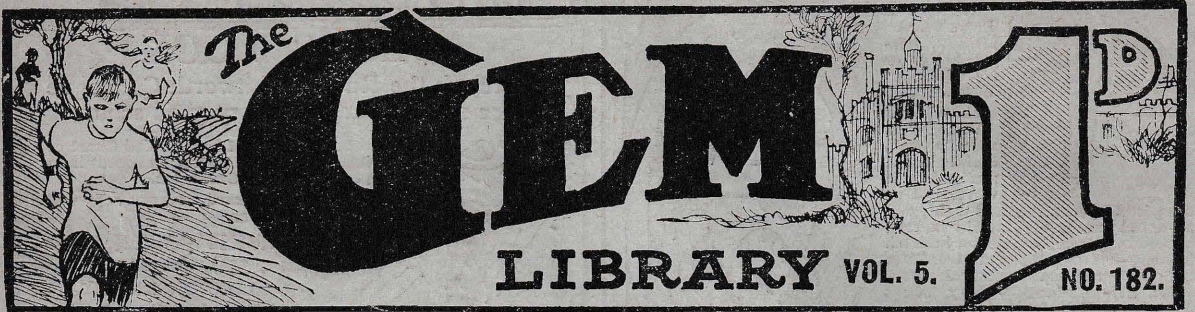


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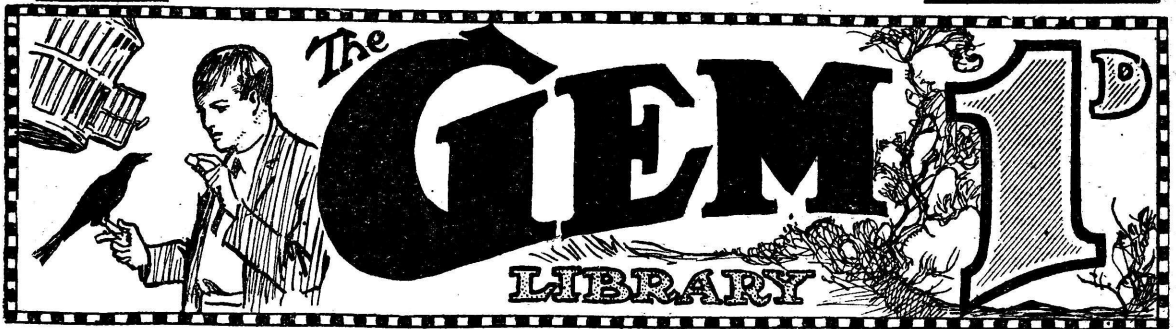
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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER 1.

What's the Matter?

BANG!
Bang!
Bump!
"What is it?"
"What's he up to?"
"My hat! Listen!"
Bang, bang! Bump, bump.

An excited crowd of juniors had gathered at the end of the Shell passage in the School House at St. Jim's. They were crowded outside the end study, from which the mysterious noises were proceeding. Bang! Snap! Biff!

"It's Glyn!" exclaimed Tom Merry, of the Shell. "But what is he up to?"

Tom Merry thumped on the door of the study. Manners and Lowther kicked at the lower panels. The Terrible Three had been doing their prep., when they were startled by the loud noises at the end of the passage, and they had come out to investigate. There were a dozen juniors behind him—Blake & Co. had come along from the Fourth Form passage, and the rest were Shell fellows.

And they were wrathful. While in the throes of their preparation, the juniors did not like to be disturbed by a tremendous row in the end study, and there was always something going on there. Bernard Glyn, the inventor of St. Jim's, had his quarters in the end study, and Glyn's inventions were fearful and wonderful, and they frequently worked with disastrous effects. The Terrible Three thumped and kicked on the door, and Jack Blake, of the Fourth, howled through the keyhole, and the rest of the fellows shouted. But from within

the study came no reply, save the unaccountable bumping and banging and biffing.

Bang, bang! Crash!

"There goes the glass!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in amazement.

There was no mistake about it.

From within the study the crash of shivering glass told its own tale.

The juniors looked at one another in wonder, mingled with alarm. What was the matter in the end study? Had Glyn locked the door for the purpose of wrecking his own quarters undisturbed?

"Open the door!"

"What's the matter?"

"Glyn! Bernard Glyn!"

No reply, excepting—

Bang, bang! Crash-ash!"

"That's the bookcase," said Manners. "My hat! I wish I could get a snapshot of him breaking up the happy home! He's mad, of course."

"Must be off his rocker," said Blake.

"Bai Jove, yaas!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form "Bai Jove, I weally considah that there is no doubt that Glyn is off his silly wockah!"

"Must be! He ought to be stopped! Hark!"

Bang, bang! Crash!

"That's the window!"

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Glyn! Bernard Glyn! Open the door, there's a good chap!"

No answer.

"My word," said Digby, "he's mad, of course—mad as a hatter! Inventors are

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always mad, you know, like poets! He's not safe—that's a certainty."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Is he alone in there?" asked Monty Lowther. "Where's Kangaroo and Clifton Dane?"

"Kangy! Where's Kangy!"

"Co-ey!" sang out a voice along the passage, and the sturdy Cornstalk came along, and Clifton Dane with him. They shared the end study with Bernard Glyn. "What's the matter here, you fellows?"

"Glyn's gone mad," Blake explained.

"My hat!"

"Oh, he's only making an invention!" said Clifton Dane, laughing. "I knew he was at work on something."

Bang, bang! Crash!

Kangaroo and Clifton Dane started. The disturbance within the study was growing terrific.

"My hat!" howled Kangaroo. "That's the clock! He's biffed it off the mantelpiece with his infernal machine! The silly ass! Hark!"

Crash-ash!

"There's another pane of the window."

"Bai Jove!"

Kangaroo kicked at the door.

"Glyn! Glyn, old chap! What's the matter?"

Bang! Whirr-r-r-r!

"Glyn! Let us in!"

Bang, bang! Bump!

Crash!

"Another pane, bai Jove!"

"He'll give a pain himself when we get in!" roared Kangaroo. "He's wrecking the blessed study! Fathead! Ass! Open the door!"

Bang!

Kangaroo kicked at the door furiously. The other fellows helped him; they were always ready to lend assistance in a thing like that. The crowd in the passage made more noise than the inventor in the study, which is saying a good deal.

"Open the door, Glyn!"

"Let us in!"

"Glyn! Glyn! Glyn!"

"Hallo!" came a voice from inside, as if Bernard Glyn had suddenly awakened to the fact that there were fellows knocking at the door. "Hallo! Anybody there?"

Kangaroo roared.

"Yes, you ass! Are you stone deaf, you fathead! Open the door."

"Sorry!"

"Let us in!"

"Sorry!"

"We want to come in."

"You can't!"

"Can't! Can't come into our own blessed study! What do you mean? Open this blessed door, or we'll biff it in!" roared the Cornstalk.

"Sorry! I'm trying my invention."

"Bust your invention."

"Wait till I'm finished."

"Rats!"

There was a creaking sound inside the study, as if some machinery were being wound up.

Creak! Grind! Clank! Then—

Bang! bang! bang! Crash! Bump! Crash!

"That's the last pane of the window!"

"My hat!"

"And that's the vase!"

"And that's the picture!"

"The villain's wrecking the study! He's mad!"

"Mad as a hatter!"

"Yaas, wathah! Maddah than most hattahs, you know. Hattahs are not weally vewy mad, because we weally owe to them the invention of the silk-hat, which is a proof of remarkable intelligence."

Bang! bang! bang!

"Open the door, Glyn!"

"Let us in, you chump!"

Bernard Glyn did not trouble himself to reply. Perhaps he was too deeply interested in the working of his invention, or perhaps he considered that he had explained sufficiently.

At all events, no sound came from the study excepting the banging and crashing of the unknown machine. The juniors raged in the passage in vain.

"Anybody got a crowbar?" exclaimed Kangaroo, exasperated. "We're not going to have the blessed study wrecked in this way. Get a jemmy, or something."

"There's a crowbar in the box-room," said Monty Lowther.

"Get it, somebody."

The crowbar was brought. Kangaroo pushed hard on the door, and inserted the crowbar sufficiently to gain a purchase

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upon it, and wrenched. The lock of the door flew in pieces under the pressure, and the door swung open.

The juniors rushed in.

"Now, then!" roared Kangaroo. "Now, then—oh! Ow! Ooooooh!"

Something caught Kangaroo under the chin as he rushed in, and bowled him over, and he fell among the feet of the excited juniors, and five or six of them rolled over him before they could stop themselves.

CHAPTER 2.

Bernard Glyn's Wonderful Invention.

"YOW!"

"Oh!"

"Yah!"

"Geroff!"

"Whoop!"

Dusty juniors disentangled themselves on the floor. There was a creaking, whirring sound, as of a machine running down. The banging ceased; and Bernard Glyn, the inventor of the School House, glared at the dusty and furious intruders.

"You asses!" he roared. "What do you want?"

The study presented a strange sight. Everything that was breakable appeared to be broken. Every pane of the window had a jagged hole through it. The looking-glass had been shattered to pieces. The clock lay in fragments in the grate, along with the dislocated remains of a flower-vase.

The bookcase glass was smashed to atoms, and so was the glass of the picture on the wall. The wallpaper was broken in many places, apparently by hard and heavy blows. Strangest of all, cricket-balls lay about the room in every direction. Wherever the juniors moved, they trod and slipped on the round red balls.

Bernard Glyn was looking a little excited. That was, doubtless, caused by enthusiasm on the subject of his invention. But his excitement was as nothing to that of the other fellows. Kangaroo and Clifton Dane gave one look round the study, and then they rushed at their study-mate.

"You villain!"

"You dangerous ass!"

Glyn dodged round the table.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "I—I've only been trying my invention."

"You ass!"

"You fathead!"

"You chump!"

"But where's the invention?" exclaimed Tom Merry, looking round him. "I can't see it. Where's the giddy invention?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's a secret at present. I—"

Monty Lowther pointed to a curious object in a corner of the room. It was covered by a large cloth, which had evidently been thrown over it. It appeared to consist of a tripod, with arms projecting from it, upon which the cloth hung.

"What on earth is it?" exclaimed Manners.

"Blessed if I know."

"Some unearthly contrivance for wrecking studies in the shortest possible space of time, I suppose," said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then it's a big success," grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kangaroo and Clifton Dane rushed round the table after the youthful inventor. They were proud of Glyn and his inventive powers—sometimes! But this was not one of the times. This time they were furious.

"Collar him!" gasped Kangaroo. "Collar him! He's smashed up the blessed place, and now we'll smash him up!"

"Yes, rather!" panted Dane.

Glyn dodged round the table in alarm. He made a rush for the door, but the crowd was too thick for him. Kangaroo and Clifton Dane seized him, and dragged him back into the study, and he was bumped over.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Leggo! I—I've only been trying my invention! Yow!"

"Bump him!" roared Kangaroo.

And Bernard Glyn was bumped—hard! And as the floor was strewn with cricket-balls he was bumped upon them, and the bumping was painful. The inventor of the School House roared and wriggled.

"Ow! Yow! Leggo!"

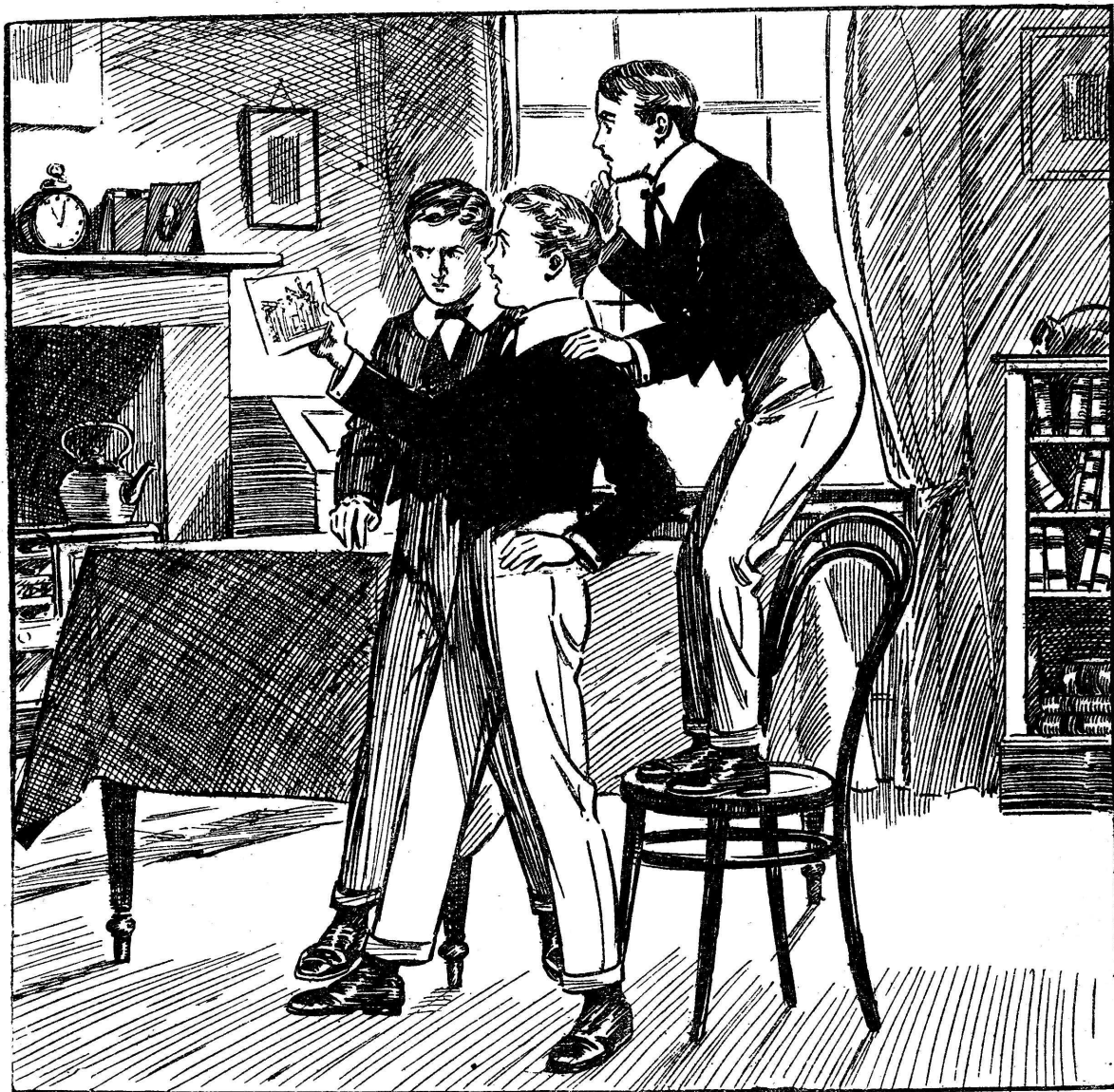
Bump!

"Chuck it!"

Bump!

"Stop it, I say! Yow! Ow! Yarcooh!"

Bump!



Manners held up the unfinished print, and there in the corner of the picture was shown the School letterbox with a figure beside it in the act of extracting a letter; and the face of the figure came out with startling distinctness. "Levison!" said Tom Merry and Lowther together.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow!" yelled Glyn. "Rescue! Yaroh! Stop them, you fellows. I'll show you my invention if you stop them. Yow!"

"Bai Jove, that's a fair offah!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Drag 'em off!" said Tom Merry.

The juniors laid violent hands upon Kangaroo and Dane. The two bumpers were dragged off and bumped over on the carpet. There they sat and gasped. They had fatigued themselves with their kind attentions to Bernard Glyn, and were really glad of a rest. Jack Blake helped Glyn to his feet, and the inventor of St. Jim's stood and pumped in breath.

The crowd was thickening in the passage. The study and the doorway were crammed, and fellows outside craned over one another to see what was going on. Bernard Glyn gasped and gasped.

"Show us the invention, Glyn!"

"Trot it out!"

"We're waiting!"

"All right," gasped Glyn. "Let a chap get his breath back. Those silly asses—oh! I'm all right now. They don't deserve to have an inventor in their study!"

"We don't!" grinned Kangaroo. "All our crimes added together don't deserve that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I'm jolly glad we haven't an inventah in our study, dear boys! It would be very wuff on a fellow's silk hats!"

Bernard Glyn lifted the cloth from his wonderful invention. The juniors gazed at it in amazement. It was like unto nothing that they had ever seen before. It was in the form of a tripod, the three legs planted firmly, and evidently weighted down. From the top of it projected a disc containing a number of arms, and there was a long spring, and a crank, and a handle to wind. From the arm disc ran a belt, intended for what purpose the juniors could not guess. Arranged in the join of a slanting triangle was a board, which was evidently intended as a "feeder" of some kind.

The juniors gazed at the machine in wonder.

"What is it?"

"What on earth is it meant for?"

Bernard Glyn smiled.

"Can't you guess?"

"My hat! No!"

"Patent window-cleaner?" asked Levison, of the Fourth, who had managed to squeeze into the study. Levison, of the

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Fourth, generally did manage to squeeze in anywhere where anything was going on. Nothing ever escaped the Paul Pry of the School House.

"No," said Glyn.

"Potato-peeling machine?" ventured Blake.

"You ass! No!"

"What on earth is it, then?"

"Bowling machine," said Glyn. "Patent automatic bowler."

"My hat!"

"My only Aunt Sempronia!"

"Bai Jove!"

It was the last thing the juniors had expected. Glyn had invented automatic figures and automatic horses, but an automatic bowling machine was a surprise.

"What's it for?" asked Manners. "Playing bowls?"

"Bowls! No, ass! Cricket!"

"Cricket!"

"Cricket! Bai Jove!"

"I've heard of mechanical bowlers before," said Tom Merry. "I've never seen one."

"I have," said Bernard Glyn, "but not like this. I have developed the thing, you see, and made it into a magazine bowler, on the principle of a Maxim gun. This slanting board contains the supply of cricket-balls, and as fast as they are bowled a new one drops into the slot. By the time a mechanical arm reaches this slot to bowl again, the second ball has run to the place, and is ready. See?"

"Bai Jove!"

"You simply have to sight the machine to the pitch, and there you are! This one is made to hold any number of balls. It could be made to hold fifty—about enough to give you a whole afternoon's practice at the nets—and then a chap would go round afterwards collecting up the balls. See?"

"Great Scott!"

"The thing will bowl better than the best bowlers, once you get it set at a correct pitch, and every ball comes down in good order," said Bernard Glyn. "I can tell you, it's no joke to bat against a mechanical bowler."

"Weally, Glyn, I wathah think I could knock the thing into a cocked hat, deah boy. The mechanical bowlah would not be able to touch my wicket."

"Rats! He'd bowl you out on the spot!" said Bernard Glyn.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"We'll try to-morrow," said the youthful inventor, with a cheerful grin. "I'll give you a sight of it now, though. I've only just finished it, and I've been testing it."

"Testing the study walls, too, I should think!" grinned Tom Merry.

"And the furniture!"

"And the windows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, one must expect to do a little damage in testing a really valuable invention," said Glyn.

"A little! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anyway, there can't be much more damage done," said Glyn, with a glance round the study, "so I can demonstrate how the thing works."

"You won't demonstrate here!" roared Kangaroo. "There's nothing left but the walls, and you're not going to bust them!"

"But—"

"Take it out!"

"Look here—"

"Bai Jove, yaas, I must say that I agree with my friend, Glyn. It is weally expectin' too much, you know."

"But I want to show—"

"You won't!" said Kangaroo. "If you start that blessed machine working I'll biff it with the crowbar!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The junior inventor grinned.

"Oh, all serene! I'll show you chaps in the morning. Anyway, I've got to draw up the papers to-night."

"Papers!" said Levison.

"Yes. For the patent."

"Patent!"

"I'm going to patent it, of course!" said Glyn. "It's a wonderful improvement on anything that has ever been tried in the way of mechanical bowlers. I've got down the papers from the Patent Office, and I'm going to fill in the specification for provisional protection, now I've finished it."

"And how long does that protect it for?" asked Tom Merry.

"Nine months. In that time I hope I shall be able to induce some firm of manufacturers to take it up, and then—"

"Then what?"

"Then the quids will come rolling in, if it catches on," said Glyn, cheerfully.

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"And if it doesn't?"

"Well, then, they won't, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll help you with the papers if you like," said Levison, with a curious gleam in his eyes. "I know a lot about legal papers, too. I've got an uncle a solicitor."

The inventor grinned.

"Thanks, but I don't want any help. I'm keeping the secret until the invention is patented."

"But if you're going to show us—"

"I'm going to show you the thing working, but not to explain how it works," said Glyn. "You can leave that till they're on the market. Now, if you chaps will buzz off I'll begin filling in the specification."

"Going to work in the study in this state?" shouted Kangaroo.

"H'm!" said Glyn. "You're right. I can't settle down to write in a room in this condition."

"You'd better clear it up, then."

"Oh, I don't mean that. I mean I'll go and write out my papers in somebody else's study, said Glyn serenely.

"Well, you boulder!"

"You can come into my study if you like," said Levison.

"Thanks. I'd prefer Tom Merry's."

"Come, by all means!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Anything, so long as you keep quiet while we're doing our prep."

And the youthful inventor was soon deep at work in Tom Merry's study, and he said not a word while he was filling in his papers, so deeply was he engrossed in the subject.

The Terrible Three finished their preparation, and left the study, leaving Glyn still hard at work.

"Aren't you coming down, Glyn?" asked Tom Merry, pausing at the door as he went out.

Glyn grunted.

As he vouchsafed no further reply, the Terrible Three grinned and went down. An hour later they looked into the study. Bernard Glyn was still writing busily at the table, and he did not turn his head as the door opened.

"Hallo, Glyn! Not finished yet?"

Glyn gave another grunt.

Then the Terrible Three left him to himself.

CHAPTER 3. A Precious Pair.

LEVISON, of the Fourth, came into the study with a very peculiar expression upon his face. His study mate and chum, Mellish, hastily lowered a cigarette under the table; but as he recognised Levison, he brought it out again, and restored it to his thin, sallow lips.

"I wish you wouldn't come in so suddenly!" he growled. "It startles a chap!"

Levison closed the door without replying.

"Smoke?" asked Mellish.

"No."

"What's the matter?"

"I'm thinking."

Mellish sat upright in his chair. Levison spoke in so significant a tone that the cad of the Fourth could not help seeing that something was on.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I'm thinking of that blessed thing of Glyn's."

Mellish sniffed.

"Oh, that rot! I've heard the fellows talking about it. He's wrecked his study with testing a mechanical bowler, or something."

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"It's not rot," said Levison quietly. "It's an invention—a really ripping idea. There have been all sorts of mechanical bowlers invented for cricket practice, but Glyn's one knocks them all into a cocked hat. The magazine principle, and the automatic action of the bowling arm, are quite new ideas; and my belief is, that if the thing works well it will catch on like anything."

"I don't believe it will work."

"I believe it will. Anyway, Glyn is going to give a demonstration in the quad. to-morrow morning before brekker."

"We may as well see it."

"He's drawing up the specification for the Patent Office," said Levison, in a low tone. "If the thing works, that specification will protect him for nine months, for a guinea. It's cheap enough. But—"

"But what?"

"If anybody else sent in the specification instead of Glyn, the thing would be patented all the same, and it would belong to the other chap."

Mellish looked astonished.

"That couldn't happen," he said. "Glyn is not likely to let another fellow send in the specification, surely?"

"He mightn't be able to help it."

Mellish drew a quick breath.

"What do you mean, Levison?"

The rascal of the Fourth gave a quick look round, as though he feared eavesdroppers, even with the door of the study closed. He came nearer to Mellish, and lowered his voice.

"Suppose somebody took the papers."

"What!"

"Suppose somebody collared the papers before Glyn could send them in, and sent them in in his own name instead," muttered Levison.

"My hat!"

"Whoever did that would be the legal owner of the invention, which may be worth hundreds, perhaps thousands, of pounds."

"Levison!"

Levison's eyes were glittering. It did not seem to occur to him that he was planning a theft. To his cunning mind anything was justifiable which enabled him to score over others.

"As a matter of fact, I'm a bit of an inventor myself," he said; "but not up to Glyn's weight. I saw some mechanical bowlers at a shop in Holborn when I was in London, and that put the idea into my head. They were clever enough, but not what was wanted. I've been thinking the matter over, and I've made some sketches. But I couldn't do it as Glyn has done it—I never thought of the magazine principle, for one thing—and I couldn't have worked it if I'd thought of it. But if I could get a sight of Glyn's papers—"

"That wouldn't be much good, if they're going in to the Patent Office to-night or to-morrow," said Mellish. "They'd reach the Patent Office first."

"Not if they were stopped."

"My hat!"

"Glyn is certain to post the letter in the school box," said Levison, in a whisper. "It will be in a big cartridge-paper envelope. You know that letters have been fished out of the school-box before now, with a hook and line. Glyn's letter will be easy enough to get."

Mellish turned quite pale.

"I—I say, you know, that—that's stealing," he stammered.

"Rot! I'm his rival in making the same invention, and all's fair in war," said Levison, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"But—but—but—"

"Oh, blow your butts!" said Levison irritably. "I tell you it's all right. Besides, I don't care twopence about that. If I can get Glyn's papers—"

"But they'd be in Glyn's writing; he would be able to prove—"

"Ass! I should copy them out, of course."

"And then—"

"Burn them."

"Ah!"

"And send in my papers," said Levison coolly. "Glyn wouldn't know that his letter had miscarried, perhaps for days or weeks, and in that time I get my patent, and if there's anything in the thing, I get the cash."

"But—but he'd know—"

"He'll never know that I had seen his papers. How could he? Some of the fellows know that I'm at work on a mechanical bowler; I've shown my drawings to some of them—Gore, and Lumley-Lumley, and Herries, anyway. It would simply be supposed that I'd hit on the same idea."

Mellish's eyes glittered.

"And—and you think there would be money in it?"

"I know there would."

"Then we'll do it. After all, I don't see what Glyn wants with money; his pater is a giddy millionaire."

"Of course he is," said Levison; "and mine is poor—or stingy, anyway. We're going to rope in those hundreds, or thousands."

"My word!"

"Mind, not a whisper! We've got to get the plan and the specification, that's all. And when Glyn drops them into the letter-box, one of us will have to keep watch, while the other gets the letter."

"It's jolly risky."

"Not the way I shall work it," said Levison confidently.

"You can rely on me. I've got brains. But now the thing is to keep an eye on Glyn, and find out when he's going to post the letter."

"Good!"

Ten minutes later, just before bedtime, Levison looked into Tom Merry's study. Bernard Glyn was still there, still poring over his plans. Levison called in to him.

"Glyn, old man!"

A grunt.

"Glyn, it's just on bedtime."

Grunt!

"I'm just going down to the letter-box," said Levison, who had a stamped letter in his hand. "Like me to post anything for you?"

"No."

"I thought you were going to post your specification to-night."

"It won't be finished."

Another grunt.

Levison walked away. Glyn's specification was still unfinished when bedtime came, and he locked the papers up in his study when he went to bed. And as he had a small iron safe to lock them in, with a patent key, they were safe from Ernest Levison so far, at all events.

CHAPTER 4.

Clean Bowled!

THERE was a great deal of interest in Glyn's invention, among the Shell fellows especially, the next morning.

Bernard Glyn's inventions had caused trouble on many an occasion, and although they were mostly very clever, there was sometimes something wrong with them which brought them to grief, and brought trouble to the inventor. Bernard Glyn's complete confidence in the success of his mechanical bowler did not prevent the juniors from anticipating fun. Glyn was always confident.

Before breakfast, in the sunny summer morning, Glyn and Kangaroo brought the mechanical bowler downstairs. Kangaroo had recovered from the shock of the previous evening, and though the study still looked a wreck the Cornstalk was in a good temper, and on the best of terms with Glyn again. As a matter of fact, Kangaroo and Clifton Dane were very proud of their chum's inventive genius, trouble enough as it sometimes caused them.

"Careful!" exclaimed Glyn, as the tripod bumped on the banisters. "Don't smash it, you ass! This machinery is very delicate."

"Pewwaps I'd bettah lend a hand, deah boy," suggested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was surveying the operations through a glistening monocle.

Bernard Glyn snorted.

"Perhaps you hadn't," he replied. "I don't want any accidents."

"Weally, Glyn—"

"Bear a hand here, Tom Merry."

"Certainly, old son!" said Tom Merry, in his obliging way.

"Hold the arm so that it can't swing round," said Glyn. "I'm afraid of it's biffing on something. Look out, you fat-head!"

"Yaroooh!" roared Tom Merry.

The arm swung round as Glyn was speaking, and one of the arms caught Tom Merry on the side of the head. The hero of the Shell collapsed on the stairs.

"Ow! Ow! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yolled Monty Lowther and Manners.

Glyn glared at the sprawling Shell fellow.

"You ass! You've damaged it, very likely. What did you want to biff your head against it for?"

"Ow! It biffed against my head, you silly ass."

"Well, it couldn't have if your silly head hadn't been there," said Glyn. "Somebody else take hold of it, for goodness' sake!"

Jack Blake advanced cautiously, and caught the arm, and held it, and the mechanical bowler was brought down the stairs in safety. Tom Merry followed, rubbing his head.

The tripod and its bowling attachment were carried out triumphantly into the quadrangle, a crowd of fellows following. News of the mechanical bowler had got abroad, and Glyn's inventions always attracted a great deal of attention. Fellows of the Fifth and Sixth joined the crowd, curious to

see how the fearful and wonderful-looking contrivance would work.

"What on earth is it?" demanded Kildare, of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's.

"Mechanical bowler," said Glyn.

"My hat!"

"Automatic magazine bowling machine, you see."

"Great Scott!"

"It's for practice at the nets. You set it going, and it bowls six balls in succession, with exactly the same pitch. Could be made to bowl any number of balls," said Glyn airily. "That's the idea of it."

"Well, if it works it will be all right," said the St. Jim's captain.

"Oh, it will work!"

"It worked in Glyn's study last night," grinned Tom Merry. "It smashed up every blessed thing there. If it works the same way here—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you doing now?" asked Monty Lowther, as Glyn took some cricket balls out of a bag carried by Clifton Dane, and began to insert them in careful order on the sloping board.

"Loading it."

"By Jove!"

"Now I'll wind it up, and then I shall only have to push this lever, and it works. It could be worked with an electric motor, of course, but this is cheaper. Suppose I want to bowl at that window—"

"You'd better not."

"I say suppose, ass. I should set the machine like this, and put the arm like that for a start, and then by touching this lever it goes."

"Good!" said Levison. "But how is the action conveyed from the lever to the bowling arm?"

"That's my secret," said Glyn coolly. "When I've got my patent out, you can know all about it, but not before. You can't see through the tin lining, and you're not going to. But I—Hallo!"

Glyn had placed the machine fronting one of the windows of the School House, a big window belonging to the Shell Form-room. The mechanical bowler was loaded up, and it needed only a touch of the lever to start it. Perhaps there was something slightly wrong, or perhaps the bumping in getting it downstairs had put it a little out of gear. At all events, the machine started suddenly without the lever being touched.

The bowling disc suddenly started to revolve, and the juniors jumped out of the way.

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry.

The arms swung round, one with a ball grasped in the holder at the end.

Whiz!

The ball flew with a perfect aim, and the round red leather crashed through the very centre of the Form-room window.

Crash!

Shivering glass dropped into the Form-room, and out into the quadrangle, and there was a roar

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The window's gone!"

"My hat, it's still working!"

That was where the magazine principle came into play. A second ball ran into the second arm, as the disc continued to revolve, and then the ball was ejected again.

"My hat!" gasped Bernard Glyn.

He sprang at the tripod to jerk it away in a new direction. The second ball whizzed from the bowling arm, and there was a crash as it smashed into the middle of the next window.

Glyn had not dragged it away quite in time.

Crash!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry, wiping tears of merriment from his eyes. "Oh, dear! This is stunning!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's still working!" shrieked Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whiz!

Glyn tried in vain to stop the machine. The bowling disc was fairly going now, and it was not to be denied. Glyn eventually swung the tripod away from the windows, and that was something; but the result was not wholly fortunate. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, had rushed out to see what the breaking of glass was about, and he was just in the line of fire.

Whiz! Biff!

"Good heavens!" shrieked Mr. Linton.

A ball was planted fairly on his waistcoat. As he staggered back the unhappy machine got out another ball, and it struck on the next waistcoat button. Mr. Linton gave a wild yell, and sat down in the quadrangle.

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CHAPTER 5.

Detained.

TOM MERRY gave a shout of warning.

"Cave! Buzz off, Glyn, you ass!"

"I—I—I've got to stop the beastly thing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Glyn wrestled with the mechanical bowler in vain.

Whiz—whiz!

The last two balls flew fast, and both of them crashed on the ground close to the amazed and terrified master of the Shell.

Then, with a peculiar whirring grunt, the mechanical bowler ceased. He was run down.

"Over!" yelled Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare had rushed to the master of the Shell. He raised him up, Mr. Linton gasping wildly for breath.

"What—what was it?" gasped Mr. Linton. "I—I have been assaulted. I have been pelted with cricket balls. Ah! Oh—oh!"

"I'm so sorry, sir—" began Bernard Glyn.

"Glyn! So it was you!"

"No, sir—"

"Then who was it?" cried Mr. Linton, turning an almost ferocious look upon the crowd of juniors. "Who was it? Was it you, Manners?"

Manners jumped. As a matter of fact, he was grinning with satisfaction at that moment. He had brought out his camera to take a snapshot of Glyn's invention, and he had succeeded in getting a snap of Mr. Linton being bowled over. With the picture on his film, Manners felt elated. It would make an excellent photograph to frame and hang up in the study, although, of course, it would hardly do to let Mr. Linton-himself see it.

"I, sir?" stammered Manners.

"Yes. Was it you?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"You were laughing, Manners."

"W-w-w-was I, sir?"

"Yes, you were."

"I—I—I—"

"Take fifty lines, Manners."

"Oh, sir!"

"Who threw those cricket balls?" exclaimed the master of the Shell. "I insist upon knowing! Who was it?"

"It—it was my bowler, sir," stammered Bernard Glyn.

"Your what?"

"My mechanical bowler, sir."

"W-w-what?"

Bernard Glyn dragged his unfortunate machine forward. Mr. Linton stared at it in blank amazement.

"W-w-what is that extraordinary contrivance?" he exclaimed.

"Automatic bowler, sir. It delivers a whole over without reloading, sir. It's an invention of mine."

"And you—"

"It went a little bit wrong, sir, that's all. I was showing the fellows how it worked, and it started working on its own, sir. I—I'm so sorry!"

Mr. Linton gasped.

"Take the thing away immediately, Glyn, and take five hundred lines!"

"Oh, sir!"

"And stay in this afternoon and write them out!" snapped the master of the Shell.

Bernard Glyn looked blank. The afternoon was a half-holiday, and he had looked forward to giving his mechanical bowler quite a field-day. But there was no arguing with his Form-master. Mr. Linton closed his mouth like a vice, and walked away, stooping a little, and keeping one hand pressed upon his waistcoat.

"Well, you've done it now!" said Blake, with tears in his eyes. "Jolly lucky you aren't going to be tried for attempted manslaughter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Glyn as a dangerous ass!"

"Oh, these blessed masters are all the same!" growled Glyn. "They don't understand a chap with inventive faculties. A chap with brains doesn't get any encouragement at school. Yah!"

And the chums of the end study wheeled the mechanical bowler away, leaving the crowd yelling with laughter.

When the Shell went into their Form-room for first lesson there was quite a breeze blowing across the room from the windows smashed by the automatic bowler. Mr. Linton still looked a little snappish, and once or twice he was seen to press his hand reminiscently to his waistcoat.

Bernard Glyn came in for quite a great deal of attention from his Form-master that morning. Mr. Linton seemed to want to ascertain whether he had neglected his studies

in applying himself so keenly to the invention of mechanical bowlers. But the Liverpool lad came through that ordeal unragged. He was one of the brightest boys in the Form, and it was not easy to catch him napping.

After morning school Glyn wore a worried look. He had to go back into the Form-room after dinner instead of joining the other fellows on the cricket-field.

"Never mind!" said Tom Merry consolingly. "We'll take your bowler out for a run if you like, kid."

Bernard Glyn looked alarmed.

"Don't you do anything of the sort!" he exclaimed. "I don't trust my inventions in any hands but my own."

"We'll regard it as the apple of our eye," said Monty Lowther.

"Rats! You let it alone. Have you got that new lock on the study door yet, Kangy?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then lock up the study and keep the key in your pocket."

"What-ho!" said the Cornstalk.

"I'll jolly well get my patent papers down here!" said Glyn. "If I'm going to be detained, I may as well finish the specification in the Form-room, and one of you fellows can look in and post it for me when I've finished. I shall have it done in time for the afternoon collection."

"I'll come in and post it for you, if you like," said Levison.

"Thanks! Tom Merry will, I'm sure."

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry. "And we'll give your mechanical bowler a run after tea. That's all right."

"All serene!"

And Bernard Glyn went in to his detention, and most of the other fellows went down to the cricket. It was a glorious day, and the weather was perfect for the grand old summer game. There was no special match on for the afternoon, but Tom Merry & Co. intended to knock up a scratch match with Figgins & Co. of the New House.

"Don't count on me," said Manners, taking his arm out of Tom Merry's as they drew near the cricket-field. "I'm not cricketing to-day."

"Oh, rats! We want you to bat."

"Give Lumley-Lumley a chance instead. He's as good as I am, and he's been sticking to practice well," said Manners. "I'm going to take some photographs."

"Oh, that blessed camera again!" sniffed Tom Merry.

"Well, some of my people abroad want some pictures of St. Jim's, and I've promised to let them have them," said Manners. "Chap can't do better than keep his word, and it's rotten putting off to to-morrow what you can do to-day. I read that in a copybook once, so it must be true. Besides, I'd rather take out the camera."

"Oh, blow the camera!"

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther joined the cricketers, leaving Manners to wander round the old quad. with his camera, filling up the films with views of the old school taken from different aspects.

Tom Merry did not forget his promise to Bernard Glyn. At about half-past four he looked into the Shell Form-room.

"Finished?" he asked.

The St. Jim's inventor grinned.

"I've finished the specification but not the lines, by a long chalk," he said. "You'll catch the post with it easily, though. Here it is. I'll wire into the lines now, and get them done before tea."

He handed a bulky, long envelope to Tom Merry.

"Mind that chap Levison doesn't get hold of it," he said.

"Levison?"

"Yes. He's been jolly obliging in offering to post letters for me—this letter, I mean," said Glyn; "and Lumley-Lumley said that Levison is making a mechanical bowler himself—or drawing the plans for one, at all events. He's been jolly curious to see how my machine works, and I don't trust him."

"He sha'n't touch this letter, anyway," said Tom Merry.

"Thanks!"

The hero of the Shell quitted the class-room with the letter in his hand. Bernard Glyn turned to his lines, and ground away at them cheerfully. In the Form-room passage Tom Merry almost ran into Levison of the Fourth, who was near the door of the Shell room.

Glyn's words were still fresh in Tom Merry's mind. He stopped, and his hand closed more tightly upon the school-boy inventor's letter.

"Hallo!" said Levison. "I was just going in to see Glyn."

"Well, he's still there," said Tom Merry drily.

"That a letter you're going to post?"

"Yes."

"I'll take it if you like; I'm going down to the box. I suppose you want to get back to the cricket?"

"Yes, but I'll post the letter first."

"I don't mind the trouble, if you'd like me—"

"I shouldn't!"

Tom Merry walked on, leaving Levison biting his lips. The cad of the Fourth strolled out into the quadrangle after him. The school letter-box was in the wall, half hidden from view by the trees. Tom Merry dropped the letter in the box, and turned away to go back to the cricket. There was a click, and he turned his head and saw Manners with his camera.

"Still at it?" he asked, laughing.

"Yes. The light's beautiful for it, and I'm getting some really ripping pictures. I think this will be one of my best films, and I'm going to have some of the pictures done to hang up in the study."

"Good egg!"

"You can come in and see me develop them later if you like."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Thanks! I'll stick to the cricket if you don't mind. I'll see the prints afterwards."

And he strolled away. Manners walked on with his camera. Levison was lounging at a distance, and when both the Shell fellows were gone the cad of the Fourth strolled up to the letter-box.

He had a letter in his hand, ready to post. But he had not come to the letter-box to post a letter. He had a bent wire in his sleeve—and Levison, the amateur conjurer, had performed more difficult feats than fishing a letter out of a letter-box. He gave one cautious glance round, and then inserted the twisted wire.

His eyes gleamed suddenly.

"I've got it!"

The end of Glyn's bulky letter came from the slit in the letter-box. Levison's fingers closed on it, and he drew it out and slipped it under his jacket.

Then, with his heart beating faster than usual, but with a cool and unconcerned face, the cad of the Fourth strolled away.

Mellish met him at the door of the School House. Mellish's face was eager, his eyes gleaming with excitement.

"Got it?"

"Hush!"

"Yes. But have you got it?"

"Yes. Come up to the study."

"My word!"

The precious pair hurried to their study. Levison turned the key in the lock, and laid the letter on the table. Mellish's hands were trembling. He was as great a rascal as his comrade, but he lacked Levison's iron nerve.

"And—the specification is really in that?" he muttered.

"I suppose so. We'll see, anyway."

Levison slit open the long envelope. He drew out the stiff, crackling paper and ran his eye over it—over the printing and the handwriting—quickly and eagerly. Then he drew a deep breath.

"It's all here!" he said.

"My word!"

"The secret's ours, and we can patent it now," said Levison coolly. "I've only got to copy it out in my own writing on another paper—"

"Have you another paper like this?"

"Yes. When I've finished we burn this. We'll burn the envelope now," said Levison, striking a match. "Nothing like making sure."

He held the torn envelope in one hand, the flaring match in the other. The paper flared up. There was a knock at the door, and Levison started and uttered an angry exclamation as the flame burnt his finger.

"Oh!"

"Who's there?" exclaimed Mellish angrily.

"Faith, and it's meself," said the voice of Reilly of the Fourth. "Sure, and for phwat have ye got the dure locked?"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"Can't ye lend me a Latin dictionary?"

"No, I can't!"

"Sure, it's a disobliging spalpeen ye are, Mellish; and I'll dot ye on the nose if ye'll open the dure!"

"Get out!"

"Faith, and are ye on fire in there?" asked Reilly through the keyhole. "Sure, I can smell something burning!"

"It's only a fag, you ass!"

"It doesn't smell like tobacco, Mellish. But it's no business of mine, I suppose," said the Belfast boy. "Don't set the School House on fire."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Reilly kicked on the door to express his feelings and walked away. Mellish was panting for breath. The envelope burnt to white ash, and Levison dropped the last corner of it in the grate.

"That's done!" he said.

"Jolly lucky we had the door locked!" said Mellish nervously.

"Yes. Confound that fellow!" said Levison angrily. "It was rotten luck for him to come here just now, and especially to smell the burning. But it can't be helped; and, after all, he doesn't know anything."

"Are you going to copy out the paper?"

"Yes, rather—at once!"

"Good! I'll have a cigarette and watch you."

Levison sat down at the table and began to write. And for a long time no sound was heard in the study save the scratching of his pen.

CHAPTER 6.

Arthur Augustus is Bold and Bowled.

BERNARD GLYN rose, with a yawn. He had had a long, long task, but it was over now. He was late for tea in Hall, but not for tea in the study; and he was hungry enough for tea, after his afternoon's grind at Latin lines. He laid his impot upon Mr. Linton's desk, and quitted the Form-room, and outside in the old Quad, he met the cricketers coming in to tea.

"Finished?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Yes. I'll have tea with you chaps," said Glyn. "Then we'll have the mechanical bowler out and give him a trial. You posted that letter all right?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"Good! I shall feel safer when it's gone," said Bernard Glyn. "I don't like the way Levison has been nosing about on the subject. Lemme see—what time is the collection to-day?"

"Seven," said Monty Lowther.

"Well, the letter's safe enough in the box, I suppose?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You surely don't think that anybody would take a lettah out of the lettah-box, deah boy?"

"Well, no. Only—"

"Only what?" asked Blake.

"Well, a chap who has made an invention generally feels a bit nervous about it, I think, till the patent's taken out," said Glyn. "And I'm convinced that this is a jolly good invention, and that there's heaps of tin in it."

Tom Merry laughed.

"As a patent window-breaker, I suppose, it would be a howling success," he remarked. "We haven't seen its other qualities so far."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll see after tea," said the Liverpool lad confidently.

Glyn had his tea with Tom Merry & Co., and the chums of the Shell did not delay over it. They were keen to get down to the cricket-ground and put the patent bowler to the test.

After tea all hands joined in the task of carrying the mechanical bowler down to the junior ground.

Quite a crowd followed them there.

The strange aspect of the mechanical bowler caused a good many facetious remarks. It was certainly a curious-looking contrivance.

All St. Jim's knew of the window-breaking episode of the morning, and the fellows were prepared for further accidents. Only Bernard Glyn seemed to be completely confident in the invention.

"Here we are!" said Tom Merry. "Plant the beast somewhere. Who's going to bat against him?"

There were no volunteers.

No one, apparently, was eager to bat against the automatic bowler and run the risk of being treated like the Form-room windows and the master of the Shell.

"Don't all speak at once," said Monty Lowther sarcastically. Nobody spoke at all.

"Who's going to rush into the breach?" asked Manners.

"There really isn't any danger."

"Nothing to speak of," said Blake.

"Why don't you bat, then?" asked Herries.

"Well, you see, I've been batting against the New House chaps this afternoon."

"So have I," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, rats!" said Bernard Glyn. "Look here, I'll set him working first, and you can bat afterwards. You can see it take the wicket first."

"Good! Go ahead!"

The tripod was planted firmly on the ground, Glyn calculating the distance with his eye. Then the arm was placed in position, and the machine was loaded with half a dozen cricket-balls.

"Now then!" said Bernard Glyn.

"We're just going to begin!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Glyn touched the lever, and the machine began to work. The bowling-disc revolved, and the ball was bowled, with a

really splendid accuracy of pitch. It dropped and broke for the middle stump, and whipped it clean out of the ground.

"My hat!"

"Good!"

"Bai Jove, that's wippin'!"

The second arm swung round and then jerked forward, and the second ball flew. It whizzed through the wicket where the middle stump had been.

Then the other four balls in the machine followed, each pitching in exactly the same place.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It's ripping! Why, you could get first-rate batting practice against that machine."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Field those balls, somebody," said Bernard Glyn. "I'll load it up again, and one of you fellows can bat."

"Yaas, wathah! I don't mind offewin'. What is weally required to test that invention is a fellow of tact and judgment. I'll bat with pleasuah."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took his bat and went to the wicket.

"Weady!" he called out.

"Right-ho!"

"Load up, Glyn!"

"Let her flicker."

"Mind your eye, Gussy!"

The juniors looked on with the keenest interest. The middle stump was set up again, and the balls put in. The fellows were very keen to see whether the swell of St. Jim's would succeed in saving his wicket from the assault of the bowling machine.

Glyn stood behind his machine, with a confident grin on his face. By slightly moving the machine he could differentiate the pitch and break of the ball, and he had not the slightest doubt that D'Arcy would be bowled out.

D'Arcy stood in his usual elegant position at the wicket.

"Play!"

"Go it, Glyn!"

"Fire!" shouted Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The machine whirred, and the bowling-arm swung over, and the bowling commenced. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy watched for that ball and swiped at it and stopped it on the crease.

Then there was a sudden exclamation from Glyn.

"My hat! The beggar's gone wrong again!"

It was what had happened before when the Form-room windows had suffered. The machine—something evidently having gone wrong with the works—started bowling at a terrific rate, pitching out a ball every second, or faster.

Cricket-balls rained upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy like the balls kept in the air by a juggler.

"Ow!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Yawooh! Ow!"

The wicket was down, and Arthur Augustus was nearly down, too. Cricket-balls crashed upon him one after another. As fast as he tried to dodge one, another caught him somewhere.

The juniors shrieked with laughter. It was no joke for the swell of St. Jim's, but to the other fellows it seemed irresistibly comic.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it!"

"Yawooh!"

With a whirr the machine ran down. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat on his wrecked wicket and gasped.

CHAPTER 7.

Missing!

HA, ha, ha!"

The juniors simply shrieked.

The sight of the swell of St. Jim's dancing on the pitch and attempting to dodge the raining cricket-balls was too much for them. Glyn's face, too, was a study.

The fellows shrieked, and roared, and some of them rolled on the grass and wept. The only two who did not laugh were Bernard Glyn and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The latter was boiling over with indignation.

"You uttah ass!" he shrieked, staggering to his feet. "Is that what you call a bowlin' machine, you fwabjous idiot?"

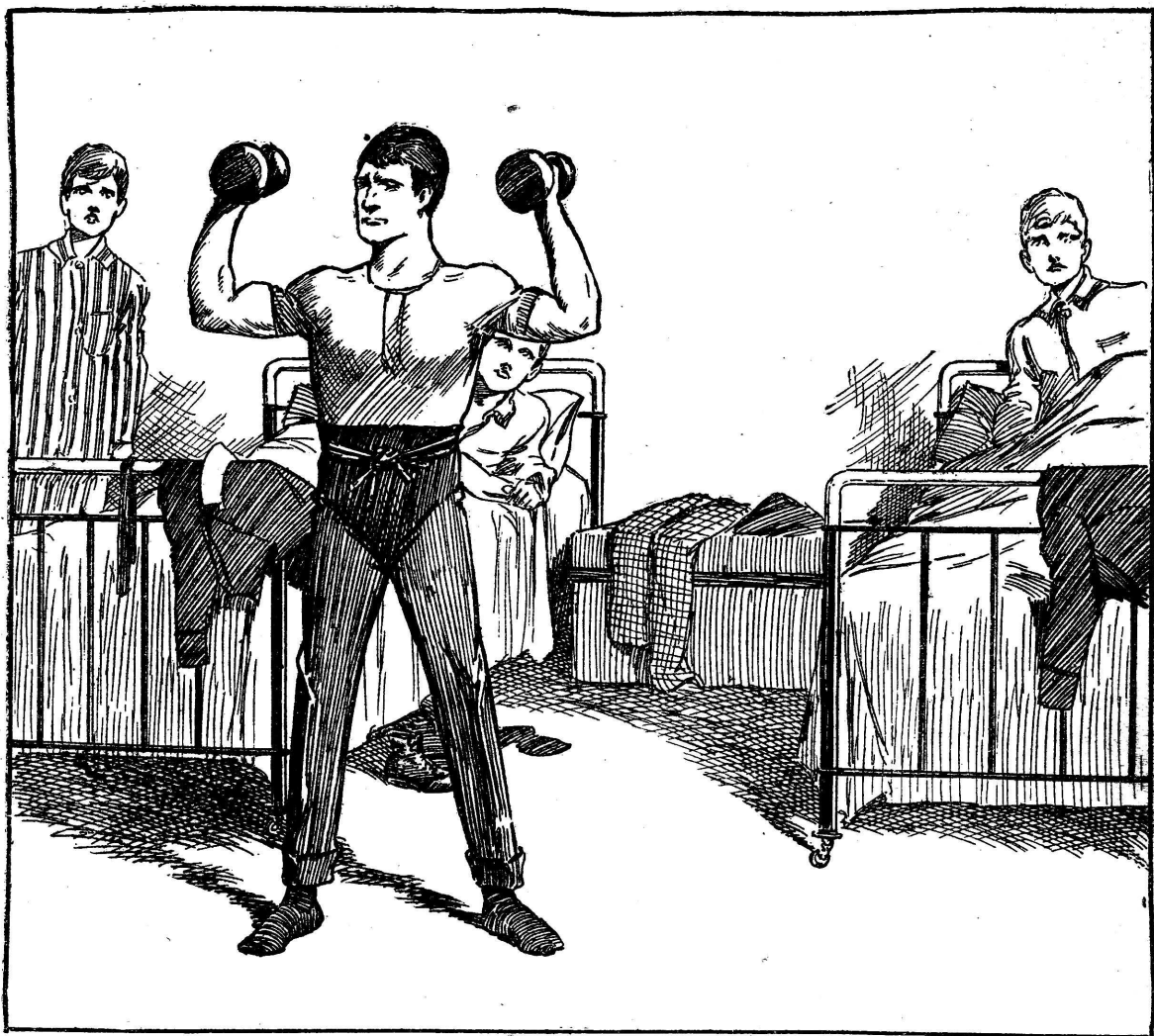
"It's only a slight error in the spring attachment," said Glyn, looking round. "Magazine-rifles go wrong like that sometimes, so do Mauer pistols. I can alter it quite easily."

"You uttah fathead!"

"Help me get it back to my study, you fellows. I'll give you another demonstration to-morrow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll have to bat against it to-morrow yourself, then."



The burly new boy grasped the heavy dumb-bells, and proceeded to go through his exercises, while the Remove juniors sat up in bed and looked on in wonder. (A striking dormitory incident in the splendid, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars College, entitled, "Cock of the Walk," contained in this week's issue of the "Magnet" Library. Now on sa'e. Price One Penny.)

gaspd Tom Merry. "I don't think you'll get anybody else to do it."

"No fear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you dangerous ass!" gaspd D'Arcy. "I am hurt all ovah!"

"Injured?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's all over?"

"Yaas."

"Then if it's all over, what are you grumbling about?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't make any of your wotten jokes now, Lowthah. I weally cannot stand them. I wegard you as an ass. As for Glyn, I considah him a dangewous lunatic, with his wotten inventions, and I am goin' to smash up his wotten bowler."

And the excited swell of St. Jim's grasped his bat, and rushed at the bowling machine.

"Stop him!" shriekd Glyn.

Four or five juniors grasped Arthur Augustus in time. Tom Merry gently jerked away his bat.

D'Arcy struggled in the grasp of his captors.

"Let me go!" he exclaimed. "I insist upon smashin' up that wotten contivance! It is not safe to have, it about!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weleasc me at once!"

"Take it calmly," said Tom Merry, almost choking with laughter. "It's all right, Gussy. You see—"

"I wefuse to wegard it as all wight. I shall have a black eye now."

"You'll have two if you damage my machine," growled Bernard Glyn.

"You uttah ass! I have a pain in my arm, and a pain in my chin—"

"And a pane in your eye," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass—"

"It's all right, Gussy! Get that dangerous thing away, Glyn, while we pacify Gussy," said Tom Merry. "How do you pacify Gussy when he's like this, Blake?"

"Stroke his hair," said Blake.

"Good!"

Tom Merry stroked D'Arcy's hair. But in spite of Blake's assurance, it seemed to have the effect of exciting the swell of St. Jim's instead of pacifying him. He struggled in the grasp of the juniors, and began to hit out.

"You feahful asses! Weleasc me at once!"

"Whisper nice things to him, then," said Blake.

"You—you feahful idiot—"

"Well, are you going to be quiet?" asked Tom Merry.

"We can't allow you to commit assault and battery on Glyn's bowler."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

NEXT

"FIGHTING HIS WAY"

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A Splendid, New, Long, Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co. BY MARTIN CLIFFORD

"I wefuse—"

"Will you make it pax?" asked Manners.

"Certainly not!"

"There's a nice puddle over there," said Kangaroo.

"Let's sit him in it, and let him consider."

"Good egg!"

"Yank him along."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! You uttah wuffians! Upon second thoughts, I will make it pax."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's was released. He was looking somewhat dishevelled now. He groped wildly for his eyeglass. It was hanging down the back of his neck, and he could not find it. Monty Lowther took it and extended it to him with a bow.

"Thank you," said D'Arcy. "I wegard you all as a set of wuffians!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I wefuse to wegard you as fwiends."

And Arthur Augustus strode off the cricket-field looking very head. The juniors roared till they had no laugh left in them.

"Well, I must say that Glyn's invention is worth something," Monty Lowther remarked. "It's as good as heaps and heaps of comic papers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Glyn and his helpers had taken the unfortunate bowler back to the end study by this time. Bernard Glyn was looking considerably vexed. There was certainly a fault in his machine, and although he knew that he could alter it, the alteration was not specified in the paper he had sent in to the Patent Office. The Liverpool lad met Tom Merry as he came in a little later. Tom Merry clapped him on the shoulder.

"Wherefore that worried brow, my son?" he asked.

Bernard Glyn grunted.

"I'm bothered about the machine," he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle! It's a great success!" said Glyn, crossly. "But I shall have to modify the steel spring attachment, that is all."

"Good! Better get it done before you start bowling again."

"Oh, never mind that. I'm thinking about my specification," said Glyn. "I've filled it in, you see, and posted it, and now I want to make an alteration."

"Oh, I see."

"I suppose I could get my letter back from the postman?" said Glyn. "I know it's against the rules to get a letter back when it's been once posted, but you fellows could tell Blagg it's my letter."

Tom Merry nodded.

"I should think he'd let you have it," he said. "Anyhow, we could ask Mr. Railton to tell him. He'd do what Mr. Railton said."

Glyn brightened up.

"Good! I didn't think of that. It's ten to seven now. Blagg will be along to make the collection in ten minutes. Suppose we wait for him and put it to him? If he won't let me have my letter, we'll ask him to bring it in and show it to Mr. Railton, and see what our house-master says."

"I should think that would work all right," assented Tom Merry.

"Then come on."

The juniors went down to the gates. Manners, and Lowther, and Blake, and D'Arcy joined them, as Tom Merry called them. It was as well to have several witnesses that the letter really belonged to Bernard Glyn, to induce the postman to let him have it back to make the alteration.

The letter-box in the school wall had the opening for letters inside the school ground, but the lock for the postman was on the outside of the wall, so that the letters could be collected without the postman coming in. The juniors went out at the gate, and along the road as far as the letter-box, and there they waited for Blagg, the village postman, to arrive.

Blagg was supposed to come at seven, but Blagg was never known to be in a hurry. It was nearly a quarter past the hour when his portly figure was seen coming down the lane. He nodded to the juniors, and set his bag down, and prepared to open the little door of the letter-box.

"Good-evenin', young gents!" said Blagg, cheerfully.

"Good-evening, Blagg!" said Tom Merry. "We want you to do us a favour, old son."

"Yes, Master Tom?"

"Glyn has posted a letter, and he wants it back."

Mr. Blagg shook his head.

"Impossible, Master Merry! Letter once posted becomes the property of the person addressed, and can't be given back nohow!"

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"THE BOCK OF THE WALK!" is the Title of the Splendid Complete School Tale of Harry...

"But it is a peculiar case," Tom Merry explained. "Glyn has sent in a specification of an invention to the Patent Office—"

"Oh, lor!" said Blagg, in astonishment.

"And he wants to make a slight alteration in the details," said Tom Merry. "That is all. We'll prove it to you that the address on the envelope is in Glyn's hand, so that you can be sure it's his letter."

The postman shook his head again.

"I ain't allowed to give a letter back, Master Tom."

"Well, will you bring it into the House, and ask our House-master about it?" said Glyn. "That will be all right, Blagg."

The postman hesitated.

"I could do that, Master Glyn; but it ain't allowed—"

"I'd open the letter in your presence, make the alteration, and give it back to you," said Bernard Glyn. "It wouldn't take long. I'd do it in the presence of Mr. Railton, and that will show it's all right."

"Well, p'r'aps I could do that much, Master Glyn."

"You're a good fellow, Blagg!"

Mr. Blagg opened the letter-box. There were a good many letters in it, and he scooped them out, but there was no large, thick envelope among them, such as Glyn had posted his specification paper in.

"Which of these is yours, Master Glyn?" asked the postman.

"None of them, Blagg. Mine was a large cartridge-paper envelope."

"Then it ain't 'ere."

"But—but it must be there!" exclaimed Bernard Glyn.

"You posted it, didn't you, Tom Merry?"

"I certainly did!" said Tom Merry, in bewilderment. "I listened to hear it drop in the box, too, when I posted it. It was all serene."

"And it ain't one of these?" asked Mr. Blagg.

"Oh, no!"

"Well, there ain't any other letter 'ere."

"May I look in the box?"

"Certainly, Master Tom!"

Tom Merry looked in the letter-box. There was nothing in it. It was quite empty, and there was no sign of the large letter he had posted in the afternoon. The juniors looked at one another in bewilderment.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

In spite of his unfortunate experiences with the bowling machine, D'Arcy was as concerned as anybody else at Glyn's curious loss. The swell of St. Jim's was never angry for long.

"I don't understand it," gasped Tom Merry. "I—I posted the letter—I'd swear to that! I know I posted it quite safely."

Glyn drew a sharp, deep breath.

"Then it's been taken out of the box," he said.

Mr. Blagg locked up the box again.

"You must 'ave forgotten to post it, Master Tom," he remarked. "I must be getting on. Good-evening, young gents!"

And Mr. Blagg went down the road with his bag. The juniors turned back slowly into the gateway of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 8.

Where is the Letter?

FOR some minutes no one spoke. Tom Merry & Co. were utterly bewildered by the strange happening.

The letter had certainly not been in the box when the postman opened it. Tom Merry had dropped it into the box, however, a couple of hours before. What had become of it in the interval?

"You're sure you posted it, Tom?"

It was Manners who asked the question, breaking the painful silence at last.

"I know I did," said Tom quietly. "I tell you I stopped to hear it fall down in the box before I left. There isn't the slightest doubt on the subject. I came straight from the Form-room when Glyn gave me the letter, and posted it."

"Yet it isn't there now!" Blake remarked.

"No. I can't catch on to it at all."

"There's only one explanation," said Bernard Glyn quietly.

"And that is?"

"Someone has taken it from the box."

The juniors were silent. There was no doubt that Bernard Glyn was right—someone must have pilfered the letter from the box. It was not a pleasant suspicion, but there it was. The letter had been taken. Who had taken it?

"We didn't want to have it talked of before Blagg," went

on Glyn quietly. "No need to have a scandal. It must have been a St. Jim's fellow who took it, and we want to find him; but we can keep the thing to ourselves."

"Yaas, wathah! It would be howwid to let it be known outside the coll. that there was a chap here mean enough to steal another chap's lettah."

"Yes, rather!"

"But who was it?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I suppose it must have been a chap here—no one else could get at the box, as there is no opening for letters on the outside of the wall."

"No; the box is used only for the school," said Blake. "Whoever took the letter must have taken it on the inside of the wall."

"It was a St. Jim's chap," said Monty Lowther. "There's not the slightest doubt on that subject. The only question is—which?"

And as if the same thought occurred to every mind simultaneously, the answer came from all the juniors:

"Levison!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I cannot help wegardin' it as extwemely pwob. you know."

"Levison's the chap!" said Tom Merry. "There are very few fellows at St. Jim's mean enough to do it, and he's one of them."

"I think so, too," said Blake; "and then there's the curiosity he's shown on the subject, and the fact that he's trying to make something of the sort himself—"

"And his kind offers to take the letter to the post," said Tom Merry. "Keeping it would have been easier work than fishing it out of the box, I suppose."

Bernard Glyn nodded.

"I suspected him all the time," he said. "He is always playing some mean, rotten trick. You remember his hiding the money at the time of the Coronation celebrations, and getting us into a pickle?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Yaas; I wegard it as extwemely pwob. that it was Levison."

"If it hadn't been for wanting to make the alteration in the specification, I shouldn't have discovered that the letter was stolen at all," said Glyn slowly. "When the answer didn't come from the Patent Office, I should only have imagined that there was some delay—and they are always long-winded there, you know. I should have written to them in a week or two, and then found that they hadn't had the letter."

"Luckily, we've discovered the truth to-day."

"Yes; and we can look for the thief," said Glyn, frowning.

"But what can he be going to do with the letter?" asked Jack Blake, puzzled. "It would be a rotten trick to destroy it, and that would serve no purpose."

"I expect he will destroy it, but not till—"

"Till what?"

"Till he has copied it."

"Bai Jove! Why should he copy it, deah boy?"

Bernard Glyn shrugged his shoulders.

"He hasn't taken it for fun," he said. "He wouldn't run such risks for the sake of merely playing a trick."

"Then what—"

"He means to steal the idea."

"Bai Jove!"

"He's going to copy the specification, and send it in to the Patent Office himself, and protect the invention as his own," said Glyn. "That could be his only possible object."

"Gweat Scott!"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"It seems impossible that the fellow—even Levison—could be such a howling cad as that!" he exclaimed.

"I haven't the slightest doubt of it."

"But—but he may have sent it already, then."

"It's possible."

"Or he may be just going to."

"We'd better see him," said Tom Merry abruptly.

"Come on!"

The juniors hurried to the School House. They went up to Levison's study first, and found it empty. As a matter of fact, Mellish had seen them coming towards the House from the study window, and the two cads had hurriedly left the study.

Nothing but a scent of cigarette-smoke remained to show that they had been there. Tom Merry looked round the study.

"I suppose we couldn't very well search a fellow's room, without letting him know," he remarked.

"Wathah not!"

"Besides, it wouldn't be any use," said Glyn quietly. "Levison wouldn't leave the plans where anybody could find them."

"No; I suppose not."

"We've got to find Levison himself! Come on!"

The juniors left the study. Tom Merry asked Curly Gibson, who was lounging in the hall, for information, and received it. Curly Gibson was a keen-eyed little fag, and few things escaped his attention.

"They're gone to the shop," he said.

The "shop" was the school tuckshop, kept by Dame Taggles. The juniors crossed the quad, and entered the little tuckshop behind the elms. True enough, Levison and Mellish were there. They were chatting with great apparent carelessness, and sucking lemon squash through hollow straws.

Bernard Glyn walked straight up to Levison and touched him on the shoulder.

"Levison!" he said crisply.

The Fourth-Former glanced at him.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Where is my letter?"

"Eh?"

"Where is my letter?" repeated Glyn.

"What letter?"

"The one you have stolen from the post-box!"

Levison yawned.

"Is this a joke?" he asked carelessly.

And he resumed sucking his lemon-squash.

The juniors looked at one another. Levison was perfectly cool, and they realised that they had no proof at all. It would not be easy to make the cad of the Fourth confess to the theft.

CHAPTER 9.

Levison Knows Nothing.

LEVISON sucked away at his lemon-squash, as if he had no care in the world. Mellish, taking courage from Levison's example, did the same. The juniors stood looking at them baffled. Bernard Glyn's brow darkened; he felt morally certain that the cad of the Fourth had taken the letter, and he was not disposed to stand upon ceremony.

"I want my letter!" he said.

"What letter?"

"Yes, what do you mean?" exclaimed Mellish. "If you've lost a letter, what reason have you to suppose that Levison knows anything about it?"

"Heaps of reason. It's the letter containing the specification of my invention, to send to the Patent Office."

"Indeed?" said Levison, yawning.

"Yes, indeed! It was posted this afternoon by Tom Merry—"

"My dear chap, this doesn't interest me! I—"

"It has been taken from the letter-box."

Levison glanced at his watch.

"Naturally," he said. "It's nearly half-past seven now, and the collection is supposed to be at seven o'clock!"

"It was taken before the postman came."

"How do you know?"

"Because I asked the postman to give it back to me, to make an alteration, and when he looked in the box it was not there."

"How unlucky for you!"

"Yes. But I am going to have it back!"

Levison nodded.

"I hope you will," he said. "I sincerely wish you success. Can I be of any assistance to you in the matter?"

"Certainly—by restoring the letter you have stolen!"

"My dear chap, I suppose I ought to knock you down for making such an insinuation," said Levison; "but I'll overlook what you've said, as you're excited. But you are piling it on a little too thick, you know. What reason have you to suppose that I've taken your letter out of the pillar-box?"

"You are cad enough—"

"Thanks! But even admitting that, that's hardly proof, is it?"

"No. It's ground for suspicion. We have not forgotten how you hid the Coronation funds, and got us into a fix!"

"That was a joke, and I owned up to it!"

"Not before we bumped the facts out of you!" said Tom Merry scornfully. "Perhaps this is a joke, too, and we can get at the facts by the same method."

Levison faced him, his eyes glittering.

"If you lay a finger on me, I'll go straight to Mr. Railton, and ask him for protection!" he said. "You sha'n't rag me into admitting a thing I never did!"

"Do you deny taking the letter?"

ANSWERS

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

NEXT THURSDAY:

"FIGHTING HIS WAY."

"I don't see that I'm called upon to deny such a ridiculous accusation; but if it will satisfy you, I will deny it."

"You did not take the letter from the box after it was posted?"

"Certainly not!"

"You don't know anything about it?"

"Nothing!"

"I don't believe you!" said Bernard Glyn, in his direct way.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"You can believe me or not, as you please," he replied.

"I've got no more to say, excepting this—I've got no proof that there was ever such a letter, or that it was posted! You give me your word for it, as I give you mine that I know nothing about it. If my word isn't good enough for you, you can't expect yours to be good enough for me! It looks to me as if this is a trick!"

"A trick!" repeated Tom Merry. "What do you mean?"

"Bai Jove, if you impute twickewy to me, Levison—"

"Let him speak, Gussy."

"I refuse to have twickewy imputed to me. If he imputes anythin' of the sort, I shall give him a feahful thwashin'."

"Cheese it!"

"I decline to cheese it! I refuse—"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy!" said Blake. "We're trying to get at the facts of the case, you know. This isn't the time for an oration. Now, what do you mean by a trick, Levison? We're willing to give you a chance."

Levison's eyes glinted.

"You all know that I've been at work myself upon an invention similar to Glyn's," he said. "I showed the plans to Lumley-Lumley, and Gore, and some other chaps, before Glyn said anything about this machine of his. Well, it looks to me that Glyn is trying to pinch my idea."

"What!" shouted Glyn.

"Hold on, Glyn! Let him finish!"

"The cad!"

"Yes, he's a horrid cad, but let him finish," said Tom Merry, pushing back the excited Liverpool lad. "Go on, Levison."

"Very well. Glyn has tried his machine, and it won't work. I can't afford to make a model of mine; but I believe it will work. I'm sending in the specification to the Patent Office soon, and my opinion is that Glyn would like to get my papers, and say they are his, that's all."

Glyn's eyes blazed with rage.

"You howling cad!" he shouted.

"Yaas, wathah; you are an awful cad, Levison. I am quite convinced that our friend Glyn would nevah do anythin' of the sort."

"Levison is trying to turn the tables," said Monty Lowther.

"You can't expect a trick like that to work, Levison."

Levison gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"Well, that's my opinion," he said. "It's the only reason I can see for you fellows to jump on me like this for nothing."

"For nothing!"

"Yes," said Levison defiantly. "I don't know anything about any letter of Glyn's, and I've not touched it."

"Will you show me your papers in connection with this invention?" asked Glyn. "I could see at a glance if they were like mine."

"You could see the idea, you mean, and steal it!" retorted Levison.

"Why, you cad!"

"I'm not going to show the papers to anybody till the wheeze is patented. Then you can see them as soon as you like."

Glyn drew a quick breath.

"You utter worm! You're thinking of patenting my invention, are you?"

"Mine!" said Levison.

"Look here," said the Liverpool lad, "I've had enough talk. Someone took the letter from the letter-box. It was you."

"Prove it."

"I'll prove it, the same way that we proved that you had hidden the Coronation funds!" said Glyn, between his teeth.

"I'll thrash you till you own up!"

Levison sneered.

"Well, you're six to one, so I suppose you could rag me if you liked," he said. "But even if you made me admit it, it wouldn't be true, and it wouldn't do you any good that I can see."

"But it is true!"

"I say it isn't!"

"It goes against the gwain with me to doubt any fellow's word, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; "but I cannot help wealisin', Levison, that you are pwobably not tellin' the twuth."

"Oh, rats!"

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"If you say 'Rats!' to me——"

"Rats!"

"Will you kindly hold my hat, Blake, while I give Levison a feahful thwashin'!"

"We're going to bump him," said Manners. "We'll bump the truth out of him, the same as we did over the Coronation fund business."

"Vewy good!"

Levison stepped back. Bernard Glyn made a step forward to grasp him. With a quick movement of the arm, Levison jerked his lemon-squash into the face of the Liverpool lad, and Glyn staggered back gasping.

"Oh! Ooooooh!"

Levison made a wild spring for the door.

Two or three pairs of hands grasped at him, but he tore himself loose, and dashed out of the tuck-shop.

"After him!" shouted Tom Merry.

"What-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors streamed from the tuck-shop. Glyn, dripping with lemon-squash, and mopping his face and collar with his handkerchief, was the last. Levison was dashing across the quad, and in a moment Tom Merry & Co. were whooping in full pursuit.

CHAPTER 10.

Hands Off!

TOM MERRY was in the lead, with Jack Blake close behind him, and the others following fast. Levison

had a start, but the hero of the Shell was gaining upon him rapidly. He had expected Levison to make for the House; but he did not. The cad of the Fourth was heading for the cricket-ground, and Tom Merry quickly saw the reason.

The Sixth had been playing a match that afternoon, and it had just finished. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was chatting with Darrel, of the Sixth, outside the pavilion, and there were a dozen other seniors about in cricketing flannels. Levison was dashing straight towards the spot where Kildare stood.

Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

He saw that Levison intended to drag the captain of St. Jim's into the matter. If he was innocent, indeed, it would have been hard to blame him for seeking protection from a ragging. But Tom Merry & Co. were convinced that he was guilty.

Tom Merry strained every nerve to overtake the cad of the Fourth; but fast as he ran, and quickly as he gained, he was still behind when Levison reached the ground.

By that time the seniors on the cricket-field had become aware of what was going on, and they were looking towards the chase in surprise.

Levison dashed gasping up to Kildare, with Tom Merry only three feet behind him, and the others coming on breathlessly.

Levison halted, panting, close by the captain of St. Jim's, and caught hold of his blazer. Kildare looked down at him.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Protection," said Levison pantingly. "I'm being bullied and ragged by a crowd of those rotters, and I want you to stop them!"

"What does this mean, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry had stopped. He could not lay hands upon the cad of the Fourth in Kildare's presence.

"We want that cad, Kildare!" he exclaimed.

"What has he done?"

"Do you want me to tell Kildare, Levison, or will you give up the letter?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I can't give up what I haven't got!"

"Liar!"

"Merry, you can stop that!" said Kildare sharply. "That's not the sort of talk for you to use, even if Levison is not telling the truth."

Tom Merry flushed.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I know that, but the fellow exasperates me. He tells such barefaced whoppers!"

"What has he done?"

"He's taken a letter from the school-box after it had been posted, and he's keeping it!" Tom Merry gasped.

Kildare's brow darkened.

"Is that true, Levison?" he demanded.

"No," said Levison promptly.

"Did you see him do it, Tom Merry?"

"No."

"Who did, then?"

"He wasn't seen."

"How do you know he took the letter, then?"

"Oh, we know he did!" said Tom Merry, rather lamely.

Kildare frowned angrily.

"I know there is bad blood between you and Levison," he said; "but you might be fair to the fellow, Tom Merry. Do

you mean to say that you are accusing him of so serious a thing as taking a letter from the letter-box without a particle of proof in support of your accusation?"

"He's done things quite as mean before."

"That's not to the point. The question is, whether he did this or not. Whom did the letter belong to?"

"Glyn."

"Are you sure it was posted, Glyn?"

"I gave it to Tom Merry to post, as I was detained in the Form-room this afternoon, owing to the—the accident this morning," the Liverpool lad explained.

Kildare smiled slightly at the reminder.

"Oh! And how do you know it was taken from the box?"

Glyn explained the interview with the postman. The captain of St. Jim's listened very attentively.

"There there is no doubt that the letter was taken, if it ever was posted," he said. "But are you sure you posted it, Tom Merry?"

"Quite sure."

"Was anybody with you at the time?"

"No; I was alone. I passed Levison a few minutes before, and I had the letter in my hand, and he offered to take it to the post. I wouldn't let him. Glyn had just warned me that he believed Levison wanted to get at the letter. After that, I spoke to Manners, just after I put the letter in the box."

"Did you see Tom Merry post the letter, Levison?"

"No."

"Do you remember seeing it in his hand?"

"I remember seeing some letter, but I didn't specially notice it."

"H'm! Manners, you saw Tom Merry, he says, just after he had posted the letter," said the St. Jim's captain.

"Yes, that's so."

"Did you see him post the letter?"

"No; I was busy with my camera just then."

"Then no one saw you post the letter, Merry?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Not that I know of," he said.

"H'm! Yet you are quite certain that you posted it?"

"Quite. I was specially careful, you see, because I knew it contained Glyn's paper about his invention—his specification for the Patent Office."

Kildare wrinkled his brows. He looked at Tom Merry, and then at the cad of the Fourth. If it had been a question of taking the word of one or the other, he would have had little hesitation in deciding in favour of Tom Merry.

Candour and truth shone in the sunny face of the hero of the Shell. But it was quite possible, of course, that Tom Merry had made a mistake—that he had not posted the letter, but had intended to, had mislaid it, and had forgotten. That was more likely than that there was a thief in St. Jim's, Kildare thought.

"You deny having taken the letter, Levison?" asked Kildare.

"Wholly."

"You know nothing about it?"

"Nothing at all. I'm strongly in doubt whether there was such a letter," said Levison boldly. "It looks to me like a scheme of these chaps to get a sight of my papers—"

Kildare cut him short with a gesture.

"You needn't make insinuations of that sort," he said curtly.

"They are making insinuations enough against me."

"Well, without proof you can't be found guilty, at all events. What were you fellows going to do in this matter?" asked Kildare, looking at Tom Merry & Co.

The juniors hesitated, and coloured. They had had a plan—a ready and drastic one—but it was not one that would be likely to recommend itself to the captain of St. Jim's.

"Well, you see—" said Tom Merry haltingly.

"Well?"

"We were going to—to—"

"They were going to rag me to make me own up," said Levison. "They were going to bump me till I admitted it, whether it was true or not. That's why I claim your protection as a prefect."

"Bai Jove! I regard you as a wottah, Levison!"

"You're not going to have it all your own sweet way," said Levison, with a sour grin. "I've had more than enough of ragging, thanks."

Kildare frowned.

"Was that your intention, Tom Merry?" he demanded.

"Well, yes."

"Mind, I forbid it. If you can get any proof against Levison you can bring it to me, and I will see that he is brought to book soon enough," said the St. Jim's captain. "I am really surprised at you, Merry, for thinking of bullying a fellow like that—"

"We weren't going to bully him—"

"There's not much difference between bullying and

ragging in a case like that," said Kildare drily. "Mind, you're not to do it. Suppose you bumped Levison till he admitted that he had taken the letter. That wouldn't make it true that he had taken it."

"We were going to bump him till he gave it up."

"But suppose he hasn't it?"

"Oh, we know he has."

"I'm afraid that won't do, Merry. Mind, I've warned you—Levison is not to be touched by anybody here, and you're not to put anybody else on to ragging him either. I shall see into it if you do."

"Of course, we shall do as you say, Kildare."

The St. Jim's captain nodded.

"Quite so. Mind that you do. Now buzz off!"

The juniors walked off the senior cricket-ground somewhat crestfallen. Levison was the only one who looked cheerful. He gave the juniors a mocking glance.

"I rather think your claws are cut just now," he remarked.

"Oh, shut up!" said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Levison—"

"Rats to you!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy paused, and pushed back his cuffs, and slipped his monocle into his waistcoat pocket. Then he turned upon Levison.

"Levison, you uttah cad, that is the second time you have said 'Rats!' to me—"

"I'll make it a third if you like," said Levison cheerfully.

"Rats!"

"Put up your hands, you wottah!"

"Rats!"

"Bai Jove! I—"

"Hold on, Gussy—"

"I decline to hold on, Tom Mewwy. I am goin' to give that wottah a feahful thwashin'. There's somethin' due to a fellow's dig."

Blake dragged his excited chum back.

"You ass!" he exclaimed. "Can't you see—"

"I wufuse to be called an ass!"

"Can't you see that Kildare is looking in this direction, and Levison's only trying to get you into trouble with the skipper?" exclaimed Blake impatiently. "We've got orders not to go for the cad."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that, you know."

"Then think of it now, and come on, and don't jaw!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, come on!"

Blake dragged Arthur Augustus away, and the rest followed, and Levison was left to follow at his leisure. There was a sneering smile upon the face of the cad of the Fourth Form. He did not usually come out best in his little difficulties with Tom Merry & Co., but this time there was no doubt that he had scored.

CHAPTER 11.

Arthur Augustus Means Business.

BERNARD GLYN was looking glum enough as he walked back to the School House with his friends.

The Liverpool lad was generally very cheerful, but now there was a dark shadow upon his face. The loss of the specification had hit him hard. It was in the hands of a rival, and he had very little doubt that that rival was Levison of the Fourth. "But whether it was Levison or not, there was no doubt upon one point—that the specification had been stolen to be made use of. Already it might be on its way to the Patent Office, for the idea to be patented as the property of the thief. And then, when that had happened, how was the Liverpool lad to prove his claim to it?"

"You can buck up and get a new paper written out, and send it in," Tom Merry remarked.

Glyn shook his head.

"That takes time," he said. "I couldn't get it done so quickly as all that, especially as I want to think out that alteration to put in it. And the other chap may have posted his letter already."

"Bai Jove!"

"I shall have to prove that the idea's mine, and not his," said Glyn. "How am I to do it? If it was Levison, he can prove on his side that he was working on the same idea—he seems to have told the truth so far, as Lumley-Lumley says he has seen the plans Levison was drawing."

"It's a rotten position, kid. The best thing to do is to get the specification drawn up as quickly as you can and send it in, with a letter explaining."

"I suppose so."

"It's jolly lucky, anyway, that you found out the theft to-day," Manners remarked. "But for asking the postman

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for the letter back, you wouldn't have known, and you wouldn't have had the slightest chance of checkmating the thief."

Bernard Glyn nodded.

"Yes; I suppose I'm lucky, as I've a chance left yet," he said. "It's hard cheese, though, after the work I've put into the thing, to have even the risk of losing it."

"Yaas, wathah! Howevah—"

"However what?" asked Glyn, a little tartly.

"Howevah," said the swell of St. Jim's calmly, "pewwaps it would be bettah to dwop the whole thing."

"Eh?"

"Are you gettin' deaf, deah boy? I wemarked that pewwaps it would be bettah to dwop the whole thing."

"Ass! Fathead! Chump!"

"Weally, Glyn—"

"Duffer! Idiot! Lunatic!"

"Bai Jove! Weally—"

"Idiot—"

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry, laughing. "Haven't you got to the end of the list yet, Glyn? Draw it mild, old man!"

"Oh, chain him up!" said Glyn. "He makes me tired. You can't expect anybody to stand Gussy on a hot day."

"Weally, you uttah wottah—"

"Oh, scat!"

"I wufuse to scat—I mean, I decline to do anythin' of the sort, and I wegard you as a boundah!" said the swell of St. Jim's indignantly. "I considah my suggestion a good one. Your invention is uttably wotten, as you are aware, and all these fellows are aware. You have tried it, and have only broken windows, and caused me sewious personal inconvenience."

"Blow the windows!"

"I'm not thinkin' so much about the windows as about myself—"

"Blow you, too!"

"Weally, Glyn—"

"Oh, cheese it, Gussy!" said Blake. "Ring off, old chap!" "I wufuse to wing off! I wegard my suggestion as eminently pwacticable. I declared that I would smash the mechanical bowlah, and I am a fellah of my word. I wufuse to bweak my word."

"Fathead! Ass—"

"Oh, don't begin again, Glyn, old boy!" said Monty Lowther. "We know the list by heart. Besides, we all know Gussy—no need to describe him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"If Gussy has sworn a dreadful swear, of course he must keep his swear," said Monty Lowther, with due solemnity. "If he has sworn to smash your bowler, Glyn, I don't see how the machine is to get off. Gussy swears things by the bones of his ancestors, you know, and it's simply creepy."

"You uttah ass—"

"Well, it was the bones of your ancestors, or your aunt's sisters, or somebody," said Lowther. "Horrid for a kid of Gussy's age to swear at all, I think; but I suppose he wasn't whacked enough in his early youth."

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah! I have said that I will destwoy that wotten bowlah, and I feel bound to keep my word. Look at my face."

"Eh?"

"I say, look at my face."

Lowther made an imploring gesture

"Ask me something easier, Gussy!" he pleaded. "I will face the lion in his wrath—I will from the robber rend the prey—but don't ask me to risk losing my eyesight at one fell swoop! Don't—"

"You feahful ass—"

The juniors shrieked with laughter. Even from Bernard Glyn's face the shadow was chased away, and he laughed as loudly as the rest. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was crimson with wrath.

"I mean, look at the damage my countenance has sustained fwom that wotten mechanical bowlah," he exclaimed. "I wegard it as a good thing if the wotten contwaption is lost and nevah found again. A chap who invents things of that sort ought to be shut up in a lunatic asylum in a stwait jacket. I considah—"

"Oh, ring off!" said Glyn crossly.

"I wufuse to do so! I am goin' to point out that the loss of your silly papah was a blessin' in disguise. I think all the fellahs should insist upon your dwoppin' the wotten ideah," said the swell of St. Jim's warmly. "My eye is wapidly becoming black, and my nose will not be stwaight again for a week, pewwaps."

"Was it ever straight?" asked Lowther innocently.

"I wufuse to weply to fwivolous questions. Undah the cires., Glyn—"

"Oh, rats!"

Bernard Glyn strode away. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, almost snorting with rage, made a movement to follow him, but the other fellows held him back.

"Welease me, you asses!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's. "Undah the cires., I have no wesource but to give Glyn a feahful thwashin'."

"Have mercy on him at such a time as this!" pleaded Blake, with a pathetic shake in his voice. "Think of his plans being lost—"

"Well, pewwaps I can let him off the thwashin'," said D'Arcy, "but I am goin' to destwoy that wotten contwaption. I have said that I would, you know, and what I have said I have said, as somebody wemarked once."

"Go hon!"

"Must let him have his way," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Gusy has sworn a dreadful swear; by the bones of his aunt's sisters—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a collection of uttah asses!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. And he jammed his monocle into his eye, gave the juniors a lofty stare of scorn, and walked away—leaving them almost in hysterics.

CHAPTER 12.

Not the Same Thing.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY sat in his study—with a frown upon his aristocratic brow!

D'Arcy was a fellow of his word.

He had said that he would smash the mechanical bowler, and he felt that he was bound to do it. And the discoloration round his eye was growing darker, and the bump on his chin was growing bigger—and the swelling on his nose was growing redder—three good and substantial reasons why he should keep his threat of smashing the bowler. And that D'Arcy was determined to do.

"I'm sowwy for that silly ass, Glyn!" he murmured. "But a fellow must keep his word—and, besides, I have to con-

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"Ow!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Yawooh! Ow!" Cricket balls crashed upon him one after another, hurled by Glyn's mechanical bowler. As fast as the swell of St. Jim's tried to dodge one, another caught him somewhere.

sidah my dig. I have been tweeked with gwoos diswespact, and I am simply bound to smash the bowlah. It's got to be done!"

There was a tap at the door, and Monty Lowther looked into the study.

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and fixed an inquiring and somewhat freezing stare upon the humorist of the Shell.

"Pway, what do you want?" he asked.

Lowther gave a cautious glance round.

"You're alone?" he asked, in a stage whisper, though he could see perfectly well that the swell of St. Jim's was alone.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hush!"

Monty Lowther stepped into the study on tiptoe, and closed the door noiselessly behind him. He bent at the key-hole for a moment, as if to satisfy himself that there were no eavesdroppers outside. Then he faced round towards Arthur Augustus, who had witnessed these proceedings with growing astonishment, wondering inwardly whether Lowther was getting weak in the head.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah, deah boy?"

"Hush! Are you ready?"

"Weady for what, Lowthah?"

"To keep your swear."

"M-m-my what?"

"You swore a swear to smash Glyn's bowler."

"I certainly declared that I would do it, and a D'Arcy cannot go back on his word," said the swell of St. Jim's.

"But—"

"Then if you're ready I'll help you."

"Bai Jove!"

"Remember your swear! Remember—remember the Fifth of November—I—I mean, remember the blood of the D'Arcys, and the honour of the family, and do not fail to keep your swear."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"'Tis now the fitting time of night for such fell deed," said Lowther. "If you are ready, let us hence, and do the dire deed."

"I weally wish you would not speak in such a dweadfully theatrical way, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus. "It thwows me into quite a fluttah. I have determined to smash

the automatic bowlah, but you are speakin' as if we were goin' to wob a church, or commit murdah, or somethin'."

"Remember—remember—"

"Weally, you know—"

"Come with me—hence, and let us away," said Monty Lowther. "Between us we will smash the bowler—"

"But Glyn keeps his study door locked—"

"Shall a locked door intervene between a D'Arcy and his vengeance?" demanded Monty Lowther. "Perish the thought! Perish the bowler, whether mechanical, or a common one of felt! Perish—"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Besides, it is not necessary to get into Glyn's study," went on Lowther, in a whisper. "I have placed the bowler in the box-room."

"Bai Jove! Have you weally?"

"Yes, I have—come on."

"But how did you get hold of it, Lowther, deah boy? I am weally vevy much obliged to you; but how did you do it?"

"That is my dread secret. Come!"

"Oh, vevy well!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rose from his seat.

"Better bring your bat," said Monty Lowther.

"My bat? What for?"

"To smash the bowler."

"It might damage the bat, deah boy—and its wathah a good bat—"

"It's more likely to damage the hat than the bat—"

"The hat! What—"

"I—I—I mean—never mind," said Lowther hastily, "bring Blake's bat, then; it will do just as well."

"Yaas, that's wathah a good ideah!"

Arthur Augustus picked up Blake's bat, and put it under his arm, and followed the Shell fellow from the study. Lowther led him to the stairs of the upper box-room. There was a glimmer of light from a gas-jet turned very low.

"It's jollay dark here, Lowthah," D'Arcy remarked.

"Yes; such deeds are best done in the dark," said Monty Lowther, with a deep and thrilling voice that the heaviest villain in the stock company at the Theatre Royal, Wayland, might have envied.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Hist!—lest forbidden ears may hear us, and our intentions are frustrated, and our bold designs are baffled."

"I weally wish you would talk sensibly."

"Hark!"

Monty Lowther seized D'Arcy by the arm, and dragged him into the recess of the staircase window, and stood listening.

"Weally, you know—" said D'Arcy, considerably ruffled.

"Safe!" hissed Lowther. "Safe!" 'Twas but a footprint—I mean footstep."

"Weally, I am not afwaid of a footstep, and—"

"Onward!"

"Look here—"

"Onward and upward, ever upward! Excelsior!"

And Monty Lowther urged D'Arcy on up the box-room stairs. The swell of St. Jim's was beginning to grow quite alarmed at Lowther's theatrical manner. The darkness of the staircase concealed Lowther's face, and D'Arcy could not hear his subdued chuckles.

They reached the landing, and Lowther opened a door.

The box-room was before them, and on the further side of it was a single pin-point of light.

D'Arcy paused on the threshold. He did not care to enter the room in the dark, and risk barking his shins on the boxes and the other lumber that was stacked there.

"Bai Jove! Why don't you have a light, Lowthah?"

"Is not the dark more fitting?"

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know!"

"The bowler is here—"

"You've brough't the automatic bowler here?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, letting the bat slip into his hands, and grasping a cane handle. "All wight! I twust it won't damage Blake's bat, but a fellow is bound to keep his word. As for Glyn, it will be a mercy to him to destwoy the twoublesome beast of a thing. Pway turn up the gas, Lowthah, and let me see it."

"I must go! You can turn up the gas."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

But Monty Lowther had stepped out upon the landing. Arthur Augustus stood in the deep shadows of the box-room, with the pin-point of light winking and blinking at him across the room.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Lowthah—"

"Go it!" said Lowther. "I'll keep watch here for Glyn, in case he comes to the rescue of his bowler."

"Yaas, that's a wathah good ideah!"

Arthur Augustus picked his way across the room. He

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knocked his legs on several boxes, and gave little yelps, and then reached the gas jet and turned up the light.

The light glared up in the box-room.

Arthur Augustus looked round him. There was a sound on the landing—and the open door of the room was crammed with grinning juniors.

D'Arcy stared at them.

"Bai Jove! Where did all you fellows spwing fwom?" demanded.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've come to see you smash the bowler," exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy gazed round the box-room.

"Bai Jove! But where is the bowlah? Lowthah, you howwid boundah, you said that Glyn's bowlah was here."

"So it is," said Lowther, looking in over Kangaroo's shoulder.

"Then where is it?"

"On the floor, just in front of you."

Arthur Augustus allowed his gaze to fall upon the floor, and then he beheld—an ancient bowler hat! He gazed at it without understanding Monty Lowther's little joke for a moment or two; and then, as the truth slowly dawned upon him, the expression on his face made the juniors shriek:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 13.

Smashing the Bowler.

"H A, ha, ha!" The juniors roared. The expression upon the aristocratic countenance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was irresistible.

The swell of St. Jim's seemed unable to speak for a full minute. He gazed at the old bowler hat, and he gazed at Monty Lowther alternately, his mouth opening and shutting like that of a fish out of water, but not a word coming forth.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated, at last.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go ahead!" said Monty Lowther, in a business-like tone. "I suppose you haven't come here for nothing, have you, Gussy? Go ahead!"

"What do you mean?"

"You came here to smash Glyn's bowler, didn't you?"

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"Well, there's the bowler; go ahead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry & Co.

D'Arcy turned a glance full of wrath upon the humorist of the Shell.

"You feahful ass!" he shrieked. "You know perfectly well that it was Glyn's mechanical bowlah I meant—his beastly cwicket bowlah—not an old bowlah hat! You uttah ass, you have been pulling my leg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Gussy!"

"Ain't he a prize packet?" almost sobbed Blake. "Oh, Gussy, you'll be the death of me some day, I know you will."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Why don't you get on?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Why don't you smash the bowler?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you feahful ass! I'll—I'll smash you!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's, and he made a rush at Monty Lowther.

Lowther skipped back behind the crowd of juniors. Many hands grasped the swell of St. Jim's and held him back.

"Peace, my son!" said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Hold on!"

"Let go my arm, Tom Mewwy! I command you to release me at once!" shrieked the swell of the School House frantically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am goin' to thwash Lowthah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus struggled violently. The juniors were laughing almost too much to hold him back. Monty Lowther was doubled up with merriment on the landing, and was in no state to defend himself if the swell of the Fourth had got at him. But Tom Merry & Co. made an effort, and D'Arcy was whirled back into the box-room and planted in a sitting posture on one of the boxes.

"Now, sit tight, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to sit tight!"

"Simmer down!"

"I decline to simmah down! I—"

"Are you going to keep the peace?"

"Certainly not!"

And the swell of St. Jim's made an effort to rise. The

juniors bumped him down again. Manners picked up the old bowler hat.

"Now, if you're not quiet I'll crown you with this!" he exclaimed. "Now, are you going to be nice?"

"I wefuse to be nice! I—I—"

"There you are, then!"

Manners planted the old hat on D'Arcy's head. It was two sizes too large for the swell of St. Jim's, and a thump on the crown drove it down over his eyes. There it fitted tightly enough, and the swell of St. Jim's was plunged suddenly into darkness.

"Ow! Gweat Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Welease me! Ow! Take that howwid thing off! Yow!"

The juniors, yelling with laughter, retreated in a crowd from the box-room. Lowther picked himself up, almost weeping, and retreated downstairs with them. Arthur Augustus tore at the bowler hat, but it had been jammed down so tightly round his head that he could not squeeze it off.

The rim came down upon the bridge of his aristocratic nose, and the leather lining was tight upon his ears, and he simply could not get it off. He groped to and fro, completely blinded by the hat.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Yow! Yawoh! Take the howwid thing off! I can't see! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The retreating footsteps echoed down the stairs. D'Arcy groped his way to the door and yelled.

"Go it! Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's tore furiously at the bowler hat. He wrenched the crown open at last, and then the hat split, and he dragged it off. He hurled the pieces to the floor.

The juniors cheered.

"Hurrah!"

D'Arcy glared round him, groping wildly for his eyeglass.

"Where's that beast Lowthah?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have been the victim of a twick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am going to smash Lowthah!"

"Lowthah—Lowthah! Come and be smashed!" sang out Blake.

But Monty Lowther was not to be seen. Arthur Augustus looked up and down the crowded passage in vain for the humorist of the Shell.

"Where is that howwid beast Lowthah?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Faith, and I saw him downstairs!" said Reilly, of the Fourth.

D'Arcy made a rush for the stairs. The Irish junior chuckled.

"Sure, it was no need to mention that it was three hours ago I saw him downstairs," he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther looked out of Gore's study, with a grin.

"Safe?" he queried.

"Ha, ha, ha! He's gone!"

"Has he smashed the bowler?"

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"Ow! Help! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's, breathing fury, groped down the stairs, holding on to the banisters. He reached the passage, and groped along past the studies. The loud yells of laughter that greeted him brought fellows from all quarters to see what was going on, and they shrieked at the sight of the blindfolded swell of St. Jim's.

"Oh, my word!" gasped Lumley-Lumley. "I guess this takes the cake! Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell passage rang with laughter.

"Bai Jove! Help! Ow!"

"What on earth is it?" exclaimed Bernard Glyn, coming to the door of his study. The St. Jim's inventor had been busy drawing up his new specification for the Patent Office.

"It's the only one—the one and only!" gasped Monty Lowther. "He wanted to smash a bowler, and there's the bowler."

The Liverpool lad roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why don't you smash the bowler, Gussy?" yelled the juniors.

"It's the only way you'll get it off," shrieked Blake.

"Smash the bowler, Gussy."

The swell of St. Jim's tore at the old hat with his hands. He succeeded in getting the brim off with a desperate wrench, and the juniors cheered him on enthusiastically.

"Hurrah!"

"He's smashing the bowler at last!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! I—I—I—"

"Yes. Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not find the humorist of the Shell downstairs. Neither did he find him again at all that evening. Monty Lowther was careful to keep out of the way, and D'Arcy searched for him in vain up and down the School House till nearly bedtime.

By bedtime D'Arcy's wrath, which never lasted very long, had cooled down, and when he met Lowther in the passage going up to bed, he gave him nothing but a sniff, by way of expressing his feelings, and affected not to take any notice of Lowther's expression of mock terror.

"Good-night, Gussy!" said Lowther softly.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon him freezingly.

"I werged you as a wottah, Lowthah!" he said.

Monty Lowther looked astonished.

"What!" he exclaimed. "After I helped you to smash Glyn's bowler! You wanted to do so much, you know, and I tried to help you!"

The juniors roared. Arthur Augustus turned majestically upon his heel and strode into the Fourth Form dormitory.

CHAPTER 14.

Under Watch.

LEVISON sat up in bed. Eleven o'clock had struck from the old tower, and all was dark and silent in the School House.

Levison sat listening to the quiet, steady breathing in the dormitory for some minutes, his heart beating fast.

"You fellows asleep?" he asked at last.

There was no reply.

Levison put one leg, out of bed, and then paused and

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"FIGHTING HIS WAY"

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listened. From the darkness of the dormitory there came a faint but perceptible chuckle.

"Hullo! Who's that?" exclaimed Levison, in startled tones.

"Me!" said the voice of Jack Blake, ungrammatically but cheerfully.

"Oh! You're not asleep!"

"No."

"I can't go to sleep, either," said Levison, with a yawn.

"Hard cheese!" said Blake, sympathetically.

"Yes. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

Levison lay back in bed again, gritting his teeth. It was useless for him to rise while Jack Blake was awake. He wondered whether Blake was awake on purpose. Was he being watched?

He lay in bed and thought it out. He had finished copying the stolen specification quite early in the evening. But when he went down to the school letter-box he had found a couple of juniors there, and he had not ventured to post the letter. He had obtained a prefect's pass and walked down to the village, but three or four of Tom Merry's friends had gone out, too, and they had never lost sight of him. In their sight he could not venture to post the letter. They must have been watching for it—he felt it. And besides, if he had attempted to post the letter, they could have stopped him, and he had little doubt that they would have done so. He could say what he liked afterwards, but if they found him attempting to post off Glyn's plans to the Patent Office they would have stopped him. He had come back to St. Jim's fuming, half afraid that they would raid him in the lane, and collar the long envelope he had hidden under his jacket.

They did not do that. He brought his letter safe back to St. Jim's with him. But what was he to do with it? His only resource was to slip out of the house after lights out and post it while the other fellows were asleep. Then it would go safely on its way without their knowledge.

But Blake was awake!

There was no doubt about it. Blake was watching him. All Bernard Glyn's friends were "in the know," and they did not mean to give him a chance, however much trouble it cost them to keep him under surveillance.

Half an hour rolled slowly away. Half-past the hour rang from the clock-tower. The cad of the Fourth sat up in bed again.

A cool, drawing voice came from Lumley-Lumley's bed.

"That you, Levison?"

"Yes," said Levison, between his teeth.

"What are you getting up for?"

"I'm not getting up!"

Lumley-Lumley chuckled.

"I thought you were. I guess. It's all serene."

"I can't sleep," said Levison, with a yawn. "I think, upon the whole, I'll get up and stretch my legs in the passage a bit."

"I guess I'll do the same," said Lumley-Lumley.

Levison ground his teeth.

"Are you watching me, Lumley-Lumley?" he demanded.

"Eh?"

"Are you watching me, hang you!"

"Watching you!"

"Yes. You heard what I said."

"Why should I watch you, sonny?"

"I believe you are staying awake on purpose—you and Blake!"

"Right you are, my son," came a voice from Jack Blake's bed. "You've hit the right nail on the head, Levison."

"What are you watching me for?"

"To see that you don't post Glyn's specification to the Patent Office as your own," said Blake coolly.

"You—you—"

"You're not going to do it, I guess," said Lumley-Lumley. "Whenever you get near a letter-box, Levison, you'll find somebody there first, and you'll have to show the address on the letter you post. If it's addressed to the Patent Office, you'll have to prove that what's inside is your own property and not Bernard Glyn's."

"How dare you interfere with me?"

Lumley-Lumley chuckled.

"I guess we dare to interfere with any thief," he replied.

"It is my own specification I am going to post to the Patent Office," said Levison, in a suppressed voice.

"Let some impartial person see it, and decide that it isn't an exact copy of Glyn's, and you can post it as soon as you like," said Blake.

"If it is like Glyn's, I can't help it—that will be purely a matter of chance."

"Rats!"

"Look here, Blake—"

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"THE COCK OF THE WALK!" is the Title of the Splendid, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

"If your plans are like Glyn's, it will be because you have copied Glyn's, after stealing the letter from the post-box," said Blake, scornfully.

"Hang you!"

"Fire away! You can say what you like, so long as you don't post the letter," said Blake, cheerfully. "As soon as Glyn's specification had gone in, and has been received at the Patent Office, you can do as you like, it will be too late."

"Hang you!"

And Levison settled down in bed again. He understood that it was useless to attempt to post the letter that night, and he allowed himself to fall asleep. He did not wake till the rising-bell was clanging in the morning. Blake and Lumley-Lumley were somewhat heavy-eyed when they turned out. They had remained awake longer than the cad of the Fourth.

Blake rubbed his eyes and yawned as he turned out at the clang of rising-bell.

"Jolly sleepy," he remarked. "I've a jolly good mind to give you a licking, Levison, for spoiling my night's rest in this way."

Levison snarled.

"Hang you!"

"I think you're more likely to be hanged, of the two, considering the way you're starting life," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah," remarked Arthur Augustus D'arcy. "Although I do not approve of Glyn and his wotten mechanical bowlers, I wegard Levison as a wank wotter to attempt to steal his ideahs."

"Oh, go and eat coke," said Levison.

The cad of the Fourth left the dormitory before most of the juniors were ready to go down. He found Tom Merry and Manners in the passage chatting. The chums of the Shell must have risen very early.

Levison scowled at the sight of them. The two Shell fellows nodded to him very cheerfully and amicably.

"Up quite early, ain't you?" Manners remarked.

"Mind you own business!" snapped Levison.

The Shell fellows chuckled.

"We're minding it," said Tom Merry.

Blake looked out of the dormitory, fastening his braces. He nodded and grinned to the chums of the Shell.

"Oh, you're there," he said. "Keep an eye on the boulder! It will be all right after nine o'clock."

"We're keeping an eagle eye on him."

Levison tramped away down the passage. Tom Merry and Manners followed him. The cad of the Fourth crossed the Quad towards the school letter-box. The Shell fellows reached it as soon as he did.

Levison scowled at him fiercely.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"We're watching you," said Tom Merry, cheerfully.

"What for?"

"To see that you don't post Glyn's specification." Levison drew a deep breath.

"Do you mean to say that you are going to take any letter from me, if I try to post one?" he asked.

"Yes, if it is addressed to the Patent Office. We shall take it from you, and take it to Mr. Railton, and ask him to compare it with the plan that Glyn will place in his hands," said Tom Merry, calmly. "If they correspond, Mr. Railton will know what to think."

Levison ground his teeth in helpless rage.

"And how long are you going to keep up this game?" he demanded.

"Till nine o'clock," said Tom Merry. "There is no collection here between seven in the evening and nine the following morning. Bernard Glyn has posted his letter afresh, with a new copy of the specification, and it won't be collected and sent on to London till nine o'clock this morning. It's in the letter-box now, and we don't mean you to have the ghost of a chance of fishing it out. And you're not going to have the ghost of a chance of sending an exact copy of it to the Patent Office to reach there by the same post—not much!"

"Then Glyn has posted his letter again?"

"Yes; a new copy, with improvements."

"Hang you!" said Levison. "Hang you!"

And he walked away. Tom Merry and Manners exchanged a grin.

"It's pretty clear," said Manners.

"Yes, rather!"

"Keep an eye on him, Tommy. I've got my films to develop, and I want to get it done before brekker," said Manners. "I've got to get the pictures done, and send them off to-day, if I can."

"Right you are."

And Tom Merry followed upon the traces of Levison, while Manners departed to the study in the Shell passage to proceed with developing the negatives he had taken the previous afternoon.

CHAPTER 15.

Manners is Mysterious.

MANNERS was busy at the open window of the study when Tom Merry and Lowther looked in just before breakfast time. There was a somewhat excited look upon the face of the amateur photographer of St. Jim's. He was placing printing frames on the window sill. Early as it was, the sun was very powerful, and the study window caught the bright rays, and the position was very favourable for printing out.

"Hullo!" said Tom Merry. "Still busy?"

"Yes."

"Got any pictures yet?"

"I've developed all the films," said Manners. "I've got some prints. What do you fellows want?"

"Brekker in a few minutes."

"Buzz off to brekker, then."

"Aren't you coming?"

"No."

"Look here, you're coming down to brekker," exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Leave those blessed photographs. They'll do any time."

"Rats!"

"I believe you're going dotty over that blessed camera of yours," said Tom Merry, laughing. "What are you excited about? You look as if there was something on."

"This photo."

"What's the matter with the photo?"

"Nothing."

"Good! Now come to brekker."

"Oh, blow brekker!"

"Aint you hungry?"

"Yes."

"Then come and grub."

"Blow grub."

Tom Merry and Lowther stared at Manners. They knew his keenness after his hobby, but they did not quite understand him now. They could see that there was something extraordinary in the picture he had placed in the printing frame and exposed to the sun's rays. But what there was specially interesting in that negative they had not the faintest idea.

"Look here," said Tom Merry. "What's it about? What are you being so beastly mysterious for? Have you accidentally photographed a murderer in the act?"

"Not exactly."

"What is it, then?"

"Something quite as interesting, if not more so, I think," said Manners. "I'll put this picture in to be fixed while we have brekker, and then you can see it."

"But what is there in the picture?"

"It struck me when I looked at it in the developer," said Manners. "I developed these films in Mr. Lathom's dark-room. When the picture came up, something struck me in the corner of the film—"

"Well, that was better than something striking you in a corner of the eye," Monty Lowther remarked.

Manners snorted.

"Oh, don't start any of your idiotic jokes now, Lowther, old man," he said. "Can't you see I'm in a regular twitter?"

"But what about?" demanded Tom Merry, mystified.

"About this giddy picture," said Manners, carefully watching the negative in the frame. "As I was telling you when that prize idiot interrupted me with a silly joke, something struck me in a corner of the negative, that I never suspected was there—something I never thought of taking in the photograph."

"What was it, for goodness sake?"

"A figure."

"What kind of a figure—Roman, or Arabic—1, 2, 3, 4, or 5?"

"Oh, don't be an ass."

"Why can't you explain?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I'll explain when you look at the finished picture," said Manners. "I'm not quite sure about it yet—but—"

Manners was staring at the picture in the frame.

"But what?"

"My hat! I'm almost sure?"

"Sure of what?"

"What I suspected."

"What did you suspect?"

"I'll tell you when you can see the picture."

Tom Merry and Lowther looked at him in great exasperation. Their curiosity was excited; but Manners evidently did not intend to gratify it yet. He took the picture out of the frame, and the chums made a forward movement. Manners waved them back, and put the photograph in the fixing solution.

"Wait a bit!" he remarked.

"Look here, you exasperating ass—"

"We'll go and have brekker now," said Manners cheerfully. "It must be ready."

"But look here—"

"Oh, let's go down! We shall be late for brekker."

The Terrible Three went down, Tom Merry and Lowther still in a very puzzled frame of mind. Manners did not vouchsafe a word of explanation. But as he sat down at the breakfast-table he glanced round at the Fourth Form table and grinned at the back of Levison's head.

Tom Merry started.

"Is it anything to do with Levison?" he demanded.

Manners grinned.

"You'll soon see!" he replied.

"Look here—"

"Wait till I show you the picture."

"You blessed chump!" murmured Lowther. "If you don't answer like a sensible Christian I'll spill my tea over your bags! Now then, is the thing in the picture anything to do with Levison?"

"Yes!" said Manners hurriedly.

"Oh, good!"

The fragment of information imparted by Manners had not enlightened the chums very much. But it made them very eager to see the finished picture. As the juniors came out of the dining-room after breakfast Manners hurried at once for the stairs. Levison turned towards the door, and Tom Merry grinned as he saw Blake and Kangaroo join him there. The cad of the Fourth was safe under watch, and Tom Merry and Lowther were free to go up to the study.

They joined Manners in the study. The amateur photographer was washing the print, and his eyes were sparkling with excitement.

"Can we see it yet?" demanded Lowther.

"Well, really it's not to be handled yet," said Manners grudgingly. "But I suppose if you're very curious—"

"What is it?" roared Tom Merry. "If you don't explain, you mysterious ass, I'll bump you over and bust your blessed camera on your napper!"

"Look here," said Manners hastily, "it's all right. It comes out as clear as anything in the picture."

"What does?"

"The extra figure!" said Manners, with bated breath. "Oh, it's ripping! I was taking a picture of the row of elms, you know. You know what's behind the elms?"

"The school wall," said Tom Merry, in perplexity.

"Yes. But what else?"

Tom Merry reflected.

"Nothing, that I know of—unless it's the school letter-box," he said. "You can see that between the elms."

"Exactly!" said Manners.

"Do you mean to say that you've got a photograph with the school letter-box in it?"

"Exactly!"

"Well, what is there interesting in that?" demanded Tom Merry.

"A jolly lot!" said Manners. "You remember when I was taking the snaps yesterday—just after you had posted Glyn's letter?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I've got a snap of the letter-box here—it comes out in a corner of the picture. I never thought of it at the time—from where I stood I never noticed it—and the chap at the letter-box never noticed me, you can be bound."

Tom Merry started.

"The chap at the letter-box?" he repeated.

"Yes, that's it!" Manners grinned triumphantly. "Talk about the camera as an aid to discovering crime! What do you think of this? You can guess how it made me jump when I saw it coming up on the negative in the developer! But I wasn't sure till I saw it printed."

"Saw what printed?"

"This figure in the corner of the picture—a chap at the letter-box—"

"Well?"

"Fishing out a letter—"

"What?" shouted Tom Merry and Monty Lowther together.

"Fishing out a letter," said Manners calmly. "He's got a line and hook, or else a bent thin wire, I can't make out which. But he's just catching the letter as it comes out. And his face is shown."

"My hat!"

"Let's look!"

Manners held up the unfinished print. Tom Merry and Lowther looked over his shoulders in keen eagerness.

There it was! Through the leafy elms the school letter-box in the old stone wall showed clearly, with a figure beside it. The face was turned, as if to scan the surroundings cautiously, as the hand drew a letter from the box; and the face came out with clear, startling distinctness.

From Tom Merry's lips, and from Lowther's lips, dropped the same name at the same moment:

"Levison!"

CHAPTER 16.

Clear Proof.

MR. RAILTON, the House-master of the School House, had gone into his study. The door he had closed opened the next moment, and Ernest Levison of the Fourth Form presented himself. Blake and Kangaroo were behind him in the passage. Levison's eyes were glinting savagely. The cad of the Fourth had made up his mind; and the juniors who were watching him were a little startled at the course he took. Mr. Railton looked at the juniors inquiringly.

"What do you want, Levison?" he asked.

"If you please, sir, I want you to help me," said Levison. "I want to post a letter containing a specification of an invention I have made—a mechanical bowler—and Blake won't let me do it."

Mr. Railton looked amazed.

"This is very extraordinary!" he exclaimed. "Come in here, Blake."

"Yes, sir!"

"Now, kindly explain, Levison," said Mr. Railton. "I have heard of this mechanical bowler; but I understood that it was Glyn of the Shell who was making it."

"So it is, sir," said Blake. "He—"

"Let Levison speak, Blake, please."

"Very well, sir."

"Glyn is making something of the sort, sir," said Levison. "But I have been at work on the idea a long time. A lot of the fellows have seen my plans, and can bear witness to that, if necessary, sir. I suspect that Glyn has seen my papers, and has copied my idea—"

"Levison!"

"I have reason for thinking so, sir. Yesterday Glyn accused me of having taken a letter of his from the postbox in the wall. He had no proof whatever; and he could not even prove that such a letter had been posted. My belief is that he made the accusation because he had seen my papers and had drawn up papers exactly like them, and wished to have a pretext ready for accusing me of what he had done himself—borrowing another chap's ideas."

"My hat!" murmured Jack Blake.

"That is a very serious accusation to make, Levison," said Mr. Railton, with a note of deep sternness in his tone.

"I can't help it, sir. Glyn and his friends have been watching me ever since. They won't let me post off my specification to the Patent Office. Glyn has written out a paper and posted it; and if mine doesn't go he gets the patent. It's the provisional protection for nine months, sir, that I'm after; and I believe Glyn has collared my idea and posted it, while these chaps are preventing me from posting my letter. I thought I had a right to complain to you, sir, under the circumstances."

Mr. Railton glanced at Jack Blake.

"What explanation have you to make, Blake?" he asked.

"It's true, sir, that we won't let him post his letter," said Blake. "He stole Glyn's letter from the box yesterday and copied out the specification—"

"How do you know?"

"If you take his paper, sir, and compare it with Glyn's, you'll find them both alike, sir, I'll answer for that."

"But Levison accuses Glyn of having done the copying."

"That's only one of Levison's lies, sir!" said Blake bluntly.

"How do you know he took the letter from the box?"

"Oh, we know he did, sir!"

"Have you any proof?"

"N-n-no, sir."

"Then you have no right to make the statement. I—"

"The letter was posted, sir; and Blagg will bear witness that it wasn't in the box for the collection. So someone must have taken it," said Blake eagerly.

"Who posted it?"

"Tom Merry posted it for Glyn, sir."

"Bring Tom Merry here."

Blake hurried out of the study. He returned in a couple of minutes with the Terrible Three, all of them looking wildly excited. Manners had an unfinished print in his hand. Levison glanced at it idly. He felt that he was in a strong position, and he cared nothing for what the Terrible Three might say. He had no suspicion that any new evidence had come unexpectedly to light.

Mr. Railton looked at the Shell fellows.

"Did you post a letter for Glyn yesterday in the school box, Merry?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And it was missing when the postman made the collection?"

"Yes, sir."

"What reason have you for suspecting that Levison took it?"

"We suspected him because he's that kind of chap, sir,"

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and he's Glyn's rival in making a mechanical bowler, sir, and—and other reasons," said Tom Merry. "But, as it turns out, sir, it's not a matter for suspicion at all. We've just got proof."

"Indeed?"

Levison smiled sneeringly.

"I'll be glad to see your proof," he said.

"Go ahead, Manners, old boy!"

"What have you to say upon the subject, Manners?" asked Mr. Railton.

Manners laid the photograph upon the House-master's table.

"I was taking photographs in the quad, yesterday, sir," he said. "When I developed my films this morning I found that the school letter-box had come out on this picture. It shows between the elms, you see."

Levison turned deadly pale. He made a step forward and raised his hand; but before he could touch the photograph Tom Merry shoved him backwards.

Mr. Railton glanced at him sternly.

"Stand back, Levison!"

"Look at the picture, sir," said Manners. "I don't think that it will leave much doubt as to whether Levison took the letter from the letter-box."

Mr. Railton carefully examined the photograph. Then he laid it down again, and his eyes turned upon Levison, with a look that made the cad of the Fourth quake.

"This photograph leaves no doubt on the subject, as Manners says," said Mr. Railton coldly. "You took a letter from the letter-box, Levison. Was it Glyn's letter?"

Levison did not speak.

"Was it Glyn's letter?" thundered Mr. Railton.

"Yes," muttered Levison, between his dry lips.

"Ah! You have a letter in your pocket, I understand, containing a specification of the mechanical bowler," said Mr. Railton. "Place it upon the table."

Levison silently obeyed.

"You will not post that letter," said Mr. Railton. "You have acted like a thief, Levison, and you will be punished. You deserve to be expelled from the school. I shall report this affair to the Head, and you will at least be soundly flogged. I am ashamed that so base a lad should be in my House. Follow me!"

Mr. Railton strode from the study, and Levison followed him slowly, with white face and dragging footsteps. He did not speak one word to the chums of the Shell.

Ten minutes later sounds of anguish were heard proceeding from the Head's study. Dr. Holmes seldom flogged; but he knew how to lay it on when it was deserved—and deserved it certainly was in Levison's case.

The Terrible Three rushed off in search of Bernard Glyn. They found him in the study, putting the last touches to his mechanical bowler.

Tom Merry clapped him on the back.

"It's all right!" he roared.

"What?"

"Levison's found out. Manners had him in a snap, boning the letter."

"My hat!"

"Mr. Railton's taken him in to see the Head."

"Serve him right!" said Glyn.

"Yes, rather!"

"How's the automatic bowler getting on?" asked Tom Merry, looking at the fearsome contrivance.

Glyn rose, with a smile of satisfaction.

"Rippingly!" he said. "I've perfected it now—no danger of anything going wrong again. I'll show you it working after morning lessons. Which of you chaps will bat against it?"

"I'll leave it to Manners," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I'll leave it to Lowther," said Manners.

"I'll make it spades," grinned Lowther. "I mean, I'll biff the blessed thing with my bat if you plant it near me!"

"Oh, rats!" said Glyn. "I'll bat against it myself."

And he did! And the automatic bowler went in perfect order; and even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy admitted that it was "all wight."

Levison's specification was never sent in. The cad of the Fourth was only too glad to let the matter drop; and he would have been glad enough if the other fellows would have let it drop, too. But that they were not likely to do for a long time to come—for many days yet general scorn and contempt were likely to be the lot of the Inventor's Rival!

THE END.

(Next Week: Another splendid, long, complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, entitled "Fighting His Way," by Martin Clifford. Please order next Thursday's issue of the "Gem" Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

A wonderful new Serial Story,
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The ALLIANCE OF THREE



A
Splendid, New, Short Serial Story.

.. By ..

A NEW AUTHOR.

A Brief Resume of the Previous Instalments.

Three friends—Bob Harding, Ralph Chesterton, and Tom Manton—who meet in Cairo, are seated on the verandah of the Hotel du Nil, when they are suddenly startled by a cry for help. They rush out and rescue a young lady, Miss Helen Fortescue by name, from the hands of five Arab thieves, thereby earning the gratitude of the lady's father, Mr. William John Fortescue, who, the next morning, hands the three friends an envelope each. The envelopes contain letters asking the three to go to a small state called Argendor on an errand of mercy. They decide to go, and prepare for the journey.

(Read on from here.)

The Comrades Come to a Decision.

"It's been a hard day's work," said Bob Harding at half-past six, as they started from the Hotel du Nil to walk to Shephard's to tell Mr. Fortescue of their decision. "But everything's done, and we're now quite in readiness for the start."

"I am curious to hear how the old chap will take our decision," said Tom, removing his panama, and mopping the perspiration from his brow. "Great Scott, if the climate's anything like this in Tecsaguay, we shall have a hot time of it in two senses!"

The day certainly had been sweltering, but now, the sun having descended below the horizon, the air felt a little less humid. The time was but a few minutes to seven when Bob, Tom, and Ralph presented themselves at the entrance of Mr. William John Fortescue's apartments. They were shown straight to his study.

He was alone, and gave them a quick glance as they entered—a glance at once scrutinising, comprehensive, and questioning. Before they could even shake hands he rose to his feet, and, with that peculiarly-characteristic habit of his, pointed his forefinger in their direction.

"Well?" he exclaimed suddenly.

"Our answer, Mr. Fortescue, is 'Yes,'" replied Bob quietly.

The old gentleman's face broke into a genial smile, and he grasped the civil engineer's hand cordially.

"Good," he exclaimed—"good! You are all agreed?"

"Yes, sir, every one of us."

Mr. Fortescue shook hands with the others, nodding his head in satisfaction. It was obvious to them all that he was immensely pleased.

"I knew it," they heard him murmur. "I knew they would go out and stop this foul work! Splendid fellows—noble fellows—"

Mr. Fortescue coughed suddenly, and turned to his table.

"It is settled, then," he exclaimed briskly. "Here, Harding, is three hundred pounds in notes and a draft on a bank at Rio de Janeiro. When the three hundred is used you can obtain more—"

"But, Mr. Fortescue," began Bob, protestingly.

"Tut-tut, my young friend!" exclaimed the millionaire, pushing the bundle of notes into Bob's palm. "I will have no 'buts.' Now say no more about it—nothing whatever! It is dinner-time, and my little girlie is waiting for us!"

He turned his back on the three visitors abruptly, and they looked after his stoutish figure as he walked to the door. Bob glanced at the other two, smiled, and followed without a word.

They found themselves in a brilliantly-illuminated dining-room, with the table tastefully laid out for five. Helen was there, and the comrades thought she looked particularly attractive in her white evening-gown. She welcomed them warmly, and made them all feel quite at home at once.

The meal was an exceptionally merry one, the conversation never once touching on the subject which was, all the time, foremost in the minds of the three young men. Mr. Fortescue had a host of amusing anecdotes to tell, and he kept the party in laughter with hardly a moment's cessation.

When the time came to depart, the visitors felt really reluctant to go. Both Mr. Fortescue and his charming daughter had been everything that was pleasant. The former, even when he said "Good-bye!" made no further comment upon the subject which the chums had come expressly to discuss with him.

"Good-night, my dear young friends," he cried, "and remember that wherever I am, you are always welcome—always! So don't forget!"

"We won't forget, Mr. Fortescue," they answered, fully understanding the inner meaning of his words. With a nod and a smile, after a very hearty handshake, the old gentleman re-entered his library, leaving Helen alone with Bob, Tom, and Ralph.

"Good-night!" she exclaimed warmly. "We have spent a most pleasant evening together, and you must come again before long."

"As soon as possible, Miss Fortescue," declared Bob, taking her dainty hand in his strong one. "We have all enjoyed ourselves immensely. Good-night!"

The other two shook her hand equally as carelessly as Bob had done. At least, it seemed careless, but in reality, knowing they would not see Helen again for perhaps two years, their grasp were both cordial and fervent.

"He staid no time for our departure," said Bob, as they walked down the Muski, "so the best thing we can do, is to go to our hotel, get a jolly good night's rest, and start by the first train to-morrow morning."

So it was decided. And at about nine o'clock the three of them, all attired in light flannels and panama-hats, boarded the train for Alexandria. Their luggage was not great, merely three medium-sized trunks. To all appearances they were a trio of light-hearted tourists, and nobody could possibly have guessed their hazardous and all-important mission.

Tom was just a little bit excited, for his was an impetuous

nature, and while the others made up their minds to enjoy the long journey, he chafed under the delay. He wanted to be in Tecsaguay—on the field of action.

The whistle blew and the train slowly steamed out of Cairo station, with its gaily-coloured throng of people of many nationalities. Tom was leaning out of the window, having a last look, when he suddenly drew his head in excitedly.

"I say, you chaps," he exclaimed, "who do you think I saw looking out of a window lower down? Why, nobody else but that scoundrelly Arab, Halil Ahmed!"

"Well, what of it?" asked the Army officer.

"Doesn't it seem peculiar? It looks very much to me as though he's following us! These Arabs don't travel by train, as a rule."

"Nonsense!" laughed Bob. "The fellow probably has no idea we're on the train; and if he has, he certainly wouldn't be fool enough to play any tricks."

And the incident was dismissed from their minds. Bob was wrong for once, however, for they were to find that Halil Ahmed was in reality on their track, that his whole mind was filled with thoughts of revenge, and that at some future time he was almost to be the cause of their undoing.

Don Carlos Castello, President of Tecsaguay.

"By Jimmy! Cairo is cold in comparison to this!"

Tom Manton gave expression to his feelings rather forcibly as he tipped his Panama further over his eyes to escape the glare of the fiery sun overhead.

"The sun's no hotter, Tom," exclaimed Ralph. "It's the closeness of the day and the absence of wind you feel so much. I don't mind admitting that my clothes are sticking to me like glue, and that I'd give all my worldly possessions for a cold bath."

The Alliance of Three were walking slowly down one of the principal streets of Rio de Janeiro. They had only arrived in the capital of Brazil an hour or so previous, and, having found a quiet hotel, were then on their way to make inquiries regarding the quickest way in which to get to Tecsaguay.

It was afternoon, and the hottest part of the day—an extremely humid day into the bargain—but Bob Harding did not stop for that. He did not mean to stay in Rio a day longer than was necessary. Their long journey was over, and there was now nothing to keep them from setting to work almost immediately. How they would do so could not be decided until they arrived at Elvasgo, the capital of the Republic of Tecsaguay.

"I mean to be out of Rio by to-morrow morning at the latest," declared Bob as they walked along. "According to the newspaper reports the atrocities lately have been worse than ever, so the sooner we are there the better it will be for Argendor."

"Rather!" agreed Tom.

"I do not mean to state for a moment that we shall make things better," went on the engineer. "Nevertheless, we are all agreed to do our very utmost to bring about the desired effect."

"The battleship is responsible for nearly everything," put in Ralph, an angry tone in his voice. "I tell you, chaps, that it will give me nothing but pleasure to send the confounded thing to the bottom!"

They found that to reach Elvasgo they would have to travel by train for a considerable distance, then alight, and proceed the best way they could, for there was no railway service, to Elvasgo at present, the line having been torn and ruined in more than a dozen places.

"Well, we shall have to manage somehow," said Bob, as they sat at tea in their hotel. "If it comes to it, we shall have to go on foot, even though it takes a week to do it."

This was looking at the worst side of things, however, for it was practically certain that they could purchase horses or mules.

The journey from Rio the following day was not an exceedingly long one, and the comrades were all feeling glad that the long delay was over—that they were at last nearing the scene of action. Somehow there seemed to be a tension in the air. Everybody was talking of the war, and looked at the three English "lords" somewhat in awe, for Tom had mentioned to someone on the train that they were bound for Elvasgo, "just to look round, and see the sights."

Arriving at the station nearest their destination, which was thirty-five miles short of Elvasgo, the adventurers alighted, their three trunks were piled up on the rough track which served as a platform, and they sought out the stationmaster.

The town being an unimportant one, this individual was stationmaster, porter, and telegraph operator rolled into one.

He bowed low before his questioners, for it was very seldom indeed that Britishers alighted at that unimportant spot.

"Now, my friend," exclaimed Tom, in perfect Spanish—he was the only one of the three who had a complete command of the language—"we have a few questions to ask you."

"I do as you command, my lords," murmured the stationmaster obsequiously, also in Spanish, which was the language used almost universally in that part of South America.

"To commence with," said Tom, "which is the best and quickest way of reaching Elvasgo?"

The man raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"Elvasgo?" he repeated. "But, your Excellency, the whole of the country round the capital is in a turmoil. Elvasgo is where the main Tecsaguayan army is situated."

"We thought the place would be interesting, and so decided to pay it a visit," returned the naval officer, wishing to give the other the impression that they were merely tourists. "Come, hurry up, if you can help us."

The Tecsaguayan gazed at the three comrades in awe.

"By the faith," he murmured, "you will be going to your death! But the road, my lord! I will tell you the most direct way."

He did so, and as Tom listened he translated it into English, so that Bob and Ralph could memorise it as well as himself.

"Ask the fellow where we can find an hotel," exclaimed Harding. "It's too late in the day to think of starting on an unknown road, and I'm fairly famished for something to eat."

"He thinks we're awfully big pots," grinned Tom, "and considers it suicide to travel to Elvasgo."

"These ignorant fellows have got an idea that there's fighting in the streets all day long," replied Bob, "while, as a matter of fact, there is no Argendorian force within twenty miles of the capital."

A few minutes more questioning elicited the information that they could find a good hotel in the centre of the town. Tom handed the stationmaster a liberal tip, upon receipt of which his gratitude could scarcely be sufficiently expressed, and the three travellers, having ordered their luggage to be sent on, made their way into the little town.

The accommodation they found at the hotel was scarcely everything that could be desired, but as they intended staying only one night, they put up with it. The landlord, having heard of their intended visit to Elvasgo, declared emphatically that they would never return alive. And they heard him referring to them as "foolhardy British madcaps, anxious to run their heads into a noose."

"There's been no fighting here," laughed Bob that night, as they retired to rest, "and the people are as nervous as kittens in consequence. By this time we are known all over the town."

"Perhaps it's as well," remarked Ralph, with a yawn, "for by the time we reach the capital the news of our coming will have preceded us. Our plan is to get on good terms with the President, and make him think we are all on his side."

"We shall be hypocrites," said Tom, as he slipped between the sheets of a somewhat hard bed; "but it's all in a jolly good cause, for these skunks here are about as bad a lot as could be found. Well, good-night, you chaps; the heat of this beastly place has made me as tired as the very dickens."

Five minutes later the three of them were asleep, and, despite the thrilling object of their mission, they rested peacefully and soundly, and when morning came were thoroughly refreshed and invigorated. They knew perfectly well that if a word of the truth leaked out—the truth that they were enemies of Tecsaguay—their lives would not be worth a moment's purchase, but, having given the impression that they were friends, they were treated with the most profound respect.

A trio of mules were purchased with very little trouble, although the owner demanded the most exorbitant prices for them. The chums paid up without a word. It would have been decidedly bad policy to haggle over the question of terms.

"Well, thank goodness, we're clear of that hole!" exclaimed Tom Manton, as they trotted over the rough track under the blazing tropical sun. Their kits were packed securely on the saddles behind them, and their mules, being fresh and hardy, were stepping it out in lively fashion.

"We shall do it in the day all right," declared Bob, as he leisurely filled a pipe. "Elvasgo is, of course, on the coast, so I hope we shall find it a little fresher there than in this part of the country."

He looked round him at the glaring, sun-scorched scrub. Dotted about could be seen clumps of forest land, but for the most part the surroundings were composed of unculti-

vated waste land, now and again interspersed by tiny brooks and rivers. The road could scarcely be dignified by that name, for it was nothing more nor less than a rough track. The main road from the Tecsaguayan capital to Rio lay in quite another direction, and they would certainly have travelled that way had they not been so pressed for time.

Of hedges there was not a sign, the tall pampas grass and stunted shrubs growing on both sides of the way, and overhead, in the cloudless sky, the burning sun glared down with unabating fierceness. The very ground seemed to radiate the heat, and the comrades knew that their journey was to be a tedious one.

After a weary day of jolting and uncomfortable riding, the sun having blazed from a cloudless sky the whole time, the three adventurers at last arrived within sight of their destination—within sight of Elvasgo, the capital of the Republic of Tecsaguay.

They first sighted the place from the top of a long hill, the time being early evening, just as the sun was beginning to lose its fiery heat. Straight ahead could be seen the sparkling blue of the Atlantic Ocean, while nearer, laying down in the hollow, on the shores of a wide bay, could be seen the city itself. By all appearances it was a fairly large place, and from here there was no sign of turmoil or warfare.

No sign, that is, except one.

That one was in the bay outside, floating gently on the comparatively still, rippling water. The Venebia was resting after one of its ghastly missions, and the comrades' eyes glittered as they saw there before them the object of their quest—the object which had caused them to travel all these hundreds of miles.

"By Jimmy!" cried Tom, who was the first at the brow of the hill. "The Venebia herself!"

"Yes," agreed Bob quietly, gazing intently before him through the transparent atmosphere. "We've reached the end of our journey at last. Elvasgo seems to be a decent-sized place, at all events. The Venebia, too, is a much larger ship than I imagined."

Tom unslung his binoculars and took a long look.

"She's a pretty boat," he exclaimed, with the air of a connoisseur, "and I wouldn't mind wagering she was built on the Clyde. I wonder how these heathens got hold of her? By Jove, look at the guns! Why, she's simply bristling with them!"

"She won't bristle long," put in Ralph grimly. "She's created more havoc already than I like to think about. By gad, Bob, it makes my blood boil! Fair fighting's all right, but this one-sided butchery is more than flesh and blood will stand!"

"It's got to be stopped, Ralph," was all Bob answered—"it's got to be stopped!"

And there was something in his tone which told the others that he meant to exert every ounce of his energy to accomplishing the work which Mr. Fortescue had outlined, and they, being Britishers, were with him heart and soul, the more so because they were both fighting men.

The last lap of the journey was accomplished quickly, for the road was downhill, and their goal within sight. As they entered the town they found the inhabitants looking after them curiously, many of them raising their hats in token of respect.

The capital, although large, was a straggling place, and the roadways were far from being perfect. The farther the visitors proceeded into the town the less they liked it. Everything was dingy, old-fashioned, and ill-kept. The inhabitant themselves appeared to be taking it very easy, lounging about the streets, gossiping in groups, and smoking their long, thin cigarettes.

Of traffic there was comparatively none. The reason for this was that the day's work was practically over, and that the citizens were in a state of continuous excitement owing to the war. Many were the bands of drunken merry-makers the comrades passed as they proceeded to the centre of the city.

"The place is nothing more or less than a dirty hole!" declared Tom disgustedly, "and the people, by the general look of them, are just about suited to their surroundings!"

The city certainly did not appear to be very clean, and Tom was quite justified in his forceful remarks. There was good reason to feel disgusted, and it would be an unpleasant task to make-believe that they were charmed by their surroundings, which, of course, they would find it necessary to do.

The President, Don Carlos Castello, resided almost in the centre of Elvasgo, his mansion being of considerable size. Not that it was by any means a handsome example of architecture. For, besides being ugly, it bore that same appearance of dilapidation which characterised almost every public building. The shops themselves were uninviting, with the exception of one or two belonging to European firms and

individuals. These stood out in striking contrast, for they looked neat, clean, and inviting.

"Of course, there's no British hotel here," remarked Tom, as they turned into the stable-yard of the most important hostelry the town boasted. "Just our luck! Still, there's no telling but what this will suit our purpose better."

"And remember this," warned Bob, "we are simply three English tourists, with plenty of money, who can't speak a word of Spanish. You understand, Tom? By doing this we shall in all probability overhear things which are not intended for our ears."

Having left their mules in charge of a stableman, they entered the hotel, a crowd of Tecsaguayans, attired in picturesque clothing and wide-brimmed sombreros, meanwhile eyeing them with frank curiosity.

The landlord proved to be a short, stout individual, bearing the name of Jose Lorenzo. He was absolutely delighted with the honour of accommodating the distinguished British lords, as they were looked upon.

The chums were somewhat pleasantly surprised to find that the good Jose was a fairly clean man, and that the rooms to which he showed them were really passable. They sat down to a hearty meal on a pleasant verandah at the back of the house, from which a splendid view of the Atlantic Ocean could be had.

The Venebia lay quiet and peaceful, and from there no one would have suspected her true character. Bob, Tom, and Ralph were quite alone, and there was no possibility of their conversation being overheard.

"Well," exclaimed Tom, gazing full at the battleship, "here we are, and there's the Venebia. The question is, how are we going to send her to the bottom? Now we're on the spot, it doesn't seem quite so easy."

"The first step," replied Bob, who was, quite unconsciously, the recognised leader of the three, "is to get on good terms with that scoundrel of a president, Don Castello. From what I heard at Rio, he's one of those cringing cowards with absolutely no humane feelings in his constitution."

"That is all very well," said Tom, "but it is no easy matter to get on intimate terms with presidents. These fellows think they are kings, and our friend here is under the impression that he is the biggest monarch on earth."

"And what we have to do," put in Ralph, "is to make him believe we think so, too. Our policy is to play a game of bluff, or, to speak plainly—"

"To do a little gentle swanking," grinned Tom, as he proceeded to light a cigarette. "Well, I'm fairly longing to get to work, to ease my feelings a little by teaching these blackguards what British fighting is like."

"I don't suppose there'll be much head-punching to do," exclaimed Bob, smiling at Tom's eagerness. "Strategy will play an important part—"

Bob paused as the door opened, and the stout figure of Jose Lorenzo made its appearance. The landlord's swarthy face was creased into an obsequious smile, and he bowed low.

"A letter has just been delivered by a servant from the palace, your Excellency," he murmured, handing an envelope to Bob, who sat nearest. "Shall the man await your answer?"

"No. I can easily send up if an answer is necessary, thank you."

"I will do as you say, your Excellency."

The proprietor, having visions of liberal payment from his British visitors, was everything that could be desired, and he backed through the door as though he had been in conversation with King George himself.

Bob tore the letter open in silence. It contained but a few words, which ran:

"The president will have pleasure in receiving the British visitors to Elvasgo at his palace at seven o'clock this evening."

"Rather short," remarked Tom, as he read the note; "but fancy it coming just as we were talking about seeing the president."

"Yes, it is something of a coincidence," replied Bob Harding. "By Jove, it is just upon six now, and we must attire ourselves in evening clothes for an occasion such as this."

"Evening clothes in this heat!" protested Tom. "Great Scott, who is old Carlos, anyhow? Nothing but the head of a tinpot little republic."

"Nevertheless, Tom, we want to make Don Castello think he is a very big man in our opinion, so must take every care to treat him with respect."

"It would be rather a good idea," said Ralph, "to call him 'sire' when in conversation. That would please him tremendously, and get him on good terms with us right away. A man of his calibre would be very susceptible to those little attentions."

"That's a good suggestion, Ralph, and well worth putting into practice. What do you think, Tom?"

Tom made a wry face.

"I shall squirm every time I say it," he exclaimed.

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"Fancy paying respect to that wriggling worm! It fairly makes a cold shiver go down my back."

In their travelling-trunks the comrades had included a dress suit apiece, and when they donned these, together with white shirts and patent leather boots, they seemed almost too grand for their surroundings, and certainly gave the impression that they were indeed members of the British peerage.

If the townspeople showed respect before, they were absolutely servile now, and gazed in awe as the trio of Britishers walked leisurely down the uneven roadway towards the "palace," as the president's unbeautiful residence was termed. They all smoked cigars, and seemed to take a great amount of interest in the public buildings and business houses. They could, of course, have hired a vehicle of some description, but preferred to walk, for the especial reason of displaying their grandeur.

Much as they disliked doing this, it was very essential, for their object was to make as big a splash as possible, and gain the respect of everybody in Elvasgo.

Although it was not yet quite dark, the palace was illuminated brilliantly, and the visitors were admitted in state by a couple of gorgeously liveried servants—so gorgeous, in fact, that they looked almost ridiculous in their flaring clothing of bright red and gold.

The entrance-hall was decorated in the same outrageous fashion, and the chums had a difficulty in repressing smiles as they were escorted to the state-room. No word was spoken, for they were apparently unable to understand Spanish.

The two flunkies preceded them with stately tread up the hall, then, arriving at the end, they faced about and bowed low. After this little ceremonial, two wide doors were opened, and the visitors found themselves in a large apartment, brilliantly illuminated by incandescent gaslight.

And there, seated in his state robes, on a slightly raised dais, was his Excellency, Don Carlos Castello, President of Tecsaguay.

The Interview with the President.

"Welcome to Tecsaguay, my lords!"

The President rose to his feet, and stood there with his hand outstretched, waiting for the chums to approach. They looked at him critically, and their first impression was decidedly not a favourable one.

He was a small man, thin and clean-shaven. His age might have been anything from thirty-five to forty, and his hair was thin at the top. It was evident to even a casual observer that he was addicted to drinking spirits, for his face was decidedly bloated. The expression on his face, moreover, and the obsequious manner in which he said the words, told the comrades what to expect.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance," murmured the President, as he shook hands. "Please seat yourselves, gentlemen, and let us have a few minutes' conversation."

"You were soon aware of our presence in Elvasgo, sire," said Bob Harding deferentially. "We hardly expected to be honoured by an interview with yourself so soon as this."

Don Castello smiled condescendingly. It was very plain that he was susceptible to flattery, and thought a very great deal of himself. He looked from one to the other of his visitors as they seated themselves in the three chairs near his own.

"No doubt you are surprised to hear me speak such splendid English," he exclaimed, with that same oily smile on his features. "I may say, I have studied your language considerably, and it gives me delight to see you out here."

"As Tecsaguay was being talked of a good deal," replied Ralph, endeavouring to smile in his usual manner—for he felt like giving this crawling President a good hiding—"we decided to pay it a visit. The climate is rather hot, but otherwise quite pleasant."

As a matter of fact Bob, Tom and Ralph hardly knew what to talk about, for while they all felt like speaking their minds, they were forced to smile and act as though they held the President in the highest esteem.

"Tecsaguay will become before long one of the most important South American Republics," declared Don Castello. "When the present war is over she will have hundreds of miles of land to add to her domain."

"Then you think Tecsaguay will win?" asked Tom.

"Think so?" exclaimed the President. "I know it, my lords, I know it! My troops are winning all along the line, and in addition to their superiority over the enemy, there is the battleship. She is our greatest acquisition!"

"I can well understand that, sire," said Bob seriously. "You will indeed be proud of your country when the present war is over. There seems to be no fighting in Elvasgo, however."

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"No; we are quite out of it here. There was an invasion a short time ago, but my soldiers very soon taught the dogs a lesson. Not one man escaped alive—and there were three hundred of them into the bargain!"

Tom's eyes gleamed for a second with anger, for the callous manner in which the President spoke made his blood boil. But he remembered himself in time, and forced a smile.

"There is nothing like strict measures," he observed. "By the by, I have seen no sign of soldiers about, so I presume the garrison is not near the town?"

Don Castello smiled in his pompous manner.

"In Tecsaguay every man is a soldier. Every citizen carries weapons about with him, and at the least sign of battle he is ready for work. This war should have been over months ago; but, after all, slow and sure is perhaps the best maxim. But perhaps you would like to smoke?"

The chums, wishing to acquiesce in all things, said they would be honoured to smoke with the President. The latter rang a bell, and a few minutes later the air was being scented by the smoke of some really excellent cigars. Don Castello had these made especially for himself, and gave them away only on rare occasions.

"You mean to stay in Tecsaguay long?" he queried.

"We have never thought of the matter," replied Bob.

"This is merely a holiday, and we shall take ourselves off as soon as the fit seizes us."

"I understand. Well, I hope you will enjoy yourselves while in the capital, for I assure you Elvasgo is a go-ahead place. Should you wish it, I will instruct one of my ministers to take you round the town."

"We shall be delighted to accept the honour," said the three, almost at once. Inwardly they felt that the minister was going to prove a bit of a nuisance.

"You will pardon my asking the question," put in the army officer suddenly, "but I am curious as to where your main army is situated, and where most of the fighting is going on?"

"You need not be in ignorance much longer, my lord," murmured Don Castello, displaying a gorgeously-decorated handkerchief. "The stronghold is situated in the mountains quite close—within four miles, in fact, and the fighting goes on along the border, which is quite a long way from here. In that stronghold I have thousands of men waiting to march into Argendor and settle the matter once for all!"

Bob felt his pulse beat a little faster.

"And when do you intend to send them to invade the other Republic?" he inquired casually, as though he had no real interest in the matter.

"My troops will start under the command of Marshal Perlado on Friday morning at dawn—that is, in four days' time. At the same hour the Venebia will start for Argendor, and will bombard several towns along the coast. By Saturday midday we shall have everything in our hands!"

"I do not doubt it, sire, if everything comes to pass as you anticipate. You will be busy, evidently."

"Busy?" echoed the President. "I shall be working from dawn till dusk. But when it is all over you must come and see me again. Indeed, I might go so far as to invite you to a grand dinner on Monday next—a dinner to celebrate our great victory."

"We shall be more than pleased to come," said Ralph quietly, "and must thank your Excellency for the invitation."

"It is an honour, I assure you," replied Don Castello, in an oily tone. "We do not often have British visitors to Elvasgo—at least, not distinguished visitors such as yourselves."

The conversation after that was of no importance, being mainly in connection with matters which did not bear on anything which interested the comrades, nor yielded any further information which would prove of material value to the furtherance of their object.

They were heartily glad when the interview was at an end, and had difficulty in repressing their looks of disgust, as they shook the President's hand. His conduct was everything that could be desired, but Bob knew perfectly well that should it suit his purpose better he would think nothing whatever of ordering them to be quietly "knifed." Their policy was to keep in his good books.

During the latter part of the conversation at the palace, they had used a considerable amount of flattery, and had left the conceited Spaniard—for Don Castello was of that nationality—in a contented frame of mind, feeling, if possible, a greater and more important man than ever.

"The fellow simply disgusts me," said Bob in his quiet way, as they walked back to their hotel. "I imagined him to be a rotter, but not such a crawling worm as he is in reality."

"By Jove, Bob, you are getting a little bit strong in

your language!" laughed Ralph. "But you are looking serious over something. What's troubling you, old chap?"

Bob looked round him across the deserted street.

"I'll tell you when we get to the hotel," he said. "There's no knowing who's listening here. The road seems deserted enough, but it's rather dark, and there's no need for hurry."

For such an important capital as Elvasgo it seemed rather peculiar that the streets should be quiet so early, for it was but little after nine. The chums found, however, after a short walk, that the quarter of the town in which their hotel was situated, showed more signs of life.

Here several shops were open, as well as numerous drinking houses. Some commotion in these latter seemed to draw no attention from the many gorgeously-uniformed police-officers who paraded the streets. To the three Britishers the

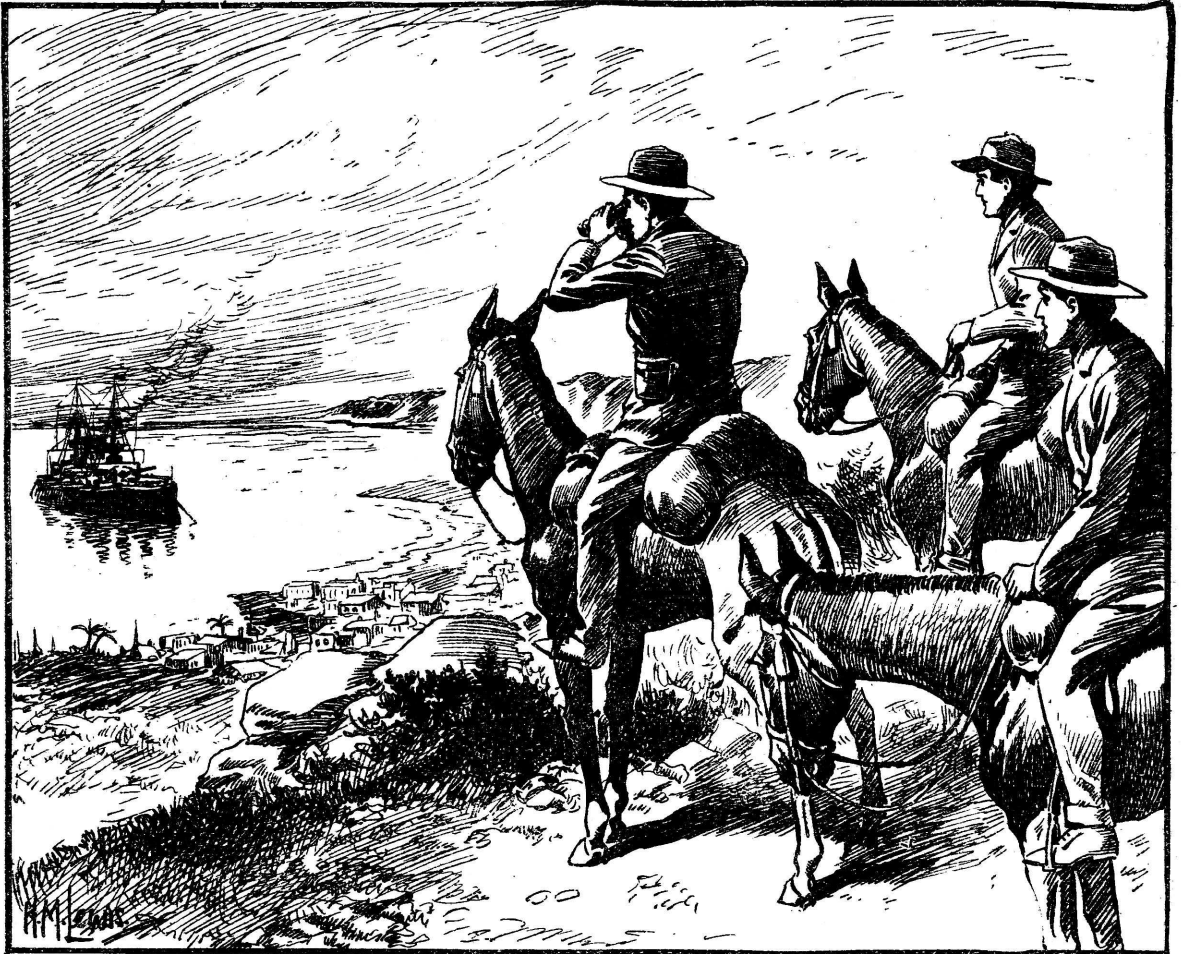
"I know that I am hungry," put in Ralph, "so if you will get us some supper, my good Jose, we shall be more satisfied."

"It shall be done at once, your Excellencies," murmured Lorenzo. "I will put before you the best I have in the house."

He was as good as his word, for twenty minutes later the comrades sat down to a really excellent repast. When this was over they adjourned to the verandah to enjoy a quiet smoke before turning in. Bob had been unusually silent during the meal, and it was plain to the others that he was thinking deeply.

"Now, Bob, let's hear what the trouble is," said Tom, as he lit a cigarette. "There's no reason why you shouldn't talk now, for nobody here understands English."

"I've been thinking," said the civil engineer—"thinking



Tom unslung his binoculars and took a long look. "She's a pretty boat," he exclaimed, with the air of a connoisseur, "and I wouldn't mind wagering that she was built on the Clyde. By Jove, look at the guns!" (See page 28.)

whole place seemed rather insignificant, and they entered their hotel with as little delay as possible.

"We can look round the place to-morrow," declared Bob, "under the guidance of that confounded minister. I suppose he'll prove to be one of the leading grocers, or publicans, or something of that sort!"

His companions laughed, and they passed inside the hotel to their own rooms. The landlord did not waste much time in putting in an appearance.

"You have seen the President, your Excellencies?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied Tom immediately. "And he appears to be a very determined sort of man!"

"He is a great man," said the landlord, in almost a reverential voice. "His Excellency, Don Castello, is the finest president Tecaguay ever had, for it was not until he was elected that the war was begun. Ah, my lords, you do not know what this means to us!"

the best way in which to attain our object. We're here on the spot now, and it's no use beating about the bush. The work's got to be done, as you two fellows know."

"Of course," agreed Ralph. "The puzzling part is, how to set about it. Our interview with the squirming President doesn't seem to have made matters much clearer."

Bob Harding puffed silently at his cigarette for a moment. "On the contrary, my dear chap," he said, "it has made a very great difference, and has given me the clue as to what will be our best method of procedure."

"Then you're sharper than I am," said Tom, laying back in his chair. "For, to speak plainly, the whole thing is as clear as mud to me."

"Look here, just think for a moment," said Bob, in his usual matter-of-fact way. "What did the President say?"

"A lot of rot for the most part."

"Can't you be serious, Tom? Carlos said that on Friday morning at dawn the Venebia would start for the coast of

Argendor. That leaves us only four days, for it will be too late after that, and the biggest massacre of the lot will have taken place, unless we prevent it. The Tezcaquayan Army can't do half so much damage as the battleship."

"There's not much time, at all events," said Ralph thoughtfully. "When it comes to plain fighting I'm in my element, but all this secret work is just a little beyond me."

"Not at all, Ralph. Our policy must be to get on the best of terms with the President, and be invited again on Thursday night—Wednesday night, if possible."

"What for?"

"Well, I've formed a plan," replied Bob—"a rough plan. I admit, but it is gradually taking shape. The main question is, how to get that invitation. But you want to know what my plan is? I'll tell you."

He did so, and Tom and Ralph were unanimous in their opinion that the idea was a first-class one—a plan which would be practically certain of success.

"By Jimmy, Bob, old man," said Tom, "it's a ripping wheeze, and will do the trick properly, if we can get that invitation. It seems essential, though, that while you're doing the work, Ralph and I must be with Don Castello."

"Of course. It might work without your presence at the palace, but if you are there it will practically ensure success. And you've got to be there, somehow or other. For the first day I reckon we've done considerably well, and vote we go to bed and sleep on it."

"It's not late yet," put in Tom, looking at his watch, "so why not go for a stroll before turning in?"

"Haven't you had enough exercise for one day?" laughed Ralph. "Still, I'm willing if you particularly wish it. What do you say, Bob?"

"I say no," said the engineer, rising and throwing his cigarette-end away. "Sleep's what we want. The trunks have to be unpacked, however, so if you like to go for a walk I'll do that job while you're out."

"Good!" exclaimed Tom. "The place I want to go to is the docks. The more I can learn about that locality the better. When it comes to the point, we shall want to know exactly where to go."

The two young fellows passed out of the room laughing, and very soon found themselves in the rough-paved street. At that moment a crowd of half-drunken cowboys were swaggering past, singing at the top of their voices. This was but one of the usual spectacles to be seen in the streets of Elvasgo, which filled with cowboys from the surrounding country after dark.

"Quite a lively time they're having," remarked Ralph. "After all, Tom, I'm enjoying this adventure much more than I thought I should. The life round here is a bit different to Cairo—eh?"

"Well, just a little," laughed Tom, as he and his companion turned down a side street which led in the direction of the harbour. "That's a ripping idea of Bob's."

"Yes, great. I can't quite see how we're to secure that invitation to the palace, though. It'll be a pity if we have to set to work without the President's own aid, because, in a way, he will be unwittingly assisting his own downfall. Hallo, what's that?"

"What's what?"

"Didn't you see somebody pass against that wall?" said Ralph, stopping in the middle of the road and gazing concentratedly to his right. "I am certain I saw a form—"

"We'll soon make sure," declared Tom, producing a neat little electric torch from an inner pocket. He touched the button, and the light cut across the dark street. For half a second it played fully upon the features of a man dressed in European clothing.

Ralph uttered a cry of surprise under his breath as the man turned and darted up the street.

"Halil Ahmed!" muttered Tom, in amazement.

Preliminary Preparations.

"Great Scotland Yard!" exclaimed Ralph, staring up the street. "What on earth can that fellow be doing in Tezcaquay?"

Tom did not answer for a moment.

"It can't be him!" he said at length, in genuinely surprised tones. "Yet I'd swear to the Arab's face among a thousand! By Jove, Ralph, there's something fishy about this!"

They stood looking at one another in the darkness, completely taken aback by this little incident. It was certainly startling to find that Halil Ahmed had followed them all those hundreds of miles. It was too startling, in fact, to seem feasible.

"We must have been mistaken," declared the Army THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 182.

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officer finally. "It's perfectly ridiculous to think of such a thing. I know these Arabs are vindictive fellows, but, hang it all, they wouldn't follow us half across the world!"

"It does seem a bit tall, I admit; but there was that same look in his eyes, and, anyhow, who would be following us about now? Dash it, he's not the only Arab in the world, and it's quite likely that chap was an ordinary inhabitant of Elvasgo!"

So the chums decided that their imagination had gone a little too far. Nevertheless, though they scoffed at the idea, the incident still lingered in their minds as they continued their walk. That one look had practically convinced them that the man had indeed been Halil Ahmed. Yet their better judgment told them that they must have been mistaken.

"Well, this is a rotten show, and no mistake!" exclaimed Tom, when they arrived at the docks. "My word, the atmosphere is just a little pungent into the bargain! If ever I saw a one-horse place, this is absolutely it!"

And with that emphatic remark, the naval officer turned on his heel and strode back the way he had come. He had good reason to feel the way he did, for although he had often heard that the South American ports were not exactly ideal spots, he was quite convinced that Elvasgo was unequalled for dinginess and odour.

They made their way back to the hostelry with no loss of time, and arrived just as the customers were being turned from the saloon in more or less of a confused state. The passage which led to their own quarters was dark and deserted, and they paused for a moment as they heard the sounds of voices proceeding from behind one of the thin walls which were, in reality, merely wooden partitions.

"Wait a moment, old man," whispered Tom. "I think those chaps are talking about us. I'll listen a moment."

The two stood perfectly still, and it was quite easy for Tom, who understood Spanish, to distinguish what was being said. The voices belonged to Jose Lorenzo, the landlord, and his wife.

"They will pay well, Jose, you may be sure," the latter was saying. "For it is quite certain they are important personages. Otherwise, the President would not request an interview so soon."

"Oh, yes," replied Jose, "they have plenty of money. I do not like Britishers as a rule, but their purses are not to be despised. If they stay here any length of time, they will see the end of the war, for I hear the end is drawing near."

"What's he saying, Tom?" whispered Ralph.

"Shut up!" replied his companion hurriedly. "I'll tell you afterwards."

"The President is a clever man," said the landlord's wife enthusiastically, "and it is remarkable how he makes all his plans."

"Ay, indeed! The marshal, however, has charge of the forces. His Excellency meets him every day, I am told, and they make their plans together. It is very seldom Senor Perlado enters Elvasgo, for the President travels to the garrison every evening. But it is late—"

"Yes, and our guests are still out. At least, two of them are. Have they said what time they will arise—?"

Tom crept back to the front door, and made a pretence of entering. He walked heavily on the stone floor, and talked to Ralph in quite an unnecessarily loud tone.

"It's all right," he said, when they got to the sitting-room. "I didn't want Jose to know that we'd been listening."

"Well, what did he say?" asked Ralph, sitting down and proceeding to take his boots off. Bob had evidently gone to bed. Tom told his companion what he had overheard.

"There's nothing in that," said the Army man, with a yawn. "Jove, but I feel pretty tired! Hallo, what's up?"

Tom had suddenly thumped the table rather forcibly, and was now staring at Ralph with some excitement in his eyes. He had evidently been struck by an idea.

"By Jimmy," he said, in a low voice, "the very thing! Come and find Bob, and I'll hear what he has to say."

They entered the bed-room which had been allotted to them—a large apartment containing three separate beds—and found that the engineer had already slipped between the sheets. He looked up sleepily as they entered.

"You've come at last," he said, with a yawn. "Get your clothes off, and put the light out. What's up, though? Anything happened?"

He had seen the flushed expression on Tom's face, and sat up in bed with a look of inquiry in his eyes. Tom did not waste a moment, but told Bob the conversation he had just overheard.

(A splendid, long instalment of this thrilling serial story next Thursday. Please order your copy of "THE GEM" Library in advance; price One Penny.)

A Thrilling Tale of Modern Adventure on Land and Sea.



By ROBERT W. COMRADE.

Conclusion.

Kingston never hesitated a second, but continued climbing upwards until his knees were on a level with the porthole. The latter was one of the large variety, quite pretentious enough to allow him to pass through. He had climbed so quietly that Mount-Fannell never had a suspicion. Suddenly, however, he received a shock, followed immediately by a second shock, the latter being by far the most paralyzing. He had been reading and smoking, when, with startling abruptness, he heard a squenching thud behind him.

As he had been in the cabin alone, he started, and turned quickly. The next second he uttered a cry of absolute terror, and his face turned to a deathly pallor.

The figure before him was sufficient to startle any man, for Kingston, with his dripping clothes and straggly hair, looked by no means a prepossessing sight. But to Mount-Fannell the shock can better be imagined than described. Only a few days previously he himself had seen Frank Kingston's form bound, and thrown into the Thames. The following day Milverton had examined his dead body. Yet here he was, dripping, and—

Mount-Fannell uttered another cry, this time more like a moan, and sank to his knees.

"Good-evening, Mount-Fannell!" exclaimed Kingston, in a terribly stern voice. "I expected something of this kind when you first saw me, for, doubtless, you take me for a ghost? Let me tell you at once that I am very much alive, and that my day of reckoning has come. The game is up, Chief!"

"Good heavens!" murmured Mount-Fannell hoarsely. "What is the meaning of this? You startled me, and— He gained confidence rapidly, and then stepped forward. "Frank Kingston!" he exclaimed, with a curse. "So you weren't dead, after all! Great powers, I might have guessed it from a man such as you. What a fool I was not to have made certain for myself!"

"Yes, you were, rather," replied Kingston calmly. "I may as well tell you, Chief, that I have come here merely on pleasure, just for the sake of giving you a talking to before you are taken away!"

"Taken away!" repeated Mount-Fannell furiously. "What do you mean?"

"Precisely what I say. At the present moment there are two tugs approaching from the mainland, and they carry, as their cargo, a number of police-officers, including Sir Nigel Kane himself. Your plan is foiled, and before you can do any damage every man aboard this vessel will be in the hands of the police!"

Mount-Fannell stood there silent and motionless for the space of ten seconds.

Then he seemed to suddenly take leave of his senses, for his eyes blazed with defiance, and he crouched back like a tiger at bay.

"So you think you've done me—eh?" he snarled. "You think I'm going to be foiled at the last moment like this! Bah! You take me for a fool! You see this switch? One turn of that means that a dozen battleships will be instantly blown to atoms. I am now going to turn that switch!"

He moved his finger as he spoke, and a click sounded. Kingston watched with a contemptuous smile as the Chief stood there with an expression on his face, more like a devil's than a human being's. The silence was broken by a scornful chuckle.

"I think it is you who takes me for a fool!" exclaimed Kingston quietly. "Before I came aboard I cut every one of the wires, and—"

He was interrupted by a perfect shriek of wild frenzy, and he looked with surprise as the Chief twirled round and turned

another switch. It was plain to see that Lord Mount-Fannell, under the stress of the moment, had taken leave of his senses. He gave utterance to a maniacal laugh.

"Ha, ha, Kingston!" he said, in a low, hoarse voice. "You may have foiled me, but I have now come to my part, you understand? There was one wire you did not sever, and that is the wire that is going to be your end! I turned a switch just now, and that set fire to a fuse in the magazine, immediately below this cabin. The apartment is stored with hundreds of the most terrible explosives, and every man aboard this ship will be blown to atoms! Ah, you pale!" he added, with a triumphal sneer, as Kingston stepped back in genuine alarm.

It was plain to see that the Chief did not know what he was doing. He sprang forward and grasped hold of Kingston. The latter, with all his great strength, found Mount-Fannell's little figure to have suddenly become possessed of the most amazing strength.

Only for a moment, however, and then Kingston slowly forced the madman from him and flung him far across the cabin.

Kingston was aware of a knocking at the door, but he took no notice. At last he was able to see his way clear, and in one clean, magnificently-judged dive, he was clean through the port-hole and into the water outside. He rose to the surface instantly, and struck out as he had never done before in his life.

He cast one glance behind him after he had swum fifty yards, and was surprised to see the figure of Lord Mount-Fannell hanging face downwards through the porthole. Without a doubt he had endeavoured to follow Kingston, but had somehow caught himself while in the act. As a matter of fact, he had guessed the truth exactly. Lord Mount-Fannell's waistcoat was firm on an iron hook which protruded from the woodwork. And he was in such a position that it required careful manipulation to extricate himself. The Chief, in his madness, could not do this, and he struggled in vain for perhaps twenty seconds.

And then the end came.

With a roar that could be heard for miles round the Unicorn's magazine exploded. And so terrible was the force that the whole vessel was blown into a thousand pieces. She sunk like a stone, and as the force of the explosion was downwards and outwards, there was scarcely one atom of flying debris, for the magazine was below the waterline.

Kingston, at the moment of the explosion, was clutching hold of the Dart's rail. In a second he was dragged aboard, flung rather than helped down the companion by Gray, who followed him immediately afterwards. The manhole was clamped down not a second too soon. For the terrific wave caused by the explosion lifted the little Dart like a feather, and flung it down helpless into the mass of foam.

"Yes, my dear Gray, it is indeed a marvellous thing that we escaped with our lives," remarked Frank Kingston calmly, as he and Carson Gray sat in the former's rooms at the Hotel Cyril. "As I anticipated the instant I heard the explosion, not one man who was on the Unicorn escaped with his life."

"And so, in one swoop, the remainder of the Brotherhood was wiped out!" exclaimed the detective. "By Jove, Kingston, it was an exciting time while it lasted, that night last week. And now you are the talk of the whole of Britain, while the papers are full of nothing but your marvellous exploits."

"They are exaggerating them grossly," smiled Kingston. "And I really shall have to make complaints to the newspaper proprietors."

Carson Gray puffed at his cigar.

"Tell me," he said, "now that your work against the Brotherhood has come to a conclusion, what do you mean to do? I can scarcely imagine a man like you, Kingston, settling down to a hum-drum life in England. And big-game shooting or foreign travel doesn't seem, to my mind, to exactly suit you."

"Really?"

"Yes, really, Kingston," replied Carson Gray seriously. "You're cut out, from head to foot, to be a detective, and although I'm saying this—for, of course, as a detective I should instantly be in the background—against my own interests, I don't hesitate a moment to tell you the truth. You've got to be a detective, Kingston—simply got to be!"

Kingston smiled in his old languid manner.

"My dear Gray," he drawled, "the prospect you are outlining certainly appeals to me, but before I give you any definite answer to your question, I am going to pay a visit to Dolores. There is a certain matter I wish to discuss with her, and should the interview prove satisfactory, I will then revive this matter and give you a final answer."

And Carson Gray understood exactly.

THE END.

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NEXT

"FIGHTING HIS WAY"

BY HARRY CLIFFORD

OUR NEW WEEKLY FEATURE

**Advice and Information.**

If any of my readers are in want of friendly advice or require some special information I am quite willing to reply to their request on this page, providing, of course, that the subject is of sufficient general interest to warrant publication. Readers should address their letters or postcards to: "The Editor, THE GEM LIBRARY, 23, Bouverie Street, London, E.C." and should not expect to see an answer to their inquiry until at least a month has elapsed from the date of sending the letter.

Next Thursday's Story.**"FIGHTING HIS WAY."**

Martin Clifford has written a story under this title which will, without a doubt, touch the heart of all Gemites. It deals with the struggles of Dick Brooke, who is a day boy at St. Jim's. His efforts to keep his thoughtless father and a good mother and at the same time pay his own fees at the old school will be more than appreciated by all readers of the GEM.

When you order your copy of the GEM containing "Fighting his Way," will you do your Editor a good turn and order at the same time a copy for your own special friend? When your chum reads the splendid tale of Tom Merry & Co., I have no doubt that he will become a regular subscriber.

Special Announcement Next Week.

I shall have something to say in our next issue of a wonderful New Serial Story, by Reginald Wray, which will appear in a week or two's time in THE GEM LIBRARY.

From an Old Subscriber.

L. L., of Kingston-on-Thames, is an old subscriber, who takes in the GEM for his son to read, because, in his own words, "it is of the kind that a boy can read." He writes to ask me at what number Vol. V. will finish, as he is having his copies bound. I have pleasure in giving my good friend the information he requires. There are fifty-four numbers to a volume, new series, and Vol. V. began at No. 134. It will therefore end with No. 187.

A Message for some Special Friends.

I have received particularly interesting and most welcome letters containing many helpful suggestions from readers who sign themselves as follows:—"Great Admirer," Darlington; James Harris, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia; Leslie Bull, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia; W. Smith, and R. Williams, of Whangaree, New Zealand. All the above have my very best thanks, and I shall be delighted to hear from any or all of them again.

A Personal Request.

I so frequently ask my readers to order their copy of the GEM in advance because I do not like to hear of my friends suffering disappointment on being told by the newsagents that the GEM is "sold out." Therefore I again ask you to place an advance order with your newsagent, and at the same time you might ask your special chum to become a regular subscriber to either the GEM or our companion paper, the "Magnet" Library.

Camping Out.**No. 3.—PITCHING THE TENT.**

If you make up your mind to have a water-side holiday you will find it necessary to choose some weeks*beforehand where you will go. Take a map showing the rivers and canals. You can buy one of any county for sixpence. Prick off your route, and decide on a starting-point. Then, if you have no knowledge of the place, write to the clerk of the station bookstall there for a local paper. In it you will be sure to find the address of a boatbuilder and hirer, and you can write and make terms with him for the hire of boat.

Of course, it is by far the best to go down beforehand and make arrangements personally; but if this is not possible matters can generally be settled by correspondence.

Those who do not care about rivers, but prefer moorlands, such as those of North Wales, Yorkshire, Devon, or Cornwall, have two alternatives before them—either to hire a van and two strong horses, or to make a permanent camp. The latter is, of course, by far the cheaper method, and in such a camp, pitched preferably near a trout stream and in the midst of beautiful scenery and fine, bracing air, a most enjoyable holiday can be spent.

There is a great deal more than is generally imagined in the selection of a camping-ground, and in making the preparations for the night's rest. Nothing is more miserable than a night under canvas when the wrong site has been chosen and the proper precautions for keeping dry and warm have not been taken.

Do not wait until dark to choose your camping-ground. Whatever your haste, stop in good time, so that your preparations need not be hurried. In selecting your site, the first essential is a perfectly level piece of ground.

Presuming you are travelling by boat it must be remembered that on still nights a heavy mist usually rises from the water. This is not healthy to breathe for hours at a time. It is also chilly. Therefore, try to find a spot seven to ten feet above the water.

Avoid that part of the river where the towing-path runs. It is most annoying to be disturbed by tramping horses.

If the night threatens to be windy it is well to make an effort to find a clump of trees which will give shelter.

Do not forget when pitching the tent the enormous contraction that moisture exercises on rope. Wet ropes will pull the tent-pegs out of the ground with absolutely irresistible force. If there is any likelihood of rain all the guy-ropes should be slackened before turning in. Another most essential point, when there is a prospect of rain, is to dig a trench all round, close to the sides of the tent. This will catch the heavy drippings from the eaves, and prevent the ground inside becoming sodden. Provided with

• a good ground-sheet,

there is really no reason why air mattresses or cots should be carried. It is almost always possible to find plenty of material to form a soft and luxurious bed. Grass, hay, leaves, and twigs, small branches of evergreens, heather, bracken, and a score of other natural products can be laid in a thick layer upon the ground, and, with the waterproof sheet over, perfect sleeping accommodation is assured. However, it is usually quite possible to sleep quite soundly upon the sheet spread on bare turf. In the latter case, it is a tip worth knowing that to scoop a small-hole in the ground for the thigh-bone to fit in increases the comfort of the sleeper.

(Another of these interesting articles next week.)

THE EDITOR.

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