

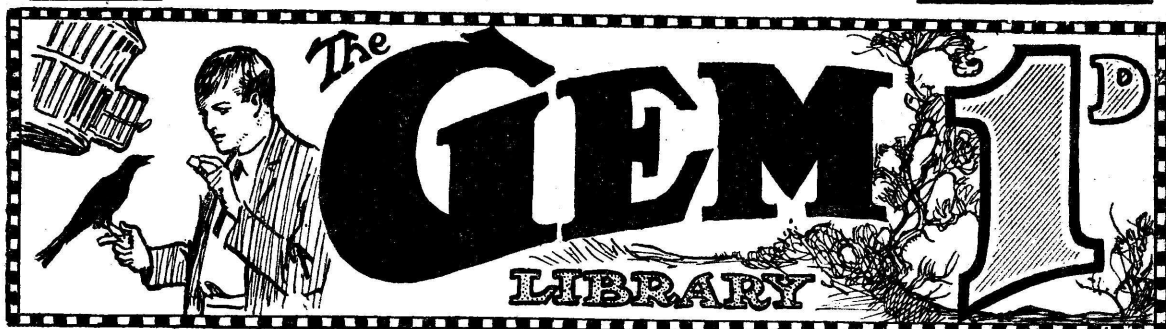
NEXT
THURSDAY:

“JOE'S CHAMPION.”

Another Splendid Tale of Tom Merry at
St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

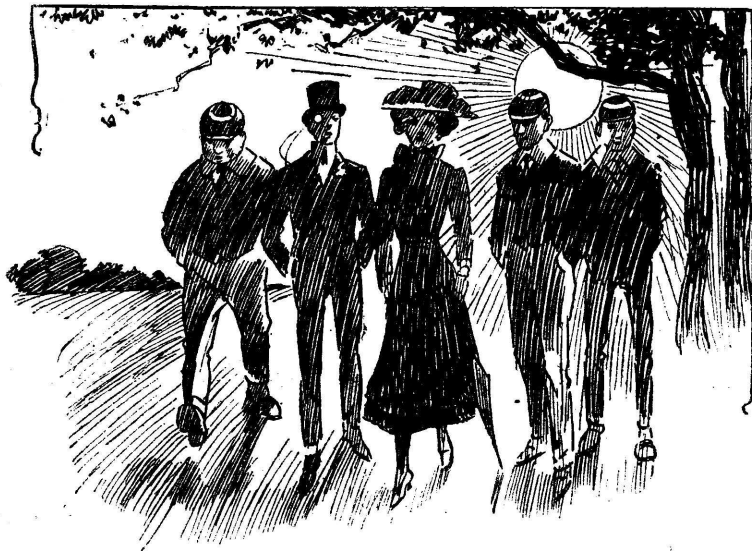
Every

Thursday.



Complete Stories for All and Every Story a Gem!

[Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Story are purely imaginary, and no reference or allusion is made to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.]



All Fools' Day at St. Jim's!



A Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Plotters.

“THE question is,” said Tom Merry thoughtfully, “how are we going to do it?”

“You're right, Tom,” said Lowther.

“That's the question,” added Manners.

It was March the thirty-first, and the Terrible Three—as Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners, of the Shell Form at St. Jim's College, were generally called—were assembled in their study—No. 1 in the Shell passage—after morning school in solemn conclave.

Upon one point they were all three agreed—it was up to them to make April fools of Figgins & Co., of the New House, on the morrow.

The only question was—how?

Judging by the faces of the Terrible Three, this question was proving a knotty one.

“We've just got to do it, you chaps,” said Manners, argumentatively, after a pause. “You heard how the New House bounders were swanking after the footer match?”

“Rather!” grunted Lowther. “They were saying that

anyone who made April fools of them would have to be pretty well up to snuff.”

“The cheeky bounders!” sniffed Tom Merry. “We'll show 'em!”

“Yes, but how?” said the practical Manners, coming back to the knotty point again.

“Blessed if you don't keep on the same note like a giddy parrot, Manners!” growled Lowther. “Turn on a new record, for goodness' sake!”

“You ass!” began Manners wrathfully.

“Rats!”

“Look here——”

“Oh, scat!”

“Peace, my children,” said Tom Merry pacifically.

“Peace, or I'll knock your giddy cocoanuts together! Now, to-morrow's April the first——”

“Go hon!” murmured Lowther sarcastically.

“Shut up, Monty! To-morrow's April the first——”

“So you said before!” grunted Manners.

Tom Merry stopped and glared, while his chums chuckled softly.

“Will you shut up, you pair of fatheads!” roared the leader of the Shell. “Blessed if I ever knew such a pair

Next Thursday:

“TOM MERRY & CO.” AND “THE BROTHERHOOD OF IRON.”

No. 167 (New Series.)

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of chumps! If you aren't enough to discourage a chap, when he has got a good idea—"

"Oh, so you've got an idea, have you, Tommy?" said Monty Lowther, curiously. "That alters the case, of course!"

"Of course I've got an idea, ass! While you two chumps have been cackling rot, I've—"

"Oh, cut that out and come to the point, Tommy!"

"Get on with the washing!"

Thus adjured, Tom Merry proceeded to explain the great idea which had just flashed into his mind.

"You know what fun we had with Fatty Wynn when we kidded him into trying to reduce his figure?" he said, with a grin.

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

"Well, my idea is, that Fatty Wynn should receive a big box from Mother Murphy's to-morrow morning. As some compensation for his recent sufferings, from his friends and admirers in Study No. 1." Ha, ha, ha!"

And Tom Merry burst into a ringing laugh.

Manners and Lowther surveyed their chum in silent disgust.

"And you're the chap who has the cheek to call yourself the leader of the Shell," said Manners, more in sorrow than in anger, apparently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you frabjous chump, a babe in arms would see through that rotten wheeze of yours in two seconds!" said Monty Lowther. "Are you off your rocker, Tom?"

Tom Merry checked his mirth.

"Fatty Wynn is easier to spoof than a babe in arms, if there's grub about," he said, with a shake of the head.

"You ass! But what about Figgy and Kerr?" cried Manners impatiently.

"Oh, they'll suspect something at first, of course," said Tom Merry, offhandedly; "but they'll be taken in when they unpack the hamper and see the grub."

Manners and Lowther gave a simultaneous gasp.

"The—the grub!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, not exactly the grub, you know!"

"Then what do you mean, ass?" howled Monty Lowther.

"Why, the—the—what looks like grub," said Tom Merry, with a wave of the hand.

"Blessed if I understand!" growled Manners.

"Neither do I!" snapped Lowther.

"Very well, I'll explain, you duffers," said Tom Merry, with a patronising air. "Have you ever noticed Mother Murphy's shop?"

Monty Lowther sniffed. Mother Murphy's was a tuckshop in Rylcombe Village, and there was not a fellow at St. Jim's who did not know it intimately inside and out.

"If you're going to be funny, Tom—"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Monty!" said Tom politely. "What I mean is, have you ever noticed the shelf which runs along the wall of Mother Murphy's shop, behind the counter?"

Manners and Lowther considered.

"It's full of tins of tongue and potted meat, etc., isn't it?" said Manners.

"That's just where you're wrong, Manners," said Tom Merry, impressively. "All those tins of stuff are dummies!"

"My hat!"

"My only aunt!"

"Now do you catch on, you dense chumps?" demanded Tom Merry. "I'm going to pack a lovely box for Fatty Wynn if Mother Murphy will lend me those dummies."

Monty Lowther and Manners stared at their leader for a moment dumbly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"It ought to work, oughtn't it?" grinned Tom Merry. "Imagine Fatty's face when he finds the whole lot are dummies!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Terrible Three roared in chorus at the idea.

CHAPTER 2.

Some More Plotters.

STUDY No 1 in the Shell passage was by no means the only study which was busy in taking thought for the morrow.

On the contrary, All Fools' Day plots were hatching in half the studies at St. Jim's, to say nothing of the Junior common-room.

Figgins & Co., of the New House, who occupied the chief place in the Terrible Three's thoughts, were themselves devising a plan whereby certain members of the school were

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intended to lay themselves open on the morrow to the reproach of "April fools."

But, in happy innocence of Study No. 1's amiable intentions towards them, Figgins & Co. were directing their mental energies against quite a different Co.—the Cornstalk Co.

Figgins & Co. had decided that the Cornstalk Co.—in other words, Noble, the Australian lad, Clifton Dane, the Canadian, and Bernard Glyn, the St. Jim's inventor—wanted "taking down a peg or two," and the present season seemed to the New House Co. to afford a suitable time for this desirable event to be brought about.

"Fancy that cheeky bouncer, Noble, offering to come over and teach the New House how to play football!" snorted Figgins. "Why, we were playing footer here, at St. Jim's, before Australia was thought of!"

Kerr, the Scottish partner, grinned.

"We must be a jolly sight older than we look, then, Figgy!" he remarked.

"Ass! You know what I mean!" returned Figgins. "When I said we, I mean the chaps who were at St. Jim's at that time."

"At what time?" inquired Fatty Wynn, the Welsh member.

Figgins sniffed.

"You're blessed dense, Fatty! Why, at the time when I'm speaking of—the time before Australia or any of these new countries were thought of!"

"Oh, ah!" said Fatty, vaguely, while Kerr grinned slightly.

"Very lucid, Figgy!" remarked the Scotsman. "But, speaking seriously, that blessed Kangaroo can play footer!"

"Rather!" chimed in Fatty Wynn. "Did you notice him this afternoon? Blessed if I could stop his shots for nuts!"

Fatty Wynn was the champion goalkeeper of the junior school, so that this, coming from him, was praise indeed.

"My dear asses," said Figgins at once, "do you think I don't know all about that? The Cornstalk's absolutely ripping at footer, and I only wish he was in our House team. Next to Tom Merry, I should say he has come on better than any other junior in the school."

"That's so," nodded Kerr.

"But what I say is," continued Figgy warmly, "blessed if we're going to stand him swanking about it over the New House!"

Kerr shook his head.

"Noble doesn't exactly swank, Figgy, you know."

"Well, no; but he has the cheek to chip the New House about their footer, and he ought to be sat on!"

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "But I say, did you hear what Kildare said to the beggar as he came off the field this afternoon?"

"No—what?" exclaimed Figgins and Kerr together.

"Kildare said the Cornstalk had played a rattling good game, and that he'd soon have to put him in a First Eleven trial match if he went on like that."

"My hat!"

"Good old Cornstalk!"

The New House Co. and the Cornstalk Co. were the best of friends in reality, and Figgins was delighted to hear of the honour done to the fellow he was proposing to "take down a peg" by the captain of the school. None the less, he intended to jape him.

"Cornstalk certainly played up like a blessed Steve Bloomer this afternoon, and I'm jolly glad that Kildare was there to see it!" said Figgins. "But all the same, we must make an April fool of the bouncer."

"Hear, hear!"

"Rather!"

"Then the question is— By Jove!"

"What is it, Figgy?"

"My hat!"

"What's up?"

"My only green panama!"

"What's the matter, ass?"

"I've got it!"

Figgins slapped his leg in ecstasy.

"Expound!" shouted Kerr.

"Out with it!" roared Fatty Wynn.

"Well," said Figgins, with a chuckle, "listen, my sons, and see if you don't agree that you've got a jolly bramy leader."

"Rats! Get on with the washing!"

"Right-ho! My idea is, that after what Kildare said to him, young Noble would hardly be very surprised if he received a notice that he was picked for the next First Eleven trial game, would he?"

"My aunt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr and Fatty Wynn chuckled joyously.

"The notice might end by telling him to report himself after morning school to Kildare for instructions," continued Figgins, grinning. "You can imagine Kildare's expression when the Cornstalk turns up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"But will he swallow it?" gasped Fatty Wynn. "It's pretty tall, you know."

"After what Kildare said to him, he'll be so bucked with himself, he'll swallow it like a shot," declared Figgins.

"Ha, ha! So he will!"
And so, like the other one of the Terrible Three's, the plot was hatched.

Meanwhile, the Cornstalk Co., themselves, had not been idle, nor had Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy—commonly called Blake & Co.—of Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage in the School House.

Plots were in the air by the score, in fact, and the morrow bade fair to be a record All Fools' Day at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 3.

Arthur Augustus is Taken to Task.

TELEGRAM for Master D'Arcy!
Toby, the red-headed page of the School House, after rapping at the door, had put his head in at the door of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, and made this announcement.

Blake & Co., the occupiers of that famous apartment, were within, plotting deep plots for the morrow, of course.

"Telegram for Master D'Arcy!" said Toby again.
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, commonly known as the swell of St. Jim's, adjusted his monocle somewhat hurriedly, and stared at the orange paper envelope.

"Hand it ovah then, deah boy," he remarked gracefully.
"Here you are, sir."

"Pway excuse me, deah boys!"
Arthur Augustus took the telegram, and tore it open rather hastily. An expression of satisfaction spread itself over his aristocratic features as he scanned the brief message.

"It's all wight, Tobay, deah boy. You may wotire."
"Yessir!"

Toby turned, and opened the study door as if to retire. But he did not retire immediately. He lingered a moment.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was reading the telegram over again, when he suddenly seemed to remember something.

"One moment, Tobay." He fished in his pocket. "Pway accept this tannah for your twouble."

Toby grinned as he took the proffered coin.
"Thank'ee, sir!"

And he retired, with a little chuckle.
"Silly ass, Gussy!" said Blake, as the door closed behind the page.

The elegant junior addressed gave his chum a stare through his monocle.

"Weally, Blake—"
"You're spoiling that young rascal, Toby, you duffer. He was waiting about for that tanner."

"Of course he was," said Herries.
"He knows his Gussy," grinned Digby, the fourth of the chums. "Knows what an ass he is, I mean."

"Weally, deah boys—" said Arthur Augustus, a little feebly.

"Well, don't do it again, chump," said Blake severely.

"That telegram probably only cost a tanner to send from Timbuctoo, or somewhere, and you give Toby a tanner for bringing it upstairs."

"But the telegwam isn't fwom Timbuctoo, Blake; it's only fwom—"

D'Arcy suddenly broke off short.

"Well?" said Blake, looking at his chum curiously.
Arthur Augustus looked confused.

"Er—it—it's only fwom quite a short distance away, deah boy."

"Oh," said Blake. He saw that D'Arcy had pulled himself up, and evidently did not want to tell his chums where the telegram came from. He felt curious, but, of course, said nothing.

Rat-tat!
Another knock at the door.

"Come in!" sung out Blake.
Toby's red head appeared again, adorned with a five-inch grin.

"Well?" said Blake rather sharply.
"Telegram for Master D'Arcy, sir."

D'Arcy gave a start.
"Kindlay hand it ovah, Tobay!"

The page handed over the second telegram, which Arthur Augustus proceeded to open and read, not forgetting to murmur a polite "Excuse me," again. His chums watched him curiously.

"There's no answah," he said at last. "You may clear off, Tobay, and here's a tannah for yourself."

And the good-natured swell of St. Jim's fumbled in his pocket, and gracefully presented another sixpence to the delighted Toby.

"Thank'ee, sir, kindly!" said the page, and withdrew hastily.

Arthur Augustus raised his eyes rather uncomfortably to look at his chums, and gave a sudden start.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed, in dismay.
The eyes of all three of his chums were fixed on him in a wrathful glare, Jack Blake's being positively basilisk-like.

"You ass!" roared Blake. "You've gone and done it again, you chump!"

Arthur Augustus shoved the telegram into his pocket.
"Bai Jove! Done what, deah boy?"

"Tipped Toby."
"Bai Jove! So I have! I nevah thought of that!"

exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, dismayed.
Blake snorted.

"You dummy! Blessed if—"
Rat-a-tat-tat!

Another knock!
Blake looked exasperated.

"Come in!" he shouted, in a long-suffering tone.
The study door opened, and in came Toby, a somewhat nervous grin on his freckled features this time.

"Telegram for Master D'Arcy, sir."
"G-give it heah, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus

D'Arcy helplessly, while his three chums looked on in ominous silence.

D'Arcy tore open the telegram agitatedly, and his face took a more cheerful look.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "No answah, Tobay."
He absentmindedly felt in his pocket, and drew out the smallest silver coin he had left. It was a shilling. He held it out to the expectant page.

"Heah, deah boy, give the telegwaph-boy a tannah, and keep the othah— Ow!"

He broke off with a surprised yelp, as Blake knocked his out-stretched arm up with a sharp blow, sending the shilling flying to the further corner of the study.

"You utter maniac!" roared the exasperated leader of the Fourth. "Chuck it, will you?"

"Toby the page set up a yell.
"Where's my shillin'?" Oh, Master Blake, where's my shillin' got to?"

Herries and Digby gave a simultaneous roar.
"Stop that row!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped the dismayed swell of St. Jim's.
The page-boy was seized in a none too gentle grasp by Herries and Digby, as he made a dive, with evident intent to grovel after the strayed shilling.

"Chuck it, you young burglar!" exclaimed Herries, giving Toby a vigorous shake.

Blake confronted the whimpering page with a stern look.
"Now confess, you blessed little highwayman! One telegraph-boy brought all those three telegrams at once, didn't he?"

Toby hung his head.
"Well, Master Blake—"

"Did he, or didn't he?" demanded Blake, in an awful voice.

"Ye-es, Master Blake."
"I thought so. And the bob that Master D'Arcy was going to give you"—Blake put particular emphasis on the "going"—"would have gone to join the other two sixpences in your pocket?"

"Ye-es, sir."
"There, Gussy, you see what a blessed little spoofer you are making Toby into! He brought those telegrams up separately, just because he knew you were soft enough to give him these tips!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus feebly. "Bai Jove! I wegard that as vewy w'ong of you, Tobay, deah boy!"

"Ye-es, Master D'Arcy," sobbed poor Toby, now fairly in tears.

Blake's face softened a little as he saw the genuine distress of the little boot-boy.

"Now then, don't be a young ass, and stop blubbling," he said gruffly. "Just remember that you are to bring telegrams up directly they come in future, and don't hang about for tips."

"Orl-r-right, sir!"
"Now cut off, then!" said Blake tersely.

Herries and Digby released their prisoner, and pointed to the door in their best dramatic manner as prominent members of the junior dramatic society. But the red-headed page still lingered.

"Is there anything else we can do for you, Toby?" asked Blake, a little grimly.

"P-please, sir," said Toby diffidently, "mayn't I have my shillin'?"

The four juniors gasped. After what had passed, this ingenious request fairly took their breath away.

Blake sighed at last, and shrugged his shoulders.

"No, Toby," he said, with an air of patient resignation. "I have been trying to indicate to you that it is not right to expect tips for every little thing you do. Leave the shilling where it is."

"Oh, Master Blake!"

The little page's face puckered, preparatory to another outburst, as he turned dolefully to the door.

Blake stepped over to him hastily, and gave him a gentle shove to help him out.

"Cut off, Toby," he growled. "And remember what I've told you!"

And the good-hearted Yorkshire lad slipped a coin—which had happened to be his last florin—into the page's hand, and shut the door.

His face was severe again as he turned to Arthur Augustus, who was looking rather sheepish.

"You see what harm your extravagant habit of promiscuous, ill-considered, and imprudent tipping leads to, Gussy?" he said impressively. "Young Toby is a decent kid enough at heart, but you will make him a mercenary young bouncer if you don't stop your blessed swanking habits of distributing largesse!"

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle, and gave Blake a chilly stare through it.

"I refuse to have my habits characterised as swank!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I regard it as my duty to reward anyone who is in a less fortunate posish. than myself for any service they do me, howevah slight."

Blake sniffed. Outwardly, he did not seem at all impressed by the stately tone in which Arthur Augustus delivered his views. Inwardly, he recognised and admired his chum's kind heart.

"Anyway," he snapped, "I don't believe in spoiling that kid Toby's character by over-tipping him."

"Is that why you gave him two bob, which I know was your last, Jacky?" inquired Digby sweetly.

Jack Blake turned pink, while D'Arcy and Herries leader.

"Did he do that?" exclaimed Herries, giving his leader a slap on the back. "Just like the good-hearted old ass! And after all his preaching at Gussy, too! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Herries and Digby, in chorus.

"Chuck it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stow it, you cackling asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had been gazing at Jack Blake's now crimson countenance through his monocle in indignation and amazement, joined in heartily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 4.

April the First.

LANG, clang, clang!

The strident notes of the rising-bell echoed insistently through St. Jim's. Taggles, the school porter, did not love early rising himself, but as he had to get up he rang the bell viciously in the determination to wake everybody else.

Clang, clang, clang!

The summons of the rising-bell did not immediately awaken much response in the slumbering Fourth Form dormitory on this particular morning. One or two juniors grunted, apparently in their sleep, and more than one turned over comfortable on his other side, and continued to doze.

At length one of the occupants of the white beds sat up, with a lazy yawn.

As a rule, it was Jack Blake, the leader of the Form, who was the first to rouse himself, and then he did not take long to rouse the others. But this morning it was Reilly, the lad from Belfast, who was first astir.

"Yaw-aw-w!"

Reilly yawned prodigiously, and rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"Sure, it's a mistake old Taggles must have made," he mumbled. "It's certain I am it's not five o'clock yet."

But a sleepy glance at his watch showed Reilly that it was in fact five-past seven, and he yawned again.

"Yaw-aw-w!"

Suddenly he gave a start.

"Faith, an' it's the fir-rst of April, that it is!" he exclaimed.

Just then Blake woke up.

"Tumble up, you chaps!" he called out. "It's late! Out you get!"

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With many grunts and sleepy groans, the juniors began to bestir themselves.

Reilly hopped on to the top of his bed-rail and took a look out of the high window beneath which his bed was placed.

The next moment he gave a yell.

"Snow!" he yelled. "Arrah, now, chaps, if it isn't snowing!"

There was a chorus of exclamations at once.

"Snow! Rats!"

"Snow at this time of year!"

"Chuck it, Reilly!"

"You're still dreaming, duffer!"

Reilly danced excitedly on the bed-rail.

"Faith, then, ye disbeliefin' gossoons, take a lufk for yerselves, thin!"

There was a rush of juniors to the look-out of the high windows. Snow at this time, after the fine, springlike weather they had been having lately! It was absurd!

There was a roar as the fellows looked eagerly out of the windows. Outside a bright morning sun shone on the green Close, giving promise of a fine, springlike day. But of snow there was not the slightest sign.

The boy from Belfast gave a yell.

"Ha, ha, ha! Faith, an' it's a pack of April fools ye are! Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fourth Form dormitory gave a gasp.

Of course, it was April Fools' Day! They realised it in a flash. Reilly had not given them time to realise it before scoring off them. And there was no doubt that the quick-witted Irish lad had caught them fairly.

"Ye sleepy-witted gossoons! Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Reilly.

But, caught as they were, the dormitory did not intend to allow Reilly to crow over them with impunity.

There was a general howl of wrath.

"The howling japer!"

"Go for the bouncer!"

"Give him something for his nerve!"

"Lynch him!"

A rush was made at the convulsed Irish lad, and he was grasped by many pairs of avenging hands.

"Rag him!"

"Give him beans!"

Reilly struggled and kicked in vain.

His hearty roars of mirth were changed into equally hearty roars of dismay as he found himself hopelessly overpowered by the rush of indignant juniors.

"Ow! Leggo!" he yelled. "Sure, an' I caught ye fairly!"

"Br-r!"

"Rats!"

"Faith, it's fair April fools I made of ye!" howled the luckless Irishman.

But the wrathful crowd of juniors were not in the mood to listen to reason from the daring japer. In their opinion, Reilly's nerve in daring to jape the whole dormitory, April 1st, or no April 1st, required severe measures.

"Duck the beggar!" shouted Digby, struck by a sudden, happy inspiration. "Souse him in a bath!"

There was an instant yell of approval.

"Good!"

"Hurray!"

"Yank him along!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The unfortunate joker struggled frenziedly

"Ow! Help! Leggo!"

"Rats!"

The crowd rushed their prisoner along the dormitory and out across the passage to the bath-room opposite.

The row of baths on their leaden slats looked very chilly, each being filled half-full with ice-cold water.

Reilly yelled again at the sight of them, and the juniors laughed joyously.

"Ha, ha, ha! We'll give him an April 1st bath!"

"Hear, hear!"

"In with him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Splash!

"Ow! Oh! Ouch! Garooh!"

There was a mighty splash and a terrific gasping and choking from the luckless Reilly, as he was plunged, pyjamas and all, into the ice-cold bath.

The juniors, their indignation appeased, yelled with laughter.

"I hope you see the point of this joke, Reilly, old man," grinned Digby. "It's jolly funny, you know, really!"

"This ought to cool his ardour for making jokes about chilly things like snow," chuckled Jack Blake. "His next joke'll be something warmer, I expect!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who's the April fool now, Belfast?"



D'Arcy grasped one of the hampers as best he might, and staggered along in the wake of the cheerful party, with the perspiration starting freely to his aristocratic brow.

"Ye, ye beasts!" yelled Reilly, floundering out of the bath. "Ye, ye haythen bouncers! I tell ye it was a fair April the First jape!"

"Ha, ha! So's this, old man!"

"Ye fatheaded gossoons!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Fourth-Formers, their good humour now thoroughly restored, trooped back to the dormitory to dress, with the exception of Blake & Co., and one or two others, who proceeded to have their morning tub.

Reilly stripped off his soaking night-clothes, and proceeded to rub himself into a warm glow with a rough towel, at the same time reflecting that smartness is not always appreciated as it ought to be, at any rate, out of Ould Ireland.

CHAPTER 5.

Arthur Augustus is Mysterious.

"MY hat!" said Blake.

"Phew!" whistled Digby.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Herries.

The three chums were standing in front of the letter-rack in the hall of the School House after breakfast. The letter-rack was unusually full this morning, and each of the chums found one or more letters for him.

But it was not this fact, though it was somewhat unusual, which was causing them surprise. Blake was pointing to a whole bundle of correspondence addressed to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, a bundle comprised of some half-dozen letters, and no less than eight telegrams.

"Where is the duffer?" demanded Blake, looking round at the crowd that was surging eagerly round the letter-rack. "There must be something up!"

"Rather! Look at the telegrams he had yesterday, too!" said Digby indignantly. "Toby brought three up into the study!"

"My hat, yes! Where is the bouncer?" grunted Herries. As Herries spoke, a languid drawl was heard coming from the further end of the passage.

The three chums exchanged grins. They recognised the tones of their aristocratic study-mate.

"Weally, Mellish," drawled the voice, "I wefuse to admit that you have made an Apwil fool of me! If you persist in your wiculous statement, I shall have no wescource but to administah a feahful thwashin'!"

"But, you ass, I did make you an April fool, and a jolly easy job it was, too!" came in the unpleasant tones of Mellish, the cad of the Fourth.

"Pway wefwain fwom callin' me oppwobwious names.

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT WEEK

"JOE'S CHAMPION."

Mellish," replied Arthur Augustus, in chilly tones. "I absolutely wefuse to be called an ass. I considah that this conversation had bettah cease befoah I lose my tempah and stwike you!"

"Hark at that blessed gramophone!" grinned Blake.

"Hallo there! Gussy, you're wanted!"

"Hallo, deah boy! I'm just comin'!"

And the elegant swell of St. Jim's strolled gracefully into view.

As soon as he was near enough, Blake grabbed him by the arm.

"Now, then, what's your little game, Gussy?" he demanded severely.

Arthur Augustus gazed at his chum with a chilly stare that ought to have withered him on the spot. Then he groped for his eyeglass, and, screwing it firmly into his eye, he gazed again.

But Jack Blake did not seem disturbed.

"What's your little game, you boulder?" he demanded again.

Arthur Augustus drew himself up in his most stately way.

"Weally, Blake, I stwongly object to bein' accused of havin' any little game on," he said, in icy accents. "I should wefuse to be up to any little game, you know. I must also wequest you to wefwain fwom callin' me a boundah."

Herries and Digby chuckled, while Jack Blake gave a roar. "You blessed chump! Come off it! Look here, what's the meaning of all these telegrams if you haven't got a little game on, eh? It's not your birthday or anything, I suppose?"

Arthur Augustus gazed at the pile of orange-coloured envelopes, and his jaw dropped in obvious dismay.

"Bai Jove!"

Several juniors standing round looked at the swell of St. Jim's curiously. It was not a very common thing for a junior to receive one telegram, but when he had eight at a time, it was something to make the fellows open their eyes.

"It isn't your birthday, Gussy, is it?" inquired Kerruish, the Manx lad, repeating Blake's question.

Arthur Augustus gave a start.

"Weally, Kewwuish, I should uttably wefuse to have a birthday on Apwil the First, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"Faith, an'-it's a jolly good day for ye entirely," said Reilly solemnly. "Miny happy returns of the day, me lord!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned pink

"Weally, Weilly—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you wottah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors chuckled joyously, and D'Arcy gave up attempting to remonstrate. He gathered up his letters and telegrams, with an indignant look at the mirthful ones, and strode off, making for the direction of Study 6 in the Fourth-Form passage.

Blake, Herries, and Digby exchanged glances.

"Come on," said Blake resolutely. "I'm going to get to the bottom of this! Gussy had no business to have all that correspondence without consulting us."

"Rather not!"

"Then come on!"

And the three chums marched off after D'Arcy.

They found him in the study, just starting to open his telegrams. As they came in, he looked up with an expression of annoyance, and began to cram the telegrams in his pocket.

Jack Blake wagged a finger at him severely.

"Look here, Gus," he said impressively, "it won't do. We can't have you going about with guilty secrets. What is it?"

"Out with it!" admonished Digby.

Arthur Augustus looked distressed.

"Weally, deah boys, it is not a guilty secwet at all. It's— it's only—"

"Well, what is it? We ought to know, as your chums and study-mates," said Blake.

"Wats!" said D'Arcy. "It's pwivate, you know, deah boys!"

"Oh!" said Blake slowly. "It's private, is it? So you don't want us to know?"

"No, deah boy"

"If you're in any trouble—"

"But I'm not in any twouble, you see, Blake, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, much distressed. "You—you see—"

"Blessed if I do!" said Blake shortly.

"You haven't taken up rotten betting on racehorses, I suppose, Gus, and those telegrams are the latest wires from the course?" inquired Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies, you ass—"

"Well, that's what it looks like, you know," said Herries,

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with a solemn shake of the head. "If you won't tell us what it really is, you can't blame us if we put a wrong construction on the affair."

"You wottah, Hewwies—"

"Abuse is no argument," said Herries calmly. "It only makes the case look more suspicious against you."

"You—you feahful chump, Hewwies—"

The three chums chuckled. They could not help it, in spite of the fact that their aristocratic chum was glaring at them with a withering glare.

"I wegard you as a set of cacklin' asses!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in tones of deepest indignation. "I shall wefuse to wegard you as fwriends in futchah! Pway wetre!"

"Then you refuse to tell us the guilty secret?" asked Blake.

"Certainly, Blake!"

"Very well, then," exclaimed Blake, in a tone of warning, as he linked arms with Herries and Digby. "Very well, then, Gussy! We will leave you to your evil courses—at present. But we can't stand much more of it, you know, so I warn you. Ta, ta!"

And the three chums went out of the study arm-in-arm, leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looking very disturbed and indignant.

CHAPTER 6.

The Terrible Three are Caught.

THE three chums of the Fourth swung out of Study No. 6 into the Fourth-Form passage and down the stairs.

They swung out into the quad., still arm-in-arm, and at the bottom of the School House steps they swung right into three other juniors, who also had their arms linked.

Crash!

There was a dull thud and a yell from six throats simultaneously, and the two colliding trios glared at each other wrathfully.

"You blundering Shell-fish!" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"Where are you coming to?"

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed the centre one of the three juniors addressed indignantly. "Here you clumsy Fourth-Form kids come barging down the steps slap into us, and then ask us where we're coming to!"

"Blessed nerve, I call it!" chimed in one of the chums.

"Oh, rats to that, Tom Merry!" said Jack Blake, with a good-natured grin. The trio with whom the Fourth-Form chums had collided were none other than their friends the Terrible Three. "Who are you calling kids, anyway? But as it happens, I wanted to speak to you."

"Fire away, then!" said Tom Merry cheerily, as the two trios fell into step alongside one another.

Jack Blake nudged Herries on one side of him and Digby on the other, and received answering nudges back in token of complete comprehension. Then he cleared his throat.

"Ahem! I was just wondering whether you and Manners and Monty had—er—seen it yet."

Herries and Digby put up their hands to smother chuckles, while the Terrible Three stared at Blake in surprise.

"Seen what?" they demanded, with one voice.

Blake coughed, and grinned.

"Then you haven't been over there?" he remarked, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

"Over where?" inquired Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"What on earth are you driving at, Blake?"

Blake, Digby, and Herries exploded into a loud guffaw, while the Terrible Three glared at them with rising wrath.

"They're off their blessed rockers!" said Monty Lowther, with conviction.

"They must be!" said Tom Merry.

"Right off!" added Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "They little know! If they could only see it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries and Digby. They had no idea what "it" might be, but they had a very good idea of backing Jack Blake up. They held their sides as if in an ecstasy of mirth.

"Only see what?" howled Tom Merry. "Explain, you ass, Blake, or we'll wipe up the quad. with you!"

And the Terrible Three advanced on the Fourth-Formers with warlike looks.

"Here, hold on!" gasped Blake. "I don't want a scrap just now!"

"Expound, then, you boulder!" growled Monty Lowther.

"And be quick about it!" grunted Manners.

"Well, look here," said Blake more seriously, and apparently somewhat reluctantly, "I don't want to give the whole show away, you know! But it's rather a shame, after all, blessed if it isn't!"

"It is a bit!" said Digby, with a grin.

"That's what I think!" added Herries.

"You babbling asses, will you explain?" shouted Tom Merry.

"Your new football, too!" said Blake musingly, as if to himself.

"What?" howled Tom Merry.

"And Monty Lowther's new great-coat!"

"Eh?" roared Lowther.

"To say nothing of Manners' Sunday bags!"

"What's that?" shrieked Manners.

"Of course," went on Blake calmly, "if you fellows haven't been behind the fives-court—"

"Behind the fives-court!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I said behind the fives-court," repeated Jack Blake stolidly, "Of course, I don't say you'll find anything there, but—"

"My hat!" shouted Manners. "I believe I tumble! Come on!"

"What-ho!"

"Rather!"

And the Terrible Three dashed off across the quad, at top speed in the direction of the fives-court, which lay on the farther side of the playing-fields.

Jack Blake slapped his leg in ecstasy as he watched them go.

"How's that, chaps?" he chuckled. "How's that for an April fool jape? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha! There's nothing behind the fives-court, of course?" gasped Digby: "No effigy of Tom Merry, or anything like that?"

"Not that I know of!" grinned Blake. "I never said there was, did I?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

And the three chums of the Fourth roared again.

Clang—clang—clang!

"My hat!" exclaimed Herries. "There's the bell for morning classes! Come on!"

"Rather!"

"Those duffers'll be late if they don't buck up," said Blake, as they ran into the School House. "Hope they don't get lined."

"So do I," grinned Digby. "They'll be sick enough as it is when they realise how they've been done."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. were late in getting into the Shell Form-room, but, as it happened, Mr. Linton was a little late that morning, so they escaped any punishment.

As Digby foretold, they were looking decidedly "sick" as they all slipped breathlessly into their places at the last moment.

Neither did the sight of a bit of paper pinned with a drawing-pin to the desk of each tend to raise their spirits much.

The bits of paper all bore the same legend, in the hand-writing of Jack Blake:

"April fool!"

CHAPTER 7.

The German Lesson, and After.

THE second lesson for both the Fourth and the Shell Form at St. Jim's on Saturday mornings was German, for which subject the two Forms were combined, and were taken together by Herr Schneider, the German master.

Blake & Co. grinned cheerfully at Tom Merry & Co. as the Fourth invaded the Shell class-room for the German lesson, and the Terrible Three could not help grinning back, though a little sheepishly. At the same time, they made signs to the Fourth-Formers indicative of what they would do to them after school, whereat the Fourth-Formers only grinned still more broadly, and made audible remarks about April fools.

"Now, mein poys," exclaimed Herr Schneider, blinking a little uneasily at his class through his large spectacles. "This morning we do to te translation come. Let te boy Reilly the first exercise make. Nun, Junge die erste Aufgabe!"

"Faith, an' I will, sorr—I mean, ja, ja, mein herr, sure I'll do the first Aufgaber with pleasure," said Reilly cheerfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, poys!" rapped out Herr Schneider. "I will in te class-room silence have, ain't it?"

"Sure, of course it is, sorr!" said Reilly solemnly. "It's right ye are, Herr Schneider!"

The stout German master stared at Reilly suspiciously, but the face of that youth was the picture of innocence.

"Get on, poy!" said the German master testily. "Do not talk so much mit yourself, but get on mit der exercise."

"Faith, Herr Schneider, how can I not talk and get on with the Aufgaber, too, sorr?" inquired Reilly, in a puzzled tone. The truth of the matter was, Reilly had scartely

given the time necessary to master the German exercise at prep, the night before, and he was not at all keen to display his knowledge of the German tongue—or his lack of it—that morning.

Herr Schneider's bushy moustache bristled, and he grasped his pointer in a businesslike grasp.

"Vill you mit der Aufgabe on get, poy?" he roared.

Reilly groaned, and plunged at the exercise.

"Wo sind meine pantoffeln?" he read, in halting accents.

"Where—where are my—my—"

"Pantoffeln!" exclaimed Herr Schneider. "Know you not what are pantoffeln, poy?"

Reilly stared at the word desperately.

"Sure, sorr, I—I don't like to translate it too literally, sorr," he remarked diffidently. "You—you see, sorr—"

"Pless to poy, ain't it?" exclaimed Herr Schneider impatiently. "What means pantoffeln, eh?"

Reilly gave a gasp.

"Where—where are my pant—I—I mean, where are my trousers, sorr?" he mumbled.

"Trousers!" shrieked Herr Schneider. "Ach Himmel, te poy is crazy! Pantoffeln—trousers!"

Reilly grinned a little awkwardly.

"Well, sorr," he explained diffidently, "when I say trousers, sorr, what I really mean, of course, is pan—"

"Himmel, te poy is mad!" roared Herr Schneider. "Pantoffeln means not trousers—he means slippers! Ach, himmel!"

Reilly's face for the moment looked the picture of dismay. The next minute, however, it broke into a broad grin.

"Faith, an' I see phwat it is, Herr Schneider, darlint! It's a game ye're havin' wid me, so it is!" he exclaimed.

"Sure, I forgot it was April the Fir-st, sorr!"

"Poy!" shrieked Herr Schneider.

"Sure, I see, it's pullin' me leg ye're after doing, sorr," went on Reilly. "It's not remembering the date at first I was at all, at all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the class, unable to restrain themselves any longer.

That was the last saw to the excited German master. He hauled the bewildered Belfast lad out in front of him, and laid into him with the pointer, with an energy which completely undeceived Reilly of the idea that Herr Schneider was joking. Copious doses of lines scattered among the rest of the class restored order at last, and the German lesson once more settled down to its usual more or less placid course.

Towards the end of the lesson, a little screwed-up pellet of paper fell on Blake's desk in front of him. Blake secured it, and read it cautiously, under cover of his exercise-book.

"Dear Blake," it ran—"we are scrambling a basket of apples I have had sent me behind the gym, during the interval. I thought perhaps you and your pals would like to come.—H. NOBLE."

"I don't think!" muttered Blake. "No, Noble, my lad, it's a bit too thin, seeing that to-day's April the First."

He looked over his shoulder towards where Noble, the Cornstalk junior was sitting. Noble grinned at him cheerfully, and Blake grinned back before turning round again.

Jack Blake was mightily amused.

"He'll have to get up a bit earlier than that, if he wants to catch a Yorkshireman," he chuckled to himself. "I thought the Cornstalk was smarter than that!"

He wrote the date "April the First," at the top of the note, and flipped it over to Digby. Dig read it with a grin, and nodded comprehendingly to Blake, at the same time passing it on to Herries.

Herries perused it carefully, while his chums watched him in amusement.

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Finally he passed it on with a serious face to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was sitting just behind him.

Arthur Augustus read it through carefully once or twice, and then he looked up and met the eyes of Blake and Digby, who were grinning. Arthur Augustus read the note again, and gave a wise little nod to himself. He winked at Blake and Digby with a knowing air, as he screwed the note up and dropped it on to the floor.

"I wathah think I'm too deep to be caught like that, bai Jove!" he murmured to himself. "Yaas, wathah!"

The whirr of the class-room clock, as it prepared to strike eleven, just then broke in upon Arthur Augustus' self-satisfied reflections, and caused a general shutting of books and shuffling of feet throughout the class-room.

"You may dismiss, poys, after, ain't it?" exclaimed Herr Schneider, in tones of evident relief, and there was an instant rush for the class-room door.

The Cornstalk Co. were some of the first out, and they made a bee-line for their study at the end of the Shell passage.

Noble hurled open the study door and heaved his German books on to the table. The precious half-hour of morning break was too short for a moment of it to be wasted.

"Give us a hand to heave this along, Dane," he exclaimed, laying hold of one handle of a good-sized basket which was reposing on the floor. "We— Hallo! What's that, Glyn?"

Bernard Glyn, the St. Jim's inventor, was examining an envelope which he had picked up from the table.

"It's for you, Noble," he exclaimed. "Typewritten, too, by Jove!"

"My hat!" Noble straightened himself up suddenly, and grabbed at the note. "It—it can't be—"

"Can't be what?" demanded Glyn and Dane together.

"Oh, nothing! I—"

"Open it, you duffer!"

Noble slit open the envelope, which was addressed simply to "H. Noble," and grabbed at the bit of paper, also typewritten, inside.

The next moment he gave a terrific whoop.

"It is!" he yelled. "Hip, pip, hurrah!"

"What is it?" shouted Glyn.

"Out with it!" urged Dane.

"Hurrah! Listen you chaps! Please note that you are to turn out for punt-about practice on the First Eleven practice-ground immediately after morning school.—J. KILDARE (Capt.). How's that, my sons?"

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

Glyn and Dane stared at their chum like fellows in a dream.

They knew what that summons meant, it meant that Noble was summoned to turn out for footer practice, with the great men of the First Eleven, that he stood a chance of being picked for the highest honour known to a St. Jim's footballer—a place in the First Eleven itself!

It was almost incredible.

"But—but you've never even been tried for the Second Eleven yet!" stammered Glyn, absolutely unable to believe his chum's good fortune.

"I'm—I'm blessed if I understand it!" muttered Clifton Dane half to himself.

Harry Noble grinned.

"I'm blessed if I do myself, hardly," he said; "but there's no doubt about it. Kildare's notices are the only ones which are typed, besides the Head's, you know! Besides"—Noble laughed exultantly—"after what Kildare said to me after the House match yesterday, blessed if I didn't half expect it!"

Glyn stared in sheer amazement.

"You—you half-expected it? Well, my hat!"

"Well, not exactly," said Noble modestly; "but—but, you see—"

"Blessed if I do!" said Glyn emphatically. "I know Kildare cracked you up no end after the House match yesterday, old man, but as for the First Eleven—"

Noble laughed merrily.

"Well, anyhow, I'm going to turn up after school on the practice-ground."

"You—you're going to the First's punt-about!"

"Rather! What do you think? You can't get over this notice, Glyn, old man. But don't say anything to the chaps yet."

"Well, my hat!"

Bernard Glyn seemed utterly unable to say more than that. The ejaculation seemed to express his feeling exactly.

Dane also looked decidedly incredulous.

Harry Noble seized impetuously on the handle of the basket again.

"Anyway, give us a hand with this at present," he exclaimed. "THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 164.

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claimed. "There'll be a crowd up here to lynch us if we don't show up behind the gym."

"Right-ho!"

And Cornstalk & Co. staggered out of the study under the weight of the heavy basket, Noble walking as if he were treading on air, and his two chums evidently still in a state of considerable amazement.

CHAPTER 8.

A Surprise for Figgins & Co.

IF Figgins & Co., of the New House, could have witnessed the effect which their carefully-typed notice had on Cornstalk & Co., they would no doubt have been vastly amused. They had expended a lot of care on the notice, which had actually been typed with Kildare's own typewriter. Kerr had begged it for half an hour from Monteith, the New House prefect, and president of the Sixth Form Debating Society, who, having a lot of notices to get out in connection with the society, had borrowed it from Kildare to facilitate his labours.

But, as a matter of fact, Figgins & Co. had received such a surprise themselves on returning to their study after the German lesson, that they forgot all about the little surprise-packet they had prepared for the Cornstalk Co., and the probable effect it was having.

The first thing that greeted the eye of Figgins & Co. as they entered their study, was an enormous hamper addressed in bold characters to "Master Wynn, New House, St. James' College, Sussex."

Fatty Wynn, who had just been explaining to his chums the extraordinary fact that he was invariably extra hungry just at the beginning of April, gave a gasp of delight as he saw the enormous hamper.

"My word, you chaps! Look at that!" he exclaimed in ecstasy. "Ain't it absolutely spiffing!"

"By Jove—yes!"

"Rather!"

The hamper certainly looked extremely inviting. The lid bulged outwards, as if the good things within were almost bursting forth, enabling it to be secured only with great difficulty.

Straw was peeping out between the wickerwork, and, in short, the whole appearance of the hamper gave promise that the best of good cheer, and plenty of it, would be found within.

Fatty Wynn's eyes glistened as he eyed it with a watering mouth.

"This is from my Aunt Janet, I'll bet!" he exclaimed. "I always said she was a trump, and would come down handsome one day, and give me a pleasant surprise. This is it, I'll be bound!"

"Good for your Aunt Janet, then!" said Figgins.

"Hear, hear!" joined in Kerr heartily. "I've a couple of uncles I'll be glad to swap for her, if you'll do it, Fatty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Out with the grub!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn energetically. "I'm hungry. We'll have a snack now, at once."

"Good!"

"Rather!"

And the three chums laid violent hands on the bloated-looking hamper.

"There's one thing I'm jolly glad about," grunted Fatty Wynn, as he wrestled with the string which tied the lid on, "and that is, that I never had any breakfast to speak of this morning, so I've got a good appetite now for the grub in this hamper."

"Ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "I like that, you fat fraud! You had just as much breakfast as you could manage to get down by hook or crook!"

"And that was about enough for a regiment of Dragons!" added Kerr. "Blessed if I can understand how you'll be able to eat anything more this week."

"Well, I like that, you chumps!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly. "You know very well I only had half a tin of sardines and a couple of pork-pies, besides the egg and ham! Of course, I had some bread-and-butter and marmalade, and a sausage-roll or two to fill up, but that doesn't count!"

"Of course not!" said Figgins sarcastically.

"Quite right, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn, on whom the sarcasm was quite lost. "I don't say I'm a poor eater, mind you—"

"Go hon!" murmured Kerr.

"I don't say I'm a poor feeder," continued Fatty Wynn argumentatively, "but I'm not greedy. I like a lot, that's all."

"You do!" agreed Figgins. "You does, Fatty!"



"What do you want?" asked the fat gentleman as Alonzo advanced towards him. "I wish to become a clown, Signor Tomsonio," said Todd simply. (See the grand, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled, "The Greyfriars Clown," by Frank Richards, in this week's "Magnet" Library. Price One Penny.)

"Hear, hear!" murmured Kerr. "It's a fearful thing, not to be able to get enough to eat," went on Fatty Wynn pathetically. "I'm blessed if I know how my constitution stands it. But this looks a bit better," he added, brightening up, as the lid of the hamper came unfastened at last, and numerous tins and packages showed, partly visible in the straw packing.

"My hat! What a ripping lot of grub!" exclaimed Figgins, in admiration. "I wish the dickens I had an Aunt Janet!"

"Out with the stuff!" grunted Fatty. "Let's get it all out and see what it is before we have a snack. I'm hungry!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Right-ho!"

Fatty Wynn set the example by laying hold of a large tin of tongue, which jutted out prominently among the top layer of the eatables. He gave a pull, but the tin seemed to be wedged in, somehow.

"Come out of it!" he grunted, giving a mighty pull.

Crash!

There was a mighty bump as the tin came away in Fatty's hand, and the Welshman overbalanced himself, and sat down heavily on the floor.

Figgins and Kerr stared, but the next minute they started violently and stared more than ever.

Fatty Wynn suddenly set up a terrific howl.

"It's spoof!"

"What?" roared Figgins and Kerr together.

"We're spoofed! It's all sham! We're done down!" yelled Fatty Wynn. "Look here!"

He gave a powerful wrench, and the big tin of tongue he was holding came in two pieces in his hand.

"Cardboard!" he shrieked.

"Dummies!" howled Figgins and Kerr. "We're spoofed!"

The three juniors made a dash at the hamper, and began to hurl the articles therein contained out in a frenzy.

Every one proved by its lightness, just as Fatty's tin of tongue had done, that it was a dummy—a realistic cardboard imitation of the real thing.

Right—left, the enraged and disappointed juniors hurled the dummies, until the bottom of the hamper was reached. There something caught their eyes which added the last drop of bitterness. A neat square of cardboard was tacked to the bottom of the hamper, bearing the words, in the round, firm handwriting that all three recognised at once as Tom Merry's, "April Fools!"

That finished Figgins & Co.—especially Fatty Wynn. The plump junior almost wept with rage and annoyance as he realised how he had been done.

"The spoofers!" he screamed. "The beastly spoofing cads! Wait till I get at them. I'll—I'll squash 'em! I'll give 'em April fools! I'll—I'll roll on 'em!"

Wherent Figgins and Kerr, though themselves athirst for vengeance, had to laugh.

CHAPTER 9.

Noble Makes a Little Mistake.

WHEN the bell for classes rang at the end of break, the juniors swarmed into lessons, with many mixed expressions on their faces.

Most of them had been made April fools of by someone or other, and there were some very crestfallen countenances among them.

Figgins & Co. were boiling over with wrath, Fatty Wynn.

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especially being in an almost speechless state. Blake & Co. were looking decidedly glum, too.

They realised that they had been made April fools of in a particularly exasperating way by Noble & Co., and the idea did not please them—especially Herries. Blake, Digby, and D'Arcy had never doubted that the note from Noble about the apple-scramble was a clumsy attempt to catch them, and they had professed themselves vastly amused at the Australian lad's unusual simplicity in trying to pull the wool over their eyes in such a manner.

Herries had not been so sure, and had advocated going behind the gym. to have a look, anyway. His proposal, however, was received with glares by his study-mates, who negatived it emphatically, and threatened Herries with a bumping if he let them down by going anywhere near the gym. during break.

It was, therefore, with considerable dismay that Blake & Co. observed that every second youth at least among their Form-fellows was finishing an apple as he went into class after break. It began to dawn on the heroes of Study No. 6 that they had been a little too hasty, and that Noble's apple-scramble had really taken place behind the gym.

Herries had shown a disposition to grumble, and adopt an "I-told-you-so" sort of air; but this had been promptly and firmly checked by his study-mates, who showed very clearly that they were not in the mood to stand it.

There was a notable exception to the prevalent depression, and that was Harry Noble. The Australian junior was perfectly aware of how Blake & Co. were feeling, and he did not attempt to hide his satisfaction thereat. But, above all, was he not bidden to footer practice with the First Eleven after morning school? It was enough to make any Shell fellow feel elated.

Never had lessons seemed to Noble to drag as they did that morning. Long before the end of them Noble gave up trying to concentrate his thoughts on the lesson in hand, which happened to be English history.

He brought down the wrath of Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, upon him several times, by allowing his pre-occupation of mind to lead him into giving the most extraordinary answers ever made to history questions. When asked to explain what he thought accounted for William the Conqueror's success, he replied, without hesitation, that it was constant practice at shooting at goal.

In answer to a question as to the position of the barons of England during the early part of the fifteenth century, he electrified the class by saying "Outside right!" and he asserted that the Battle of Senlac took place on the First Eleven footer-ground.

These random answers earned Noble numerous impositions, but it was not until Mr. Linton threatened to detain him after morning classes that the junior realised the danger, and paid some attention to his books.

When lessons were over at last, Harry Noble leapt up from his desk, and bounded out of the class-room like a hare.

Figgins & Co. exchanged grins, and made their way leisurely to the First Eleven footer-ground, whither a good many of the other juniors were streaming, including Noble's chums, Dane and Glyn.

As a matter of fact, Figgins & Co. had almost forgotten the jape they had prepared for the Cornstalk, in their indignation and rage at the way they themselves had been "done" by Tom Merry & Co. But, on seeing the way their victim had evidently swallowed the bait, they looked forward to seeing some fun.

Figgins scribbled something on a scrap of paper, and then hailed a passing fag.

"Here, young Green!" he remarked carelessly. "Do something for me, will you? I want this bit of paper shoved on Noble's study table just after he comes out of his den. He's in there now, changing for footer."

The fag took the bit of paper, and glanced at it suspiciously. Then he grinned as he saw what was written on it.

"Right-oh, Figgy!" he remarked. Figgins was very popular with the fags of both Houses. "I don't generally fag for a New House bouncer, but I'll do this for you."

"Just as well for you, youngster," said Figgins, with a grin. "Come on, you chaps, down to the footer-field. There ought to be some fun there presently."

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

And Figgins & Co. strolled off arm-in-arm.

Harry Noble, changing like lightning, was down at the footer-ground a very few minutes after Figgins & Co. got there.

Two or three of the great men of the Sixth and the First Eleven were punting a footer about, but Kildare was not down yet. A good many juniors stood round, watching the great men with reverential awe.

Harry Noble divested himself of his great-coat and

sweater, and threw them on the ground, and walked boldly towards the punters. As it happened, Russell major, the School right-half, missed his kick at the ball just at that moment, and the leather rolled towards Noble.

Harry Noble was on it like a flash, and before the amazed goalkeeper had time to think of defending the goal, the Cornstalk had slammed it into the net.

There was a yell of laughter from the juniors standing round, at what they took to be Noble's "nerve" in thus pushing himself into the practice game of the First Eleven, and displaying his prowess by shooting a goal.

As for the seniors themselves, they were absolutely habber-gasted. They had never heard of a junior doing such an audacious action before, and it staggered them for the moment.

Only Noble did not seem disturbed.

"Chuck the pill out again over here, will you?" he called out cheerily to the gasping goalkeeper. "I'd like another shot."

The fellows stood petrified. Surely, thought Russell major, with his head in a whirl, such cheek was without parallel in the annals of St. Jim's. Even the juniors standing round gasped.

"My only hat!" gasped Blake. "That blessed Cornstalk must be off his rocker!"

"Yaas, wathah! He must be dotty!"

"Not at all," said Glyn blandly. "He's only doing what he's told to do—that's all."

"He was told to—do that?" exclaimed Digby, staring.

"Who—who told him?"

"Kildare," said Glyn calmly.

The gasp that greeted this amazing announcement was drowned by a terrific roar. The seniors had found their tongues at last.

"Get out of the way, there, you cheeky young beast!" roared Russell major. "What the dickens do you mean by showing yourself in here? Clear out, or—"

"Yes, rather! Buzz off, you confounded young idiot, before I kick you off!" shouted Barker, of the Sixth.

Harry Noble looked calmly round.

"Rats!" he remarked coolly. "Chuck that ball over here, for goodness' sake! I want some practice, if you fellows don't!"

For a moment the seniors remained as if turned to stone. The next moment there was an angry howl, and a rush was made for the audacious junior.

Harry Noble gave a yell as Barker grasped him by the collar of his football shirt in a grasp of iron.

"Here, hold on!"

"I am holding on," replied Barker grimly, "and I'm going to hold on till I've given you a jolly good spanking for your impertinence, youngster, so don't you make any mistake about it!"

"Leggo!" shouted Noble, struggling violently. "It's all right, Barker! I—"

"All right, is it?" growled Barker. "Just you wait, my lad, till—"

"I tell you it's all right!" roared Noble. "Kildare told me to come down and practise!"

"Eh?" gasped the seniors with one voice.

"I tell you I had a note from Kildare, telling me to come down and practise with you!" roared Noble. "You ask Kildare! He'll tell you it's true!"

Barker and Russell and the rest gazed at each other, almost paralysed with surprise.

"Well, my hat, that just about beats the band!" gasped Barker. "Blessed if—"

"Here's Kildare!" exclaimed Russell suddenly. "Now we'll see what this cheeky young spoofer's got to say for himself!"

"Good!" gasped Noble. "He'll confirm what I say, you—your unbelieving beggars!"

Kildare, the St. Jim's captain, looking the picture of health and fitness, came striding towards the group on the practice-ground.

"Hallo—hallo!" he sang out genially, noting immediately that something was wrong. "What's up here? What are you chaps all doing?"

"Why, look here, Kildare—"

"This brat—"

"These chaps—"

"Steady!" said Kildare quietly, observing the flushed faces and angry looks of the seniors. "Not all together, please. What's all the row about, Russell?"

Russell snorted.

"This kid, Noble, came and shoved himself into our punt-about!" he exclaimed indignantly.

"Had the cheek to say that you told him to, too!" added Barker. "We're just going to give him something for his nerve."

Kildare stared at Noble in utter astonishment.

"Noble, what the deuce are you doing here? Don't you know this is a First Eleven practice?"

Harry Noble absolutely gasped.

What on earth did Kildare mean? Could he possibly have forgotten? The junior's tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, and he could only gasp out something inarticulate.

"Well, what does it mean?" exclaimed Kildare sharply. "Explain yourself, Noble! I'm waiting!"

"I—I—"

"Well," rapped out the captain, "out with it!"

"I—I— You told me to come, Kildare!"

Kildare opened his eyes, and then frowned.

"What do you mean, Noble?"

"The—the notice!" stammered Noble. "Your—your note!"

"My note!" exclaimed Kildare, in growing astonishment. "Are you off your rocker, kid? I never sent you a note in my life that I can remember."

"There, I knew the young beggar was trying to spoof us!" exclaimed Barker.

"Never heard of such cheek in my life!" growled Russell major.

The junior's head swam. Either he was dreaming, or Kildare was mad!

"But—but I've got the note in my overcoat over there, Kildare!" he stammered out.

Kildare's brow cleared. He began to see light now.

"Go and get it!" he commanded curtly.

Barker let the junior go with some reluctance, and Noble ran over to where his coat lay like a fellow in a dream. Surely, he thought, with the evidence of the note before him, Kildare must remember!

His trembling fingers closed over the scrap of paper in his coat pocket, and he hastened back to the group of seniors with it.

"Here—here it is, Kildare. I—I found it in my study after first lessons this morning."

"Ah!"

Kildare took the note, and ran his eye over it rapidly.

The next moment he burst into a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha! My dear kid, someone's been pulling your leg!"

"What!" gasped Noble, aghast.

"I never wrote this note," grinned Kildare. "Some chap's been having a game with you."

"W-what!"

"Ha, ha—yes! I should say the date has something to do with it," chuckled the captain. "Blessed if I understand how you came to take it all in!"

Harry Noble turned scarlet. He saw it all now, and realised what a champion ass he must look. April the first!

"Of—of course!" he mumbled feebly. "I—I am an awful ass, Kildare!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I— You see," burst out the junior, desperately, "after the match yesterday, you said—"

Kildare clapped the junior on the shoulder.

"Quite right, kid, so I did!" he exclaimed heartily. "I said you played a ripping game, and you did, by Jove! But—but the First Eleven, you know—"

"Of—of course!" stammered Noble, now absolutely purple, while the seniors began to snigger. "I—I ought to have known! I—I guess I'll go!"

He turned away, stunned. He realised, now, how absurd he had been not to see that the letter was a hoax, an April Fools' Day joke; but he could not help feeling bitterly disappointed.

The kind-hearted captain looked at him keenly, and read his thoughts accurately.

"Half a second, kid," he sang out. "Though, perhaps, you must wait a bit before you are quite up to the mark of the First Eleven"—and Kildare smiled—"I tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a trial in the Second Eleven practice match on Wednesday. How'll that suit?"

Harry Noble's face grew radiant. He had a chance of getting into the Second Eleven after all! Surely a great enough honour for a fellow in the Shell!

"You're a brick, Kildare!" he exclaimed fervently, as he walked off the field.

He pushed past Figgins & Co., on the touch-line, as if he were treading on air. The worthy New House Co. had been watching the scene with covert grins, and, truth to say, rather an uncomfortable feeling as well. They had hardly realised how seriously he would take the spoof note, and how bitterly disappointed he would be at the failure of his hopes, and they felt penitent and sorry for him as he turned away to leave the field. They saw Kildare call him back, but did not hear what the captain said to him.

Their surprise, therefore, was great, to see the elation in

their victim's face as he pushed past them, without noticing them, on his way back to the School House.

"He doesn't look very down at the mouth after all," said Figgins, staring after him in surprise. "I must say, I'm jolly glad to see it, too. I was beginning to feel rather a cad."

"So was I," said Kerr. "And I'm jolly glad to see him take it like this, too!"

"Hear, hear!" said Fatty Wynn heartily. "I wonder what Kildare said to him when he called him back?"

And when Figgins & Co. subsequently heard what it was that the captain of St. Jim's had said to Noble then, their surprise was only equalled by their genuine delight at the honour that had befallen their friend and rival.

As for Noble, he reached his study in a state of high elation, and was beginning to laugh at himself at the way he had been taken in. When he saw the notice on his study table which young Green had left there, he grinned.

"April fool!" he read aloud. "My hat, I should think I was an April fool, too! But I don't care! Figgy—I recognise his writing—has been the means of getting me a chance to get in the Second Eleven, although he doesn't know it. All the same, I guess there'll be ructions when I meet him!"

And the Cornstalk junior smiled to himself a little grimly.

CHAPTER 10.

Tom Merry's Hamper.

WHILE these stirring events were taking place on the First Eleven practice-ground, the Terrible Three, for a wonder, were occupied indoors in their study.

A surprise awaited them when they returned to No. 1 after morning school.

Taggles, the school porter, accosted Tom Merry on the landing, where he had evidently been waiting for him.

"Which there's a parcel for you, Master Merry," he remarked, "and a precious 'eavy parcel it is, too. I carried hit hup from the lodge, so I oughter know, I s'pose."

"I suppose you ought, Taggy," agreed Tom Merry. "And where is the parcel now, then?"

"Which it ain't a parcel, in a manner o' speakin'," said Taggles. "It's a 'amper."

"You said it was a parcel just now, Taggles," said Monty Lowther, with a shake of his head, "now you say it isn't. I'm afraid you've been indulging in the cup that bears—I mean cheers—again, and can't tell a parcel from a hamper."

Taggles gave a grunt. Had he not been expecting a tip from Tom Merry, he would probably have done, or said, something more.

"Which I says it's a 'amper, Master Lowther," he said doggedly, "and it's layin' in the 'all this 'ere very minit. Wot I says is, shall I carry hit hup to your study, Master Merry?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry. "Bring it along, Taggles! No use the Head paying a school porter for nothing, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Taggles grunted again, and waddled downstairs, to appear at the study door a few minutes later with a hamper of fair size, though scarcely bulky or heavy-looking enough to account for the groans and grunts which he uttered as he dragged it along.

"Which 'ere hit is, Master Merry, and mighty 'eavy, as I said before."

"Thanks, Taggles. You did mention that it was heavy before, now I come to think of it."

"You needn't mention it again, either," remarked Manners. "We'll believe you, you know, Taggles."

Taggles gave another grunt.

"Which it's a long way hup from the lodge, and a long way further hup the stairs, Master Merry," he ventured, "especially when you're carryin' of a 'eavy 'amper."

"Well, you'd better run along and start back again, then," grinned Tom Merry, "else you won't get back in time for dinner. Here's a bob to buy you a morsel of food to help you on your weary way."

"Thank you, Master Merry!"

And Taggles, having got what he wanted, retired with all speed.

"Blessed if the hamper's so very heavy, after all," remarked Tom Merry, lifting it on to the table and closing the door.

"Taggy'd groan under a hamper of feathers if he thought there was any chance of a bob in the offing," grinned Lowther. "But now to business, Tommy, otherwise to the giddy hamper!"

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT WEEK:

"JOE'S CHAMPION."

"It's from Miss Fawcett, your old governess, I suppose?" remarked Lowther.

"Yes, that's Miss Priscilla's handwriting on the label," said Tom Merry. "It's jolly decent of her to send me this, as I had one not so very long ago."

"Miss Fawcett always was a brick," declared Manners. "Now she's back at Laurel Villa she's always sending you things, Tom."

"I know. She's a dear, generous old soul, and much too good to me," said Tom Merry, cutting the string of the hamper. "Now to see what we've got this time!"

"Good egg!"

The Terrible Three raised the lid of the hamper, and plucked away the layer of straw underneath with eager hands.

The next minute there was a roar from Manners and Lowther, while Tom Merry gasped and turned a beautiful shade of pink.

Underneath the top straw the necks of at least a dozen bottles, carefully corked, were revealed, and in a moment the Terrible Three realised that the hamper which had conjured up such rosy visions of gorgeous feeds in their mind's eye was merely another consignment of the liniments and patent remedies with which Miss Fawcett was accustomed to inundate her ward at intervals.

"Medicine!" roared Manners and Lowther together. "Some more of Miss Fawcett's remedies!"

They glared at the unfortunate Tom Merry with the injured and indignant glare of fellows who had been cheated of their due, and Tom Merry's high colour heightened still further.

"I—I—" stammered Tom Merry.

In spite of their disappointment, Manners and Lowther burst into a yell of laughter. The funny side of the matter overcame them altogether. They roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"R-really, you fellows—" stammered Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther made a dive into the hamper, and fished out a large blue bottle, with a flaring red label.

"Dr. Dillwater's Delicious Decoction for Delicate Darlings!" he roared. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Manners, seizing on a large box evidently containing pills. "Listen to this. 'Tompkinson's Toothsome Tonics for Tiny Tummies.' Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry, who was now a fiery red, could stand it no longer. He made a rush at his two yelling chums, and snatched the medicinal delicacies from their hands.

"You—you dummies!" he roared wrathfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling bounders!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners and Lowther simply yelled, and Tom Merry, red-faced and glaring, had to wait till his chums' mirth had subsided. He was exasperated by their chipping and laughter, but he felt more than half inclined to laugh himself. He had made sure the hamper had contained something good, so that its actual contents had come as somewhat of a shock to him. He could not help grinning at the sight of the fearful and wonderful collection of fearsome patent medicines and remedies which the removal of straw brought to light—liniment, powders, pills, ointment, a huge jar of "Tiny Tim Lung Elixir," and goodness knows what else.

It was the favourite delusion of his old nurse and guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, that Tom Merry was the most delicate boy at St. Jim's.

The kind old lady shook her head at his sturdy figure and blooming cheeks, which proclaimed to the rest of the world his splendid constitution and perfect state of health. Miss Fawcett persisted in regarding these satisfactory outward signs as dangerously misleading, and in no way an indication of his true state of health, which she considered quite precarious. To her he was a hothouse plant, requiring the most delicate nurturing and constant care.

Seeing that he was an exceptionally sturdy and healthy specimen of the British boy, Tom Merry found the kind old lady's extraordinary delusion decidedly inconvenient, not to say boring. But he would not have hurt Miss Fawcett's feelings, or caused her the slightest alarm, however uncalled for, for all the world, so that he accepted her anxious attentions and instructions without a word. The only point on which he was compelled to dissemble was in the disposal of the nauseous concoctions with which he was constantly supplied.

These mostly found their way into the School House dustbin, that being the place where they would undoubtedly do the least harm to the human race.

It is safe to say that Tom Merry would have had all the ailments Miss Fawcett imagined she saw in him, and more also, if he had taken half the stuff so tenderly prescribed for him by his loving old nurse.

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"M-my hat!" gasped Monty Lowther at last. "To think that Miss Fawcett should have such a sense of humour, too! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you mean, you cackling duffer?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Why, it can't be by chance that you got that fat, luscious-looking hamper full of patent medicines on April the First, surely, Tom?"

"You—you silly chump!" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully.

"It's—it's judgment, that's what it is," sobbed Manners. "It was Tom who first proposed that heartless jape on Fatty Wynn; the same thing's happened to him now. Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Miss Priscilla's certainly had me there," he admitted. "And you, too, for that matter. Of course, it's only a coincidence it being April Fools' Day. I don't suppose Miss Fawcett ever heard of an April fool. Still, it's funny."

"It is," agreed Lowther.

"It are," added Manners.

"Anyhow, I've had enough chipping from you duffers for the present," said Tom Merry. "Help me shove these fearful things away somewhere, for goodness' sake."

"Won't you take just one dose of the Delicious Decoction first, old man?" urged Lowther. "You're a bit pale, you know."

"Rather! Now's the time, too," added Manners. "It says, 'Four table-spoonfuls to be taken every quarter of an hour, or oftener if desired,' so, you see, it's just time for a dose. It always is, pretty well."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Lowther.

Tom Merry made a rush at Manners, and Manners promptly dodged round the table. A sound of rushing feet came up the passage outside, but Manners paid no heed to it, until the study door was suddenly flung violently open, and caught him with a bump as he was dodging past with his eye on Tom Merry.

There was a crash and a howl, and Manners rolled on the study floor, while the slim figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, precipitated itself into the study.

"Help!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's, who was in a dishevelled condition, not at all in accordance with his usual neat appearance. "Bai Jove! Help! Those wuff wottahs are chasin' me! Help, deah boys!"

And he staggered round the table, and plumped into the study armchair, like one thoroughly exhausted.

Tom Merry and Lowther stared at the intruder, while Manners sat upon the floor, looking dazed.

Before either of the three could make any remark, there was a rush of several pairs of feet in the passage, and Blake, Herries, and Digby, of the famous Fourth Form Co., burst into Study 1, and glared round like hounds on the track of their quarry.

They raised a yell as they caught sight of D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 11.

The Secret Comes Out.

"THERE he is!"

"Rush him!"

"Bump the bounder!"

The three Fourth-Formers made a rush round the table, and there was a wild yell from Manners as Blake tripped over him, and sat down heavily on his chest.

"Ow! Yaroo!"

"Oh! Geroo!" gasped Blake. "What the—"

"Geroof me chest!" howled Manners. "Ow!"

"You—you clumsy ass!"

Blake rose slowly from his position on Manners's body, looking somewhat dazed.

"You dummy!" he growled. "What are you doing on the floor?"

"You—you clumsy ass!"

"You grovelling dummy!"

Manners had scrambled to his feet, and it almost appeared that deeds were going to give place to words, when the recriminations were cut short by a vail from D'Arcy, who was struggling in the grasp of Herries and Digby.

"Oh! Ow! Leggo, you wottahs!"

"Bump him!" shouted Digby.

"What-ho!" said Herries heartily.

And they yanked the swell out of the armchair with a vigorous yank.

Manners and Blake glared at each other, and then they turned and glared at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the author of their woes.

They made a simultaneous rush.

"Bump him!" they yelled.

"Lend a hand, then!" grinned Digby.

"What-ho!"

The unfortunate swell of St. Jim's struggled and yelled in vain in the grasp of four pairs of hands.

Tom Merry and Lowther looked on, grinning.

"Good as a circus, ain't it, Tom?" remarked Lowther, as Arthur Augustus was lifted into the air. "One!"

Bump!

"Ow!"

"Two!"

Bump!

"Yow!"

"Three!"

Bump!

"Yaroo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Chuck it, you chumps! That's enough! What's Gussy done?"

"What's he done?" echoed Blake wrathfully, as the chums let the limp form of the elegant junior down on the floor with another bump. "What's he done? That's just what we'd like to know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Telegrams!" went on Blake heatedly. "Heaps of 'em! He's had a couple of dozen at least since breakfast this morning."

"My hat! What about?" asked Tom Merry, staring.

"That's just what we want to know," howled Blake.

"He won't tell us."

"Oh, I see!"

"As his study-mates, we demand to know," put in Digby warmly.

"Rather!" chimed in Herries. "The ass must be in some kind of trouble to have all those wires. He's got to tell us."

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry looked as solemn as an owl.

"This is a very serious case," he observed gravely. "You'd better leave this to me, chaps. You have claimed my protection, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's.

"Rats!" burst out Blake. "I——" He broke off short as he caught a wink from Tom Merry.

"Shut up, Blake!" said Tom Merry. "I'm going to be arbitrator in this dispute. Now, D'Arcy, you are charged with receiving an unduly large number of telegrams for a junior, and with feloniously concealing the cause thereof from your lawful study-leader and your chums."

"Wats!" gasped Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I wefuse to have my pwivate affiahs——"

"Then you claim that the telegrams are on strictly private bisney?"

"Certainly, deah boy!"

"Then, gentlemen of the jury," said Tom Merry, turning to Manners and Lowther, "the question which you have to decide is this. Can the business of the prisoner in the dock, seeing how many persons must share the knowledge of it by the telegrams, be considered to be sufficiently private to be concealed from his lawful keepers—I mean study-mates? That is the question I put to you."

Manners and Lowther looked as grave as judges during this impressive oration, and no one would have gathered from their faces that they had even observed the wink which the learned judge had favoured them with.

"Do you find the prisoner guilty, or not guilty?" continued Tom Merry.

"Guilty, my lord," answered the jury, without hesitation.

"Weally, you wottahs——" began Arthur Augustus.

But Tom Merry cut him short.

"Prisoner at the bar, you hear the verdict of the jury," he said severely. "I have no hesitation, therefore, in sentencing you to be bumped until you reveal your guilty secret, or else give some reasonable excuse why you should not do so."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake & Co. heartily, advancing on the unhappy swell of St. Jim's with a business-like air.

Arthur Augustus gave a despairing yell.

"You—you wottahs! Tom Mewwy, you are a wotten wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard Mannahs and Lowtah as fearful wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blake, you boundah, keep off!" yelled D'Arcy. "Wetire, you wottahs! I wefuse——"

"You refuse to tell us," grinned Blake, advancing upon his victim. "Quite so, Gussy! Catch hold of him, chaps!"

"What-ho!" said Herries and Dig with one voice.

"You—you feahful wuffians, I——"

"When I say 'bump,' we all bump!" grinned Blake. "Now, Gussy, for the last time, out with your guilty secret!"

"I won't!" shrieked D'Arcy. "I wegard you as a set of wottahs! I——"

"Are you ready?" said Blake sternly to his henchmen.

"Bather!"

"Then——"

"Heah, hold on!" yelled Arthur Augustus despairingly.

"You—you feahful chumps, I'll tell you!"

D'Arcy's resolution had been broken down at last! He had had one bumping, and felt that he could not stand another, even to save his precious "dig." He could be obstinate if he liked; but obstinacy was not proof against such a severe course of bumping.

"I will tell you the secret of the telegrams, but I shall wefuse to wegard you as fwriends, you outwageous woughs!" said Arthur Augustus heatedly.

"Never mind!" said Blake airily. "We'll try and stand it! Now then, out with the guilty secret!"

"I wefuse to admit that it is a guilty secret," said the swell of St. Jim's, with a great deal of dignity. "The whole affiah is simply this. I was trying to awwange a wivah picnic for this aftahnoon, as a surprisw for all you fellahs, you know, and, of course, I had to send a lot of telegrams to—to catewahs and othah people, you see."

D'Arcy's announcement came like a bombshell to the fellows in the study.

So this was the guilty secret, this the mystery of the multitudinous telegrams! Their aristocratic chum was merely arranging a pleasant surprise for them all the time! And they had bumped him and otherwise mishandled him in trying to get the secret out of him! It was not a comforting thought for Blake & Co., or Tom Merry & Co. either.

"M-m-m-my hat!" mumbled Blake. "M-m-my aunt! That—that's torn it!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his eye and surveyed Blake coldly. He was beginning to enjoy the juniors' discomfiture.

"Did you speak, Blake?"

"I—I—I——"

"Of course, I have succeeded in makin' my awwangements for the picnic all wight," continued Arthur Augustus, in a stately tone. "It only remains to cawwy them out."

"Of—of course!" stammered Tom Merry.

"The only mattah which I shall have to weconsidah is the selection of my guests," continued Arthur Augustus, still in the same lofty tone, but with a gleam of triumph in his eye. "Of course, I shall onlay ask my fwriends!"

"Of—of course!"

"Howevah, I shall be able to awwange that all wight with my Cousin Ethel——"

"Cousin Ethel?" shouted the juniors in chorus.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Cousin Ethel!

The juniors gazed at each other in dismay.

D'Arcy's cousin, Ethel Cleveland, and a great chum of all D'Arcy's friends, was coming to the picnic! And D'Arcy didn't mean to ask them, naturally, after the treatment he had received at their hands.

Arthur Augustus was gazing at his dismayed chums, with a sparkle of triumph in his eye, when Tom Merry, with a meaning look at the others, took the bull by the horns, as it were.

"Indeed!" he remarked, with an assumption of carelessness he was far from feeling. "Then you will have a very jolly time, Gussy! Please remember me to Cousin Ethel. I suppose you chaps are all coming with me to see the Second Eleven match at Wayland, aren't you?" he continued, turning to the others.

"Yes, we'll fix up a jolly party," said Jack Blake, following the lead of the hero of the Shell. "Sorry you won't be able to come, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus looked dismayed. He did not like the turn of events at all. As a matter of fact, he had never intended to leave his chums of the Fourth and the Shell out of the picnic for a moment. The party would not be by any means complete without them. And, besides, Cousin Ethel would want to know where they were at once. No: he had merely intended to enjoy frightening them a bit, and making them eat a little humble pie. To have them take this line of calm resignation, and make other plans for the afternoon, was very disconcerting to the swell of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove!" he muttered, in consternation.

The juniors exchanged winks, which Arthur Augustus was much too preoccupied to notice. As a matter of fact, if he had only known it, the swell of St. Jim's had no need to worry himself.

From the moment that Cousin Ethel's name had been mentioned every junior in the study had determined to get an invitation to that picnic by hook or by crook. But D'Arcy was quite ignorant of this.

"Bai Jove!" he repeated. "Heah, I say, deah boys!"

"What's up, Gussy?" inquired Blake, trying to speak calmly.

"Why, I—I was onlay jokin' you know, deah boys!" stammered Arthur Augustus. "Of course, you must all come to the picnic."

Blake shook his head gravely.

"Sorry, Gussy! It can't be did!"
 "Oh, wats to that!" said D'Arcy, in great distress. "You must come, you know!"
 "Impossible, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, in a shocked tone. "You must be forgetting that we aren't your friends now. You said so yourself just now."
 "Oh, that's all wot, deah boys!"
 "I'm afraid we can't consent to have our acquaintance taken up and dropped just as it suits your lordly whim, D'Arcy," said Lowther digger, with a shake of his head. "We have to consider our dig., you know."
 "Yes, rather!"
 "Weally, Lowthah—"
 "There's only one thing to be done if you really want us to come to your picnic," continued Lowther solemnly. "You must apologise to us."
 "Apologise?" yelled the swell of St. Jim's. "What for?"
 Monty Lowther drew himself up.
 "Very well, D'Arcy, that settles it! All is henceforth over between us!"
 "Oh, weally, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I—I want you to come to the picnic, you know! I—I'll apologise! I'm weally vewy sowwy!"

The juniors could contain themselves no longer. They burst into a yell of laughter that rang through the School House.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Arthur Augustus gasped, and then he understood.
 "You—you wottahst—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Arthur Augustus gave it up.
 The juniors continued to yell with laughter until the sound of the dinner-bell bade them think of other things, and they trooped into the dining-hall with the rest of the School House, still chuckling.

CHAPTER 12.
On the River.

IMMEDIATELY dinner was over preparations were made for the picnic by the invited guests.
 Besides Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co., these included Figgins & Co., Skimpole, the genius and Socialist of St. Jim's, Wally D'Arcy, and his friend Curly Gibson, and the reformed Lumley-Lumley, one-time known as the Outsider. Cornstalk & Co. were asked, but they had previously arranged to run over to Wayland in Glyn's pater's motor, to watch the performance of the Second Eleven, of which Noble hoped to be a member before very long. Cornstalk & Co., therefore, reluctantly declined D'Arcy's invitation.
 By means of his numerous telegrams Skimpole had arranged everything very well and on his usual lavish scale.
 A recently-received remittance of a fiver from his noble governor must have been expended almost to the last farthing before he was satisfied that the picnic would be a success, as far as human foresight could judge.
 The only thing he could not arrange for beforehand was the weather, and this, as Jack Blake remarked, turned out triumphs.
 It was a fine, warm, spring afternoon, with a gentle breeze

blowing, and an azure blue sky overhead, when the picnic-party walked down to the school boathouse on the Ryll and embarked in two skiffs.

The arrangement was that they should row down-stream to a point near the little railway-station at Rylcombe, and meet Miss Cleveland, who was coming by the train arriving at two-thirty. At this landing-place, too, sundry bulky hampers of provisions were awaiting the boats, under the charge of a man from the London firm of caterers whom Arthur Augustus had entrusted with the supplying of the provisions.

After much arguing the two boats' crews were made up, the juniors embarked, and the flotilla started. Tom Merry, Jack Blake, Figgins, and Lumley-Lumley each took an oar in the boat where the seat of honour was reserved for Cousin Ethel, while Arthur Augustus steered, assisted by much advice from his young brother Wally.

Digby, Herries, Kerr, and Lowther had the oars in the other boat, while Skimpole insisted on taking the lines. Curly Gibson, however, was deputed to watch him carefully and see that he did nothing too eccentric. Manners sat in the prow of the boat and took snapshots with his beloved camera, while Fatty Wynn occupied the stern, as that was where most of the weight was wanted, and kept a space clear for the cargo of eatables which was shortly to be embarked.

Away went the two boats with a sweep of oars, and the row down-stream soon developed into a race.

The juniors were all good oarsmen, and for the first hundred yards, there was nothing in it between the boats. After that distance had been covered D'Arcy's boat, being considerably lighter, drew away from the other and took the lead.

"Yah, Curly! Buck your old barge up a bit, can't you?" yelled Wally, much to his elegant major's scandalisation. "We can't wait tea for more than an hour for you, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Rats to you, young D'Arcy!" roared back Curly Gibson. "You'd soon find yourself behind if the boats were on equal terms. We've got a ton of porpoise-meat in the stern, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors at this delicate allusion to Fatty Wynn.

"Look here——" began Fatty Wynn wrathfully, when Wally D'Arcy's shrill yell interrupted him.

"Chuck it overboard then, Curly old man! It can't sink!"
 Curly Gibson leaned forward to make a fitting reply, when there was a sudden yell behind him. He was so occupied with his wordy warfare with his chum, that he failed to keep his eye on Skimpole, and what that brainy youth was doing quite escaped his attention.

It did not escape the attention of Fatty Wynn, however. Fatty gave a fearful yell.

"Here! Hi! Look out, you ass!"
 There was a roar of laughter from the leading boat, and Curly Gibson made a grab at the rudder-line, just in time to avert disaster.

Skimpole, absorbed in the conversation which had been going on, had let go of one line altogether in his absent-mindedness, while he continued to pull hard at the other.

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"Oh! Ow! Yow! I'm being stung! Ow!" yelled Fatty Wynn, bounding down the steep side of the knoll, and p-unging headlong into the dell. (See page 17.)

As the rowers in his boat were putting in their best work in the vain endeavour to catch the leaders, it can be imagined with what promptness the boat made for the bank.

"You—you howling dummy!" roared Gibson, as he grabbed the lines, and swirled the boat round again, just in time to save it driving right on to the bank. "Ship oars, there, two and four, and push off from the bank!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the other boat's crew derisively.

"You young ass, Gibson!" growled Kerr. "Why don't you look after that dangerous maniac Skimpole?"

"Really, Kerr—" observed Skimpole mildly.

"How was I to know the lunatic was going to turn us right on to the bank?" howled Curly. "I was—I only looked away for a second!"

"Then don't do it again," growled Digby, "or we'll heave you overboard!"

And the oarsmen fell into a steady rhythm again, and swung after the other boat, while Curly Gibson subsided, muttering.

The first halting-place was reached in quick time, in spite of this trifling mishap, and the whole party disembarked, to find two enormous hampers awaiting them near at hand. Fatty Wynn insisted on taking entire charge of both of these,

so the rest of the party proceeded en masse to the little station, which they reached just as Cousin Ethel's train came in.

There was a general rush as a sweet, girlish face looked out of a first-class carriage window, and the crowd of juniors surged about the carriage, caps in hand.

It was Figgins who held open the door while Cousin Ethel got out. Somehow, it generally happened to be Figgins who did little things like this.

There was a shout of welcome.

"Hurrah!"

"How do you do, Miss Ethel?"

"Three cheers for Cousin Ethel!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"How do you do, all of you?" smiled Cousin Ethel. "It is so kind of you all to meet me like this! What a glorious day it is! We shall have a splendid time!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah gal!"

Arthur Augustus took charge of his cousin, as it were, amidst the crowd of juniors, and led the way to the boats. Fatty Wynn was found to have stowed the hampers aboard like an artist, and the party were soon under weigh again for the spot selected for the picnic, about a mile downstream.

And a very merry party they were, too.

With the sun shinning from a cloudless blue sky overhead, and the trees bursting into leaf all round them, and the promise of spring in the very air they breathed, and in the sparkle of the silver stream, it was no wonder the juniors and their girl-friend were light-hearted and happy.

Cousin Ethel lay back in the cushioned seat and enjoyed the scene to the full. She had not been over to see her friends at St. Jim's for a long time now, and she was very glad to see them again, and to hear their cheery voices around her. Although she was the only girl among so many boys, she did not feel the least bit awkward or shy. She was too good chums with every member of the party for that.

With one exception, she had known and liked them all for several years now. The exception was Jerrold Lumley-Lumley. Cousin Ethel had regarded Lumley-Lumley with anything but friendly feelings once—and with good cause, too. Lumley-Lumley had treated her in an outrageously rude manner, and besides, his character, then, was such as to make him no fit associate for any girl.

But that was all changed now. Lumley was an entirely different fellow, thanks mainly to the good influence of Tom Merry & Co. and the chums of the Fourth, and Cousin Ethel was quite ready to forgive him everything, and admit him to the circle of her chums. She was glad to see him as a member of the picnic-party, and knew enough of her cousin D'Arcy to know that he had asked him specially. Ethel had heard that the millionaire's son was reforming, and she rightly regarded his presence at the picnic-party as the very best of signs—as the sign that her school-chums could trust him absolutely to live up to his new character.

Lumley-Lumley caught Cousin Ethel's eye as she was thinking these thoughts, and there was an anxious question in the ex-Outsider's look. But at the sweet smile with which Cousin Ethel met it, that look vanished, and a great weight seemed to be lifted off Lumley-Lumley's mind. And during the rest of the day, not one of the juniors showed himself more eager and assiduous in his attentions to Ethel's comfort than the fellow who had not long ago been known as the Outsider of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 13.

The Picnickers.

"NOW, deah boys, these hampers must be cawwied up, you know!"

Thus Arthur Augustus, as he fussed round, taking charge of affairs, when the boats had pulled into the river-bank nearest to the spot chosen for the picnic.

A hundred yards from the river, a big elm-tree stood on a knoll, and it had been arranged that the "feed" should take place at the foot of the tree.

"This way, Cousin Ethel," said Figgins, helping the girl out of the boat. "That's the tree over there. I'll bring you this cushion."

"I'll bring the rug along."

"I've got your cloak, Cousin Ethel!"

"Here's your book, too."

"I'm bringing your parasol."

The juniors all picked up something which was likely to add to the comfort of their girl-chum, and moved off in the direction of the tree, even Fatty Wynn going with the crowd, bearing the tablecloth which was to be spread out under the tree.

Arthur Augustus found himself left alone at the boats, with two heavy hampers to be carried up.

"Heah, you fellahs, come back some of you!" he shouted. "There's the hampahs—"

"Oh, bring 'em along, then!" said Jack Blake, heartlessly, over his shoulders. "Don't stand jawing about it."

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye, and gazed after the light-hearted crowd of juniors with a gaze that ought to have bored holes into their backs.

But it didn't. In fact, the juniors did not seem to be aware that the swell of St. Jim's was gazing at all.

Arthur Augustus gasped in dismay.

"Heah! Hi! Tom Mewwy! Blake! Hewwies!" he shouted wildly. "Come heah, you wottahs!"

But the "wottahs" did not seem to hear. They strolled on, chatting to Cousin Ethel and to each other, leaving the swell of St. Jim's alone with the hampers.

D'Arcy gazed at the bulky hampers in dismay. But there was no help for it.

He grasped one of them up in his arms as best he might, and staggered along in the wake of the cheerful party, with the perspiration starting freely to his aristocratic brow.

It was not until Cousin Ethel and her escort had reached the rendezvous that anyone appeared to notice the forlorn figure puffing along in their wake.

Then Tom Merry uttered a sudden surprised exclamation.

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"Hallo! Just look at that!"

There was a yell.

"Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The founder of the feast!"

The swell of St. Jim's gasped for breath as he gingerly put down his load.

"Weally, you wottahs—"

"Poor Arthur! What a shame!" cried Cousin Ethel, with a smile. "Shall I come and give you a hand with the other one?"

There was an indignant chorus of protest at once.

"Certainly not, Cousin Ethel!"

"We'll go!"

"We were only japing the duffer!"

There was a rush down to the river-bank, and the second hamper was carried up in triumph by half a dozen pairs of willing hands.

"The first thing to do, of course, is to get a fire going, and boil the kettle," said Cousin Ethel briskly, taking charge of affairs in her pleasant, capable way. "Some of you get me some dry sticks, please, and I shall want the kettle filled at the spring, too."

"Yaas, wathah!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "Buck up, you chaps!"

Arthur Augustus had no intention of doing much more work himself. His idea was to get all the juniors set to work upon some task or another, while he himself remained with Ethel, and gave her, perhaps, a little occasional advice as to the setting of the "table."

But Cousin Ethel appeared to have other ideas upon the subject.

"There's the kettle, then, Arthur," she said sweetly, holding the article in question out to the dismayed D'Arcy. "Run along and fill it for me, there's a good boy! The spring's only about half a mile away, you know."

"But—but—"

Cousin Ethel arched her eyebrows ever so slightly.

"Surely you aren't going to be disobliging and refuse, Arthur!"

"Weally, deah gal," said Arthur Augustus, in an aggrieved tone, "theah's Figgins theah, you know. Figgv would be jolly pleased to fill the kettle. I'm feeling a bit fatigued myself."

"Nonsense, Arthur," smiled Ethel. "Of course, Figgins would go for me with pleasure, but I have specially asked him to stay and help me set the tea-things out."

"Yes, rather!" said Figgins, looking very pleased. "Off you get, old man!"

Arthur Augustus glared at Figgins coldly through his eye-glass, and took the kettle.

"Vewy well, Ethel," he said gracefully—Arthur was nothing if not polite—"I will get the kettle filled for you."

And he marched off, with his nose very high in the air.

"Good old Gussy!" chuckled Figgins.

"Poor Arthur! It really is rather hard lines on him after all," said Cousin Ethel, looking after his retreating form penitently. "Perhaps—"

"Oh, let him go now!" said Figgins hurriedly. "I'd—I'd much rather be here with you, Miss Ethel."

"Perhaps," said Ethel softly. "But—"

"Why, here's the duffer coming back again already!" exclaimed Figgins, with ill-concealed annoyance.

Arthur Augustus was indeed coming back. His hands were in his pockets, and he was smiling cheerfully.

"Arthur," began Ethel, in a severe tone, "where's the —"

"It's all wight, deah gal," explained D'Arcy, with a superior smile. "I met a wagged little chap just wourd the cornah, and gave him a tannah to go and fill the kettle!"

And, quite unconscious of the half-comical, half-dismayed look which Ethel exchanged with Figgins, Arthur Augustus complacently sat himself down, and began to sort out the teaspoons.

Many hands make light work, and before very long, preparations for the feast were well under weigh. The kettle, which had duly made its appearance under the charge of D'Arcy's deputy, was singing over the fire, suspended from a tripod of sticks in true gipsy fashion, and the good things from the hampers were set forth on a snow-white tablecloth, which was spread out on the grass under the trees.

The juniors were sitting round in a circle waiting for Cousin Ethel to make the tea, when Kerr suddenly uttered an exclamation.

"My hat! Where's Fatty?"

The juniors gazed round. Sure enough, all were there except Wynn, the stout Welsh junior. Fatty had disappeared—and what made it so wonderful, he had disappeared just when there was a feed on the tapis. The juniors, who knew Fatty so well, could not understand it.

"This wants looking into!" said Figgins, getting up.

quickly. "I never knew Fatty stay away from a feed, of his own free will."

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Fatty! Wynn! Fatty! Where are you?" yelled the juniors in all directions.

"Hope the ass hasn't fallen into the river, or anything," muttered Figgins anxiously, as no response was made to their shouts.

"Not much fear of his sinking, if he has," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, no! Hallo! Who's that? Why—"

"There was a yell.

"Here he is!"

"Here's Fatty at last!"

The round figure of Fatty Wynn was bounding over the uneven ground towards the picnic-party at a speed which seemed to indicate that Fatty was in a very great hurry indeed. They had seldom or never seen the rotund Welshman move at such a speed before, and, besides, there was something wild and erratic about his movements, which arrested their attention.

On dashed Fatty towards them, and as he drew nearer, the cause of his excessive haste was soon seen.

Fatty Wynn was being chased by a swarm of bees.

The fat junior was gasping and grunting furiously as he ran wildly on, and every now and then he let out a hell-like roar.

"Oh! Ow! Yow! Help! I'm being stung! Ow!"

On dashed Fatty Wynn, straight into the group of juniors, and straight past them, and still on. It was evident that he dared not stop for his life.

There was a general chuckling and dodging as the angry swarm of bees buzzed after Wynn, and several of the juniors uttered roars as they felt the sharp stings of the infuriated insects. An angry swarm of bees is not particular what it stings, so long as it stings something.

"My hat!" exclaimed Figgins. "Poor old Fatty will be fearfully stung! We must beat them off somehow! Come on!"

"Rather!"

Half a dozen of the juniors set off in pursuit of the flying Welshman, snatching off their coats as they ran. But before they had a chance of overtaking him, the climax came.

Fatty Wynn was bounding along down the steep side of the knoll, which the picnicking party had selected as a suitable place to have tea, when he spied a deep but narrow dell, lush with cool long grass, and with a few inches of water at the bottom.

Maddened with terror and the pain of half a dozen stings, the unfortunate Fatty made straight for the dell, into which he plunged headlong, with a loud squelching sound. He lay there, in the muddy water, gasping and panting painfully, and to his great relief the bees drew off, either because they did not like the water, or because their indignation was spent.

When the Welsh junior's chums dashed up, they found him in a parlous state. Breathless, covered with mud and slime, and with several swellings of considerable size in process of coming out on his red and perspiring face, Fatty Wynn was a distressing figure, and also a somewhat comic one. But his chums were much too sympathetic to laugh.

They pulled him to his feet, and escorted him back to the venue of the picnic with great care and solicitude, and they listened to the fat junior's explanation of the catastrophe with nothing but sympathy, and without a word of reproach.

"I—I was just unpacking the jams and things out of one of the hampers, you know," explained Fatty Wynn, with many grunts and gasps, "when I came on a pot of honey. I—I thought there was so much other stuff that the honey would never be wanted, and would probably only be left, so I—I took it with me over behind the bushes yonder, and— and just had a snack of it, you know. You fellows know how fond I am of honey!" he added pathetically.

Figgins nodded.

"That's all right, Fatty! We know!"

"Well, I—I—well, I was just eating a little of it—I had had about half, in fact, when a whole swarm of beastly bees came buzzing round after the stuff."

"Hard luck, old chap!"

"It was awful!" said Fatty Wynn, with a shudder. "I tried to beat the beastly insects off, but they got fearfully angry, and when I bolted, they all came after me, until I soused myself in that beastly muddy water."

"Rotten, old man!" said Figgins sympathetically. "But never mind. You'll soon get dry in this wind and sun, and we'll give you a brush down. I expect the stings hurt a bit, though, don't they?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Poor fellow!" said Cousin Ethel softly, and so sympathetically that Fatty Wynn quite brightened up, and began to feel almost reconciled to the pain of the stings.

"It's—it's all right, Miss Ethel," he said bravely.

"Poor fellow! I wish we could give you something for the pain," said Cousin Ethel.

Fatty Wynn smiled faintly.

"I—I think I could do with a little something to eat," he murmured. "I'm feeling rather faint."

"Oh, poor Wynn! What—"

"One of those ripping pork pies, now," murmured Fatty, "and perhaps a chicken patty or two—"

"Good old Fatty!" grinned Figgins, pushing a plate of pork-pies over to his chum. "Here you are! They'll cure you if anything will!"

"Good, Figgy, I believe they will!"

And Fatty Wynn wired into the pork-pies, with the evident intention of at least giving them a fair trial.

CHAPTER 14.

Skimpole Takes Up a Lofty Position.

HERE was only one member of the picnic-party who was neither perturbed nor excited by Fatty Wynn's unpleasant experience with the bees—and that was Herbert Skimpole.

Skimpole had a habit of maintaining a lofty air of detachment from the things that interested or excited ordinary people. While Skimpole was thinking out one of the mighty scientific problems which so frequently engaged his great brain, it is doubtful if he would have heard a 4.7 gun go off, were one fired within a few yards of him.

While the rest of the party were preparing for the open-air meal, Skimpole was engaged in some occupation of his own, and when the whole party had rushed off after Fatty Wynn and his vicious little assailants, Skimpole had not even noticed what had caused the excitement.

He was struggling with some contrivance at a little distance from the tree under which the cloth was spread, and when the juniors returned with the rescued Fatty, who promptly began to tuck in, there was a yell to Skimpole.

"Hi, Skimpole!" yelled Tom Merry. "Come on! We're just beginning tea!"

"Fatty's started, so you'd better buck up if you want any pork-pies!" shouted Monty Lowther facetiously.

"Oh, really!" mumbled Fatty, with his mouth full.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole blinked in the direction of the revellers.

"I'm just coming, you fellows!"

"Then come on!"

The genius of St. Jim's slowly approached the picnic-party, dragging the affair he had been so busy fixing up, behind him. It consisted of two long bits of rope which had been used to secure the hampers, and a piece of plank from one of the skiffs. Skimpole had secured the ropes to the plank in such a way that the latter would form the seat of a swing when erected.

The juniors took this in, as Skimpole walked, blinking, towards them, and there was a shout of inquiry.

"What's that for?"

"What are you doing with that, you duffer?"

"Going to hang yourself, Skimmy?"

Skimpole blinked at the picnickers in mild surprise.

"Surely you see what this is intended to be, you fellows," he remarked. "Is it likely that I should take considerable trouble to contrive a device with which to hang myself?"

"Why not?" inquired Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, my friends—I mean, you fellows," went on Skimpole, "this is a swing, which I am about to fix to the bough of this tree, which overhangs very nicely for the purpose."

"What the dickens do you want with a swing, Skimmy?" asked Jack Blake. "This isn't a little girls' tea-party."

Tom Merry nudged Blake sharply in the ribs.

"Would it be such a very terrible thing if it were, Blake?" asked Cousin Ethel, with a smile.

Blake turned crimson.

"I—I— N-no, of course not, Cousin Ethel!" he stammered. "I—I didn't mean that at all, you know. I—I—"

Cousin Ethel laughed merrily.

"Never mind, Blake! I'll forgive your slighting remark about little girls, if you didn't mean it. I was a little girl myself not so very long ago, you know, so I feel bound to stand up for them."

"Quite right, too!" said Figgins heartily, glancing severely at Blake.

"Do tell us what you are going to put up that swing for, Skimpole," said Cousin Ethel hastily. "I'm quite curious to know!"

"Well, you see, Miss Ethel, I'm just now studying the law of gravity and its effect on the human brain," said Skimpole,

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earnestly. "I'm convinced, my dear young lady, that the action of the force of gravity exercises a deleterious influence upon the brain-cells, and causes a great waste of energy thereby."

"Indeed!" said Cousin Ethel faintly.

"Yes, indeed!" continued the genius of St. Jim's enthusiastically. "I am absolutely convinced that my theory is the correct one, and I have spent some time in elucidating it, and have brought my great brain to bear on it a great deal lately."

"Oh, ring off, Skimmy!" muttered Tom Merry.

"A sincere scientist never rings off under any circumstances," said Skimpole, who caught the muttered remark, firmly; "my idea is to test my theory by suspending myself at a distance of some feet from the ground, and trying the effect of the slightly diminished force of gravity upon my own brain. As Professor Balmcrumpet says in his great work on—"

"How are you going to suspend yourself, duffer?" inquired Figgins, determining to stop the greatest bore at St. Jim's from enlarging on his theories at any cost.

"Really, Figgins, you are very dense," remarked Skimpole. "By means of this swing, of course. As Professor—"

"But how are you going to fix the swing to the branch, ass?" howled Figgins.

"Oh, that is merely a detail," said Skimpole, waving his hand airily. "As a scientist—"

"As a silly ass—beg pardon, Cousin Ethel—a silly duffer, you mean!" said Figgins, with a grim look at the loquacious Skimpole. "You'd better let us haul you up on the swing to that branch now."

Figgins threw a meaning glance at Tom Merry and Blake, who both rose to their feet.

"Good idea, Figgy!" said Jack Blake heartily. "Come on, Skimmy! Let's have the swing!"

The three juniors grasped the swing, and Blake and Figgins threw the two loose ends of the ropes over the overhanging bough and hauled on them.

"Into the seat, Skimmy, quick!" exclaimed Tom Merry, grasping Skimpole by the shoulders, and plunking him down upon the plank, which was now suspended about two feet from the ground.

"Really, Tom Merry—" gasped Skimpole.

"Haul up!" grinned Tom Merry.

And Figgins and Blake hauled on the ropes, and the amateur scientist of St. Jim's sailed upwards, clutching frantically at the ropes to keep his balance.

At the height of some six or seven feet from the ground Blake and Figgins stopped hauling, and secured the ends of the ropes to the tree-trunk, and Skimpole was left dangling in mid-air.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors, as the bony form of the genius of St. Jim's swung gently backwards and forwards in the breeze. And even Cousin Ethel's silvery peal joined in the chorus of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole, who at first had looked comically bewildered at finding himself so suddenly taken at his word and elevated to a giddy height, looked down from his airy perch with a somewhat doubtful expression on his countenance.

"I suppose the ropes are strong enough, Tom Merry?" he remarked a little nervously.

"Blessed if I know, Skimmy!" remarked Tom Merry blandly. "The swing's your contrivance, you know, and I should think you ought to have made it strong enough."

"Ye-es, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors. As a matter of fact, the rope was amply strong enough to bear the weight of Skimpole's weedy figure, but it seemed funny to the juniors that Skimpole had not considered the matter at all until somewhat late in the day.

Fatty Wynn glanced at Tom Merry over the meat-pie he was devouring.

"I say, Tom Merry, ain't it a bit of a shame to keep Skimmy up there while we're wolfing all the grub?" he remarked. "Blessed if I could stick it, you know!"

"Blessed if the ropes could, either!" grinned Tom Merry. "But perhaps you're right, Fatty. We'll let the duffer down now."

"Trust Fatty to think of that!"

"Oh, really, Kerr—"

"Now, Skimmy," said Tom Merry severely, "we're going to let you down if you'll promise not to bore us to death with your rot."

Skimpole blinked down from aloft.

"I strongly object to any such proceeding on your part," he remarked, to the astonishment of the juniors. "I am just beginning to feel the relief to the brain from being further away from the centre of gravity. Pray leave me suspended."

The juniors gasped.

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A Grand New Tale of Army Life,

IN THE NOW ON SALE. ONE HALFPENNY.

"But—but the grub!" stammered Fatty Wynn. "You want your tea, surely, Skimmy?"

"H'm! Well, I admit I could do with a little something to eat," said the genius of St. Jim's reflectively. "If you could project one of those meat-pies up to me—"

"Certainly!" said Fatty Wynn, at once. "Here you are! Catch!"

"Look out!" yelled the watching juniors in chorus—too late!

Skimpole made a clutch as the meat-pie flew past him. He clutched the air, lost his balance, the swing-seat tipped up, and the genius of St. Jim's flew through the air on to the middle of the well-spread tablecloth below.

Sploosh!

With a wild yell Skimpole plumped right into the middle of the picnic, and the picnickers sprang to their feet in alarm. "Oh! Ow! Help!"

"My hat!"

"Oh, dear!"

"My only aunt!"

Skimpole rolled in the middle of the tablecloth, and pots of jam and meat-pies and cups of tea and plates of cakes flew far and wide, or were squashed and smashed by the rolling body of the unfortunate genius of St. Jim's.

Fortunately Skimpole was not hurt, as the juniors were able to assure themselves when they pulled him, gasping and bewildered, from the wreck of the tea. For the time being, however, he was cured of his desire to investigate the effects of the force of gravity upon the human brain from an airy position seven feet from the ground.

The setting sun was painting the calm waters of the rippling Ryll with a rosy glow when the picnic party broke up their revels and embarked for the row up-stream back to St. Jim's.

A glorious day was being ushered out by an evening in its way as glorious, and contentment and a great peace filled the hearts of the juniors and their girl-chum.

Cousin Ethel's sweet voice struck up an old-time melody as the boats swung along in the gloaming, and the boats' crews took up the air, until a full chorus of boyish voices swelled out upon the calm waters of the river.

Thus with chorus after chorus to liven the way the boats quickly made Rylcombe village, where there was a general disembarkation to see Cousin Ethel off at the little station.

"Good-bye, Arthur, and thank you so much for such a pleasant excursion. Yes, I'll come again with pleasure," smiled Cousin Ethel, as she leaned from the window of her carriage. "Good-bye, all!"

"Good-bye, Cousin Ethel!"

The girl grasped as many of the hands held out to her as there was time for, dwelling, perhaps, a shade longer than necessary over one particular hand, and the next minute the juniors were standing on the platform, caps in hand, watching the fussy little local puff out of the station and away into the dusk.

Figgins heaved a deep sigh as the party turned away to leave the station.

"Well, my hat, it has been a jolly day!" he remarked with emphasis. "I—I don't know when I've enjoyed a day so much! And the promoter of the whole thing—our host—is Gussy, chaps!"

The juniors gave a ringing cheer.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Good old Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy blushed modestly.

"Weally, deah boys, it's weally vewy good of you—"

"Rats! Three cheers for Gussy!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"And I tell you what it is, chaps!" declared Tom Merry. "Gussy's heaped coals of fire on our heads! He's made fools of the lot of us to-day! We couldn't find out what those telegrams were about except by force, and then we found he was arranging—this! He was planning a treat for us all the time!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Augustus!"

"You're right, Tommy!" said Blake solemnly. "Gussy's made us all look April fools. The honours are with him to-day, and I think we all agree that we've never had a happier All Fools' Day at St. Jim's!"

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of Tom Merry and Co. next Thursday, entitled "Joe's Champion," by Martin Clifford. Please order your copy of the GEM Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

[Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Serial Story are purely imaginary, and no reference or allusion is made to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.]

A Thrilling Tale of Modern Adventure.



By **ROBERT W. COMRADE.**

Frank Kingston, the Avenger.

"I am more than pleased to see you both here," cried Professor Graham Polgrave—"more than pleased!"

The gruff voice of the old hermit echoed peculiarly in the confines of the sitting-room—a sitting-room which was, in reality, a cellar under the professor's house, the latter being dilapidated and in a state of sad disrepair.

The curious old gentleman, living quite alone, had pursued his scientific work underground for many a long year. Down there, in the cellars, he could work in absolute peace and quietness.

Frank Kingston and his fair companion Dolores—or, as she was known to London society, Kathleen O'Brien—were looking round them curiously. To the latter the scene was a new one, for this was her first visit to Professor Polgrave's home. Attired as she was in a becoming mauve gown, she had impressed the professor very considerably.

Her beauty was undeniable, the brilliance of her large eyes clearly proclaiming her to be of Irish-Spanish descent. Polgrave had at once read in them the pure and noble character of their owner, and he thought them the loveliest he had ever seen.

"You must come into the laboratory!" he cried, leading the way. "It is very seldom I have visitors, and you are doubly welcome. The questions I have to ask you are many. I wish to hear all about your work from the very beginning. There is my own work to discuss, too, and there are many of my inventions I wish to show to you."

"I am just longing to see them, professor!" cried Dolores. "Mr. Kingston has told me many wonderful things about you and your work."

They passed inside, and Kingston saw at a glance that the professor was engaged upon one of his never-ceasing experiments. The litter of test-tubes, retorts, etc., on the laboratory bench, was clear evidence of this. Dolores had not been in the apartment many seconds before she noticed the two brilliant lamps overhead. The light cast from them was certainly amazing, and at first glance it would appear to anybody as though the room were bathed in brilliant sunshine.

"So those are the electric lights Mr. Kingston has told me about," said Dolores interestedly. "I felt sure there would be something marvellous, but did not guess your invention would be so exactly similar to daylight as this. Why, it is almost as good as being in the open—perhaps better, for the light here is steady and unwavering."

"Were it not for that light," chuckled the old man, "my

eyesight would have been gone years ago, for I could never have stood the glare of any other artificial illumination. Up to now, daylight has been the best for the eyes, but this, instead of injuring the eyesight, causes it to grow stronger and more acute than ever. I can never hope to see as Kingston can, but I do not mind saying that my eyesight is far better than any ordinary man's."

"I see you are busy," drawled Kingston, nodding to the bench. "If we are disturbing you—"

Polgrave shook his head vigorously.

"No, no!" he exclaimed. "You must not think that, my dear friend. I have already told you that I will put aside any and all the work to welcome a visit from you. There are chairs there; sit down so that we may talk in comfort."

His visitors seated themselves, Dolores plainly showing that she was vastly interested. Kingston, however, almost gave the impression that he was bored, for he sat there in a decidedly languid attitude, and with eyes half closed. He was dressed in the height of fashion, and seemed nothing more nor less than a dandified fop—an empty-headed young man about town.

The old professor, however, was aware that his looks entirely belied his real character, for Frank Kingston was, without exception, the most remarkable being in the world. Every one of his faculties was intensified to such an extent that he was the strongest, cleverest, bravest and most alert of men. He opened his eyes suddenly, and glanced at the professor.

"I am happy to tell you," he drawled, "that the work I undertook last night, and which you assisted me in so considerably, has come to an entirely satisfactory conclusion."

"Good," chuckled the old hermit—"very good indeed! But before you tell me about that, let me clearly understand how matters stand—how many of the Brotherhood are dealt with, and how many remain. It is now eight and a half years since you were a member yourself. Has it remained unchanged during that time?"

"Not exactly, professor, for new members have been added since I found out the true character of the scoundrelly organisation, and vowed to expose it."

"You were rash in those bygone days," murmured the professor, "and should have been more diplomatic. The Chief, I understand, Lord Mount-Fannell, sentenced you to a life of exile on an unknown rock in the Pacific, known as the Iron Island?"

"Exactly. I have already told you, professor, of my eight years' sojourn on that desolate rock—how it affected my every faculty, how the iron of the Island entered my

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NEXT WEEK:

"JOE'S CHAMPION."

body, and made me the man I am to-day, and how, finally, Miss O'Brien came to the Island and succeeded in effecting my escape."

"I should have been helpless alone," declared Dolores, "for I was in just such a plight as Mr. Kingston himself. Indeed, it was he who did all the work, and it is he I have to thank for my presence in London to-day."

Kingston laughed.

"The true facts, professor," he said, "are that we made our escape together, each performing our separate tasks satisfactorily. It is a good many months now since we left the Iron Island, and now I come to look over it, I realise what a great amount of work has been accomplished in that time. Alone I could never have done it; but with the assistance of my good helpers, I have been able to wipe out no less than eight members of the Inner Council of the Brotherhood of Iron."

"And how many are there altogether?" inquired the professor.

"You mean how many were there? In its full strength the Council originally numbered twenty-five; but now its ranks are reduced to seventeen. The Chief is beginning to realise that he has a powerful enemy working against him, and in future, professor, I shall have to proceed very cautiously indeed. Once the Council is exterminated, the Brotherhood will be a thing of the past, for without their leaders, the common-members will be entirely disorganised, and therefore harmless."

"Obviously," declared the professor. "You need trouble yourself very little about the common members. It is the Council you are working against, and, as you have proved, you are diminishing their number with relentless rapidity, for you have been rapid when it is considered that each man was taken separately and dealt with by one of your own particular sets of devices without knowing how his downfall came about."

"It is a difficult task I have set myself," said Frank Kingston, a grim light appearing in his eyes for a second, "but it affords me the keenest pleasure in the world to perform it. At one time it was a question of personal revenge; but now that feeling has died away, and I am only working because I enjoy hounding these scoundrels down."

"And because," interrupted the professor, "you enjoy doing your country a public service. The money you are using, I understand, to assist you in your work is that which you succeeded in taking with you from the Iron Island—the Brotherhood's secret hoard?"

"Exactly," agreed Kingston. "I considered that it could be put to no better purpose. I am using very little of it—scarcely more than the interest, in fact; and when the Council is accounted for, the whole lot will go to English charities, for, having gone so far, it would be impossible to return it to its lawful owners."

"A splendid notion," murmured the old professor—"a noble resolve, and one which is quite worthy of you, my brave rescuer! And so you left the Iron Island together? Dear me, it must have been a joyful moment when you saw the last of that barren rock, which is now, I presume, deserted?"

"On the contrary, professor, it is very far from being deserted. The first member of the Brotherhood to fall was the Spaniard, Don Sebastian, and, if you will remember, I told you the facts of the case the other day. He is now an occupant of the Iron Island—the exile who took my place. But, in addition to him, I have since placed another man on the rock to share his lonely life—Colonel Marsden, the ex-governor of Cragmoor Prison."

"Ah, yes, I remember! What a memory I have! And now, in place of yourselves, those two villains are living their lonely lives where no civilisation can approach them."

"They are out of the track of all ships," put in Dolores, "and since Mr. Kingston left the island, the Brotherhood has no object in revisiting it. They think him dead, and are under the impression that Don Sebastian himself appropriated the money and made off with it."

"Leaving the course clear for you to wage your great war in secret," chuckled the old gentleman. "Ha, ha, the Council does not know what a man they have to contend against—what an overwhelming power it is which is slowly but surely dragging them to their doom!"

"The next member, as you know, professor, was Detective-inspector Caine, who, besides being reduced at Scotland Yard to the rank of a mere sergeant, was also made a

common-member of the Brotherhood. He is now in such a position as to be helpless. Then came Sir Robert Gissing, who relented and turned honest once again, to be followed by Colonel Marsden, Herr Bruckmann, and Dr. Charles Anderson. More recently—in fact, within the last week or so—we have disposed of Jacob Lowenwirth, who had charge of the affair with regard to Princess Kamala, the Indian girl I have before referred to. She has now left England for ever, accompanied by her brother."

"And Lowenwirth I know all about," put in Polgrave—"how he was tracked down by these Indians, and how your work was taken out of your hands. He died, I think, a terrible death on the Essex mud-flats?"

"That is correct, professor; and it was while returning to London in my motor-car from the scene of his grim extermination that my friend, Carson Gray, the detective, told me about the case concerning William Haverfield—the case which came to a conclusion last night, and which you have helped me in considerably. When I first came to England, I and Miss O'Brien were alone; but now, what with Gray, yourself, and my young assistant Tim, I have a regular band of splendid helpers around me. I must not forget to mention Fraser, the common-member I rescued at Rio de Janeiro. He has proved absolutely faithful, and his assistance has been invaluable to me."

"You may rest assured, Kingston, that we shall all be willing to extend you our help at any time," declared the professor. "Your cause is unlike any other in the world, and deserving of the highest commendation. It was my firm intention not to tell a living soul of the discoveries I have made in the course of my career. But, having met you, what can I do? I am practically forced to let you into all my secrets, as they fit in so well with your needs—especially as you have saved my life."

"I can only say, professor, that, even though I have known you but a few days, the help you have rendered me is incalculable. Indeed, I could never have so effectively accomplished what I have done had it not been for your marvellous drugs. Look how perfectly I was disguised when I gained admittance to the Council Chamber the other night; and look how marvellously your preparation acted on my friend Carson Gray. There is no need to go over the whole matter again, for you know, professor, that my friend is now lying in his rooms in Great Portland Street apparently lifeless."

Polgrave chuckled to himself, and his face wrinkled itself into an infectious smile.

"I knew it would not fail!" he exclaimed confidently. "Even the doctor, I will warrant, pronounced life to be extinct. Yet there is no danger in the preparation. One drop of the antidote I gave you will bring your friend back to life instantly, and he will know nothing of what has occurred meanwhile. But from your words I take it that you have not yet revived him?"

"I intend doing so as soon as I leave this house, professor," replied Kingston, gazing unblinkingly up at the powerful glare of the electric lights. "I wish the Brotherhood to think that he is recovering slowly, for, as you know, they are under the impression that he has been killed through the agency of their own poison."

"Exactly. But now that Haverfield has been finished with, they may know the truth, and will make no further effort to kill him when they find that he is still alive. But you have not told me of your adventure last night."

"It was hardly an adventure, professor," smiled Kingston. "I administered the drug as arranged, and merely walked straight home to the Hotel Cyril. I could do nothing but wait and learn the result, either through the agency of the newspapers or by word from Crawford, the common-member who is working on my side."

"I understand. You will never know exactly how my preparation affected your victim, but will have to rest satisfied with the knowledge that your object has been achieved."

"Richard Haverfield was arrested last night," said Frank Kingston. "I can only come to the conclusion that, under the influence of the drug, he blurted out the whole truth, and that Mount-Fannell decided to punish him for his treachery by giving him up to the police."

"Yes," agreed the old hermit; "that can be the only explanation. So, as you said a few moments ago, the Haverfield case has now feached its conclusion?"

"So far as I am concerned—yes," replied the other, Dolores meanwhile listening with great interest. "There will probably be a great fuss in the papers concerning his trial and so forth, but I shall take no interest in it whatever. My object now is to get to work again with as little delay as possible."

Professor Polgrave rubbed his hands together in satisfaction.

"You are the kind of man I admire, Kingston!" he cried.

ANSWERS

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"I do not think you know the meaning of the word delay. Almost the hour you have completed one episode you are talking about your next move. It is no cause for wonder that you have been so successful. You are untiring—absolutely untiring!"

Frank Kingston laughed.

"I believe in striking while the iron is hot!" he exclaimed. "Having extricated Carson Gray from his uncomfortable position, it is now my intention to set about a fresh task. Whether I shall require your aid, professor, is a question I cannot decide at the moment. Developments may occur which will give me an opportunity of making use of your marvellous inventions."

"I know you will not think me inquisitive," said Polgrave, "but I should like to know what your plans are. I could, perhaps, offer some suggestion—"

"It is my intention to tell you everything!" declared Kingston. "Since I have made your acquaintance, professor, I have learnt that your advice is of the utmost value, and I should indeed be foolish if I kept my plans to myself."

The Resuscitation of Carson Gray, Detective.

"I understand," said Dolores, with a smile, "that I am to play a part in this next adventure? It is—or seems to be—a very long time since I took part in your campaign, Mr. Kingston, and it will afford me the greatest pleasure to make myself useful."

"I am sure of that," said Kingston, "for you have always been as keen as myself. I know from past experience that your nerves are as steady as any man's, and that your bravery and skill are far better than most. Your part in the case I am about to set to work on is a fairly big one, and I am sure I can place it in your hands with the utmost confidence."

"From what you have told me, Kingston," put in the old man, "Miss O'Brien is as clever as yourself in her own way. You made no comparison, but your words clearly told me that you hold an extremely high opinion of her ingenuity."

"Oh, professor, you should take no notice!" laughed Dolores, with a flash of her beautiful eyes. "Mr. Kingston has been misrepresenting. I have always assisted him to the best of my ability, but—"

The professor held up his hand.

"My dear young lady," he exclaimed, "it is quite sufficient for me to know the whole facts concerning yourself. Had you been other than brave and unselfish, you would never have helped the work against the Brotherhood of Iron as you have done."

Polgrave turned to Kingston before Dolores could answer. "And what is the next case?" he inquired. "Who is the man destined to follow on Haverfield's heels? I declare I am as curious as a child."

"The next councillor, professor, is one I have been wanting to get hold of for many a week past. I will tell you the reason why I decided upon him. A few days ago I was talking with Carson Gray, and he, in the course of conversation, told me of a rather curious case which had come under his notice. It appeared that he received a visit from a certain young gentleman who occupies a fairly high position in the world."

"This young man told Gray that his fiancée, Miss Enid Thorne, had suddenly disappeared, and that the wedding, which had been arranged, had in consequence been knocked on the head. I was not particularly interested, and I am afraid I did not pay strict attention. Therefore, I only know the bare facts, as I have just stated them."

"But I see no connection with the Brotherhood," interrupted the professor curiously. "This was, I take it, purely one of Mr. Gray's ordinary cases?"

"On the contrary," replied Kingston; "it was nothing of the kind. I myself imagined it to be so at the time, but the following day my man, Fraser, told me something which cast a different light on the matter, and caused me to go deeper into it."

His listeners nodded.

"It appears that Fraser had heard from Crawford that a case of particular interest had occurred a few days previously. Miss Thorne had secretly been conveyed to the Grange Private Lunatic Asylum, in Sussex. Now, although nobody is aware of the fact, this asylum is the property of the Brotherhood of Iron, and the doctor in charge—who is, to all intents and purposes, the owner—is Dr. Julius Zetman, a crafty old ruffian, who has been a member of the Brotherhood since that organisation first came into existence. His servants, of course, are all common-members; and, although he takes in certified lunatics, his real business consists of keeping under lock and key certain persons who are undesirable to their relatives."

"Then it is not used by the Brotherhood as a means of ridding themselves of people who are in their way?" inquired Dolores.

"No," replied Kingston. "The Brotherhood is well provided in other directions for that sort of thing. Dr. Zetman carries on a regular business at the Grange, and all the profits, of course, go into the Brotherhood's coffers. The asylum is generally considered to be one which houses lunatics of the most violent description."

"Although some of its inmates are as sane as you or I?" asked the scientist.

"Exactly, professor. Dr. Zetman has no scruples, and being a man who has gained high degrees in the medical profession, his word is taken without question, and if he certifies—with the collaboration of the scoundrelly medico in his pay—that a person is insane, no inquiries are made. You see, certain people, while they are wicked enough to rid themselves of relatives who are unwelcome, would not go so far as deliberate murder. For these people the worthy doctor caters."

"His customers know nothing of the Brotherhood?"

"Nothing whatever. He has agents all over London on the look out for cases—spies, as a matter of fact—and these are the men who make the first advances, afterwards, if their attentions are favoured, revealing the name of their villainous employer. In the case of Miss Thorne, her uncle, an impecunious lawyer, objected to her marriage, for the young man, although of good family, was practically as penniless as himself. He therefore decided to put her away for a year or two, in order that her fiancé would be forced to give up all idea of marrying her. I presume—for I am not certain—that when she is released she will be wedded to a rich old friend of her uncle's, who will pay the latter a considerable sum for his trouble; for, alone, Miss Thorne would never consent to the marriage. The plan, I think, is that the girl will not be released from the asylum until she consents to the union. Love is a peculiar thing, and it is strange to what length a man will go to secure for himself the girl he has set his heart on, however averse she may be to his advances."

Kingston looked at his listeners and smiled.

"I am afraid," he said, "that my long explanation is proving tedious, but it was necessary that you should know all. As I said, it is my intention to attend to Dr. Zetman without delay. Not that I am interested in Miss Thorne; no, it is because I wish to bring to justice another member of the Inner Council, and, incidentally, set at liberty many people who, while certified to be lunatics, are perfectly sane."

"And the part I am to play?" inquired Dolores eagerly.

"Ah, yes," replied Kingston, "I will tell you of that now. I shall not require your services until to-morrow at the earliest, but I, myself, intend paying a visit to the Grange Asylum this very night."

And Kingston proceeded to tell the others exactly what his plans were, and how he intended working them out. He was right in saying that Dolores' part was to be a big one, for she was, in a way, to take charge. For the present, however, there were other things to think about.

"I think I have told you all," said Kingston at last. "I had no particular reason for choosing Zetman as the next man, only that he came to my notice while engaged on the Haverfield affair. This is the first mention I have made of it, but it has been in my thoughts more than once during this last day or two. However, before I set to work on that, a far more important matter must be attended to, namely, the resuscitation of Mr. Carson Gray. It will never do to leave him in a state of unconsciousness indefinitely."

"Hardly," smiled the professor. "One drop of the antidote will restore him to his full senses in practically no time. But you must not go yet—you must certainly not go yet! I have not shown Miss O'Brien over the laboratory, or, in fact, any of my inventions which she has expressed a desire to see. No—no, I cannot allow you to run away at such short notice!"

The old fellow bustled to his feet and crossed over to the bench, murmuring something to himself the while. Very shortly afterwards Dolores was vastly interested in the many curious drugs and inventions he showed her. They seemed to be never ending, for, besides drugs, the professor had devoted much of his time to the manufacture of metals. In the further laboratory could be seen a large furnace, which now stood cold and out of use.

"I have been devoting myself to other work during the last few months," explained the professor, "but if everything goes well I hope to make use of that furnace many times before I die. I have made certain researches with chemicals which have resulted in a discovery that will startle the world. These chemicals applied to an alloy of certain metals cause the latter to become nothing more nor less

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than— But, no, I will not tell you now. There are other things which will interest you to a greater extent."

And the old professor chuckled to himself and screwed his face into a mass of wrinkles as he smiled upon his two visitors. He kept them interested for upwards of an hour among his bottles of many coloured liquids, his chemical apparatus, his retorts and test tubes; he even went so far as to make certain small experiments and demonstrations for their especial benefit.

Both Kingston and Dolores were vastly interested, and for the time forgot all about the immediate business in hand. It was the professor himself who reminded them of the time.

"By Jove," exclaimed Kingston, "but you have kept us so interested that the question of time completely escaped my attention! I must be going, for there is a lot to be done."

"Come to me if you think I can be of assistance," said Polgrave. "I am almost as interested in your work as you are yourself, and might be able to offer advice."

"I shall probably be here sooner than you expect," replied Kingston, with a smile. "Now really, I think we have wasted quite enough of your valuable time, and you will be glad to see the back of us."

"Nothing of the sort," cried the scientist—"nothing of the sort! Come as often as you like," he added, smiling at Dolores, "and you will always receive a warm welcome."

"I am sure, professor," replied Dolores, "I have enjoyed myself exceedingly this last hour or two, and shall be delighted to pay you another visit. I am feeling particularly elated this morning, for I am again to take an active part in the undoing of the Brotherhood. It is contrary to my nature to live in idleness, and this adventure will prove very welcome."

"Mr. Kingston," exclaimed the professor, "you are indeed fortunate in having gained such a charming and willing helper as Miss O'Brien in your splendid campaign! I can well understand that you place infinite faith in her, for a person who is willing to help is worth twenty who are indifferent."

"Better words could not have been chosen," said Kingston. "Miss O'Brien has always proved herself to be ever willing, and, I might say eager, to do something to bring these scoundrels to justice."

"It is impossible to know all the facts," said Dolores quietly, "without having a desire to be doing something—something material, something which will hasten the extermination of that dreadful organisation."

The hermit nodded in approval, and led the way into the little sitting-room. In a few moments his two visitors were ready to depart, and he insisted upon seeing them upstairs to the outer door.

"Good-bye!" he said fervently, as he shook hands. "No, I will not say good-bye, for I shall expect you again."

"Expect us, professor, when you see us," drawled Kingston, smilingly. "You may rest assured, however, that you have by no means seen the last of us."

"That," said the scientist, "I know to be true."

Two minutes later Dolores and Kingston turned into the roadway and made towards St. John's Wood Road. It was just about one o'clock, and the atmosphere for once was singularly transparent. The rays of the spring sun beat down hotly on the pavement, and Kingston felt glad that he had taken the precaution to don a straw hat.

"Well," he exclaimed, "and how do you like the professor, Dolores? Has he struck you as being the kind of person you expected to see?"

"My expectations are more than realised, Mr. Kingston. Professor Polgrave is one of the most marvellous men I have ever met—marvellous in the sense that he has made such wonderful discoveries, and that he chooses to go unrewarded for his years of strenuous labour."

"The reason for that, Dolores," replied Kingston, "is that he is a man who believes in peace and quietness; he does not believe in notoriety or wealth. For, had he so chosen, he could have been one of the best-known scientists to-day, and one of the wealthiest."

"He is absolutely wrapped up in his work."

"Those are the very words, Dolores. The professor is so engrossed in his work, in fact, that he knows, should he give his inventions to the world, he would instantly become famous. He does not crave for that sort of thing, but prefers to live a life of absolute solitude, continuing his work for the mere pleasure of doing so."

"There are not many men of his stamp living to-day, for who would miss the chance of making a great name—a name that would rapidly become a household word—before leaving this world? Mr. Polgrave prefers to accumulate his marvellous discoveries, and let them be revealed after his death."

"The old fellow lives only for his art— Ah, there is a

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"THE RIVALS OF ST. WODE'S,"

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taxi! It will be the quickest way of reaching our destinations."

"Then you are not coming straight to the Cyril?" inquired Dolores, noticing that he used the plural.

"No. I shall alight at Oxford Circus and walk to Carson Gray's rooms. I must apologise for leaving you in such a manner, but I am sure you will realise the urgency of the matter."

"Of course," replied Dolores, as the taxi pulled up beside the kerb. "I should never think of asking you to escort me home under such conditions. I shall be quite all right."

They stepped into the taxi, and were very soon bowling along the road in the direction of Oxford Circus. Their conversation dealt solely with the case of Dr. Zeetman, which promised to be as interesting as any that Kingston had so far undertaken. Somehow the idea of entering the lunatic asylum and effecting the downfall of its master appealed to Dolores, and she was looking forward with interest to the coming conflict. At Oxford Circus Kingston bade the chauffeur pull up. He stepped to the pavement, raised his hat to Dolores, and disappeared among the crowd of pedestrians.

It was but a short distance to Carson Gray's address in Great Portland Street, and before many minutes had elapsed Kingston was ringing at the door-bell. He had noted, with a smile, that the blinds of the first floor were lowered, these windows being those of Carson Gray's suite.

"Ah, Mrs. Webster," he exclaimed, as the landlady opened the door, "I have just called round to have a last look at Mr. Carson Gray, whom, you know, was an acquaintance of mine."

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the landlady. "Durin' this last day or two I 'ardly know whether I'm on me head or me heels! Poor Mr. Gray was one o' my best-payin' gentlemen, an' now he's gone I don't know what I shall do. How about 'is funeral? Who's goin' to—"

"My dear Mrs. Webster, pray do not excite yourself!" exclaimed Kingston. "Mr. Gray's funeral will be attended to, never fear. But tell me, what has become of the butler who was here yesterday?"

"Oh, sir, 'e went away all of a sudden an' never come back. I s'pose the doctor or somebody told 'im as he wouldn't be no further use, which 'e wouldn't, seein' as Mr. Gray—"

"Has the doctor been again," interrupted Kingston, "or the police?"

"No, sir, neither of 'em," answered Mrs. Webster. They had by this time entered, and the door was closed. "Are you goin' straight up, sir? An' shall I come up with you? It ain't very cheerful lookin' at a corpse by yourself—"

Kingston smiled quietly.

"I shall not be long," he said. "It was something of a shock when I heard of Mr. Gray's death, and I felt that I should like to look on his face once more."

"Yes, sir; of course, sir."

Mrs. Webster stood aside, and Kingston ascended the stairs. As he had been there on many occasions the landlady had got to know him fairly well. He walked slowly upwards until he came to the outer door of the detective's room—a door which Gray had had specially made to shut off the noises of the house, and to make his own rooms quite exclusive.

It was not locked, but opened readily under Kingston's touch. He stepped inside and closed it gently behind him. Once that was done, his actions became decidedly more brisk. He walked quickly across the consulting-room and entered Gray's bedroom, which was now darkened owing to the lowered blinds.

"By Jove!" thought Kingston. "Unless I had the professor's word for it I should imagine that Gray were really and truly dead! This place seems to be a chamber of death, and no mistake!"

Kingston was right, for in the gloom the body of Carson Gray looked particularly ghastly. The detective lay on the bed fully dressed, covered with a white sheet from head to foot, to all intents and purposes a lifeless corpse.

Kingston lost no time, but turned the top of the sheet down, exposing Gray's face. It was cold and waxy, and the eyes were now closed. From a waistcoat-pocket Kingston produced a tiny hypodermic syringe and a phial of dark green liquid. He dipped the needle into the latter and filled the syringe with the preparation.

"Now to bring about a very considerable change!"

He applied the instrument to a spot on the side of Gray's neck, and pressed the needle home. An ordinary man would have found his nerves tried severely over the experience, for it was no pleasant task reviving an apparently lifeless body. The effect on Kingston, however, was nil. He actually wore a slight smile of amusement as he set about his task. To him the whole affair was something of a joke.

He watched carefully the first few seconds after the

antidote had entered Gray's blood, and nodded with satisfaction as he saw a faint tinge of colour steal into the detective's cheeks and the waxy appearance vanish from his skin.

"Good!" he told himself. "The stuff is acting in the exact manner the professor informed me it would. In one minute Gray should open his eyes and ask what the deuce happens to be up."

He waited, watching with intense interest the effect on his companion. The drug acted with amazing rapidity, and at the conclusion of fifty seconds Gray's eyelids flickered, and suddenly he sat up, blinking, appearing for all the world as if he had just awakened from a sleep.

well; the sooner it is over the better. You'll explain everything afterwards?"

"Of course. I am now going to rush down the stairs shouting for the landlady. Everybody thinks you dead, but I, while taking a last look on your face, detected a sign of life. The doctor will be here before many minutes, and you must apparently recover with the tardiness and gravity the occasion demands."

"That's all very well—" began Carson Gray, but Kingston chuckled silently, and forced him into a lying position. Then, with a last word of warning, he ran noisily out of the room. In a moment he was on the stairs, and as it happened, he met Mrs. Webster coming up.



Suddenly the monster moved across the dimly-lit window, and as Kingston watched from the shrubbery, he drew his breath in sharply, as if in readiness for a coming battle. (See page 27.)

"Hallo!" he murmured dazedly. "What the— Why, by Jove, it's Kingston! I—I—"

"Hush!" murmured the latter. "Don't you know where you are, Gray? I have just revived you."

"Great Scott, yes!" replied Carson Gray, looking round him, now wide awake. "I have been dead, haven't I? What's the time? How long have I been like this? I'm frozen to the bone, Kingston."

"That is hardly surprising, considering the temperature of the room," replied the other. "But lower your voice, or, better still, don't speak a word—remember our arrangement. You are supposed to be dead, so must not come back to life too suddenly. Lay down again and pretend to be partially unconscious."

Carson Gray made a wry face.

"And I'm as hungry as a hunter!" he murmured. "Very

"Oh, sir, what can be the matter?" cried the landlady, startled. "I knew that there corpse would have some such effect on your nerves—"

"Quick, Mrs. Webster! Send for the doctor!" gasped Kingston. "I find that Mr. Gray is still alive!"

"Still alive!" echoed the landlady, grasping hold of the balustrade for support. "Have you taken leave of your senses, sir? I saw Mr. Gray meself, and if 'e ain't dead—"

"But he is not!" cried Kingston. "Do as I tell you, for every minute is of the utmost value! Mr. Gray is breathing, and has partially recovered consciousness! He even tried to speak to me!"

"Good gracious me!" gasped Mrs. Webster. "I 'ardly know wot I'm doin'! Mr. Gray alive! Dear, dear, dear! I can't believe that, sir!"

"Whether you believe it or not, Mrs. Webster, it is a fact."

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NEXT
WEEK.

"JOE'S CHAMPION."

said Kingston. "Will you send for a doctor, or shall I have to go for one myself? Please remember the urgency of the case."

"I'll go, sir, only I'm that bewildered I don't know wot I'm doin'!"

And Mrs. Webster hurried off downstairs, murmuring to herself in a very considerable fluster. She had spoken the truth, for, indeed, her limited amount of brains could not grasp the full significance of what had just occurred. Just as she was she rushed out for the doctor, the idea of sending the maid never entering her head.

It was perhaps best that this was so, for the doctor arrived in record time. He found the door wide open, and the rather scared-looking maidservant standing on the steps, trembling and frightened. Brushing past her, the medico bounded up the stairs.

He found Kingston in the detective's bed-room, the blinds of which were now up, admitting the cheerful sunlight, and giving the room an altogether more pleasant appearance. Kingston had whipped the sheet off Carson Gray, and the latter now lay on the bed merely dressed in his ordinary clothes.

"Ah, doctor," said Kingston quickly, "I am glad you have come—deuced glad, in fact! I had the very dickens of a start when I found Mr. Gray with life in him! Come and soo! He's getting better every moment!"

Kingston spoke in his affected, foppish voice. But the doctor had no time to take note of who it was speaking to him. His whole attention lay in the direction of the bed, for this was the most remarkable incident he had ever heard of in the course of his career. He was, in fact, considerably excited, and uttered an exclamation of amazement as he saw the healthy colour in Carson Gray's cheeks, for now that the antidote had taken full effect, the detective was in perfect health and spirits.

"Upon my soul," exclaimed the doctor, as he felt Gray's pulse—"upon my soul, this is most extraordinary—most unaccountable! I am at a loss, for I could have sworn Mr. Gray was beyond all hope. Yet he is now in practically his usual state of health, or will be as soon as he recovers from his present stupor."

"It is certainly a surprising occurrence," agreed Kingston. "You can guess how confoundedly startled I was when I found my friend to be alive. I came into the room, and saw immediately that something out of the usual had occurred, for Gray's breathing sounded quite plainly. I tell you, doctor, I was beastly startled for a minute!"

"I am not surprised to hear you say so," said the other, bending over Carson Gray. "See, there are distinct signs of consciousness already! I must make a note of this, for it is one of the most remarkable cases that has ever come under my notice."

The man of medicine gazed down upon Carson Gray with amazed eyes, and Kingston, behind him, laughed inwardly. But, at the same time, it struck him very forcibly what a genius Professor Polgrave was to have succeeded in making such a discovery as this.

Gray, of course, heard everything that was passing, and, feeling both cold and hungry after his long, trance-like sleep, decided to bring matters to a head as soon as possible. He was curious to know what time it was, and how events had gone since he had become unconscious.

So he suddenly moved, and opened his eyes for a second, this being but a preliminary.

"Ah," exclaimed the doctor, "as I said, he is already recovering consciousness. Dear me, I am entirely at a loss! All I can surmise is that Mr. Gray in some manner unknown to us took some poison—unwittingly, of course—which has had this singular effect. Probably it was some unknown Eastern poison. At all events, the occurrence was one of which I have never before heard. The poison may have been administered by an enemy, for, being the clever detective he is, Mr. Gray certainly had enemies."

"By Jove, doctor," drawled Kingston, in his languid voice, "your explanation seems to be the only possible one! But see, he has opened his eyes!"

Carson Gray had indeed done so, and he looked about him dazedly. He was undoubtedly a good actor, for the doctor was entirely deceived. Gray raised himself upright with apparent difficulty.

"Water!" he exclaimed, in a husky voice.

"I expected something of the sort," declared the doctor, turning and hurrying out of the room. Carson Gray lay where he was, but Kingston smiled a trifle as he saw the detective's left eyelid flicker.

"Water!" murmured Gray, in disgust. "I feel more like packing away a good solid steak, together with—"

"S-sh!" interrupted Kingston, holding up his hand. "You'll give yourself away, Gray, if you're not careful."

Carson Gray grinned, and relapsed into silence. This was undoubtedly the most novel experience he had ever undergone. It was not without its humorous side, and both he

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and Kingston were enjoying the worthy doctor's mystification.

He returned after a moment, and the water appeared to have a truly remarkable effect on Gray, for within two minutes he was sitting upright, looking about him, and asking what in the world all the fuss was about.

"You have been dead," cried the doctor, "or, at least, I should say, we were under that impression. My dear Mr. Gray, allow me to congratulate you."

"Congratulate me!" exclaimed Gray. "What on earth for? There seems to be a considerable fuss over nothing. I'm not ill; therefore, may I inquire, doctor, what you are doing by my bedside? Let me see, where was I? Ah, yes, talking to a client!"

"That is it!" cried the doctor. "You were talking to a gentleman, when you suddenly fell forward apparently lifeless. Your death is announced in all the papers, and it was I, after an examination, who pronounced life to be extinct. That was yesterday afternoon, twenty-four hours ago."

"Twenty-four hours ago!" echoed Gray, in surprise. "Great Scott, you surprise me, doctor!"

"Your surprise can be nothing to ours. The case is unparalleled in the history of medical science, and I beg of you, Mr. Gray, to offer some explanation."

"Explanation? My dear doctor, surely I am not the person to come to for an explanation!" exclaimed Carson Gray innocently, at the same time slipping from the bed to the floor, where he stood somewhat unsteadily, supporting himself by the bedpost. "All I remember is suddenly falling forward at my client's feet, and then—well, you know best what happened after that."

"But the cause!" protested the doctor, holding up his hands. "What was the cause of your collapse—what poison was it you took?"

Carson Gray laughed.

"I am not aware," he exclaimed, "that I took any poison at all. I certainly do not think my coffee was drugged, or any such thing as that. But the fact remains that I fell into this trance, and the fact also remains, let me add, that it has left me with the very deuce of an appetite. You can see, doctor, that there is nothing the matter with me, so as soon as you are quite ready I will set about ordering a meal of some description. You can make what you like of the affair, but for the present I do not mean to puzzle my brains over it; my stomach will occupy my whole attention for the next hour to come."

The Grange Asylum, and its Mysterious Night Guard.

"By Jove, Kingston, it's remarkable what a comfortable feeling a good, sound meal imparts to one," exclaimed Carson Gray, lying back in his chair, and looking across the table at the figure of Frank Kingston, who was reclining languidly in an easy-chair.

The doctor had departed an hour since, and by this time the news of Gray's marvellous recovery would be in the hands of all the evening newspapers. While Gray had partaken of a good meal, Kingston had set him up with all the facts which had occurred during the detective's enforced sleep.

"Then," said the latter, as he filled his pipe from a tobacco-jar on the mantelpiece, "since Haverfield has told the truth to the Chief—that I said nothing to him about the Brotherhood that night at Chelsea—I am safe from molestation?"

"Quite!" replied Frank Kingston. "Haverfield has paid for his fabrications by being handed over to the police, for there is no doubt at all that his arrest was brought about by the Chief."

"That seems fairly conclusive."

"The Council know—or, rather, think—they were mistaken with regard to you, and when they find that you are still alive will merely be under the impression that their poison failed to have full effect. Consequently, believing you to be no menace, they will leave you to yourself."

"Well, Kingston, I must really congratulate you on the manner in which you have carried your plans through," said Gray, puffing a cloud of smoke into the room. "You have rendered my life safe from danger, in the direction of the Brotherhood, and secured the arrest of Haverfield at the same time. That case is now, I presume, finished with?"

"Absolutely!" declared Kingston. "So far as I am concerned I shall trouble my head no further about the matter. There is other work to be done, and I mean to set about it this very day."

Carson Gray laughed.

"By Jove, Kingston," he cried, now undoubtedly his old self again, "you are a most remarkable chap! Most people would at least take a few days rest after completing such a case as the Haverfield one satisfactorily. Yet you do not allow yourself a minute's respite."

"My dear Gray," drawled Kingston, "you do not seem to realise the fact that I am doing no work whatever. It is all pleasure, and I should be like a fish out of water were I to drop all thoughts of the Brotherhood and devote myself to a month's holiday. I tell you, Gray, I am looking forward with considerable eagerness to this new adventure, for I believe it will prove to be one of exceptional interest."

"To which are you referring?" asked Gray. "You have not yet told me the name of the next Inner Councillor to receive your attention."

"No; but I will at once proceed to do so. His name, to begin with, is Dr. Julius Zetman—a most unprepossessing cognomen—and he is the master of the Grange Private Asylum, situated on the borders of Sussex, not very far from Horsham."

"An asylum?" repeated Gray, with a laugh. "By Jove, Kingston, your campaign is taking you to some peculiar places!"

"That is not at all surprising, my dear Gray, when you consider how varied are the positions held by the various members of the Inner Council. But you wish to know the facts concerning Zetman. Very well, I will tell you."

And Kingston proceeded to put Gray into possession of all his plans, and all the facts concerning the asylum keeper. The conversation was of considerable length, for Gray had to be told of Professor Graham Polgrave, and his marvellous discoveries; but at last the detective knew everything.

"And so," he said, "Miss O'Brien is to take a large part in this affair? I, of course, shall be entirely out of it?"

"Not necessarily, Gray, for a situation may crop up in which your assistance may be invaluable. Until it does, however, I do not wish to interrupt your own work further. I dare say there are plenty of cases waiting for your attention, and you must not keep your clients waiting. Besides, think of the financial—"

"I don't think of that at all, Kingston," declared Gray. "I am not a poor man, and an opportunity of working with you is an opportunity I cannot afford to miss. You may look upon me as being ready at all times to render what little assistance I can."

"That's very good of you, Gray, but I knew that without your saying so. Your actions heretofore have quite conclusively proved that. But it is getting late; we have been talking here for well over two hours, and I have a few arrangements to make which are very necessary."

"You mean to pay a visit to the asylum to-night?"

"Exactly! I shall make no move, however, but merely run down to get the lie of the land, as it were. It is always a wise precaution, for when I pay my second visit I shall know exactly the positions of the various doors, windows, etc. If you will excuse me, I think I will take myself off, and leave you in peace to open that batch of correspondence I perceive on the side table."

Carson Gray glanced at the spot indicated, and saw a very formidable heap of letters waiting to be opened. He laughed.

"Yes," he said, "there are a few, I admit. I cannot claim to be as active as yourself, Kingston, and those letters will be extremely lucky if they find themselves opened before to-morrow morning. You must remember that I cannot recover from the effects of poison without some little delay."

Kingston smiled as he placed his hat in position, and grasped his walking-cane. He extended his hand, and gripped Carson Gray's warmly.

"Good-bye!" he said. "And thank you for the assistance you have lent me this last day or two. I shall take you at your word, and you must not be surprised if you receive a summons at any time of the day or night to help me once again."

"Far from being surprised, Kingston, I shall be delighted," declared the detective sincerely. "Good-bye, and I wish you the best of luck for to-night's work."

"That's good of you."

A moment later Kingston was slowly descending the stairs on his way to the outer door. The feeling of awe and surprise was still hovering in the air of the establishment, for as he descended he saw the almost scared face of the maid-servant looking out at him from one of the doorways.

The quickest way to get to the Cyril was by taxi, and Kingston found one of these very useful vehicles as soon as he turned into Oxford Street. Before stepping aboard, however, he noticed a flaring placard on which were the words:

"AMAZING DISCOVERY.

"MR. CARSON GRAY COMES TO LIFE.

"FULL REPORT!"

Pausing for a moment, Kingston purchased an evening paper, and while he was being driven to his hotel he read the account of how Carson Gray had come to life. The "full report" merely consisted of about half a dozen lines, stating the bare facts. Kingston's name was mentioned, but that,

of course, mattered nothing. It was only natural that he, as well as anybody else, should have found Carson Gray with life still in him.

And Kingston was not the only man who was particularly interested in the account of Gray's resuscitation. Almost at the same moment as Kingston bought the paper, Lord Mount-Fannell, the Chief of the Brotherhood of Iron, was perusing the report in his library at the house in Grosvenor Square. Mr. Milverton, the Chief's most valued assistant and fellow-councillor, was by his side, and they had both expressed considerable surprise at the startling news.

"It is very evident," declared the Chief, "that the poison you used, Milverton, was not of sufficient strength to kill. I am sure I cannot guess the reason for this, but these Oriental poisons are peculiar things to deal with, and there's no telling what effect they will have."

Mount-Fannell was, of course, in complete ignorance of the fact that Gray had never touched the poison at all, but had substituted Milverton's prepared cigar for one which was treated with the professor's singular drug.

"Well," replied Milverton, "the news comes rather welcome than otherwise, for since that lying Haverfield has been exposed, there was no necessity to have the detective put out of the way at all. He's totally unaware of this organisation, and, after all, it is ridiculous to suppose that he could ever have found us out. He is a clever detective, I admit, but it needs a smarter man than he to fathom our well-kept secrets."

"I think you are right, Milverton," said his lordship, "and we will let Gray continue his career as he chooses. So long as he does not become dangerous to us he might as well live. Nevertheless, I cannot understand the matter."

"These poisons are unaccountable in the action they take," said the barrister, "for, after all, we know very little of them. And undoubtedly a great deal depends upon the constitution and physical condition of the recipient. And Gray has considerable strength, if I am not mistaken. Yes, I agree with you that it is rather a good thing the poison failed in its object."

So Gray, as Kingston said, was to be left to his own devices in future. It had been rather a strenuous task getting him out of his dangerous situation, but now it was accomplished Kingston felt a little easier, for he was free to proceed with his real work.

When he arrived at the Cyril he went immediately to his own private suite, gaining admittance by means of his latch-key, for his rooms were, in a way, as complete as a well-appointed flat.

"Ah, Tim," he exclaimed, as the lad met him in the little entrance-hall, "where is Fraser? Tell him I want to speak to him immediately."

"All right, sir," answered Tim, turning and proceeding to carry out the order.

Kingston entered his study, stirred the fire up a little—for although it was spring weather, it was not yet warm enough to dispense with fires—and stood on the hearthrug, his face wearing that languid expression Fraser had got to know so well.

The faithful ally appeared after a few moments had elapsed, and looked at his master respectfully.

"Tell me, Fraser," said the latter, "is the car ready for work?"

"I have just finished cleaning it up, sir," replied Fraser, "an' it's fit for a five-hundred-mile tour if need be."

"Good! I shall want it to-night, Fraser, at about ten-thirty, so do not fail to have everything ready at that time. We start on a new case to-night, and I require the car to take me to the country."

Fraser's eyes sparkled.

"You don't lose much time, sir, beggin' your pardon for sayin' so. Will you be alone, sir?"

"Yes, Fraser, with the exception of yourself. I intend, as a matter of fact, to repeat the performance we went through when commencing to deal with the case of Dr. Anderson. I mean to simply look round the house of Dr. Zetman—it is curious that they should both be doctors, by the by—and do a little reconnoitring work, afterwards re-entering the car and driving back to London."

"I understand, sir," replied Fraser. "By gum, I'm mighty glad you're goin' to do for that scoundrel! He's a regular rotter, an' I know for a fact that half the people in the asylum are as sane as I am, sir."

"Before long, Fraser, they shall all be released, and the establishment entirely disorganised. It is quite time that Zetman was exposed and punished. He has been practising his villainy now for many years, and it will give me the keenest pleasure in the world to see him meet with his well-deserved punishment."

"Then I'll be in the front with the car at half-past ten, sir," said Fraser, preparing to depart. "Is there any message for Crawford, sir, in case I see him?"

"Yes, Fraser. You can give him this when you meet. Do!

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MAURICE CLIFFORD.

"JOE'S CHAMPION."

NEXT WEEK.

not go out of your way to see him, for it will do any time." Kingston handed Fraser a leather purse containing ten pounds in gold.

"This is not intended for bribery," laughed Kingston, "for I am sure Crawford would assist me without thinking of reward. Nevertheless, I dare say he will be glad of a little extra money."

At half-past ten exactly Kingston lounged down the entrance-hall, attired as before, and with apparently no care in the world. His expression was one of absolute boredom, and nobody would have suspected the errand he was about to set out upon.

An hour or two previously he had paid Dolores a visit, and told her exactly what he wished her to do. He knew that she would carry out her part of the business satisfactorily, and felt glad that she was once again working with him.

The night was as beautiful as the day had been, for the stars shone brilliantly, and hardly a breath of wind stirred the atmosphere. Once out of London the air became clear and transparent, and Fraser opened the throttle of the Daimler until the car was bounding along the high road at record speed.

The Grange Asylum was situated in the centre of a spacious heath, there being no other buildings within a mile of it. The place was, as a matter of fact, looked upon with awe by the country-folk around, and not one of them cared to approach within five hundred yards after dark. Why this was nobody could tell, but the house had a sinister reputation in the neighbourhood.

From the high road it was impossible to see it, although it was only half a mile distant—the road itself ran across the heath from end to end. The reason for this was that the asylum had been built at the bottom of a deep hollow, and on winter nights it was almost impossible to detect the presence of a house at all, for it was smothered from top to bottom in white mist.

Now, however, there was no mist, and as the Daimler proceeded along the road, Fraser suddenly pulled up at a command from Kingston. The latter had seen a rutty by-lane branching out at a right-angle, and as there was no other place to which it could lead, it was very evident that it led to the asylum.

"Now, Fraser," said Kingston, looking round him into the darkness, "do exactly as you did before. I do not suppose I shall be more than an hour, so be at this spot again at the expiration of that time. If I am not here, do not wait, but return again after a further half-hour."

"Very good, sir. I will do as you say." Fraser was a man who believed in few words, and he slipped his clutch in immediately, leaving Kingston standing on the heath, a solitary figure outlined against the starlit horizon. There was no object to be gained by letting Fraser stop there with the car, for it would only create suspicion should anyone happen to pass, and Kingston wanted his visit to be an absolutely secret one.

He stood there until the car had disappeared from view, and then set out on his walk to his destination. The silence was intense, and, despite the stars, the heath was practically in darkness. So dark, in fact, that an ordinary man would never have seen Kingston's figure hurrying along the rough tracks which led to the asylum.

But, in spite of its roughness, this remarkable individual walked along as though he were stepping on a smooth carpet. His pace was amazing, yet he made no sound—no slip of any description. Eight years of life on the Iron Island had rendered Frank Kingston as sure-footed as a mountain-goat.

Shortly he reached the point on the heath where the track began to dip, and saw before him a cluster of dark and dismal buildings. He paused for a moment to take a full scrutiny, and somehow he could not help being irresistibly reminded of Cragmoor Prison. Indeed, the two establishments, both situated on a moor, were similar in many respects—more respects than the outside public ever guessed; and the inhabitants of the Grange Asylum were prisoners quite as much as were the inmates of Cragmoor.

In one or two places a dim light could be seen, but elsewhere everything was in darkness, and, although Kingston listened for some sound—the bark of a dog, the whinny of a horse, he heard absolutely nothing—all was as still as the grave.

"An extremely cheerful-looking building," thought Kingston, as he continued his walk. "I do not wonder at the country-folk around here being afraid to approach after dark. There is no doubt about it, it has every appearance of being a convict settlement."

He was looking forward with some eagerness to the work before him, the question as to how he was going to enter the grounds never entering his mind. He had nothing with him to help him—no ladder or tools, but trusted entirely to his own strength, agility and ingenuity, to enable him to gain admittance.

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"THE RIVALS OF ST. WODE'S,"

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A Splendid New School Tale, by Charles Hamilton,

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The gates, to begin with, seemed altogether too formidable to overcome. Before reaching them, both sides of the lane for a matter of a hundred yards were bordered by large yew-trees. The track turned abruptly near the entrance-gates, so that until this turn was made, the asylum was not in sight, being obscured by the thick evergreens.

The gates were huge affairs, twelve feet in height, surmounted by a series of formidable-looking spikes. They were locked securely, and it was impossible to see through them, for they had been covered on the inner side by heavy boards.

"Well," Kingston told himself, "I do not think it is possible to gain admittance here. Those gates bear an extremely prisonlike appearance, and no mistake!"

He walked across the lane and pushed his way through a couple of yew-trees, finding himself, once through, to be on the bare heath again. On one side stretched the undulating moor, covered with thick gorse and heather, and on the other rose the high wall of the asylum—so high, in fact, that the buildings within were entirely obscured, for Kingston was standing within a few feet of the wall.

He looked up at it confidently, and although it would have caused despair to enter the heart of an ordinary man, he smiled to himself as he prepared to set about his task. The wall was practically as high as the gates, with the additional safeguard of a set of railings affixed to the top, these latter adding four feet to the height.

Apparently there was no means of gaining the top, yet such a thing as doubt never entered Kingston's head. He did not even trouble to make a tour round the wall in the hope of finding an easier means of access. He walked onwards from the wall for a matter of five or six yards, then faced round and judged the distance.

Suddenly he darted forwards, and when within six feet of the wall, rose into the air in a magnificent leap—a leap such as no other man could ever hope to accomplish. He rose clean, and with scarcely a jar alighted on the summit of the wall. It had been a near thing even for him, and, after having exerted every ounce of his terrific energy, he only just succeeded in gaining a foothold. Indeed, had the railings not been there for him to grasp, he could never have performed the action, for his feet would have slipped away and precipitated him to the ground.

"By jingo," he breathed, "it was further up than I thought! Still, I've accomplished it, and that is the main thing. Now to get over this confounded fence! Zeetman evidently means his property to be thoroughly safeguarded."

Zeetman did, and in a way Kingston had yet to discover. He was under the impression, not unnaturally, that the high wall was the only obstacle, but very soon he would find something even more formidable than the wall to contend against.

For the present, however, the immediate difficulty was to surmount the spiked fence and drop to the ground the other side. The first was easily overcome, for Kingston grasped half a dozen of the spikes one after another, and bent them over until it was possible for him to clamber across without any inconvenience.

Before descending, he gazed at the house, the ground beneath him, and made a mental note as to where this certain spot was situated, this being to facilitate the scaling of the wall on his return. Beneath him, he could see, was nothing but an untidy flower-bed, and, without hesitation, he released his hold of the railings, and dropped.

Without a sound, he alighted, for the bed proved to be soft, and covered with weeds. He looked around him, in the endeavour to find the best method of making his tour of investigation. To his left could be seen the drive leading from the gates to the front door, while to the right a large expanse of garden extended round the house. This latter was little less than a wilderness, shrubs and trees growing in profusion. Kingston could see this even in the comparative darkness, and decided to make his way through it to the other side of the building.

With this object in view, he stepped quietly from the flower-bed to the weed-grown path, the other side of which was bordered by an untidy hedge of gooseberry-trees. He walked along this path swiftly and with noiseless footsteps, meanwhile keeping his glance fixed on the building.

The course he found wound round the building, until, instead of gazing upon the front, he found the windows of the expansive and straggling side facing him. All was in darkness with the exception of one window on the ground floor, which was illuminated by a very dim light. Kingston paused for a moment to look at this, and wondered why it should be there, for the hour was extremely late.

All the while his eyes were taking in the lie of the land, and he was storing away in his memory every little detail that could be distinguished in the semi-darkness. He was sure that all this information would come in extremely handy

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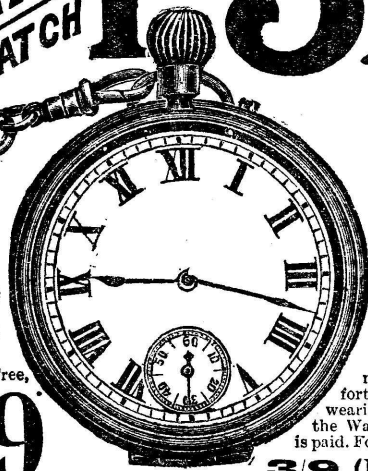
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at some future time, were he in a hurry to get clear of the grounds with as little delay as possible.

He stood there perfectly still, counting the windows on that side of the house. He needed no notebook to remind him afterwards, for his memory was an extremely good one. There were two doors, one, a fairly large one, and the other evidently belonging to the domestic offices, for outside could be seen drain-pipes, a pump, and a large dustbin. Just beyond that, near the lighted window, a large clump of laurels obscured the view, and Kingston was just gazing at these when he felt a thrill run through him—a sense of extreme alertness.

Why?

The reason was not far to seek. Against the background of the house Kingston had quite distinctly seen something move. What it was he could not even guess, but he was absolutely certain that there was another presence in the garden besides his own.

He gazed at the spot intently, waiting for the object to move again. He was not disappointed, for, faintly—almost too faintly to be distinguishable—he could see some form moving along the front of the house. Kingston looked on interestedly, for the occurrence was of a decidedly peculiar nature. Who else could be in the garden beside himself at that time of night? And why should it be there at all? Not a sound could be heard, and yet Kingston was as silent as the grave. Surely, if the thing was living, it would make a noise of some description?

But no. There it was, intangible, silent, yet plainly—to Kingston—visible. Its shape could not be decided, but it was evidently of huge proportions—nothing less than six feet in height, and extremely broad. It moved forward slowly and steadily, and Kingston stood there waiting—waiting for the object to come closer and reveal its character.

And then suddenly it moved forward right across the front of the dimly-lit window, and as Kingston saw, he drew his breath in sharply, and clenched his fists as if in readiness for a coming battle.

What could it be?

Preparing for the Fray.

Frank Kingston did not move an inch, but stood perfectly still, as silent as a statue. His glance was fixed on that slowly moving figure which was steadily approaching him.

In spite of the weirdness of the situation, and the sense of coming danger, he felt perfectly calm, and his only sensation was one of curiosity as to what, and who, his companion might be. It it were a man, Kingston thought, he was walking with quite surprising noiselessness.

But what could a man be doing there, in the grounds of the Grange, in the early hours of the morning? It was out of the question to suppose that another individual besides himself was searching the grounds. In addition to that, Kingston was perfectly certain that no human being could have detected his presence, for he had been as silent as a Red Indian on the war-path, and equally as stealthy.

The next instant he received something of a shock—something which tried even his iron nerve. Without the least warning whatever, the bulky figure which had been so silent up till that moment turned and sprang into the air with terrific force, landing, in fact, within a yard of Kingston himself.

The latter stood for a moment gazing at the object which had so suddenly appeared, and as he looked a peculiar sensation of horror began to take possession of him. It was not fear, for Kingston was a man who did not understand the meaning of that word. But the shock he received at that moment was so surprisingly abrupt that for the space of five seconds he did not even move.

Within a foot of his own face a ghastly visage was thrust—a countenance so horrible that the average man would have turned sick and faint at the very sight of it. The only effect it had on Kingston, however, was one of loathing and repugnance. He could feel on his face the hot breath of the thing as it glared into his eyes. It was a face unlike any other thing in the world, and Kingston even at that dramatic moment found himself wondering what fearsome creature it could be.

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"JOE'S CHAMPION."

NEXT WEEK.

To suppose it was human was out of the question, and yet it was unlike any belonging to an animal. Certainly, in the darkness, Kingston imagined that he could see a faint resemblance of humanity there; but, he told himself, it could not possibly be a member of the human species.

Before he could think further he drew his breath in sharply. The ghastly thing had extended a hand—Kingston could feel that it was a hand, for the long nails dug into his flesh—and grasped him with terrible strength by the right shoulder.

Kingston knew that if he were to save himself he would have to act on the second. Yet he did not wish to fight, for a tussle would create a commotion, and, very probably, bring a keeper on the scene. That would never do, for Kingston wished his visit to the asylum to be absolutely a secret one.

All these thoughts flashed through his mind in a second, and he decided what to do at once. So, exerting every ounce of his colossal strength, he drew his fist back and lunged forward at the face before him.

His fist struck home with a terrific thud, and his whole arm quivered with the force of the impact. With a snarl unlike any other Kingston had ever heard, the fearful monster before him staggered back and released its hold. Before he could return to the attack Kingston had twirled on his heel and was darting towards the outer wall with all the amazing speed with which his legs would carry him.

He did not act in this manner because he was afraid, but for the simple reason that, had he stopped to fight it out, all his plans would have been ruined, for were it known that a stranger had been in the grounds that night Zeetman would be strictly on his guard in the future.

Kingston had no doubt at all that had he stopped he could have vanquished the unknown assailant. But at present it was wise policy to flee. Even as he rushed along he could not help realising what a terrible night guardian this thing made, and how awful would be the fate of any intruder who happened to get into its clutches.

The monster gave chase with a low mutter of fury, seeming, after a second, to feel no ill-effects from the stunning blow Kingston had delivered. It came onwards with a heavy, lumbering gait, crashing straight through the bushes and evergreens as though they did not exist. But, in spite of its speed, Kingston was the quicker of the two, and decidedly the more agile.

Instead of breaking through the bushes, he leapt them clean, thus saving a deal of time, and when he arrived at the wall he was a good ten yards ahead of his pursuer. With a spring, more powerful if anything than his previous one, he regained the summit of the wall.

With the agility of a monkey he turned round, and stood prepared to knock his assailant to the ground in case it should attempt the leap.

It did so, but fell back helplessly, finding it impossible to reach the place where Kingston was standing. Four more attempts it made, but each was more futile than the last, and, finally, it turned on its heel and rushed pell-mell back towards the house, leaving Kingston standing there, with a slight smile playing around the corners of his mouth.

"What a ghastly creature!" he thought. "And what awful strength it possesses! What it can be I have not the least idea, but it seems too ridiculous to suppose it can be a man. And yet— But what is the good of surmising? No good can come of that."

In less than a minute he was standing on the ground the other side. Without loss of time he set off back to the High Road, never once glancing behind him at the gloomy and forbidding building. His adventure had left him utterly cool and collected, and he was rather, disappointed at not having been enabled to complete his reconnoitre.

"That monster will have to be printed in some way or

other," he told himself, as he stepped it briskly out. "And yet I do not want Zeetman to know anything about it. Ah, the very thing! By Jove, but Professor Polgrave's discoveries are coming in remarkably handy! I could not have met a better man, for if there's one work which needs assistance of that kind it is mine!"

He was not long in reaching the main road, and found that he had some minutes to wait before Fraser's hour had elapsed. As he was standing there, thinking, a sudden idea struck him, and for a moment his eyes twinkled with pleasure.

"Yes," he thought, "I will finally decide to act in that way. A more fitting punishment for Zeetman would be hard to find. For years without number he has been practising this vile trade of his, and it will indeed be suitable if the scoundrelly doctor receives punishment in the way I have mapped out!"

He chuckled softly.

"Yes, it will certainly be just the punishment to fit the crime! Ah, here is Fraser, I believe! I will occupy the front seat, so that I can tell him of this mysterious night guard at the Grange, and of my plans for to-morrow."

So, while the powerful Daimler was whizzing on its way back to the metropolis, Kingston informed the incredulous Fraser of the adventures he had just passed through.

"Then how about to-morrow, sir?" asked Fraser. "With that thing in the garden—whatever it is—you can't walk about as though it was the public park, can you, sir? It won't be safe, 'cos if you mean to kill the thing there'd sure to be a big fuss in the morning when old Zeetman found the body."

"I have no intention of killing it, Fraser," drawled Kingston. "What I shall do is to merely render it helpless, although not by binding, for the space of a couple of hours. Therefore, in the morning it will be precisely as usual. I am convinced it is not human, and cannot relate what has happened. For, were it human, it would assuredly have said something to me to-night. To-morrow we start on this business in grim earnest, and, by the look of things, we shall have a very lively time of it. It will be no easy matter to bring about the downfall of Dr. Zeetman."

"And you will want me, sir?" asked Fraser eagerly.

"That I cannot say at the moment. You will probably receive your orders to-morrow morning. For the present, I mean to simply drive straight home and have as much rest as possible before the morning."

The roads being deserted, the ride to London was accomplished with record speed, and very shortly afterwards the landaulette turned into the courtyard of the Hotel Cyril.

Kingston went straight to his rooms, and, without even waiting to read his correspondence, he slipped between the sheets.


He could, of course, have gone for two or three days without sleep and still showed no effects, but it was necessary that he should have every ounce of his vitality at his disposal. So one minute after lying down he was lost in slumber; and precisely at the stroke of seven he opened his eyes, refreshed and invigorated.

Dressing rapidly, he descended the stairs and lounged out into the Strand, stick in hand, as though bent upon an early morning walk. But as soon as he had proceeded the short distance towards Charing Cross he hailed a taxi that was on its way to its stand, and bade the driver convey him to St. John's Wood. It was his intention to pay the professor a rather early visit.

This was necessary, as much other work had to be accomplished that morning, and now was the only time he could spare to pay this call, which was, into the bargain, imperative.

(Another instalment of this splendid serial story next week.)

HOW DO YOU DO?



JOE'S CHAMPION.

Arthur Augustus, with all his funny little ways, is a true gentleman, and his championship of Joe, if productive of fun, has its serious side, and, as usual, you will find our next Thursday's story full of interest.

WATCH THE X ON THE BACK PAGE.

