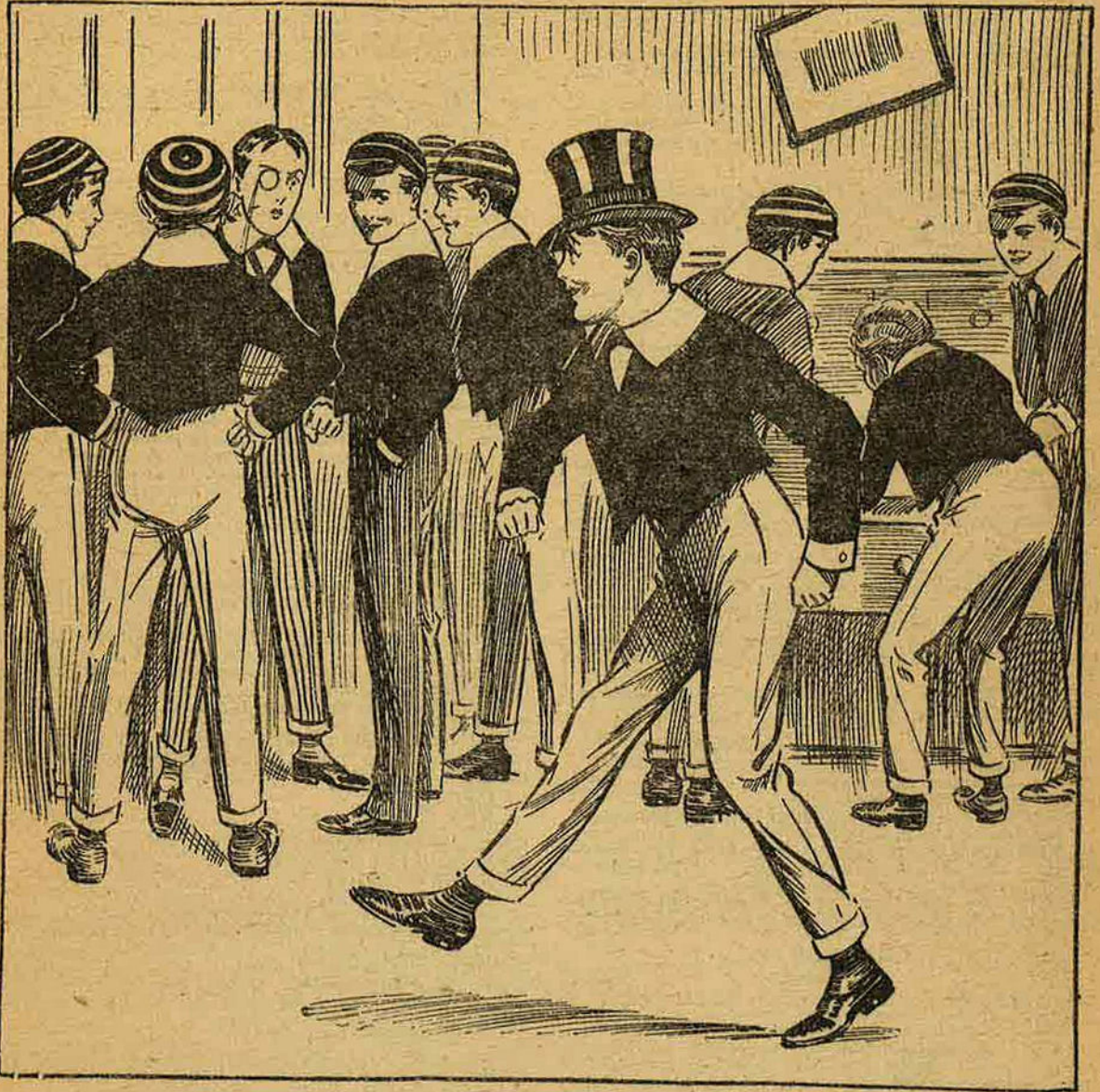
ANSWERS

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"Dudlay, you uttah young wascal, put that toppah down, or I shall give you a feahful thwashin'!"
exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in tones of anguish.

"Yaas, I twust I always pay pwopah wespsect to my attiah," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I considah it one of my most pwessin' dutie. See you latah, deah boys."

And the swell of St. Jim's hurried from the dormitory. He made his way down towards the study at great speed, but he was not thinking of the French he had to do.

To Gussy's way of thinking a far greater problem had to be solved.

"I weally don't know which waistcoat to weah, bai Jove!" he mused thoughtfully. "There is that wed one with cweam spots and gwecn stwipes, which is vevy neat, and then again—bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus started violently.

A hand had been laid heavily on his shoulder from behind.

"D'Arcy—it is D'Arcy, is it not?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy; but I must wequest you not to startle me in that wotten mannah. I am all in a fluttah."

"Have you had notice of the mass meeting yet?"

Arthur Augustus recovered slightly from his flutter and viewed the speaker doubtfully through his monocle.

"No, Skimmay, deah boy, I wegwet to say I have not. As a mattah of fact, I have only just wisen, and am in wathah a hurwy. Powhahs at some othah time—"

"The mass meeting takes place this afternoon at three o'clock in the gymnasium," went on Skimpole, as if he were construing from Casar. "I trust you will be present—"

"Bai Jove! Impos., deah boy—"

"Nothing is impossible. At least, you can prove nothing impossible, because it is impos-ible to prove anything except your own existence. I have often pointed out that very simple fact to you, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! Only I am in a feahful hurwy now, as I neglected to pwepare my Fwench, and I wathah think the Fwench mastah will be wuffed—"

"Nonsense! All French mas'ters are nationalised—I mean: the tuition of French is nationalised. At three o'clock punctually."

"Impos.—or wathah, as you pwefer it, deah boy, it is impwacticable that I can attend the mass meetin', because I am cyclin' to Sefton on a vevy important mattah."

"I request you to attend, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, wathah; but I am sowwy to say that I shall have to wefuss your wequest."

"As a sincere Socialist, I request you to attend, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, wathah, I undahstand your positih, but—"

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"GLYN'S GREAT WHEEZE!"

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By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"And as a sincere Socialist I have a perfect right to request you to attend."

"Gwated, deah boy. When one considahs the way you look at things; but as I am cyclin' ovah to Sefton on a vevy important biznay, I wgwet to say—"

"No refusal can be accepted. It is for the common good that you attend the mass meeting. I wish to use you as an object in my discourse on the degeneracy of the upper classes, so-called upper classes—"

"Bai Jove!"

"In the eyes of the world—the world of yesterday, I might say," went on Skimpole, with much excitement, "no one in the school is as well born as you. Therefore, no one is as depraved. You follow my reasoning?"

"Gwate Scott!"

"Then I can expect you?"

"Undah any othah circs. I would attend with pleasure, deah boy, in spite of your wathah wough and weady mannah of speakin' of my respected family."

"Your pater, Lord Eastwood, is merely the product of a corrupt system. As an individual, I rather admire Lord Eastwood, and if you would point out to him that he is not really to blame—"

"Gwate Scott! I must wufuse to point out any such wotten thing to my patah. I wufuse to considah such diswepsect to one's eldahs."

"Later on, when you come to understand these matters better—"

"I twust I shall novah be diswepsectful to my eldahs, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, in horror. "It would be impos. for me—"

"Still, that does not matter," went on Skimpole. "I shall expect to see you at three o'clock."

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"You will miss a great chance of learning once and for all the great truths of Socialism, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, wathah! And that is a mattah foah much wgwet. Howevah, I am afwaid it cannot be helped. At any othah time—"

"There will not be another time," said Skimpole mystically. "The time has come."

"Bai Jove!"

"The event is about to take place—has taken place!"

"Gwate Scott!"

"Yes—but I must leave you now."

And Skimpole hurried away.

Arthur Augustus stood looking after him in astonishment.

"Bai Jove! I wathah think Skimmy gets wildah evewy day," the swell of St. Jim's mused. "Howevah, I must wotiah to the studay and wpreare my Fwench. I twust Blake and the othahs will wfwain fwom intewwuptin' me."

But, in spite of his wish, Arthur Augustus was to be disturbed before his French was finished in more ways than one.

CHAPTER 8.

The Event.

"HA, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy minor chuckled loudly.

"So this is the giddy event, is it, Skimmy?"

"Yes," said Skimpole simply, "the event for which St. Jim's—I may even say the world—has been looking. For many months my book has been growing, and now I have decided to publish as much as is done—"

"My aunt! Isn't all of it here, kid?"

"Certainly not, Gibson. Less than one-tenth."

"My only Aunt Jane!"

The staunch chums of the Third—D'Arcy minor, Arthur Augustus' younger brother, Curly Gibson, and Jameson—stared at a huge pile of half-written, half-typed manuscript on the reading-table of the Third Form common-room.

As far as Wally D'Arcy could judge, there must have been as much copy as would have gone to make a long novel, and it looked a fearful amount of manuscript.

"Less than one-tenth," repeated Skimpole, "considerably less than one-tenth."

The Third Form fags chuckled. About twenty of them were present, and the spirit of mischief was in the eyes of all.

D'Arcy minor became serious again.

"What are you going to do with this little lot, Skimmy?"

"Do with it?"

"Tear it up, and have a decent paper-chase?"

"Good gracious! D'Arcy minor—"

"What's it for, then?"

"To be read. I expect everyone of you to read every word."

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"Burn it, you mean, Skimmy, not read it."

"Every word, Gibson."

"I don't think."

D'Arcy minor grinned and winked solemnly.

"Great snakes, Skimmy! You aren't expecting much, are you? However, we'll glance at the piffle—"

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"Dear me, D'Arcy minor, what did you say?"

"We'll just have a look at the bosh—"

"Good gracious, D'Arcy minor, I fail to follow the drift of your remarks!"

"I mean, we'll just have a peep at the bunkum, if we can find time," grinned Wally. "But to get on with the washing, Skimmy, we've talked it all over, and have decided to give Socialism a thorough trial."

"Good!"

"We are going to carry the thing through properly."

"Excellent!"

"And we are going to start at once," said Wally seriously. Skimpole's eyes sparkled with enthusiasm. In his long search among the Fourth and Shell Form-fellows he had failed to find juniors who really believed in him.

Now it seemed that the whole Form were ready, even eager to receive his doctrine.

"This is very creditable of you, D'Arcy minor," the amateur Socialist exclaimed, "very creditable indeed. I should, of course, have preferred to convert the Sixth Form—"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"What is the matter, D'Arcy minor?"

"The Sixth! Ha, ha, ha! Fire ahead, kid!"

"Dear me, you appear rather incoherent this morning, D'Arcy minor," said Skimpole, looking puzzled. "Still, as I was saying, I should have preferred to have converted the Sixth Form, but that will have to come later. I will now instruct you all in the great truths underlying the principle of a universal brotherhood of man which is so ably—I mean, which is so clearly stated in my book as far as it is written. First of all—"

"You chaps fit?"

"Right-ho!"

"Better get a move on then, Jameson," said Wally. "We haven't got much time for the rag—for the experiment in Socialism."

Skimpole glanced from one Third-Former to another in blank astonishment. Not one of them was even listening to him. Skimpole blinked for a moment or two, then seized Wally by the top button of his waistcoat.

"Please pay attention to me, D'Arcy minor," he exclaimed.

"First of all—"

"We'd better glue together in case the old fogies cut up rough," said Wally. "They like to think they're top dogs and inclined to yap—"

"D'Arcy minor—"

"Hallo, Skimmy."

"Dear me—"

"You still here, Skimmy?"

"Of course I am still here, in fact—"

Curly Gibson grinned.

"He's still here, Wally; Skimpole is still here."

The twenty fags of the Third turned and stared at the brainy man of the Shell fixedly. Skimpole blinked back at them.

"Ah, I think I understand," he said, after a moment or two of thought. "You wish to be alone with my book, to study the great question for yourselves. Do not interrupt; I understand. I shall expect you all at the great mass meeting in the gymnasium this afternoon at three o'clock—"

"Sorry, Skimmy, but—"

"The whole school will be there," went on Skimpole, too excited to notice the interruption. "I am confident we shall have to hold an overflow meeting in the stables—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Even masters will be there. I myself intend asking Mr. Linton and Mr. Lathom, and I have hopes of Dr. Holmes. Dear me, isn't that Tom Merry in the quadrangle? I must request Tom Merry's presence at the great mass meeting."

The Third-Formers watched Skimpole disappear in amazement. Then Wally began to chuckle.

"My only Aunt Jane, he's gone dotty at last."

"Fairly off his rocker."

"Look at his giddy book, kids," grinned Wally. "Take care of it, though. He thinks a lot of the bosh and he's a decent old ass. Shove it in that desk, Curly."

"I thought we were going to glance at it, kid?"

Wally chuckled.

"So we have. I didn't say whether we were going to glance at the outside or the inside, did I, kid? The outside is good enough for me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now to get on with the washing," went on Wally, with his usual briskness. "We've promised ourselves to take the old fogies down a peg often enough, and the time's arrived."

"Rather!"

"Get a move on then, Wally."

"Don't waste the time jawing; get on with the giddy washing."

"Right-ho!"

It was obvious from the few words they had spoken that what was to happen had been carefully planned out, and it was also

obvious that the great theory of Socialism had not been entered upon with the completeness it deserved.

The fags of the Third were hardly of the age to discuss social questions, a fact Skimpole had lost sight of in his enthusiasm.

But Skimpole was more than satisfied with his progress during the last few days in his attempt to convert the Third, and the reception of his book had pleased him immensely.

As the clumps of the Third form were also pleased, it was all a matter for mutual congratulation.

Wally led the way along the corridor with a chuckle.

CHAPTER 9.

Arthur Augustus is put in a Flutter.

"BAI JOVE!"

Arthur Augustus sighed and turned to his French dictionary again.

"I considah it weally wotten of the Fwench to have iwweegulah verbs in the language," he mused. "I wondah what the pwsent impewative of—Hallo, deah boy!"

A sounding tap on the door had interrupted his train of thought.

"Open the door, ass."

"Weally, deah boy, I must wequest you not to address me in that extremly wude mannah, whoevah you are—"

"Open the door, kid."

"But I am bizay; as a mattah of fact I am vevy bizay indeed—"

"That doesn't matter. Open the door."

"But I wegwet to say that it does mattah, deah boy. I am doin' my Fwench, and—"

"Are you going to open this giddy door?"

"Yaas, certainly, deah boy, if you wegwet it open," exclaimed Arthur Augustus obligingly. "Howevah, I shall have to wequest you to wetiah wathah wapidly—"

"We won't keep you two minutes, kid."

"Honour bwight?"

"Yes, rather."

"Wight-ho, deah boy."

And Arthur Augustus unlocked the door. The next moment he uttered a gasp of surprise.

Quite twenty Third-Formers were crowding together in the passage outside the door.

"Gweat Scott! What has happened, deah boys?"

"Nothing, Gus," grinned Wally, "but something nearly did."

"Bai Jove—"

"Yes, old Selby is on the prowl."

Arthur Augustus viewed his younger brother with displeasure. "If you are wefewwin' to your Form mastah, Mr. Selbay, I wegwet to say that you are not showin' pwopah wewspect, Wally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus."

"I wepeat, you are not showin' pwopah wewspect to your eldahs. And there is anothah mattah, Wally; I wegwet to have to inform you that you have some inkmarks on your collah."

"Good!"

"Weally, Wally—Bai Jove, you can't all come in heah, deah boys. There isn't woom and I am feshfully bizay—"

"Come in, you chaps."

"Weally, Wally, as your eldah bwothah—"

"Ring off, Gussy."

"I wefuse to wing off! Gweat Scott, wetiah instantly; ewevy one of you!"

Wally grinned.

"We have a perfect right in here, as much right as you have."

"Gweat Scott!"

"Yes, we have, Skimmy says so."

"Yaas, wathah, but then I considah Skimmay an uttah duffah

in these mattahs—bai Jove, I must wequest you to leave that cupboard door shut, Gibson."

"Right-ho—when I've got what I want from it."

"Gweat Scott—Gibson, you howwid little wagamuffin'—Gibson—"

Arthur Augustus gasped in horror. Gibson, his fingers not as free from ink as they might have been, had seized the waistcoat Arthur Augustus contemplated wearing that very morning.

He was even rolling it up and tucking it under his arm.

"Gweat Scott, I shall administrah a feshful thwashin', you young wottah," gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "Pwvay let me pass, Jameson; pwvay let me pass instantly."

But Jameson did not acquiesce. He could not have done so even if he had wished to.

The press of twenty active young Third-Formers in Study No. 6 meant that Arthur Augustus was jammed up against the wall and looked like having to stay there.

To his utter horror he saw Dudley grasp his new silk hat, the silk hat he sometimes placed on the table before him just to admire the wonderful gloss.

"Dudlay, you uttah young wascal, put my toppah down. Put my toppah down or I shall have to thwash you! Bai Jove, Gibson, if you dare to touch my collah box—"

"The kids have a perfect right to anything you have if they want them, Gus."

"You uttah young duffah—"

"Skimmy said so. Didn't Skimmy say we had a perfect right to Gussy's giddy wardrobe if we wanted it?"

"Rather!"

"There you are, Gus; it's quite all right—"

"I wefuse to considah it quite all wight. As a mattah of fact I wecognise it as all w'ong—"

"We have Skimmy's word for it, kid."

"Yaas, but I considah Skimmy a wavin' lunatic, and I considah— Put my necktie down, Jameson; put my neckties down instantly—"

Wally chuckled.

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus, we've a perfect right to the things—"

"You weekless young wascals—"

"That's all right, Gus. Shove the things in that footer bag, Curly."

"It's Jack Blake's."

"Good! Tell Blake we had need of his footer bag, Gus. He'll understand."

"Gweat Scott, I shall administrah a feshful thwashin' to ewevy one of you. I shall—bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus was gasping. He struggled to get near his wardrobe, but the press was too much for him. There was nothing he could do but stand jammed against the wall, gasping with amazed indignation.

The whole affair only took a few seconds, too, so the swell of St. Jim's had barely time to grasp the situation. Wally did not mean him to.

"That's enough, you chaps," he said briskly. "Out you tumble!"

"Stop!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Stop instantly—"

"No time, Gus."

"As your eldah bwothah, I ordah you to stop—"

"Impossible! The two minutes are nearly up."

"I wefuse to admit that it is impos—Stop, Wally; stop instantly while I administrah a feshful thwashin'—"

"I don't think!"

Arthur Augustus made a wild grab at the nearest fag and missed him. The next instant there was a general stampede from the study.

"Stop! Stop, you uttah young wascals—"

"Run for it, kids."

"Wally—Wally, as your eldah bwothah—"

"Look out for old Selby—my aunt!"

Arthur Augustus became flustered. He made a grab for one fag and then another, and so missed capturing any of them. Then he stumbled over a chair.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus went to the floor with a bump. When he scrambled up again the last of the fags was disappearing through the doorway.

"Gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Gweat Scott!" He dashed to the doorway then stopped. There was not a single Third-Former to be seen.

Arthur Augustus gasped and turned to look at Study No. 6. The room was dismantled.

Cupboards had been opened, the table-cloth was gone, and the fireside seat—the private property of Arthur Augustus—was not to be seen.

The swell of St. Jim's choked indignantly.

"A waid; a waid by Third-Formers, and they have collahed all our beastly pwoperty."

Arthur Augustus was quite overcome. He sat down and stared round the room blankly. A chuckle

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"GLYN'S GREAT WHEEZE!"

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD

came from the passage, but Arthur Augustus did not hear it. Then, presently, an exclamation rang out.

"My hat!"

Arthur Augustus started.

Standing in the doorway was Jack Blake, and behind him Herries and Digby. The amazement on their faces concealed every other expression.

CHAPTER 10. The Second Raid.

"MY—my hat!" Jack Blake gasped. Herries suddenly rushed into the room.

"Where's Towser's dog-collar? What have you done with Towser's collar, Gussy?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"What have you done with it, ass?"

"Weally, Howwies, I haven't seen Towsah's collah," began Arthur Augustus faintly. "I am all in a fluttah—"

"And where's my cricket bat I was ciling up for the season?"

"Weally, Digbay, I have no ideah where youah ewicket bat is, Gweat Scott!"

Jack Blake glanced round the room astounded.

"My only aunt, what an earth have you been up to, Gussy?" he demanded wrathfully. "Look here, if you want to scrap with people you'll have to do it in the gym., not here."

"I wathah think I am not in the habit of sewappin' with people—"

"Then what has happened, ass?"

Jack Blake and Herries each seized one of Arthur Augustus' arms and shook him violently.

"What's happened, kid? Has there been a row?"

"Yaas, wathah—a wotten wow!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "In fact, there has been a waid—"

"My aunt, it looks as if there'd been half a dozen raids!"

"Was it Figgins & Co.?"

"No, deah boy."

"Cornstalk & Co.?"

"No, deah boy. Bai Jove, I am all in a fluttah!"

"Ass!"

"Tom Merry and his crew, then?" shouted Jack Blake. "My hat, if it was—"

"But it wasn't, deah boy. It was a waid—a waid of Third-Formahs."

"What?"

"Yaas, wh, ah! About twenty of them wushed in and removed our property. Gweat Scott, I am all in a fluttah!"

"Twenty Third-Form fags raided a Fourth Form study?"

Jack Blake gasped.

"Yaas, wathah! And they were led by my minah. I shall administah a feahful thwashin' to Wally. The young wascals have taken my waistcoats and my collahs and my neckties—"

"My hat, this willhave to be nipped in the bud, chaps!"

"Rather!"

"If once we let the fags goat about there'll be no stopping them," exclaimed Jack Blake seriously. "Come along, kids!"

The four pelted along the corridor, all thoughts of his unprepared French vanishing from Arthur Augustus' mind. He was too flustered to think clearly about anything now.

"It is a mattah of personal dig," he panted. "We have no otab course but to administah feahful thwashin's all woud. I twust you agreee with me, Blake, deah boy?"

"We'll slay the young beggars! My hat!"

"Gweat Scott, there is a wow somewhere!"

"Tom Merry's room, kid?"

"Yes, that's it, Dig. Something is going on in Tom Merry's den!" exclaimed Jack Blake, darting towards the Shell studies. "My aunt!"

The Fourth-Formers stopped dead.

The door of Tom Merry's study was open, and the spectacle which met their eyes was one to remember.

The Terrible Three were raging. And they had good cause; their neat little study was a wreck.

"It's Figgins—"

"Or that young rotter Blake."

"Yes, the Study No. 6 kids, most likely."

Jack Blake took a couple of steps into the room.

"Choor-ho, Tom Merry!" he said coolly. "Been having a dust up to get an appetite for brekker?"

Tom Merry wheeled round, a warlike expression on his handsome face.

"If this is your doing, Blake, my son—"

"Ring off!" said Jack Blake quickly. "We haven't had anything to do with this, chaps."

"No, wathah not, deah boy. The affair suppwises us as much as it does you. I wathah think I know who has done it, though."

"You do?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Was it Figgins & Co.?"

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"No, deah boy. Figgay has had nothing to do with the mattah. In fact, there has been a waid—"

"Ass!"

Arthur Augustus stared loftily at the Terrible Three.

"I wegwet to say you are not payin' pwopah respect to a visitor to your studay, deah boys. Howevah, I wecognise that you are wathah wuffed, and so I will ovahlock the mattah. There has been a waid of Third-Formahs—"

"A what of which?"

"A waid of Third-Formahs, deah boy."

"My only aunt!"

"What's the young burbler cackling about, Blake?"

"Blessed if I know, really!" returned the chief of Study No. 6. "Our studay is wrecked, and Gussy says a whole army of fags did it before his eyes."

"My hat!"

"Yaas, wathah! And it appeals to me the same thing has happened in this woom."

"Phew!"

Tom Merry looked at Jack Blake thoughtfully. What was to be done?

"Yaas, I considah myself the question is what is to be done, deah boys. I pwopose we wethah to the Third Form woom and administah feahful thwashin's all woud."

"We shall have to look into it, Blake."

Jack nodded.

"Of course."

"Is there time to slay the young sweeps before brekker?"

Manners glanced at his watch.

"Might just do it."

"Yaas, wathah! As a mattah of fact, we have plenty of time, deah boys. I wathah think it will not take me long to administah feahful thwashin's to Third-Formahs. I twust I shall not lose my tomph, deah boys."

"Come on!" said Jack Blake briefly.

And the seven juniors hurried out into the passage, determined and warlike expressions in their eyes.

CHAPTER 11.

A Surprise for Tom Merry & Co.

"THERE they are, chaps!"

"There are the young rotters!"

"New House! New House!"

The Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6 started.

"Bai Jove!"

All seven turned round. Careering towards them along the corridor were Figgins & Co.

"Gweat Scott, they seem all in a fluttah, deah boys!"

"There they are!"

"New House! New House!"

"Bump the cheeky bouncers."

"What do you mean by it, you sweeps?" panted Kerr, the Scots chum of Figgins & Co. "What do you mean by it, eh?"

Tom Merry smiled blandly.

"Off your rocker, Kerr?"

"Dotty?" inquired Jack Blake kindly.

"Gweat Scott, I believe they have had their studay w'eked, deah boys! Figgay, have you had your studay w'eked?"

"Yes; and we're going to wreck the sweeps who did it!" shouted the chief of the New House leaders. "Bump them! Bump them, chaps!"

Figgins was unusually excited. His party numbered three, and the supposed enemy totalled seven.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"I shouldn't try bumping, kid—it might hurt."

"Yaas, wathah; and undah the cires, I should wufuse to be bumped. Weally, Figgay, if you will wemain calm foah s short time, I will explain. The Third-Formahs have w'eked your studay, deah boy—"

"Third-Formers!"

"My aunt, here comes Cornstalk & Co.!"

"Gweat Scott! They look as wuffed as Figgay & Co., deah boys."

Cornstalk & Co. dashed up, determination and war in their eyes.

"What have you done with my insulated copper wire?" roared Glyn. "Gussy, is it you?"

"Bai Jove, weally, Glyn deah boy, I wathah think I am not in the habit of touchin' your insulated coppah wiah. As a mattah of fact, your woom has been w'eked by Third-Formahs, just like ours has."

"My aunt, has your studay been wrecked?"

"Yaas, wathah! Not to say waided—"

"And ours too!"

"Yours, Tom Merry?"

"I should say so," growled the hero of the Shell. "Nothing has been broken, so I thought it was a rag on the part of some of you young asses. But a fearful lot of things have been taken."

"Yaas, wathah! And it is the same with Studay No. 6.

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"They have even dared to wemove my collahs and my waistcoats, not to say my neckties."

"My only aunt!"

The fellows stared at one another. Study raids were by no means unknown at St. Jim's, but wholesale affairs like this seemed to be something which wanted grasping.

"Who on earth can have done it?"

"As I have already wemarked, Third-Formahs, deah boy, led by my minah."

"Third-Formers?"

"Yaas, wathah, Kangawoo! And we are now goin' to their woom to administah feahful thwashin's all woukd."

The Cornstalk squared his shoulders.

"Good biz! I'm with you."

"And so am I," said Bernard Glyn grimly. "I want my insulated wire."

"Yaas, wathah! And my collahs, and my—"

"Hang your collars! It's my camera I'm thinking of."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Yes, really, ass—"

"Ring off, you two. Let's get on with it," exclaimed Tom Merry, starting to run. "My aunt, the fags will have to be bumped, and no mistake."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegwet to say I feah my yongah bwothah is the wing-leadah."

"We'll bump him first."

"Yaas, wathah! And aftahwards I shall administah a feahful thwashin'. I shall wegwet havin' to do so, but he has weally left me no othah wesource. The young wascal has wemoved my collahs—"

"Come on, kids!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Dry up, ass!" returned Tom Merry, leading the way at a good pace. "I shouldn't be surprisid if this is Skimmey's idea in the first place—I mean the idea about giving his Socialism a trial."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! I distinctly heard my minah wemark—"

"I don't care what you heard your minor remark, Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And I don't care what you heard anyone remark," went on the Shell fellow. "I know the fags and the young sweeps are doing this for a rag."

"Gweat Scott, I nevah thought of that!"

"No, you wouldn't Gussy, but it's a fact all the same."

"Bai Jove, I shouldn't woudah—"

"Well, stop cackling as well."

"Weally, Mewwy—"

"Dry up, you chaps!" whispered Jack Blake. "They'll hear us."

"Yes, make less row. We'll pounce on them."

"Wathah, deah boys! And administah feahful thwashin's all woukd."

"Ring off, Gussy."

"Bai Jove, Hewwies, I must wequest you not to address me. S-sh, deah boys! Wing off, because we are neahin' the Third Form woom."

The juniors grinned a little. Arthur Augustus had been making more noise than all of them put together, but they said nothing.

Tom Merry led the way, with a stealthy tread, to the Third Form common-room.

"It's Gussy's wardrobe to an ole clo' shop that they are all inside," he whispered. "They'll think they are safe together."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that wathah a good ideah, deah boy!"

"Ass!"

Arthur Augustus was about to remonstrate on Tom Merry's method of addressing him, when the Shell fellow threw open the door.

"At them, chaps!"

"Now's the time!"

"On the ball, deah boys!"

It was those at the back of the little crowd who were giving the advice, the members of the van having stopped in dead silence.

"My only Aunt Maria!"

"What's up, Tom Merry?"

"Go for them, ass!"

"Bai Jove!—Gweat Scott!"

Tom Merry strode into the room, followed by the chums of Study No. 6. There was not a single fag to be seen there.

But that was not surprising the juniors as much as what was to be seen there. On the table was the most heterogeneous pile of articles ever seen except on the last day of the term in the dormitories.

There were many collars, more waistcoats, cameras, a dog-collar, and a whole crowd of books. It reminded them of an auction room on a small scale.

Jack Blake gasped aloud.

"Look there, you chaps!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Of all the cheek—of all the nerve! My hat!"

On a chair before the table was a large cardboard placard. A message had been printed on it with a black crayon, and Tom Merry read the words aloud.

"To the old Fogies of the Fourth and Shell Forms:

"The rubbish on the table can be taken back by the owners, as it is useless to the Third Form."

That was all, but it staggered the juniors. They stood staring at their belongings in blank amazement.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, after a time.

"I wathah think this exceeds the limit, deah boys."

"Did you say exceeds, dummy?" shouted Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy; and I must say you supwise me in not agweein'. As a mattah of fact, I almost wegard the action of the Third-Formahs as the wotten limit."

Tom Merry did not answer, but he went to the table instead, and seized what belonged to him. Jack Blake and the others did the same.

"Bai Jove! be careful with my collahs, deah boy!"

"Hang your collars!"

"I must wefuse to. Pway don't be so widiculous, Hewwies. Hooway! there isn't a mark on any of my collahs, deah boys; and the young wothahs have w'apped my neckties up in papah, bai Jove!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, they've taken care of our stuff all right."

"Yaas, wathah! I wecognise that, but it does not alah the mattah, deah boy. I shall administah a feahful thwashin' to my minah, in spite of my neckties bein' w'apped up in papah."

Jack Blake nodded.

"They've taken care not to hurt our things, and we'll take care not to hurt them when we bump 'em."

"I woudah where the young boundahs can be, though, deah boy?"

"We'll soon find them, kid. Are you chaps fit?"

"Yes."

"Rather!"

"Run for it, then," returned Jack Blake grimly. "We've still got a quarter of an hour. I propose we bundle our things in our rooms, and slip down to the gym. Ten to one we shall find the kids there."

"Right-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah! In fact, I was about to ppropose that myself. I considah it a wippin' ideah."

"Come on, then!"

And the thirteen juniors hurried from the Third Form common room.

"This way, chaps!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus and Tom Merry stopped. Coming directly towards them was Mr. Selby, the Third-Form master. Mr. Selby had never quite forgiven Arthur Augustus for not having given his brother's name when Wally had upset the tar over his Form-master. Mr. Selby was built a little that way. He found it very difficult to forgive things.

"Is—is that you, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, sir."

"What—what have you in your arms?"

"My collahs, sir, and some waistcoats, not to say neckties."

Mr. Selby frowned.

"Well, I object to you Fourth Form and Shell boys wandering about near Third Form quarters," he exclaimed. "Go to your separate rooms at once, and stay there until the bell is rung. You each have a hundred lines to write; they must be shown up before you leave the college this afternoon."

Mr. Selby turned on his heel, and the thirteen continued their way glumly.

"A hundred lines! Bother! It'll take an age even with two ribs in one penholder."

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove! I considah this wotten in the extreme deah—"

"Ring off!" shouted Tom Merry. "What's to be done about the fags, Blake?"

"Blest if I know!"

Figgins growled.

"I don't see that anything can be done about them now," he said. "We have to retire to our rooms. The young sweeps are in the gym for a cert. It's all U.P."

"Yaas, wathah!"

They stood where they were for a moment or two, then Tom Merry grinned. They all turned and glared at Arthur Augustus.

"Pretty fine hash you've made of it, haven't you, ass?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Nice sort of shrieking lunatic you are, Gussy, and no mistake."

"Weally, Kangawoo—"

"Fine frabjous ass, you are, to be sure, Gussy."

"Weally, Digby, I fail to follow the dwit—"

"Well, go and follow Selby into a home instead, then!"

Clifton Dane turned away.

"Oh, I don't suppose the young ass can help it," he said. "You ought to get a collar and chain for him, Blake; he's always goating about at something. See you chaps at two-thirty, then?"

"If we get the lines done."

"We must get them done."

"Yaas, wathah! But wevertin' to your extremely widiculous observations—"

"Two-thirty, if it snows coke, kids!"

"Right-ho!"

And the fellows separated, to the amazement of Arthur Augustus. Jack Blake chuckled.

"Come on, ass!"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle in his right eye, and glared at the chief of Study No. 6 loftily through it.

"Weally, Blake, I have no othah wescource but to considah you as a lot of waggin' wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In fact, I wegah you in the light of outsiders of the first watah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if it weren't for Mr. Selby's ordahs to the contwaway, I should wescuse to accompany you into the studay," added the swell of St. Jim's in a raised voice. "Howevah, undah the cires, I must wescuest you not to address me in future."

And Arthur Augustus stalked on, followed by his grinning chums. All who knew one of the most popular fellows in the old school knew that Gussy's exasperation would be dead and forgotten in less than three minutes!

CHAPTER 12.

Detention.

"**B**AI JOVE! here comes Binks, deah boys." Jack Blake glanced up from his desk, and looked startled. Binks, the boots, seldom visited a classroom during class unless he brought an unpleasant message from the Head-master.

"My hat! what's happened now?"

"Have you been up to some of your old tricks, Gussy?"

"Weally, Hewwies, I wathah think I am not in the habit—"

"Silence! Yes, Binks?"

"A note from Mr. Selby, sir."

Jack Blake's alarm increased. If Mr. Selby had chosen his supper for the previous evening without due thought for the morrow, he would be suffering from indigestion to-day. That would mean his temper would not be so reliable as it might have been. Anything might happen when Mr. Selby's temper was uncertain.

"We are in for trouble," muttered Digby. "I'll wager anything—"

"Silence, please!" said Mr. Lathom, looking up from the note. "It appears that there was a disturbance in one of the passages this morning, Blake?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Lathom frowned.

"Then you have only yourselves to blame. Mr. Selby says that you four are to remain in detention until dinner whether your lines are written or not. You can go, Binks."

Jack Blake frowned.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he muttered. "Just for being near the Third-Form quarters with our arms full of raided articles!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it wotten in the extreme. None of the othah masters would incowase an impot. Aftah the occuwence, bai Jove! I wathah think I had bettah wemonstwate with Mr. Selbay."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Duffer, then; I'm sorry. This is rotten, Dig."

"But if I wemonstwate with Mr. Selbay—"

"You'll be gated for a month—exactly."

"On the contwaway, Hewwies—"

"Oh, ring off, ass! Those Third Form fags are having some luck."

Jack Blake nodded.

The chums of Study No. 6 had planned to capture the Third-Formers between dismissal and dinner, and now that plan was rendered impossible.

"There won't be time aftah dinnah to administah feahful thwashin's all wound, eithah!"

"Of course there won't!"

"No, wathah not. If we want to weturn to St. Jim's befoah the gates are locked we shall have to start divrectly aftah dinnah, bai Jove!"

"Yes, there won't be any time to waste if we want a good scout round Setton," growled Jack Blake. "Bother it all!"

"I wropose we wemonstwate with the Third-Formahs some othah day, deah boys."

"To-night, when we return, you mean?"

"Yaas, wathah. I considah that a wippin' ideah."

"That's settled, then?"

"Yaas, wathah; unless you considah a wemonstwatation to Mr. Selbay would wight mattahs."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake, I must wescuest you to wefwain from addressin'—"

"Howling, shrieking, raving lunatic, then!" grinned the chief of Study No. 6.

"Silence!" ordered Mr. Lathom, and the word was uttered in a tone which commanded obedience.

The dismissal-bell sounded soon afterwards, and it happened the detention was to be held in the Fourth Form classroom. The chums of Study No. 6 sat where they were, gloomily watching the others file past.

Jack Blake turned to his desk at last and pulled out some lined paper.

"Selby ought to be boiled in oil!"

"Yaas, wathah; or, as a mattah of fact, he ought to be wemonstwatated with! I weally think I had bettah wemonstwate with him, deah boys—"

"Sit down!"

"But it would not take me long. I feel certain that when I wemark, in a few words, that he has wathah exceeded—"

"Sit down, ass!"

"On the contwaway, Hewwies, deah boy, I am about to wise to my feet and leave the woom! Howevah, I shall not wemain away for a longah period than is necessary to wemonstwate thoroughly with Mr. Selby—"

"Are you going to sit down, dummy—hallo!"

"Bai Jove, here come the Towwible Thwec, deah boys—"

"And Cornstalk & Co."

"Not to mention Figgay and the othah New House fellows!"

"Cheer-ho, kids!"

The new-comers entered the room and sat down.

"Selby wants boiling in oil—"

"Heah, heah, deah boy! At least, Mr. Selbay ought to be wemonstwatated with. I have already offahed to wefwiah to his room, and—"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Jolly decent of you, Gussy, and I don't suppose you can help being a silly ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mowwy—"

"Oh, dry up and let's get the lines done! The fags will have to wait until to-night, Blake."

"That's what we thought."

Harry Noble and Tom Merry nodded. After all, it did not matter much.

The main thing was to settle the affair of the curious presents which had come from Setton. The smaller matter of Third-Formers could wait.

They all scribbled away at their lines, and they were finished by the time the gong for dinner sounded.

The thirteen slammed down their desks then and raced from the room. They glanced about them on their way downstairs, but there was not a Third-Former to be seen, and so they had to take their places.

Arthur Augustus dug Jack Blake in the ribs.

"Howevah, we have already awwanged to administah feahful thwashin's all wound when we do encountah them, so there is no need to wowwy—"

"Then what's the use of cackling about it, ass?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, I accept your apology, kid, only don't let it occur again!"

"Yaas, but, undah the cires, I should not think of apologisin'—"

"Gussy, if you're going to cackle, some soup will get upset over your togs."

The swell of St. Jim's shuddered, and there was silence as far as he was concerned for the remainder of the meal.

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The swell of St. Jim's stared round the room blankly. "Gweat Scott!" he gasped. "A waid! A waid by the Third-Formahs! And they have collahed all our beasty pwoerty!"

CHAPTER 13. The Start for Seston.

"MY hat, it's a ripping afternoon, anyway!" Jack Blake uttered the exclamation keenly. Dinner was over, and the chums of Study No. 6 had just come from their room where they had been changing into cycling clothes.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! I considah it a wippin' aithnahnoc myself—"

"Not a breath of wind—"

"No, wathah not—"

"And a stunning sun for the time of the year."

"Yaas, wathah! There's one mattah, though, deah boy—"

"What's that, Gussy?" grinned Herries, glancing back over his shoulder as he led the way across the sunlit quadrangle.

"You are sorry about Towser not being able to come with us?"

"On the contway I am vewy glad, deah boy! No, I was wefewewing to my necktie. Does it harmonise with my silk collah, deah boy?"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Hewwies, I must wequest you not to address

me in that weally wude mannah! Bai Jove, heah come the Tewwible Thwee—"

"And all the other kids! Cheer-ho, Tom Merry!"

"Cheer-ho, young Blake!"

"Yaas, wathah! Figgay, deah boy, do you considah my necitic harmonises with my silk collah—"

"Rather, kid."

"Weally, but you haven't looked, Figgay, deah boy—"

"No fear. I don't want to have a headache for the rest of the afternoon. My aunt, Blake, it'll be a ripping spin to Seston and no mistake!"

"Rather!"

"There won't be any dust on the roads to speak of after last night's rain."

"No, that's a fact!"

Tom Merry darted off towards the bicycle-shed just as Cornstalk & Co. came up.

"Let's get on with it! We'll take it in turn pacing."

"Yes, that's the idea," exclaimed Tom Merry, struggling to open the bicycle-shed.

"Yaas, wathah; I considah that is the ideah myself, deah boy! But about the mattah of my necktie and the silk

collah? Mannahs, I ask you, as one gentleman to another, do you considah they harmonise? Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stopped speaking and stared into the huge bicycle-shed instead. Tom Merry had the door open now, and was also staring into the dimly-lighted building.

"My hat!"

"What's the matter?"

"Gweat Scott, where are our bicycles, deah boys?"

As it happened the thirteen juniors kept their machines together, along one side of the building, and at the present moment there was only one bicycle there.

It was a tall, twenty-six-inch frame.

Figgins hurried up to it.

"My aunt, what have all you chaps been doing with your grids? Mine's the only one in the place——"

The fellows turned and stared at the long-legged leader of the New House juniors.

Figgins grinned.

"It's all right, kids," he said coolly. "I don't know anything about it."

"Gweat Scott——"

"Ring off, Gussy!"

"I refuse to wing off—look! Look, deah boys!"

The fellows who were standing in the doorway of the building looked across the grounds in blank amazement. A dozen juniors—Third-Formers they looked like in the distance—were wheeling bicycles towards the road.

"My hat!"

Tom Merry grasped the situation in an instant.

"They've got our grids, chaps; the Third-Form fags have sneaked our machines——"

Figgins gasped with astonishment, starting forward.

"That's it, Tom Merry. The young sweeps couldn't ride mine." Tom Merry nodded. There were not many juniors at St. Jim's who could have ridden Figgins's tall mount.

All the fellows raced across the grounds.

"Bai Jove, my minah is the wing-leadah——"

"At them, chaps!"

"Now we have them!"

But Jack Blake spoke too quickly. Before they were half-way across the grounds the fags of the Third Form caught sight of them. The twelve with the bicycles stopped, hesitated, then coolly laid the machines down on the ground and made off. The fags who were with them followed their example, and there were yells of laughter.

"Gweat Scott, they are laughing at us—Tom Mewwy, they are laughin' at us!"

The Shell fellow kept on grimly, and he and Figgins were the first to reach the machines. They stopped then and looked at one another hesitatingly.

What was to be done?

"Of course, we can follow the young sweeps up, and——"

"Administah feahful thwashin's all wound——"

"Ass! We can follow them up, but it'll waste a lot of the afternoon."

"Yaas, wathah; I nevah thought of that——"

"What's to be done, Tom Merry?"

The Shell fellow glanced along the reclining row of bicycles and shrugged his shoulders.

"We shall have to leave the young sweeps until this evening, I suppose."

"Yaas, wathah! That is the ideah, deah boys!"

Figgins nodded.

"It's the same wheeze over again, chaps. I don't believe the young rascals meant to go for a ride on your grids at all. They haven't even pumped up the tyres."

"Bai Jove, no, wathah not——"

"You think it was another wheeze, then, Figgy?"

"Yes. They got to hear that we were cycling this afternoon and took out the machines. Shouldn't wonder if they were hiding in those trees until we came along, and meant to be seen all the time."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, that's about it."

"Bai Jove; yaas, wathah! As a mattah of fact I was neahly valentin' about the feahful thwashin's we had awwanged to administah all wound, but, of course, that is now imposs. I considah I am responsible for the patah for my minah's upwinging, and so I shall cowweet him when we meet latah."

Figgins grinned.

"Yes, scalp the young sweep, Gussy!"

"I shall wemonstivate with him, and then I shall administah a feahful thwashin'. The mattah is entiahly settled now——"

"Well, you can ring off, then, can't you?"

"Weally, Blake, as I was in the middle of a wemark, I must refuse to wing off!"

"Hallo! Here comes Skinny again, chaps—Skinny!"

Skimpole stopped and raised his head. He had been pacing the grounds, his hands behind his back and a thoughtful expression on his bumpy forehead.

"Did you call to me, Merry?"

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"I did," said the hero of the Shell grimly. "I suppose this is more of your doing, ass?"

Skimpole thought for a moment or two, but he did not come near the thirteen.

"The Third Form had a perfect right to your bicycles, Merry, because they wanted them——"

"Then we have a perfect right to slay them, haven't we?"

"Dear me!"

Skimpole looked puzzled. On the spur of the moment he could not think of an argument with which to combat Tom Merry's contention. Tom Merry grinned.

"And, of course, we have a perfect right to slay Skinny if we want to."

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me——"

"Of course we have. He's nationalised for one thing, and if it's for the common good that he be slain, he cannot object."

"Good for you, Kangaroo!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, I wegard that as wemarkably funny, deah boy——"

"Dear me, if you will listen to me——"

"I don't think."

"We are going to slay you instead——"

"Good gracious!" gasped Skimpole. "I regret to say I shall have to leave you——"

"Right-ho!" answered Tom Merry genially. "See you tonight at the massacre, Skimmy?"

"At—at the what?"

"The massacre, kid. There's going to be a general sort of slaying of the Third Form, and we have decided to include you in the number. Exactly how you will be treated has not been settled yet, but we shall do the thing properly."

"Ha, ha, ha! Trust us."

"There won't be any half-measures about it, Skimmy."

"Dear me, but——"

"As Socialists we have a perfect right to do as we like," added Jack Blake loftily. "See you this evening, Skimmy."

And in a somewhat anxious frame of mind, the brainy man of the Shell watched the fellows wheel their machines back to the shed to get their bicycle-pumps.

In his heart Skimpole was not quite as satisfied with the Third Form's experiment in Socialism as he could have wished. For one thing, he had not been able to find a single fellow who had read more than the first page of his book, and for another he was beginning to have a suspicion that the fags were treating the whole thing in a somewhat frivolous manner.

"They—they almost appear to consider it a joke," thought the author of "Socialism: What It is, and Is Not." "Still, as time goes on, as the spirit of brotherhood spreads and is accepted by the Sixth Form and the masters, they will understand. It is only a matter of time."

Then Skimpole's mind reverted to the mystic words of the Fourth and Shell juniors. What was to happen that evening?

"I sincerely hope they don't mean anything when they say massacre!"

Then he glanced at his watch. It was after half-past two, so he made his way to the gymnasium. The great mass meeting over which he was to preside was to begin in less than half an hour.

CHAPTER 14.

Skimpole's Mass Meeting.

"HALLO, Skimpole!" Skimpole started, blinking thoughtfully at the junior who had accosted him.

"Is that you, Mellish?"

"Of course it is I, old man. Just having a stroll?"

"Dear me. Well, as a matter of fact, I was on my way to the gymnasium."

"To arrange about your meeting. May I come and help you?"

"Thank you, Mellish; I shall be pleased if you will."

Skimpole was conscious of a momentary surprise. It was not often Mellish, the cad of St. Jim's, showed much willingness to help others.

Still, the brainy man of the Shell was unsuspecting before all things, and he accepted Mellish's offer thankfully.

"There is not much I have to do, Mellish; just arrange a few chairs and seats for the seniors—of course, the great majority of the crowd will have to stand."

"My aunt!"

"Dear me, what did you say?"

"Nothing," hastily added Mellish. "I hope the meeting goes off well, old chap."

"Thank you."

"I sincerely hope it will go off," added the other junior, dropping into stride with Skimpole. "And I say, your book is an eyeopener, and no mistake."

"A—what, Mellish?"

"Ahem! I mean it's a jolly great work!"

"You've read it? Good! I am glad you have read it, Mellish, and I am glad you think it is sound."

"Sound isn't the word," murmured Mellish, who had not even seen the book. "I don't see how anyone can help being convinced by—by your giddy arguments—by your steady arguments, I mean."

Skimpole flushed with pleasure.

"You really think that, Mellish?"

"I do, old man," replied the cad of St. Jim's, with most unusual heartiness. "Those chapters you have devoted to the nationalisation of property are simply great."

"Ah!"

"I mean, it's so—so obvious that it would be to everyone's good."

"Yes, of course; that is what I have always contended."

"Exactly. You remember how you put it about money?"

Skimpole thought for a moment or two. Mellish watched him, but not in the least nervously. The brainy man of the Shell had talked so often about the scheme of his great work that Mellish had no difficulty in keeping the conversation going.

"You remember, you point out so clearly that money really belongs to no individual, that it must be common."

"Yes, yes; of course. You understand—"

"Perfectly. There can be no two sides to the question, put it which way you like. Hundreds of examples can be found."

"Yes, of course."

"For instance, say I was hard up, and you had money in your pocket—would it be fair?"

"Certainly not; but—"

"I should have a perfect right to ask you to lend me a shilling?"

"No, Mellish; that is where you are wrong. You would have a perfect right to demand a shilling from me."

"My only hat!"

"What did you say, Mellish?"

"Nothing," stammered the other junior. "You took my breath away a little, that is all. By Jove!"

"Is anything the matter?"

"Good gracious! I was just going to Dame Taggles to—to pay a small bill of a shilling, and I haven't got a penny in my pocket. I believe I have dropped a shilling somewhere."

"How annoying! Shall we go and search for it?"

"We should never find it," said Mellish, both hastily and truthfully. "Goodness knows where I have lost it. Ha, ha, ha! It looks as if I shall have to put Socialism to the test, old chap!"

Skimpole looked puzzled.

"I am afraid I do not follow the drift of your remark, Mellish."

"I mean, I am afraid I shall have to borrow a shilling from you, as one Socialist from another."

"A Socialist would not need to borrow," said Skimpole absently; "he would have a right to what he required, provided—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mellish, with an attempt at heartiness. "Then I shall have to demand a shilling from you, old man."

"Dear me!"

"Funny this should have cropped up just as we were talking about Socialism, isn't it?" grinned Mellish.

"It certainly is. Dear me!"

"You can always rely upon me for any help you may require in arranging mass meetings, and so on, Skimpy," said Mellish, patting the amateur Socialist on the shoulder in almost an affectionate manner. "But you know that, don't you?"

"It is very kind of you, Mellish. Dear me!"

Skimpole was running his hands through each of his pockets in succession. He brought to light many things, such as tracts on social questions, pieces of string, and pen nibs, but nothing in the nature of coin of the realm.

Skimpole began to look anxious.

"You haven't tried that pocket, Skimpy."

"Ah, no! Dear me!"

"Isn't there anything there?"

"No, Mellish, I regret to say I have no money to lend you."

"Haven't you got anything?" demanded Mellish, a good deal of the friendliness dying out of his voice. "Pretty fine Socialist you are!"

"Dear me, Mellish, the fact that I am without money—"

"Silly ass!" muttered the cad of St. Jim's, and he strode away.

Skimpole stood looking after him in great surprise.

"Dear me, how extraordinarily he behaved, to be sure! It almost appeared as if he were put out about something, and he said he would help in placing the chairs for the seniors and what masters may come to the meeting. However, I suppose Mellish will come to the gymnasium later on."

Skimpole, still a trifle puzzled, made his way towards the gymnasium. He was one of the best-natured of fellows himself, and it never dawned upon him that Mellish's friendliness had merely been a pose.

Skimpole merely thought it strange, and had to leave it at that.

He hurried into the splendidly-appointed gymnasium and hastily arranged what seats and chairs there were there into two neat rows. Then he piled the mattresses in a heap to act as a platform, and took a chair and a small table there for himself.

He even found a water-bottle and a glass, and placed them on the table. It all looked very businesslike, and it pleased Skimpole immensely.

In some excitement he glanced at his watch.

"Dear me, it is three o'clock already; I must get the door open!"

He opened the door and looked out. There was not a fellow to be seen in the quadrangle.

Skimpole looked at his watch again and listened to it.

"No; my watch has not stopped," he mused. "I expect they will turn up in large groups."

Another five minutes passed, and still not a single fellow was to be seen in the quadrangle. Skimpole looked puzzled again.

"Dear me, I trust they have not mistaken the time. No, they cannot have done that, because I put a notice on the board. Dear me, this is very extraordinary!"

Ten more minutes slipped by, but still no one appeared. Skimpole began to get anxious.

Was it possible that the fellows were not coming? The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's kept his watch in his hand and noticed the minutes flying by. At half-past three he closed his watch, and hurried down to the football ground.

There were the Third-Formers right enough, engaged in exciting six-asides. Skimpole did not go up to them. He sighed instead.

"But I am not disheartened," he mused, blinking thoughtfully into futurity; "no, I am not disheartened. It is only a matter of time. Socialism is ready for the world, but the world is not ready for Socialism—time is the only remedy."

And with that comforting thought, Skimpole retired into the college and withdrew his book from circulation. He found it where D'Arcy minor had placed it, in the desk in the Third Form common-room, and he carried it upstairs with him.

In five minutes Skimpole had forgotten his disappointment and was writing another chapter to the great work.

CHAPTER 15.

Tom Merry & Co. Gain Some Information.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, I wegard this as wippin'!"

"Rather! Let her rip, Figgy!"

Figgins leant well over his handle-bars and kept up the pace. He was leading the thirteen along the pleasant Sussex roads at a good steady fourteen miles an hour.

Milestones were flying past, Fatty Wynn was panting loudly, but he did not mind that. He knew a shop in Sefton where a simply gorgeous tea could be obtained.

Presently Figgins' voice rang out.

"I'm slowing down, chaps; there's a signpost about here."

"Right-ho!"

"There it is, Figgy!"

They all turned in their saddles, for there were several roads branching in different directions at this point.

"Straight ahead and only two miles."

"Good egg!"

"Wire in!"

"Yaas, wathah, wiab in, deah boys!"

"Your turn to pace us, kid."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus, spurring to the front. "Let me know if I widge too quickly for you; whatevah you do, don't dwop behind."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fellows laughed loudly, but they found they had to pedal hard enough to keep up with the swell of St. Jim's.

In spite of his slender build, Arthur Augustus was very wiry, and he knew how to cycle. The speed did not decrease a fraction, in spite of the change of pacer.

"My hat, this is great!"

"Rather! Another mile, Gussy."

"Another mile?" panted Fatty Wynn. "Good gracious, I never felt so hungry in my life. Do you chaps mind stopping while I have some sandwiches?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I really ought to have something to eat, because I have had nothing since dinner except those apples and some buns."

"There's Sefton, deah boys."

"Good!"

"Sefton at last, chaps."

The pace insensibly increased the moment the tall steepie of Sefton parish church could be seen above the trees, and a few minutes later the St. Jim's juniors were at the top of the hill which ran right down into the little market town.

Arthur Augustus stopped pedalling with a gasp.

"Bai Jove, I twust I haven't tired you, deah boys."

"Not much chance your doing that, kid," grinned Tom Merry, free-wheeling with the rest. "There goes Fatty."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yaas, wathah!"

"Stop when you get to the bottom, Fatty."

"Don't wun into anyone, deah boy."

Fatty Wynn only grinned. On the level or up hill he had all his work out only to keep up with the others, but when it came to coasting, Fatty Wynn more than held his own. There was no holding the St. Jim's Falstaff when a steep descent had to be taken.

He dashed past Tom Merry, overhauled Jack Blake, and flashed ahead in fine style, and he was pleased that he could do it.

If nothing got in his way to cause a slackening of speed, he could rely upon a few minutes at the bottom of the hill for a sandwich or so, and in consequence he never used his brakes.

"By Jove, this is ripping!" thought Fatty Wynn. "Nothing like cycling to give a fellow an appetite—cycling in this April weather. By Jove!"

Fatty was careering down the hill at a tremendous pace, but he had to pull up as he neared the bottom, much to his disgust. A whole crowd of fellows of about his own age were on the bridge which spanned the Ryll at one of its widest spots.

Fatty Wynn rang loudly, but the youngsters were making too much noise for the bell to be heard. Just as the New House junior was about considering his chances of steering through the excited knot of fellows, they ran across the road, shouting wildly, and leant well over the opposite wall.

"Go it, you chaps!"

"Oh, well rowed, blues!"

"What do you think of the white feather, you chaps?"

"Ripping! The real Cambridge feather! Oh, well steered, Sir!"

The excitement settled it. Fatty Wynn dismounted, and just as he gained the stretch of road which spanned the river, Tom Merry and the others came along.

"Cheer-ho, Fatty!"

"What's the row?"

The thirteen jumped from their machines, then Tom Merry squared his shoulders.

He knew that dark blue and yellow-striped cap.

Jack Blake knew it, as well.

"The Sefton kids, Tom Merry?"

The Shell fellow nodded.

"We haven't had to look for them far, have we? What's the excitement, Fatty?"

"There seems to be a boat race, or something."

Tom Merry, Jack Blake and Figgins hurried on quickly. The words boat race impressed the object of their run into Sefton upon them in a startling manner.

The others followed, and they all leaned over the parapet expectantly.

"Yaas, wathah! A boat wace, deah boys, and between wival eights, too, bai Jove!"

Jack Blake looked thoughtful.

"Lucky kids to have eights, and no mistake. I'd say it was a practice spin, though, and not a race."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes, that's about it," said Figgins in a low voice. "I say, Tom Merry, you don't think they could have ragged us just because they've got racing eights and we haven't, do you?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, even Sefton U.S. wouldn't swank like that. And, besides, now I come to think of it, I believe they have had an eight for years. I saw a notice in the paper last spring. I think."

"That looks like an old boat, too."

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, I considah they wov wathah well for a private school."

"Dry up, Gussy!"

In the excitement of the moment Arthur Augustus spoke rather loudly; at least, he spoke in his usual voice, only the Sefton fellows happened to be silent at the moment.

They turned and glanced at the St. Jim's contingent. Tom Merry frowned, and stared down into the river. Jack Blake and all the others also stared at the river.

A smile spread over the faces of the Sefton juniors. They had recognised the St. Jim's caps, and one or two of the St. Jim's fellows themselves.

Presently one of them spoke in quite loud tones. "But, mind you, Carson, I don't altogether blame the kids. I don't suppose it was their fault."

Carson, a finely-built youngster, with a pleasant open face, nodded.

"No. If St. Jim's haven't got a boat or a crew, well, there the matter ends."

"Yes, that is what I have been saying all along."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus gasped. Tom Merry, Figgins, and Jack Blake promptly jabbed him in the ribs at one and the same time.

"Dry up, ass!"

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"Weally, Figgay, deah boy——"

"Ring off!" muttered the New House fellow under his breath. "I—let's clear out of this, Tom Merry."

"They wouldn't have a look in, of course," added Carson in a still louder voice.

"Rather not!"

"I'd give our second boat three lengths——"

"Three! Five, you mean!"

"And the first crew would have run away from them."

"Gweat Scott!"

"Ring off, Gussy."

Tom Merry spoke almost wrathfully. Without understanding the affair properly, he was beginning to get an inkling of the truth.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy, only——"

"Bump the young ass if he won't stop cackling!" muttered Figgins, who was still looking down into the river with the others.

"Weally, Figgay, if you are wefewwing to me——"

The Seftonian named Carson grinned.

"Perhaps it's as well the race didn't come off, after all, Field," he said. "It wouldn't have been a race, really."

"There would have been only one boat in it, of course."

"Yes."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus uttered the exclamation in a gasp. He scrowed his monocle in his right eye, and viewed Carson through it loftily.

"Bai Jove, deah boy, if you are wefewwing to St. Jim's, I wathah think there would only be one boat in it."

"What, in St. Jim's? As far as we can see, there isn't one boat in the whole school!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus stared at the lad named Field.

"Weally, deah boy, I had to see any cause foah laughtah. I wegard your twicoid's wemark as widiculous in the extweme."

"What's that?"

"I wegard your wemark as widiculous in the extweme," repeated Arthur Augustus obligingly. "I am afraid you must be off your wockah, too, when you say any cwew Sefton could waise could wov with the St. Jim's juniors."

Carson and Field went crimson. There was something about Arthur Augustus' leftness which was the essence of dignity.

Carson soon recovered from his embarrassment.

"You ought to have thought of that before you refused our challenge, then," he exclaimed.

"Wefused your challenge—St. Jim's wefused your challenge!"

Tom Merry caught Arthur Augustus by the arm.

"Ass!"

"Do ring off, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to wing off until this mattah is thrwashed out, Figgay!"

"But don't you see you'll land us in a rotten muddle if——"

Arthur Augustus waved his hand loftily.

"Weally, deah boy, you leave this mattah to me. I wathah think I am not in the habit of landin' anyone in a wotter muddle."

Carson and the other Sefton fellows chuckled.

Arthur Augustus turned to them coolly.

"I am afraid I shall have to request an explanation, deah boy. As a mattah of fact St. Jim's are not in the habit of wefusin' challenges."

"You refused this one, anyway."

"On the contwary, deah boy, I have no wocollection of wefusin' it; as a mattah of fact, I have no wocollection of wefusin' it, eithah."

Carson shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, you can put it like that if you want to," he said coolly. "Anyway, we had a letter from Dr. Holmes refusing our challenge."

"Dr. Holmes refused the challenge? On what grounds, pway, deah boy?"

"Oh, on the grounds that you did not go in for eight racing."

"Which meant you hadn't got a racing-eight boat, I suppose," added Field. "You said something about Sefton being a private school just now, didn't you? Here come our two eights back, Carson."

"Gweat Scott!"

Tom Merry was as flustered as he had been for a long time. He seized Arthur Augustus by the arm.

"The other arm, Blake!"

"Right ho!"

"Weally, deah boys, I hardly think this mattah is thrwashed out yet——"

"Come along, ass!"

"I wegwet to say I shall have to wefuse——"

"Come along, duffer!"

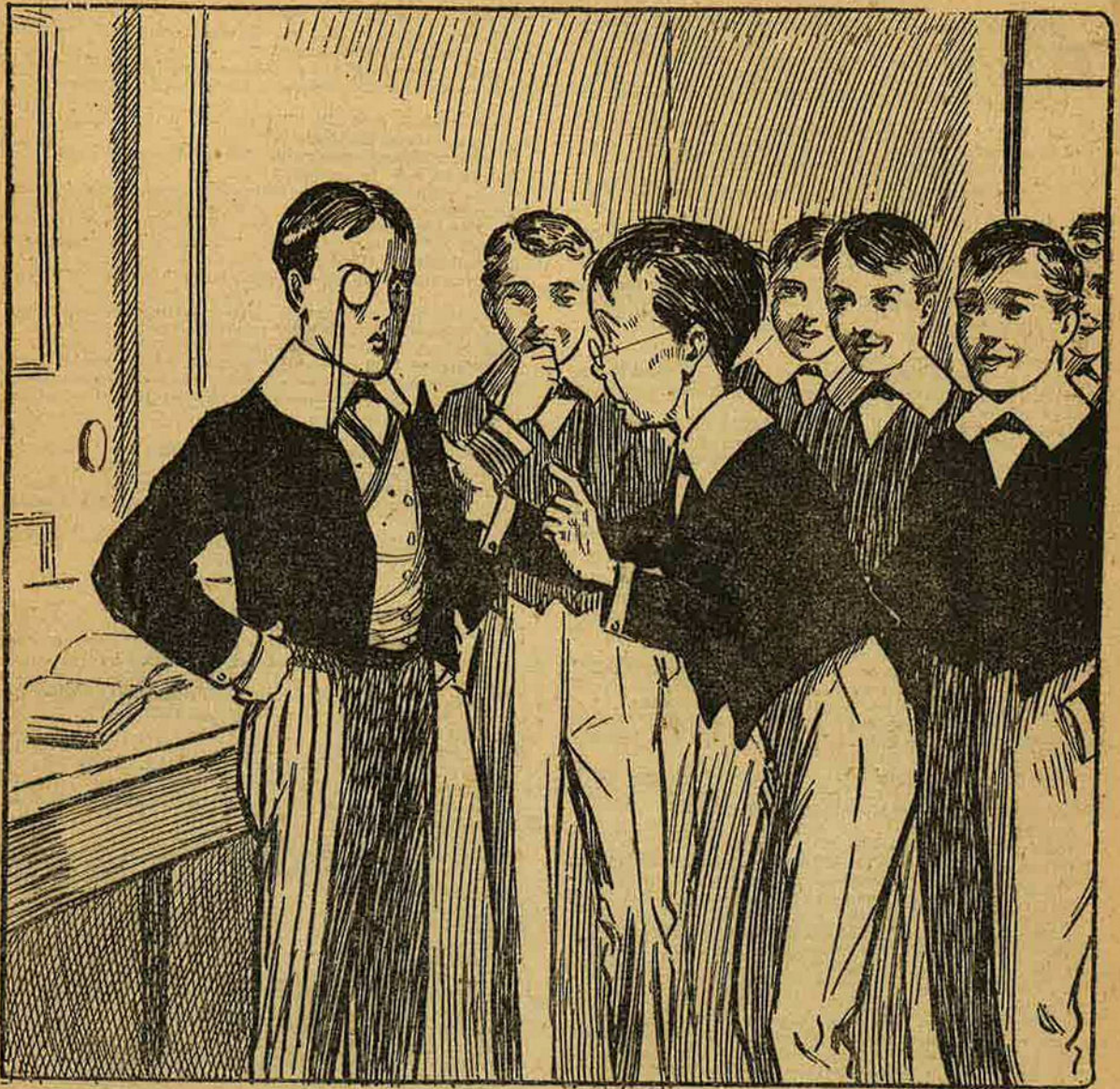
"Weally, Blake, under the cires——"

"Oh, got him away before we have all Sefton U.S. round us," muttered Harry Noble. "Come on, Gussy."

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"I will take the helm of the boat, D'Arcy," exclaimed Skimpole; "the tiller contrivance which controls the rudder, you know!"

By crowding round the swell of St. Jim's the fellows managed to induce him to mount his machine.

"Now ride for it as hard as you can, Gussy," pleaded Jack Blake. "Not up the hill; through the town."

"Yes, deah boy, but—"

"Do come on, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove, as you weally seem in a fluttah, deah boy, I will wide away with you, but I wathah think it would be bettah to stay and thwash this mattah out."

Jack Blake sighed with relief.

Arthur Augustus was pedalling away with them.

Then a sounding laugh rang out behind them.

"They are going to buy a boat—"

"And fix up a crew."

"Ha, ha, ha! Talk about St. Jim's being a sporting school.

Have you a football at St. Jim's, Merry?"

"Do you play cricket?"

"No, croquet is their game, Field."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, deah boys, I must wide back and wemonstwat with the young wottahs. They are labourin' undah a w'etehed delusion, and—"

"No, you don't!"

Tom Merry spoke crisply although he was very red. He and

Jack Blake rode on each side of Arthur Augustus and kept a firm grip on his arms.

All the others were red and fuming, but none of them looked back until Sefton was a mile behind, much to Fatty Wynn's disgust, because that meant the ripping tea-shop he knew of was also well in the rear.

At the bottom of the hill by the church Tom Merry jumped off his bicycle. Then he glared at Arthur Augustus.

"Of all the shrieking young asses—"

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy!"

Arthur Augustus also dismounted and screwed his monocle in his right eye.

CHAPTER 16.

Arthur Augustus Requires a Post-Office.

"Of all the howling, cackling young idiots—"

"Weedly, Figzzy—"

"Of all the fabulous, raving lunatics—"

"Bai Jove, Kangawoo—"

Arthur Augustus gasped in amazement. Tom Merry was positively glaring at him.

"Blake, why don't you chain him up?" he said wearily.

"You owe it to St. Jim's to do so."

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"GLYN'S GREAT WHEEZE!"

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I should wefuse to be chained. Pwag don't be so widoiculous, deah boy. But I can undahstand you being wild; as a mattah of fact, I am vewy wild myself, only I am contwollin' my tempah. I wathah think we made a gweat mistake in not stayin' at the bwidge and thwashin' the mattah out."

"Ass! Don't you see what has happened?"

"Yaas, wathah! Sefton U.S. are labourin' undah a delusion, and a few words fwom me would have put the mattah wight."

"Hopeless lunatic! Don't you see they have challenged us?"

"On the contwawy, deah boy."

"They have. They sent a challenge to Dr. Holmes, or Kildare, or someone like that, and the challenge had to be refused because we don't run to a racing eight."

"Bai Jove, yaas wathah! That w'etched outsidah, Carson, hinted at somethin' like that, but I was in such a fluttah at the time that—"

"In a flutter?"

"Off his rocker, ho means."

"On the contwawy, Blako, deah boy. I wathah think I am not in the habit of goin' off my wockah. I admit I was in a fluttah, but—"

"Must have been in a nightmare, I should think, to go on cackling when it was quite clear what had happened. My aunt, you chaps, we've bungled this affair nicely!"

Tom Merry, Figgins, and the others looked at the chief of Study No. 6 glumly.

It was perfectly clear to all now what had happened, and they wished they had never come over to Sefton. Tom Merry expressed the opinions of all in a few words.

"It makes it look so rotten for the old school."

The others nodded. That was it. St. Jim's had a reputation for not refusing any challenge which came their way, and then to have to refuse one issued by a private school because they did not possess a racing eight!

It was galling to say the least of it.

"Couldn't we offer to row them in four-oared galleys, chaps?" said Bernard Glyn, but the others shook their heads.

That wouldn't do. Arthur Augustus saw that at once.

"No, wathah not, deah boy. We should lose dig. Where the wreat twouble wests is in Kildare, or whoevah it was, wefusin' the challenge."

"Ass! How could they accept it when we haven't got a ship?"

"Then one should have been ordshed, deah boy."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, tons of rats! You could hardly expect the authorities to order a racing eight for one race for the juniors, could you? Why, the seniors haven't got an eight, and an eight has to fit you like a glove. The Varsity people have their ships made according to the weight and size of their crews, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! I nevah thought of that at the moment. Then the twouble wests with—"

"Yourself?"

"Weally—"

"So it does, Gussy. If you hadn't started cackling like an old hen we could have cleared off and let the matter drop. Now we've gassed with them it makes us look like a lot of kindergarten kids who can't row unless they ask permission."

"Bai Jove, I wefuse to considah myself in the light of a kindahgarten schollah!"

No one laughed.

Arthur Augustus went on thoughtfully:

"And when you come to considah the mattah, I weally do not see that our comin' to Sefton has caused us to lose dig."

"Don't you, kid?"

"No, wathah not. I twust you haven't forgotten the mattah of the swange pwesents which awwived foah us yesterday."

Tom Merry started. As a matter of fact, he had forgotten for the time being.

He remembered now though, and understood.

Because St. Jim's were without a boat and a crew, Sefton had sent them one. It was a jape which made Tom Merry turn crimson.

"Wait until we meet them at footer again, kids!"

"Yaas, wathah! But meetin' them at footah will hardly settle the mattah."

"Cricket next term will, anyway."

"My hat, if we don't massacre them, Tom!"

"Yaas, wathah! It goes without sayin' that we shall wun away with them at cwicket, but that won't altogether wagain our lost dig., deah boys."

They looked at Arthur Augustus inquiringly.

Arthur Augustus polished his monocle.

"There is only one thin' that will wagain our lost dig." he said after a pause, "and that is, to wace the young wottahs in a pwopah wacin' eight."

"Ass!"

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"Weally, Figgay—"

"Silly ass, I mean! How can we race them?"

"By twainin' hard, deah boys."

"Duffer! I mean, what can we race them in?"

"You aren't thinkin' of going to the doctor about it, are you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It wouldn't be any good, kid. It's not likely the authorities will run to an eight for juniors."

"And a whip round at this time of the term wouldn't raise half enough cash."

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's so," he said gloomily. "Gussy, it's no good your thinking of going to the doctor."

"You considah that imposs., deah boy?"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove, that wendahs the mattah wathah awkward, but you nevah know. Are we goin' to return through Sefton?"

"Rather not. You won't catch me in Sefton for years."

"No," sighed Fatty Wynn; "and the worst of it is, there is a place where you can get a ripping tea at Sefton. Gussy, do you considah we could—could just slip into the town and get some of those famous Sefton puffs?"

"Imposs, deah boy."

Fatty Wynn sighed, and looked at his cycling map. Presently he brightened up.

"I say, Ashfield isn't far away—about three miles. There's a little shop near the church there where they sell ripping pork pies."

"Ashfield! I know the place. What do you kids say to pushing on to Ashfield and having tea?"

"Rather!"

"And come back the other way?"

"Yes; that's the idea."

"Good!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it is a wippin' ideah myself! As a mattah of fact, I was about to make the same suggestion."

"I don't think."

"Weally, Lowthah! Howevah, undah the circs, I will pass ovah your wudeness. There is one thing, though."

"What's that, Gussy?"

"Only one thing, kid!"

"Yaas, only one thin' that weally mattahs. Is—is there a post-office at Ashfield, deah boys?"

The juniors stopped in the act of mounting and stared at Arthur Augustus.

"Post-office, kid?"

"Did you say a post-office, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Oh, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, Gus!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Who are you sending picture postcards to this time?" grinned Manners. "Clotilde, that ripping girl at Signor Tomsonio's Circus?"

Arthur Augustus went a deep red.

"Weally, Mannah—"

"Or the young lady at the inendrapers in Rylcombe?"

"Bai, Jove, Tom Mewwy—"

Jack Blake grinned.

"Oh, there's no telling with Gussy!" he said. "It might be anyone. Don't be afraid of exceeding the speed limit, chaps."

And away they sped for Ashfield.

Arthur Augustus lapsed into silence.

CHAPTER 17.

Arthur Augustus Writes a Letter.

"B AI Jove, it will be wathah a cwush, deah boys!" Tom Merry grinned.

"Thirteen in a study built for four—yes, it will, kid." "Wathah! And I have an important lettah to wite, deah boys."

"Write it later on."

"Imposs."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Figgins. "Well, please yourself, ass! If you can wite a lettah with all us in here, you must be a great man. Awfully decent of you, Blake, to invite us."

"Yes, isn't it?" said Jack Blake, dropping into a chair. "My hat, we put the pece on coming home, and no mistake!"

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah! I twust I haven't tired you, deah boys."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You get on with your lettah, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah! It's a most important lettah, bai Jove! Figgay, deah boy, I must wquest you not to shake the table."

"Right-ho, kid! Here comes Fatty with the grub."

Fatty Wynn came into the room, his extra bulk adding considerably to the discomfort of the others.

"Puffs, jam and marmalade; pork pies, a dozen of them; buns, scones—"

"Never mind giving us a list of them. Have you got enough to go round, Fatty?"

"Yes, Digby, I think I have."

"Good! If Fatty thinks he has enough to go round, there is enough to go round twice. Get the kettle on, someone."

"Right-ho!"

"Weally, Figgay, I must wequest you not to shake the table, deah boy. It is imposs, for me to w'rite an important lettah when you are shakin' the table."

"Sorry, young ass!"

"Weally Figgay—howevah, I will pass your wudeness ovah undah the cires."

"Where's the tea, Blake?"

"In that cupboard."

"Good!"

"Now for it!"

The juniors hustled about the little room preparing tea. They were all there solely to talk things over, but it was understood that tea was to be prepared first.

It would be easier to discuss the action of the Sefton fellows over tea.

Fatty Wynn removed the cover from a large basket.

"There, Gussy, what do you think of those pies?"

"Whippin', deah boy; but I must wequest you not to put the wotten basket on the table!"

"Well, where can I put it, D'Arcy?"

"On the floss—anywhere—but not on the table, deah boy. I am w'itin' an important lettah. Figgay, weally, as one gentleman to another, I must wequest you not to shake the wotten table!"

"Sorry, kid!"

"Oh, don't mind Gussy; if he will write love-letters in a crowded study."

Arthur Augustus went pink.

"Weally, Blake, I wathah think I am not in the habit—bai Jove, Figgay, do you want me to administah a feahful thwashin'—"

"What's up now, Gussy?"

"You keep wummin' against the wotten table, deah boy. Gweat Scott, Tom Mewwy, deah boy, I shall have no othah wresource but to administah feahful thwashin's all wound in a minute!"

"Hard cheese, Gussy; but if you will write love-letters in a crowded study—"

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, in another minute my tempah—Mannah, you have wun against the wotten table!"

"Come and make some toast, chaps."

"Right-ho, Blakey!"

There was silence for a moment or two as the fellows got the things from the cupboard, and Arthur Augustus went on writing, a thoughtful expression on his aristocratic brow.

Tom Merry glanced at the others and grinned.

As it happened, four of the party were just returning from the cupboard laden with as many plates as could be found. They all understood Tom Merry's grin.

Arthur Augustus wrote on, a smile flickering across his face. He was in the centre of a sentence which pleased him immensely.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured to himself. "Gweat Scott!"

Then he sprang to his feet with a gasp.

Tom Merry & Co. had banged the plates down with a fearful clatter.

"What's the matter, Gussy?"

"Got pins and needles, kid?"

"Writer's cramp, Gus?"

"Bai Jove, you uttah wottahs! Gweat Scott, I am all in a fluttah!"

"Blake, Gussy is all in a flutter."

"He shouldn't write love-letters in a crowded room, then."

"You wottahs! Tom Mewwy, I have no othah wresource but to administah a feahful thwashin'!"

"Let the young ass get on with his love-letters, Tom Merry!"

"Weally, Blake, I have remarked befoah that I am not in the habit of w'itin' love-lettahs. I considah you in the light of a waggin' wottah, and Tom Mewwy I look upon as a w'etched outsidah of the first watah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye and stared loftily at the hero of the Shell; then he resumed his letter-writing with dignity.

The preparations for tea went on apace. The sausages were cooked to a hair by Fatty Wynn, who seldom made mistakes in these matters. Fellows hurried to their own studies for extra tea-things and chairs. The table was laid, with the exception of one corner, which was reserved for Arthur Augustus' letter-writing.

Fatty Wynn viewed the spectacle with a smile of great joy.

"Excellent, you chaps!" he beamed. "It is a credit to us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Looks comfy and no mistake. Make the tea, Dig."

"Right-ho!"

The tea was poured into the various tea-pots from the different rooms, and the crumpets were taken up out of the fender. As Herries had said, it looked very comfortable.

They all moved towards the table.

"Bai Jove, it is finished, deah boys!"

Fatty Wynn gasped.

"Finished, Gussy? We haven't begun yet!"

Arthur Augustus waved his hand loftily.

"I was not w'etewwin' to the tea, deah boys, but to my important lettah."

"Oh, yes; the love-letter."

"Weally, Blake, I have no othah wresource but to considah you as a sillay ass! I wegwet to have to use the expression, but there is no othah phwase which d'scribes you, undah the cires. Howevah, I will wead you the lettah."

"Gussy!"

"What, deah boy?"

"Oh, Gus!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I fail to undahstand."

"Will she like you to do that, old chap?"

"Of course, we congratulate you, and all that; but—"

Arthur Augustus went a deep red.

"I wegard you all as waggin' wottahs! In another minute I shall lose my tempah, Lowthah!"

"Fire ahead, kid!"

"I weally have half a mind not to wead the lettah to you now."

The fellows looked penitent. Some of Arthur Augustus' letters were humorous.

Lowther sighed.

"Don't be too severe on us, Gussy!"

"Well, undah the cires, I will w'elent," said the swell of St. Jim's graciously. "This is how the lettah wuns deah boys:

"Deah Sir,—It has weached my eahs that you are wash enough to want to wow the St. Jim's juniors in wacin' eights on the wivah Wyl.

"It appeahs that the challenge you forwarded did not weach the pwopah authority in the college, and so there has been a wegwettable delay. Howevah, the mattah is entirely settled now, and in answah to your challenge, I beg to state that the junioahs of St. Jim's will have much pleasure in wacin' you in eights when and where you please.

"A date which would be convenient to us is next Saturday week.

"Twastin' we shall be favouahed with fine weathah, and awaitin' your weply.—Yours twuly,

"ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY.

"(Pwesident of the St. Jim's boat)"

Arthur Augustus read his letter very coolly. When he came to the end he looked up at the fellows through his monocle.

"Well, deah boys, do you considah that settles the mattah? I have addressed the lettah to Carson, the wottah we saw on the bwidge this aftahnoon!"

The juniors stared at Arthur Augustus in blank amazement. No one spoke for quite a long time.

CHAPTER 18.

Arthur Augustus Explains.

"YOU utter ass, Gussy!"

Tom Merry gasped.

Arthur Augustus looked at him loftily.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I must wequest you not to chawactah-wise me as an uttah ass; it is widiculous, not to say bordahin' on wudeness! If there is anythin' in the lettah you think ought to be altahed, please say so; only I wathah think it cannot be impoved."

"Do—do you mean it for a rag?"

"Weally, Figgay, does it wead like a wag?"

Jack Blake started.

"It's the old idea again, I suppose, kid?" he exclaimed.

"You're thinking of going to the doctor about the boat?"

"No, deah boy; we agweed that that was imposs."

"Then what the—"

"Weally, deah boys, if you will wing off for a moment, I will explain the mattah," said Arthur Augustus coolly. "With me this affair is a mattah of personal dig. Sefton challenged us and we w'efused. I wegwet to say that I cannot agree with our w'esp'ected Headm'astah on the point of w'efusin'. We must w'ace them, whatevah happens."

"But—"

"Yaas, deah boy?"

"How can we race them, ass, when we haven't got a boat?" blarted out Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus waved his hand again.

"The boat is already ordahed, deah boys."

"What's he raving about?"

"Weally, Figgay I am not in the habit of wavin'. You

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may wemembah I wetiaded into the post-office at Ashfield when you othahs were ordahin' some wewfishment?"

"To send a picture-postcard to Clotilde—yes."

"On the contwawy, Lowthah," said the swell of St. Jim's, going red. "I wetiaded into the post-office to send a telegraw to the patah."

Tom Merry started.

"What about, Gussy?"

"About the pwoposed boat-wace, deah boy. I explained the mattah to the patah, and asked him to ordah a wacin' eight for us."

"My only hat!"

"Phew!"

"Gussy, that's the limit! I mean——"

"I explained the affair fully, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus coolly. "It was a mattah of personal dig, with me; the govornah will undahstand, and I wathah think he will ordah the boat by telegraw. The weal point is, do you considah that lettah of mine to Carson is cleah?"

But the juniors refused to consider that as the real point. They crowded round Arthur Augustus, then banged him on the shoulder until he was gasping.

"Good old Gussy!"

"Ripping of you, Gussy!"

"Three cheers for Gussy, chaps!"

"Bai Jove, deah boys——"

"Ring off, ass! Hooray!"

"Weally, Figgy, I must wefusa to be addressed as an ass! Gwreat Scott, I am all in a fluttah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chair him, kids!"

"Mind the crumpets," exclaimed Fatty Wynn, in alarm:

"I know you will upset the crumpets!"

"Chair him!"

"Shoulder old Gussy!"

But Arthur Augustus refused to be shouldered.

"It's weally aw'fl'y wippin' of you, deah boys, but I fail to see any cause for the demoustwation. The whole mattah was one of personal dig, with me, and so, of course I had to go through with it. I am pleased you wogard my lettah to Carson as cleah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As cleah as daylight, kid."

"Good, not to say wippin'. Then I will send Binks with it to catch the evenin' post, deah boys."

"My hat!"

"What is the mattah, Blahc, deah boy?"

"We must move carefully, kid; mustn't run any risks of further rags."

"No, wathah not, but undah the circs——"

"I mean, suppose your pater doesn't see his way to present us with a boat, kid, and I should almost think he wouldn't after what he's done for us one way and another, consider what a set of asses we should look if we had to take back a letter like that?"

"Yaas, wathah, but the patah—— Hallo, here is Binks, deah boys."

"Come in, Binks."

"Yes, come in, Binks."

Binks stood in the doorway and gasped. As far as he could see it would be a physical impossibility for him to enter the room.

"A message," he said in the curiously melodramatic voice he usually adopted after reading much American fiction. "I trust the news is welcome—it's fer you, Master D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove, a telegraw——"

"Will it be from your pater, Gussy?"

"I shouldn't wondah, deah boys—Yaas——"

"What's he say, kid?"

"Yaas, deah boy."

"What's your pater say, Gussy?"

"Yaas, Figgy, deah boy."

"Ass!"

"What's he raving about now?"

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake laughed loudly. Arthur Augustus had thrust the telegram into his hands to read.

"Gussy's pater says 'yes,' kids—that's all—just the one word 'yes.'"

"Yaas, wathah; that is what I said, only none of you undahstood my wemahc. There is no ansawah, Binks—Stop, deah boy; pway stop."

"Yes, Master D'Arcy."

"There's a lettah I wequire postin'."

"Wait a minute, Gussy."

"Pway, why should we wait, deah boy?"

Jack Blake was on his feet again.

"We want to make jolly certain about this before we send your epistle, Gussy," he said firmly. "Perhaps the doctor may have some objection."

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"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that. Howevah, I do not considah it all likley."

"No, neither do I, but we'll make sure."

"Yaas, wathah; I'll wetiadh to the doctah's studay and place the mattah befoah him——"

"Shall I come with you, kid?"

"Yaas, wathah, Blake, deah boy."

"We shan't be a minute, kids——"

"No, wathah not!"

And the pair hurried from the room. Fatty Wynn sighed patiently.

It meant another wait before tea could be commenced.

However, it was not a long wait, for Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus were back in Study No. 6 in a very few minutes.

"It's all awwanged, deah boys."

"The doctor doesn't object?"

"On the contwawy, he is wathah pleased——"

"Very pleased, I should say," grinned Jack Blake. "My hat, do you know we've only a week and a few days to pick a crew and get fit."

"My aunt, we ought to have made it a fortnight next Saturday."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that. Howevah, it is too late now because the lettah has gone."

"Suppose the boy doesn't come, kid?"

"Bai Jove! I wathah expect it will, though, deah boys, and, of course, we can twain in the four-oared galleys and in ordinary wovin' boats. I say, I must w'rite to Cousin Ethel and ask her to go ovah to Sefton to see the wace——"

"How do you know it will be at Sefton, Gussy?"

"I wathah fancy it will, deah boy. I gave them choice of watah, and they will choose their own portion of the wivah, I should say."

"Good for you, Gussy."

"Trust the U.S. kids."

"Yaas, wathah—bai Jove!"

"What's the matter now, Gussy?"

"What's up?"

"Gwreat Scott, I sha'n't be able to stwoke the boat to victowy, deah boys."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I fail to see any cause for laughtah in the fact that I shall be unable to stwoke the St. Jim's boat to victowy—I have just wemembahed that I cannot wow on the stwoke side of an eight, bai Jove."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat!"

The fellows chuckled loudly, and Arthur Augustus glared at them. Then he went pink.

"Of course, deah boys, I weognise the possibility of my not gettin' in the boat but I considah it a wemote one——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As pwesident of the St. Jim's boat, I shall weed out my crew with a firm hand——"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"I shall be as firm as a wock——"

"As firm as a—what?"

"A wock, deah boy! I shall select only the best wovahs——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then Fatty Wynn's voice rang out above the laughter.

"Do start tea, you chaps," the Falstaff of St. Jim's said plaintively. "I haven't had anything to eat since the snack at Ashfield, and I feel quite faint. The crumpets are getting cold, too, and the pork pies——"

Jack Blake chuckled.

He felt happier now than he had since they crossed the bridge at Sefton.

"Yes, fall to, kids."

"Yaas, wathah—bai Jove!"

And tea was commenced, in dead silence as far as Fatty Wynn was concerned, but in just the reverse with the others.

There were a hundred things to discuss and settle and everyone talked at once. There were thirteen of them present, and probably the eight would be selected from that thirteen.

Each, of course, had a personal opinion as to whom ought to be in the boat, but everyone of them was ready to stand out for a better man.

That was the spirit which had made the old school of St. Jim's feared by rival schools in the world of sport.

CHAPTER 19.

Skimpole Visits Study No. 6.

"DEAR me, what a noise they are making!" Skimpole mused aloud reflectively, and knocked at the door of Study No. 6 again.

"Dear me, they appear not to hear me and I can scarcely wonder at it. Is Merry here?"

"Yes, kid," grinned Tom Merry for himself as Skimpole pushed open the door. "My hat, it's Skimmy."

"Skimmy, the nationalised merchant."

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"Skinmy, the shrieking ass."
Skimpole blinked thoughtfully at the laughing juniors, then coughed.

"I have a few words to say to you chaps."

"Good!"

"Only a few, Skimmy?"

"Thank goodness they are not a lot."

"Dear me, I fail altogether to follow the drift of your somewhat incoherent remarks, but that does not matter. I wish to speak to you about the experiment in Socialism, the publication of my work 'Socialism: What it is, and is not' was responsible for—"

"Rats!"

"Really, Merry—"

"More rats! We're too busy to listen to piffle like social questions or politics in any form—"

"Good gracious! Piffle—social questions. You take my breath away."

"Good!"

"Dear me, Figgins—"

"Weally, deah boy, we are awfully bizzay. As a mattah of fact we are awwanging praactices for the wacin' eight of St. Jim's junioahs—"

"Racing eight!"

"Yaas, deah boy; we are meeting Sefton U. S. in a boat-race on the wivah—"

"That's it; not in the quad or gym, or anywhere like that."

"Dear me, Lowther," murmured Skimpole, who never saw jokes. "I certainly did not imagine for a moment you contemplated having a boat-race in the quadrangle—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole blinked, looking puzzled.

"Again I fail to follow the drift of your remarks," he said.

"However, if you are getting together a crew to row against Sefton, I shall be very pleased to stroke for you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By your laughter am I to suppose that you have already filled the place of stroke?"

"Something like that, ass."

"Dear me, well, I will take the helm—"

Arthur Augustus gasped.

"The—the—what, Skimmy, deah boy?"

"Helm, D'Arcy. You know, that tiller contrivance which controls the rudder—"

"Great Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fellows roared with laughter, all except Tom Merry. He was looking at the brainy man of the Shell doubtfully.

"What do you weigh, Skimmy?"

"Dear me, Merry, what an extraordinary question. I am not a great weight—"

"I can see that, kid."

"Yes, what do you weigh, deah boy," suddenly repeated Arthur Augustus seriously. "Ovah eight stone!"

"No, under—I may say considerably under."

"Good!"

"Wippin'!"

"Dear me, I always understood that one should weigh a lot, that it was not considered good to weigh a little—"

"Oh, we mean if you want to cox us."

"Are you referring to my taking the helm?"

"Yes, only it isn't called that," laughed Tom Merry. "I say, you chaps, I'm not so sure Skimpole wouldn't make a good cox."

"I am confident that I should make an excellent cox, Merry."

"Humph! You'd want a lot of coaching, and we are going to train for all we are worth."

"Certainly! I shall be very willing to take the helm—to cox for you because I am interested in observing the gradual exhaustion brought on by exertion. You see, I am writing a work on the evils of sports and pastimes."

"Bai Jove, you must be off your wockah, deah boy."

"Sports haven't any evils, ass."

"When my work comes out, you will see by statistics that—"

"Oh, ring off, Skimmy; this matter requires considering. You're a trifle heavy, of course."

"Yes, Skimmy, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Dear me—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I considah that wathah funnay, deah boy!"

Tom Merry caught Jack Blake by the arm.

"What I was thinking of, kid," he said in a whisper, "is that Skimmy is a cool sort of ass in a way. I mean, he's not likely to get as excited as a Third Form kid would."

"No, there is that."

"And, of course, there's no one in the Shell or Fourth who is as light."

"No."

"What do you say?"

"We can try at praactices."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Right-ho, Skimmy!"

"You accept me to take the helm—to cox for you?"

"If you show up decently at practice."

"Good!"

"Now you can go, kid. We've an awful lot to settle before the dormy bell rings."

"Certainly! Oh, but I have something to say!"

"Go and say it to Mellish."

"Dear me! What would be the use of my saying to Mellish what I have to say to you, Merry?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fire ahead then, kid. Two minutes, and not a second more."

"Get it off your chest, Skimmy."

Skimpole blinked once or twice, then coughed.

"Dear me! It will not take me two minutes. It will not take me anything like two minutes. In fact, I should think one minute—"

"Get on with the washing, ass."

"Dear me! Let me see, you may remember that the Third Form carried out some experiments in Socialism to-day—"

The juniors got up, looking warlike.

"We do!"

"Yaas, wathah! And we are goin' to administah feahful thwashin's all wound, deah boy."

"Ah, that is your intention, is it, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it is our duty to cowwect the young wottahs."

Skimpole squared his shoulders.

"Then I am doubly glad that I came into this room," he said firmly. "I wish to point out to you all that the Third Form were acting solely under my directions."

"Bai Jove!"

"What's that, Skimmy?"

"Acting solely under my directions," repeated the brainy man of the Shell. "Without my arguments they would never have acted as they did act."

"Rats!"

"Dear me, Blake! Why do you say rats?"

Jack Blake grinned.

"You think the idea was Socialism, Skimmy?"

"Certainly."

"Then I say rats!"

"Yes, I heard you, but I fail to follow the drift—"

"Get on with the washing instead, kid."

"Yes, get on, Skimmy."

"Dear me! Where was I? Oh, I know! Without my arguments the experiment in Socialism would never have been made; therefore I must request you not to use brute force when you meet the Third Form next time."

"Gwoat Scott!"

The juniors stared at Skimpole in blank amazement.

No one spoke for a moment or two, and even then it was Skimpole himself who broke the pause.

"Have I your promise that brute force will not be used when you encounter the Third Form, Merry?"

"Y-yes."

"Then that is all I have to say," answered Skimpole. "I will go down into the library now, and see if I can find any useful information about taking the helm—about coxing. I am sorry I cannot stay with you, and aid you in selecting your team—your crew."

And Skimpole left the study.

There was silence again for a moment or two after he had gone; then Tom Merry sat down quietly.

"What a rum ass Skimmy is," he said quietly. "Fancy him coming in here to get the fags off a licking!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Pretty decent of him, Tom Merry."

"That's what I meant. Skimmy is a rattling little ass!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove! I wogwet to say that we have given our promise not to administah feahful thwashin's to the Third Formals, and yet I considah it is my duty as an eldah bwotlah to cowwect my minah."

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Lucky escape for Wally, kid!"

"Yaas, wathah! Howevah, I shall wemonstwate with the young wascal when we meet latah. Bai Jove! We shall have to work like wogulah Twojans, deah boys, to get in twin."

The others nodded.

They would have to work to get fit in a little over a week, and they would have to be fit if they meant to hold their own against the trained Sefton fellows.

The excited dispute as to the prospective crew was recommenced with even greater heat, and that dispute would last until the moment the crew was chosen one and for all.

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CHAPTER 20.
In Training.

THE next few days were days never to be forgotten in the junior circles of St. Jim's.

The day after the eventful acceptance of the Sefton challenge was sent the juniors crowded down to the river at every opportunity, and rowed up for all they were worth. Every type of boat was in requisition, from the four-oared galleys to the large bathing-boat, and before the day came to an end three things were discovered.

Tom Merry, Jack Blake, and Figgins were oarsmen born. Kildare, the college captain, stood on the river bank, and watched with intense interest. He could tell a wet bob at a glance.

"Tom Merry's the youngster for stroke," he said to Monteith, a once great enemy of his. "Blake's good, but better on the other side of the boat."

The senior prefect of the New House nodded.

"What about Figgins?"

"Ah, yes! Figgins is splendid. His long reach gives him extra power in the leg drive, but he hasn't quite the polish of the other two."

Monteith nodded.

He could see as well as the captain that Figgins' place was somewhere in the middle of the boat when it came to help along the weight.

Then, a day or two later, a beautiful new racing eight arrived at St. Jim's, the very best Lord Eastwood could obtain without having to have one made.

The friendly rivals of the junior forms looked at it as it was taken into the boat-house with awe and reverence.

"My hat, Gussy! Your pater is a ripping sportsman!"

"Yaas, wathah! I mean, the patah wouldn't send us a wotten boat, deah boys?"

"He's sent us the best boat I've ever seen, kid."

"My aunt, yes!"

"What is she to be called, chaps?"

"By Jove! Yes, she'll have to be christened. What do you say, Gussy?"

"Well, as a mattah of fact——"

"Get on with it."

"Yaas! Well, you see——"

"What about 'Towser'?" exclaimed Herries suddenly.

"After my bulldog?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"After your old mongrel bull-pup?"

"Really, Manners——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries looked indignant.

Then Arthur Augustus removed his monocle from his eye, and began to polish it.

"As a mattah of fact, my ideah was to christen the ship 'Cousin Ethel.'"

"My list! That's it!"

"Rather!" said Figgins, and he went a deep crimson.

The others noticed nothing, and the matter of the boat's name was settled there and then. She was to be "Cousin Ethel," after their girl chum. There was no need to discuss that point further.

Then, their first spin in the boat had to be taken.

In the wildest excitement, Jack Blake, Tom Merry, Figgins, Harry Noble, Digby, Manners, Lowther, and Clifton Dane took their places, with Skimpole as cox.

Kildare was watching but he said nothing, although he nodded his approval when Jack Blake and Tom Merry changed places, giving the Shell fellow the stroke thwart.

Arthur Augustus, who was standing near the college captain, looked up.

"You considah that an improvement, deah boy?"

"Yes; but there are other improvements that can be made yet. Who is the president?"

"I am, deah boy."

"Then why aren't you in the boat?"

Arthur Augustus coloured, and Kildare understood.

The swell of St. Jim's wasn't going to take his place until he was certain he was worth it. He wanted to see what the others could do before he accepted a thwart.

Kildare appreciated that sort of thing.

Presently Tom Merry's voice rang out.

"Easy! Kerr, take No. 6's place!"

Kerr, the Scots' chum of Figgins and Co., grinned with pleasure.

Lowther stepped out of the boat for him, disappointed, of course, but the first to admit the wisdom of the change.

"That's the style," murmured Kildare.

"Yaas, wathah! I weally considah the cwew will do like that, don't you, deah boy?"

"Humph! Bow not quite right. Ah, Tom Merry is looking round!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah Tom Mewwy is wathah a good stwoke myself. Bai Jove! They are stoppin' again!"

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"D'Arcy, take the bow's place."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus gasped.

"Here you are, kid!" panted Dane.

"Bai Jove! I am awfully sowwy, deah boy!"

Clifton Dane laughed.

The swell of St. Jim's flung off his sweater, jammed his monocle in his eye, and stepped into the dainty boat.

The next moment they were off again, and Kildare banged Monteith on the shoulder.

"That's the crew—Tom Merry, Blake, Figgins, Noble, Digby, Manners, Kerr, and D'Arcy, with Skimpole cox. They'll never beat it."

The New House prefect nodded.

Yes, that was the crew. Any experienced oarsman could see that at a glance.

Of course, the boat wasn't going well, but she would before long, because Tom Merry rowed an easy stroke to follow.

Afterwards Kildare had a chat with the hero of the Shell, and Arthur Augustus and the stroke and president were satisfied with what they heard.

They left the study grinning with pleasure.

"Bai Jove! We shall wun away from them, deah boy."

"We shall have to work first, kid."

"Yaas, wathah; but now we have the cwew, we can twain like anythin'. Bai Jove I wogard this as wippin' in the extwone. And Kildare has pwomised to coach us."

Tom Merry nodded.

It was decent of Kildare, of course, but none of the juniors knew what was in store for them.

For a whole week the captain of St. Jim's kept the youngsters hard at work; for, as the time was so short, he had to risk running them stale.

For three days of that week the eight were so stiff they could hardly move, and for the two following days so weary that they didn't want to move; then suddenly they woke up to the fact that they were wonderfully fit.

Kildare had done his work well.

CHAPTER 21.

The St. Jim's Boat-race

"BAI Jove, deah boys, I am all in a fluttah!"

Arthur Augustus uttered the exclamation, his teeth chattering with excitement.

The great day had arrived—almost the great moment.

The St. Jim's crew were standing in the doorway of the Sefton U.S. boathouse, sweaters tied round their necks, waiting for the clock to strike three.

They were alone, because all the St. Jim's partisans were down the river. It was impossible to run or cycle along the bank from the boathouse, so all who had not already collected at the finishing-post were half a mile away, all except Cousin Ethel and her brother.

Captain Cleveland had brought his sister over in a motor-car, and they were waiting to see the start. After that they meant to motor along the road to the finishing-point.

Presently Captain Cleveland came up to the boathouse.

"Ready, Tom Merry, begad?"

"Not yet; our cox hasn't arrived—the train must be late."

"Train—the train was in ten minutes ago!"

"My hat!"

Tom Merry looked anxious.

What could have become of Skimpole?

Captain Cleveland glanced at his watch.

"Time to start, begad!" he exclaimed. "Who is your cox, Tom Merry?"

"Skimpole."

"That curious youngster with glasses? I don't believe he was on the train, begad! Ethel, was Skimpole on the train?"

Cousin Ethel hurried up, shaking hands with the crew—all staunch chums of hers.

"Skimpole? No; I don't think he was—I never saw him."

"Humph! This looks awkward, begad. Hallo!"

A telegraph-boy was hurrying up to the boathouse, an orange-coloured envelope in his hand.

"Merry—anyone named Merry here?"

Tom Merry almost snatched the telegram.

"My hat!"

"What's the mattah, deah boy?"

"What's happened, Tom?"

"Skimpole has missed the train," said the hero of the Shell in bitter disappointment. "Oh, this is too bad! Why on earth didn't we make him come over by brake?"

"Bai Jove, whatever is to be done, deah boys?"

The juniors looked at one another blankly.

Impatient glances were being directed towards the boathouse by the Sefton crew, who were already afloat. Tom Merry was at his wit's end.

"Captain, would you motor along and fetch Dane? No; better have a Third-Former, on account of the weight. I——"

Tom Merry was flustered for once in his life.

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Cousin Ethel thought for a moment or two, then turned to the hero of the Shell.

"Suppose you get someone who doesn't know the river?" she said.

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"

"It's the thing you ought to have thought of then, begad!" muttered Captain Cleveland. "I suppose some of the Third Form know the river?"

"Yes; but where on earth are we to find them?"

"Humph! Still, you must have someone, begad, unless—the very thing, begad!"

They all turned to Captain Cleveland anxiously. Was there a way out of the difficulty after all?

"What about you taking the lines, Ethel, begad?"

The juniors gasped with amazement.

Cousin Ethel as cox! If she would, that was the very thing.

"Bai Jove, what a wippin' ideah, deah boy! Ethel, I ask you as a friend!"

Cousin Ethel blushed with excitement.

"But suppose I lose the race for you?"

"You won't do that, Cousin Ethel," said Figgins. "We shall win if you'll cox for us."

"Yes, begad; because she knows the river as well as their cox does."

"Will you, Cousin Ethel?"

"As a friend I ask you, deah gal."

"Of course I will; only you mustn't be cross if I lose the race for you!" laughed their girl chum. "As a matter of fact, I shall just love it!"

"Hooray!"

"Ripping of you, Cousin Ethel!"

"What about splashin' your frock, deah gal?"

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"I don't think splashin' my frock will matter much, Arthur," she said. "I am quite ready."

And nothing in the world would have allowed her to let Figgins carry the rudder down to the water's edge for her. She was cox for the St. Jim's crew. She was going to do the cox's work.

A moment or two later she was following her chums with their beautiful boat on their shoulders.

Carson, the Sefton stroke, grinned as the boat was launched. He meant to show St. Jim's what the U.S. could do that afternoon.

"Steady!" said Tom Merry, steady enough himself now.

"All in!"

The fellows slipped on to the thwarts, then backed before getting their feet in the stretcher-straps for Cousin Ethel to take her place.

Then Tom Merry gave the word.

"Paddle—back!"

He was getting into line with the rival boat.

Carson watched, an expression of amazement on his face at the sight of the girl cox. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

If St. Jim's liked to run risks of having their boat smashed into the bank of the difficult river, it wasn't his fault.

A moment or two later the pistol was fired.

Away the crews dashed, Tom Merry getting a dozen good strokes into the first twenty seconds against Carson's fourteen.

As it happened, that meant Carson had a foot start in the half minute.

Figgins had his teeth gritted.

He'd be at the bottom of the boat, done to the world, before Sefton should beat them. He glanced at Cousin Ethel's flushed face as he made that vow.

Stroke for stroke the two crews dashed through the water; then Carson quickened. He knew the river better than Tom Merry, and he knew his crew better.

He was conscious of these facts, and he had no doubt as to the ultimate result of the race.

Sefton was already creeping ahead.

Before two minutes were up their No. 6 was dead level with the St. Jim's bow.

Arthur Augustus saw this, and it made him long to quicken.

Why on earth wouldn't Tom Merry get another two strokes to the minute? He must know that his crew were ready to row themselves to their stretchers.

"Quicken, Tom Merry!"

"Let her have it!"

The cries from the bank now were tremendous. The boat-house was yards behind.

But Tom Merry kept his old stroke.

He was conscious of the fact that Carson was three strokes a minute quicker than he was, but he was only gaining in fraction of inches. Tom Merry knew enough about rowing to be satisfied.

Presently Cousin Ethel's voice sounded, in an excited sort of whisper.

"About half way, Tom," was all she said.

It was the one piece of information the St. Jim's stroke wanted to hear—to know how far he was from the finishing-post.

Carson quickened again, and a little breathing could be heard from his crew.

They were rowing magnificently, but would they ever keep that pace up?

"Three-quarter way!" whispered Cousin Ethel, in a voice she did not recognise as her own. "Quicken, Tom!"

And Tom Merry did.

Not rapidly, like Carson, but by degrees, getting in another stroke in the next half minute.

Carson saw what was happening, and called upon his crew. They answered gamely.

Sefton were getting ahead.

Their No. 4 was level with Arthur Augustus now—a half length lead.

Would there be daylight between the boats? Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

Carson was spurring, he was rowing with every ounce of his strength, sparing himself as little as he spared his crew.

Then confused cries sounded from the banks.

"Two hundred yards more!"

Cousin Ethel's voice again, her words coming just as Carson called upon his crew again.

There was nearly a length between the boats now, but the moment had come.

Tom Merry was going to row his crew out.

He quickened, his head went back, and he shut his eyes. It made no difference if he kept them open. He could see nothing but a sort of red blur, in which Cousin Ethel's pretty face only occasionally appeared.

Quicker and quicker his slide ran back on the runners—faster and faster his blade took and left the water, and the men behind him were rowing for all they were worth, too.

They were gasping, it seemed that their muscles were cracking, but that did not matter. Nothing mattered except that they were drawing level again.

Figgins could see nothing. He was done, and he knew it, but he pulled with the others. It required a good deal to beat the chief of the New House juniors.

If only he could see their No. 2.

Then the supreme moment came.

They were fifty yards from the end of the race, and half a dozen feet separated the colours.

Tom Merry was ready.

With an effort which showed the stuff he was made of he quickened. His crew answered the call; they were making the last spurt they would be capable of. Would it be sufficient to get them past the post first?

Cousin Ethel thought it would not. Then her face went white.

Tom Merry was wrenching at his oar wildly; Carson's crew were splashing. It was anyone's race yet, though.

With a tremendous effort Tom Merry got his boat in front for the first time.

His crew knew, rather than saw, it, and it was enough. Carson would not catch them again.

He tried—tried with every ounce of strength in his finely-balanced young frame, like the sportsman he was, and he actually made up some of the lost ground.

"Now!" cried Cousin Ethel.

A moment before it had seemed impossible that Tom Merry would be able to get another inch of pace out of himself or his crew, but he did.

His boat rolled, one or two of the men behind him splashed badly, then the pistol was fired.

St. Jim's had won their boat-race by less than three feet!

THE END.

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Oswald Yorke, a youth of eighteen, whom peculiar circumstances have forced to become a highwayman, one night holds up the carriage of Admiral Sir Sampson Eastlake. He is overpowered, however; but the good old admiral offers him a chance of serving the King in the Navy instead of handing him over to justice. Oswald, therefore, joins the frigate *Catapult* as a midshipman, under the name of John Smith. Oswald soon "smells powder," as the *Catapult* engages the French man-o'-war *Amadee*, which is consort to a captured Indiaman. Under the direction of Mr. Fryer, the first lieutenant, the *Catapult* has victory within grasp, when the captain, who is under the influence of drink, takes command, and steers the ship out of the fight. Infuriated by his cowardice, the crew threaten mutiny, and Mr. Fryer is hastily summoned by the now frightened captain. Under his authority the rising storm is quelled, and the malcontents, under the leadership of a man named Fid, are ordered to return to their duty.

(Now go on with the story.)

Oswald Talks in his Sleep.

Fid turned to his fellows, and for some moments they talked eagerly in low voices; then the spokesman, turning once more to the quarterdeck, touched his forehead.

"We are agreed, sir, to obey orders," he said briefly, and turned on his heel, the others instantly following his example, and returning to their various duties.

Captain Burgoyne breathed a sigh of relief.

"Insolent blackguards!" he muttered. Then he sneered: "You have wonderful control over them, Mr. Fryer. What a pity it is that you do not command this ship instead of me!"

Mr. Fryer bowed coldly.

"I know my duty, sir," he said briefly.

"Do you mean to say that I do not?" cried the captain, flaring up again now that immediate danger was passed.

"I would not presume to criticise you, sir. My own duty is clear—to respect and obey your orders, as I have always respected and obeyed the orders of my superiors."

"Was it by Captain Burgoyne's orders that you ran the *Catapult* into danger?" broke in Brabazon. "I presume—"

"You do, indeed, sir," said Mr. Fryer shortly. "I allow no criticism from my inferiors, any more than I allow myself to criticise those in authority over me." And so saying, he turned on his heel.

"One moment, if you please, Mr. Fryer," said the captain. "You ordered Smith to be carried below without consulting my wishes—"

"In order that he might receive the attention he needs," said Mr. Fryer.

"But if it is my wish that he is placed in irons instead of being nursed in your cabin, what then?" demanded the captain angrily.

Mr. Fryer shrugged his shoulders.

"It shall be as you think best," he said. "But, at the

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same time, if I might presume to offer you my advice, sir, I would not arouse the anger of the men too much now!"

"What do you mean?" cried the captain.

"I mean, sir, that Smith's action saved at least one of the crew from death, and naturally their sympathies are entirely with him. I should beware lest you force their sympathies into active form; that is all, sir." And Mr. Fryer walked below.

"Dictated to by that prig and defied by my crew!" muttered the captain between his clenched teeth. "Brabazon, I'll have that fellow court-martialled for this. I shall rely on your evidence, and I'll get him kicked out of the service. You heard him threaten me—you heard him threaten me that he would incite the crew to mutiny if I put that young scoundrel Smith in confinement?"

"I heard him distinctly," said Brabazon. "And you may rely on me for my evidence. I think he said, 'If you put Smith in chains I will induce the crew to release him,' or words something to that effect."

"That is precisely what he said. I am glad you noted it. I shall call a court-martial on the first opportunity."

By this time the last vestige of the *Amadee* and her prize had been swallowed up by the distance, and the crew of the *Catapult* were busily employed getting the frigate ship-shape.

The carpenter and his mates were already busily engaged repairing the breaches in her bulwarks. The mast-hands were hard at work on the rigging and chafing-gear. Others were swabbing down the deck and removing the bloodstains, while the victims of the recent fight were being sewed up in sailcloth by the sailmaker and his mate. Before night-fall there was little evidence of the engagement through which the *Catapult* had passed left on her decks.

Two hours after the night fell the moon rose, and Mr. Fryer, by the light of a lantern which one of the crew held, read the Burial Service over the bodies, and they were reverently lowered over the side into the dark water, through which they sank with a muffled splash to their last home on the ocean bed.

And down below, over a bottle of brandy, Captain Burgoyne and Lieutenant Brabazon were concocting vile lies and inventing plans to bring disgrace and humiliation upon the man they both hated, because he was braver, truer, and nobler than themselves.

Dr. Telford had examined Oswald's injuries, and by his instructions Maxwell was to stay by his side all night, constantly replenishing the cold water bandages that the doctor had recommended.

It was close upon midnight when Oswald came back to consciousness.

"Where am I? What has happened?" he asked, glancing curiously around the cabin. "Maxwell, is that you?"

"Yes, it's me all right," said Maxwell cheerily.

"Did we take her?" asked Oswald anxiously.

"Take what—the *Amadee*, do you mean? No!"

"Ah, she escaped, then! What a pity! I thought we were sure to capture her."

"Well, it looked like it; but, after all, we had to let her

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go," said Maxwell wonderingly. "Don't you remember that?"

Oswald shook his head.

"I don't remember much. I remember seeing our ship go through her sides, and the dead rolling on her deck, that's all. I suppose I must have got hit. Was I hit, Maxwell?"

"Well, not exactly," said Maxwell. "A—a chap grabbed you by the throat and half strangled you."

"A Frenchman? Then they boarded us?"

"Well, a sort of Frenchman, only rather worse," said Maxwell. "Now, look here, old chap, you mustn't talk so much, or I shall get into trouble."

Oswald obediently turned over and closed his eyes, and Maxwell, folding his arms, fixed himself in a more comfortable position.

"I can see the lights coming round the bend of the road," Maxwell started.

"Eh, what did you say, Smith? Not asleep yet?"

"Steady. Will, the old blood-sucker is coming; we will give him such a fright to-night that he will never forget."

Maxwell rose noiselessly, and bent carefully over Oswald.

"Why, he is asleep. Talking in his sleep," he muttered. "Stand and deliver! Your money or your life! Ah, there are others! By Heaven, they have shot him! He is down!"

Maxwell started at the note of horror in the sleeper's voice.

"What's the matter, Smith?"

"They have killed him! They think it was real, when it was only a joke. Well, they are after me; what shall I do? They are after me, and—and it was only to frighten him, I swear! It was only a joke!"

"What on earth is he talking about?" muttered Maxwell. "Ought I to awaken him?"

"Father, you believe that of me—you believe me a thief? For Heaven's sake, don't—don't turn away from me now!"

The voice rose clear and distinct, with a note of horror and pleading in it.

Maxwell could see that the perspiration was rolling in great drops down the sleeper's face.

"I ought to waken him," he muttered. "It won't do him any good to dream like this."

He seized Oswald by the arm and shook him forcibly. As the sick man unclosed his eyes, the door opened and Captain Burgoyne came in and peered round the dimly-lighted cabin. He was breathing hard, and lurched heavily against the bulkhead as the frigate rolled.

"Who were you talking to? I heard voices as I passed!" he demanded, glaring at Maxwell. "What business have you got here? Why ain't you at your duty? Cursed impudence, you boys doing just what you like! What are you doing in an officer's cabin, I'd like to know!"

"I am on duty, sir," said Maxwell coolly—"on duty here by the doctor's orders!"

If there was one person on the Catapult for whom the captain had the slightest respect, it was Dr. Telford; there was something about the little doctor that commanded respect, and a little wholesome awe, too, for his tongue was as sharp as his lancet, and Captain Burgoyne had felt its sting before now, and dreaded it accordingly.

"Oh, doctor's orders!" he grunted. "All right; suppose it's all right!" And he lurched out again, and closed the door of the cabin noisily after him.

It was not until he heard the captain's heavy, uncertain footsteps die away in the distance that Maxwell broke silence.

"Seems to me I woke you up in time, Smith! I never heard such a lot of rot as you were jawing. Another minute and the captain would have heard it, too."

"Talking in my sleep?" said Oswald turning even paler than he was before. "What did I say, Maxwell? What was I saying?"

"Well, I'm hanged if I know what you were saying! It was something about a carriage coming round the bend into sight, and money or your life, or some dashed nonsense of that sort. Then you howled out 'They have killed him!'"

The perspiration broke out into beads on Oswald's forehead.

"Anything else?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Yes, a whole lot more. Seemed to be annoyed with your father because he wouldn't believe some yarn you were pitching him, and you seemed to want to clear out somewhere."

Oswald lay back in his bunk breathing heavily.

"Thank heavens you woke me up before the captain came in, Maxwell!" Then suddenly he started up and caught Maxwell by the arm—"Promise—swear that if I tell—tell you something!" he cried. "I must tell someone—I must speak, or I shall go mad! Maxwell, I can trust you? You

would not go back on your word—you would not break faith with me, even though you disbelieved my story?"

"I don't know what you are talking about. Better lay down, old chap, and try and go to sleep."

"I can't sleep until I have told you; but promise first—give me your word of honour—swear!"

"Not to repeat what you say? Well, I'll give you my word of honour if you like; but it would be a good deal better for you if you went to sleep."

"Give me your hand, Maxwell!"

Maxwell reached out, and Oswald took his hand and held it firmly.

"Promise me now—promise me on your honour that you will never breathe a word of what I am going to tell you! Promise me!"

Maxwell saw that Oswald was in deep earnest.

"I promise you on my word of honour!" he said, throwing off the bantering tone he had affected.

For a quarter of an hour Oswald spoke in a low voice, telling Maxwell the story, as he had told it to Admiral Eastlake. All the fun had gone out of Maxwell's face long before Oswald had got to the end of his narrative, and when at last he had finished, Maxwell was silent for a moment.

"And—and that man suspects—he has recognised you?" he whispered.

"Yes, I am sure of it. The admiral—God bless him!—told a lie to shield me; but even that did not convince Captain Burgoyne."

"I know he suspects me; he watches me when I am near him. He is waiting for some incriminating word to escape me, waiting for some evidence, and when he has got it he will hang me."

"Good heavens! You are not safe on the Catapult, then, Yorke?"

"Smith! For Heaven's sake don't call me the other! I am Smith, now. Maxwell, you believe that I have told you the truth—you believe that I am not really what—"

"I believe you," said Maxwell heartily. "It is the most astonishing story I ever heard in my life; but I believe it, Smith." And as he spoke he held out his hand again, and Oswald grasped it tightly.

"Thank you!" he said simply. "You believe me, when even my own father thought the worst of me, and refused to listen to my explanation."

"It was deuced bad luck, Burgoyne being in the chaise that night."

"It was the hand of Fate—the Fate that nearly drove me to become in earnest what I had only pretended to be. But for the admiral, I—"

But at that moment the door of the cabin opened, and Dr. Telford came in.

"Ha, so you've come round at last, my lad!" he said, glancing at Oswald. "Maxwell, you young scoundrel, didn't I tell you that my patient wasn't to talk? And here I find you wagging your chins together like a couple of girls."

"I'm very sorry, sir! Promise not to open my mouth again, sir!" said Maxwell.

"Hallo, hallo! What's this?" said the surgeon angrily. "A nice excited state you have been getting yourself into, young man! Temperature gone up, perspiring like a confounded pig! I'll have to bleed you!"

In a twinkling he had whipped out his lancet, and jabbed it into Oswald's arm.

"This comes of your confounded prattling!" he said angrily to Maxwell. "By gad, I thought I could trust you; but I find I can't! There's not a man or boy on this—Confound it, now the young idiot has fainted!"

The excitement of telling his story to Maxwell had indeed put Oswald into a fever, and now, just as the blood was beginning to stream from his arm, his senses swam, and there suddenly descended on to him the blackness of night.

It was three days before Dr. Telford pronounced Oswald sufficiently recovered to go back to his duty, and during that time Maxwell had remained his constant attendant.

This and the secret the two lads shared between them brought the two lads closer together during those days than a year of ordinary intercourse might have done; and when Oswald left Mr. Fryer's cabin, convalescent, he and Maxwell were firm friends.

Meanwhile, things had not been prospering above deck, and it is probable that had it not been for the restraining influence of the first lieutenant, the discontent of the men would have found some outlet before this. Three of the most popular men in the crew had been flogged by the captain's orders for some slight disregard of duty. He had chosen an unfortunate time to exercise his power, and the men murmured among themselves, and cast evil glances in the direction of the quarter-deck whenever it held the captain and his ally and toady, Lieutenant Brabazon. Blind would any man be not to see the growing discontent of the

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By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

crew; it was apparent to Mr. Fryer, and his usually grave face grew graver still as the days went on.

"A large sail astern, sir, to windward!" called out the lookout man as he hailed the deck.

In a moment the men on deck sprang into life and eagerness.

"What do you make of her, Benton?" Mr. Fryer called out.

"Her hull hasn't risen yet, sir; but I should say by the cut of her canvas that she is a Frenchman, a big frigate!"

"Babbington, step down to the captain's cabin, if you please, and report a sail astern," said Mr. Fryer.

"By the time the skipper gets the message, we shall have the Frenchmen aboard us!" muttered Ticehurst.

Babbington went down and knocked at the door of the captain's cabin.

The captain and Mr. Brabazon were seated at the table talking, the former with his arms resting on the table, and leaning forward as though deeply interested.

"Well," he said gruffly, "what is it? What do you want?"

Babbington touched his hat, and shifted from one leg to the other; then he grew red and pale by turns.

"Why the dickens don't you speak?" roared the captain.

"Me-me-mister E-fuf-fuf—"

"Who the dickens is Mr. Fuf?" shouted the captain.

"Fuf-uf Fryer!" gasped Babbington. "Me-me-me-me—"

Brabazon burst into a roar of laughter.

But the captain sprang to his feet in a rage.

"What d'ye mean, you young hound, gasping and spluttering?"

Babbington stood petrified and dumb. Then he suddenly

bethought him of his old refuge, and, to the amazement of the captain, he broke into song to the tune of "God Save the King."

"Mister Fry-er-er-er
Says that I am to-o
Report a—"

"Get out of this before I break every bone in your miserable body!" roared the captain. "Have you gone mad, or did Fryer tell you to come and play this tom-fool trick? Out of it, I say!" And as he spoke he snatched an empty bottle from the table, and in his rage hurled it at the unfortunate Babbington's head. Babbington ducked just in time, and the bottle, crashing against the door, broke into a thousand pieces. Then, Babbington, half beside himself with terror, turned and bolted for his life, and did not stop running till he found himself on deck again.

"What are the captain's orders?" asked Mr. Fryer.

"Ge-ge-ge-get out!" spluttered Babbington.

"To get out!" repeated Mr. Fryer, in tones of surprise.

"Ye-o-o-es-to-g-ge-ge-get out!" repeated Babbington.

"Good heavens, the man is a disgrace to the British Navy!" muttered Fryer, under his breath. "He runs from every foe!"

He turned to the men, who were looking expectantly at him.

"My lads," he said, "it is the captain's orders that we—"

—his voice failed him for an instant—"that we stand out from the shore and run for it!" he finished, with an effort.

"Run for it, the cursed coward!" roared old Fid. "Cap'n, or no cap'n, I say he is a cursed coward, mates!"

The men roared their assent.

"Silence! How—how dare you! The captain's—orders must be obeyed! Hands lay aloft and make all sail! Aloft, I tell you!"

Even as he spoke the last word, his strength gave way, and one of the men rushed forward just in time to save him from falling to the deck.

They carried him below to the cockpit, where Dr. Telford and his assistants were busy with the wounded, and Mr. Pringle, the master, took command of the deck.

"Orders are orders, and, bad or good, they've got to be obeyed. Lay aloft, every mother's son of you! Aloft, or by thunder—"

The master was not a man to be trifled with, and the men went aloft sullenly and mutinously; but they went, and in a few minutes the frigate spread a fluttering mass of canvas to the wind.

Meanwhile, the hull of the strange frigate had risen above the horizon, and she proved to be undoubtedly a French frigate of considerable strength.

Whatever may have been the Frenchman's original intentions, the moment she saw the Catapult in flight she set all sail and stood in pursuit.

"That ever I should see it!" muttered Mr. Pringle, fixing his eye on the pursuing Frenchman. "That ever I should see a master on board an English frigate that runs away from every enemy she sees! There'll be red-hot mutiny over this! The crew are as mad as a pack of—"

"What the thunder and lightning is this?" roared the cap-

tain, tumbling up on to deck. "Who the—?" Just here he caught his foot in a ringbolt and fell flat on his face, which did not improve his temper.

Mr. Brabazon, coming up behind, helped him to rise, and the captain stood for a moment glaring about him angrily.

"Where is Mr. Fryer? Who gave him permission to leave the deck?"

"Mr. Fryer has fainted, and is in the doctor's hands, sir," said a midshipman.

The captain growled out an oath.

"Who gave orders to stand away from the shore—who—"

"You did yourself, sir," said Mr. Pringle. "Mr. Fryer sent down word that we had sighted a French frigate, and asked for instructions, and Mr. Babbington came back and said that your instructions were for us to get out!"

The captain glanced from Pringle to Babbington, who looked the picture of speechless misery.

"I said what? I—"

"You told him to get out!" muttered Brabazon in his ear.

If there was one thing the captain hated and had a horror of, it was being laughed at. He saw how the mistake had occurred. He had ordered Babbington to get out, and the fool had repeated the order to Mr. Fryer, who had understood it that the frigate was to get out, and had, consequently, put her before the wind.

"Quite right," he said, after a moment's pause. "That was my order. Keep her well before the wind, Mr. Pringle. With all these wounded men on board, I do not consider it policy to engage with the Frenchman. Rashness and foolhardiness is not bravery!"

And he went down below again, with the faithful Brabazon at his heels.

"No one can accuse him of rashness and foolhardiness, or bravery either!" muttered Pringle disgustedly.

The Catapult was now flying swiftly through the crisp sea, and, as the minutes passed, her sullen and discontented crew could see that she was steadily drawing away from the chase.

Before dusk fell only the topmasts of the Frenchman were visible, and then, evidently giving up the pursuit in disgust, the Frenchman beat back for the harbour.

Night had fallen when Oswald came up on to deck. His wounds had been attended to and bandaged up; but loss of blood made him feel still very shaky. Pringle was still on the quarter-deck in command of the vessel, with Ticehurst and Babbington as his assistants.

As Oswald came on to deck, Ticehurst came forward.

"Hallo! Smith," he said, "so you haven't taken a trip to Davy Jones this time. How are you feeling? You look a bit groggy on your pins."

"That's how I feel," said Oswald. "Where's the captain and Mr. Brabazon?"

Ticehurst gave a sniff of disgust.

"Where do you think?" he said. "Boozing, the blackguards; three sheets in the wind by this time!" Then he suddenly dropped his voice, and cast an anxious look round.

"I tell you, Smith, there's going to be trouble this voyage. The crew look like murder or mutiny or something very like it. They've stood a good deal of it, but this about reaches the climax!"

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Oswald.

Ticehurst told him.

"They won't stand it any longer. You can't play the fool for ever with men like these!" he said. "Mark my words, Smith, the fat's in the fire this time!"

And, shaking his head despondently, Ticehurst went below, while Oswald went to the bulwarks and leaned over, looking down on to the dark swirl of the water below.

There was a cool, refreshing breeze blowing, and the Catapult was still carrying on under all sail, although it was certain she had nothing to fear from the pursuit of the Frenchman now.

It was about half an hour later that Oswald felt a touch on his shoulder, and, turning round, saw Maxwell, whose face was as white as a sheet, and who seemed to be on the verge of fainting.

"Good heavens! what's the matter?" cried Oswald.

"I'm done up, old chap! Can't stand it. Sick as a dog!" And to prove his words, Maxwell made a rush to the side.

"Fact is," he said, a few minutes later, "I've been down in the cockpit with the doctor and his mates for the last three hours, and I couldn't stand it any longer. He told me to come up and send someone else down to take my place. I suppose you—you ain't fit?" He looked at Oswald inquiringly.

"If I can be of any use, I'll go!" said Oswald promptly.

Maxwell heaved a sigh of relief.

"You're a brick! Tell Telford I'll come down presently and lend him a hand again."

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