D'Arcy the Ventriloquist!

A Screamingly Funny Story of the Chums of St. Jim's

— Complete Stories for ALL, and Every Story a GEM. —

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The Pillar-Box Mystery!

The Schoolboy Ventriloquist causes a sensation in the street!

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COMPLETE STORIES FOR ALL, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

D'ARCY THE VENTRILOQUIST!

A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Jack Blake grasped the elegant form of the swell of St. Jim's, threw him across his shoulder like a sack of coke, and rushed down the passage. "Ow! Ow, you wottah!" shrieked D'Arcy. "Gweat Scott! You'll bweak my beastly neck!" (See Chapter 1.)

CHAPTER 1.
Very Queer!

"GWOOH!"

"Great Scott!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Gowwooooogh!"

Tom Merry looked into Study No. 6 in some alarm. Tom Merry was in flannels, and had his bat under his arm, and he was passing Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage, on his way downstairs when he heard that strange and alarming sound proceeding from the study. It sounded like the anguished utterance of a Channel passenger in the last stage of seasickness.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth was the only fellow in the study. His study-mates, Blake and Herries and Digby, were already on the cricket-ground. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and there was a Form match on between the Fourth and the Shell. Arthur Augustus ought to have been on the ground by this time along with the rest of the Fourth Form eleven; but he evidently wasn't. He was in the study, apparently busily occupied, and his occupation made Tom Merry's eyes open wide in amazement.

Arthur Augustus was standing before the glass, with his back to the door, so he did not see Tom Merry, and he was too deeply engrossed to hear him. Tom Merry saw the back of his head, and the reflection of his face in the glass; and the expression upon the reflected face was terrific.

D'Arcy's mouth was wide open, his face was unusually red, his eyes seemed to be starting out of their sockets, and all his energy was thrown into squeezing out that alarming sound from his throat.

"Gwwwwoooogh!"

The captain of the Shell stared at him blankly.

"Gowwwoop!"

The expression on the reflected face was now agonising.

Tom Merry let the end of his bat fall with a clump on the floor, and the sudden crash startled Arthur Augustus. He swung round from the glass in alarm.

"Bai Jove! I didn't see you there, Tom Mewwy!"

"What on earth are you doing?" Tom demanded, in

Next Wednesday:

"THE SECRET OF THE ISLAND!" AND "PLAYING THE GAME!"

astonishment. "Are you trying to crack the looking-glass?"

"Certainly not!"

"Have you got something in your throat, then?"

"Nothin' of the kind!"

"Then what's the little game?" exclaimed Tom, puzzled and a little alarmed. "What on earth are you making those faces in the glass for?"

"I was pwactisin'," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Practising looking like a Guy Fawkes' mask?"

"No, you ass! I was pwactisin' my voice."

"Your—your voice! That gurgle?"

"It wasn't a gurgle!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "I was twyin' to get my thwoat wight, so I had to see the weflection in the glass. I'm goin' to surpwise the fellows soon."

"You'll surprise them if they see your chivvy like that!" agreed Tom. "Surprise them into convulsions, I should say. What are you driving at, anyway?"

"It's a little secwet at pwesent," said Arthur Augustus. "When I get it goin' bettah I'm goin' to give you all a surpwise. Pway wun away now. You are intewwuptin' me."

"Time somebody interrupted you!" said the captain of the Shell. "Don't you know we're just going to pitch the stumps, fathead, and you're playing for the Fourth?"

"Bai Jove, I'd forgotten!"

"Forgotten the Form match! Well, you ass!" said Tom Merry, in measured tones. "You utter, crass, frabjous, burbling——"

"Pway wing off, deah boy! I shall not be able to play this aftahnoon. You might mention to Blake that he can put somebody else in my place in the team. I have a wathah important engagement."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, I'll tell Blake," he said; "but I expect he'll come here and yank you out by your neck, all the same."

"I should uttahly wefuse to be yanked out by my neck, Tom Mewwy!"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry went down the passage, swinging his bat. As he departed he heard that extraordinary sound from the study once more:

"Gwoooh! Gwoooah!"

Arthur Augustus was evidently at it again.

"Must be right off his giddy rocker," Tom Merry muttered. "Can't be sane, to make faces and rows like that. Must be quite potty."

There was a blaze of sunshine in the old quadrangle of St. Jim's. Most of the juniors were gathered on the cricket-ground already. Tom Merry hurried across, and Manners and Lowther, his chums, greeted him with the chummy remark:

"You fathead! You've kept us waiting!"

"Sorry! I stopped to look at a lunatic," said Tom Merry.

"Have you seen Gussy?" called out Blake, coming out of the pavilion. "We're all here excepting Gussy."

"Yes; I'm sorry to tell you that he's gone quite off his dot," said Tom sorrowfully. "It has come at last."

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Blake. "Where is the duffer?"

"In the study. He says you're to excuse him this afternoon, as he's got an important engagement."

Blake snorted.

"I'll excuse him—I don't think!" he remarked. "I'll important engagement him! He's been making a giddy mystery about something the last two or three days—writing silly letters and getting silly answers, and keeping them dark!"

"The ass has been writing to Greyfriars School," remarked Digby. "He had a letter this morning, with their postmark, in the handwriting of that fat chap—I forget his name—who came over here once with their eleven—chap in goggles. I know his fist. And Gussy kept the letter dark. He's up to something."

"He can be up to anything he likes, so long as he doesn't cut the cricket," said Blake wrathfully. "Wait a minute! I'll go and fetch him."

The juniors grinned as Jack Blake started off towards the School House. Blake was skipper of the Fourth Form eleven, and he hadn't the slightest intention of allowing his aristocratic chum to stand out of the match, engagement or no engagement. The rest of the eleven were ready—Herries and Digby and Reilly and Hammond of the School House, and Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Redfern, and Owen of the New House. Plenty of fellows of either House could have been found to take Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's place; nearly all the Fourth Form were cricketers. But Jack Blake didn't mean to be left unceremoniously in the lurch at the last moment like this. He started for the School House with wrath in his countenance.

He jumped with surprise as he came hurrying along the Fourth Form passage. From Study No. 6 proceeded a repetition of the sound that had so startled Tom Merry of the Shell:

"Gwooooooogh!"

"My only hat! He can't be ill!" exclaimed Blake. "He was all right at dinner. What the dickens——"

He ran into the study in hot haste. Arthur Augustus's face, reflected in the glass, wore an expression of anguished suffering. But it cleared up to normal as he turned round and gazed inquiringly at Blake.

"What are you up to?" demanded Blake. "We're waiting for you."

"Didn't Tom Mewwy give you my message——"

"Yes."

"Then you are awahe that I am not playin' this aftahnoon. I have a wathah important engagement to keep with Bunth—I—I mean, I have a wathah important engagement——"

"Come on!"

"Weally, Blake, you have heard me wemark that I am not playin'——"

"Are you coming?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then I shall carry you," said Blake determinedly. "You can't stand out of a cricket match simply to make silly faces in a looking-glass. Come on!"

"Wats! Did you hear me as you came in?"

"Of course I did, fathead! What were you gurgling for?"

"I wasn't gurglin'; I was pwactisin'. Where did the sound seem to pwoceed fwom that you heard?"

"From your silly head, of course," said Blake, quite puzzled. "Where should it have seemed to proceed from?"

"You are suah it did not seem to pwoceed fwom undah the table?"

Blake looked at him hard.

"I don't know whether you're dotty, or whether you're only pretending to be dotty, Gussy," he said; "but I know you're coming down to the cricket. Shut up, and come!"

"I wefuse—— Hallo! Hands off, you wottah! Blake, you ass—— Weally—— Yawoooh!"

Blake did not heed. He grasped the elegant form of the swell of St. Jim's, threw him over his shoulder like a sack of coke, and started from the study. The voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rang out in wild expostulation as Blake rushed down the passage with him.

"Oh! Ow, you wottah! Welease me! I shall stwike you, Blake! I shall hit you, you silly duffah! Gweat Scott! You will bweak my neck! Bai Jove! Ow, wow!"

Down the stairs they went at top speed, Arthur Augustus's legs and arms flying wildly in the air. Then out into the quadrangle, followed by a yell of laughter from all the fellows who caught sight of them.

CHAPTER 2.

Bolted!

TOM MERRY & Co. waited for Blake, gazing towards the distant School House in expectation. Their expectations were not disappointed.

"Here he comes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

A yell of laughter greeted Blake, as he came panting on the cricket-ground, with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sprawling over his shoulder, his arms and legs fluttering wildly in the air.

"Here the duffer is!" gasped Blake. "I've brought him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

He allowed the panting swell of St. Jim's to slide to the ground. D'Arcy dropped into the grass with a bump, and sat there, gasping and groping wildly for his eyeglass.

"Bai Jove! You uttah wuffian!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The cricketers, yelling with laughter, surrounded Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's still sat in the grass, too breathless to rise.

"Why, the fathead hasn't changed yet!" growled Herries. "Bundle him in, and make him change."

"I wefuse to change."

"Now, look here, Gussy——"

"We're waiting," Monty Lowther remarked. "I don't want to hurry anybody, but it gets dark at night, you know!"

"We're ready," said Blake. "I'll toss with you, Tom Merry. If we bat first, there'll be plenty of time for Gussy to change. If we field, we'll all help him to change, and it'll be done so quick, it will make his hair curl."

Tom Merry laughed, and tossed the coin.

"Head!"

"Right!" said Tom. "You bat! Gussy, old chap, you've got heaps of time to change."

"I wefuse——"

"Chuck him into the pavilion," said Blake. "You watch the door, Herries, and you go and fetch his togs, Dig."

"Right-ho!"

"If he tries to get away, hit him as hard as you can, where you like."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass! Hands off! Ow—wow!"

Arthur Augustus bumped down into the dressing-room, and Herries closed the door on him, and kept watch outside. Blake and Figgins went to the wickets to open the innings. The voice of Arthur Augustus was heard from within.

"Hewwies, deah boy, let go the handle!"

"Rats!" said Herries.

"I weally cannot play to-day!"

"Rubbish!"

"If you chawactewise my wemarks as wubbish, Hewwies, I shall give you a feahful thwashin'."

"You'll have to squeeze through the keyhole to do it, then!" chuckled Herries. "Get your silly clobber off. Dig will be back with your things in a minute or two."

"I wefuse to take my clobbah off. I have a most important engagement for this aftahnoon, Hewwies. I am meetin' a chap fwom Gweyfwiahs."

"You're jolly well not," said Herries grimly. "You're playing cricket."

Arthur Augustus's voice came pleadingly through the keyhole.

"Hewwies, old man, do listen to weason. As Gweyfwiahs is such a long way off, I have asked Buntah to meet me halfway, you see, and if I don't go, he will be hung up at Lyndale Station waitin' for me."

"Well, he ought to be hung," said Herries unfeelingly. "What are you meeting that fat bounder for, anyway?"

"That's a little secwet."

"Well, you can keep the secret, but you can't keep the appointment," grinned Herries. "You can send Gunter—I mean Bunter—a wire, if you like. He'd get it all right at the station."

"I wefuse to send him a wiah. I am goin' to see him. It's awf'ly important. I say, Hewwies, old chap——"

"Scat!"

"You uttah beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice was heard no more. Evidently he realised that it was useless to plead to the stony-hearted Herries. Herries kept watch and ward, with one eye on the door, and one on the cricket-field. Blake and Figgins were starting the innings, and Kangaroo of the Shell was bowling to Blake. There was silence in the dressing-room.

Digby came back into the pavilion at last, with D'Arcy's cricketing things in a bundle under his arm.

"Here you are!" said Dig.

"Right-ho! Here's your things, Gussy!" shouted Herries.

There was no reply.

"Obstinate ass!" growled Herries. "Call one or two of the chaps here, Dig, in case he makes a rush when we open the door."

Digby called in some of the cricketers. Reilly and Kerr and Redfern came in, and they all stood ready to stop a rush on the part of the swell of St. Jim's when the door was opened. Then Herries threw the door open.

"Now, Gussy——"

Herries broke off, and glared round the room in astonishment. It was empty. The window was wide open, however.

"Gone!" yelled Herries.

"Stole away!" chuckled Kerr. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"He can't be gone far!" exclaimed Dig. "The ass! We'll collar him yet! If he's going out, he must go back to the School House for his hat. He can't go miles away without a hat."

"Come on!" Herries exclaimed.

They started at a rush for the School House. But Arthur Augustus was not there. Study No. 6 was drawn blank, and he was not in the dormitory. His silk topper was seen in its usual place.

"The bounder!" yelled Herries. "He's gone out without his hat! But the silly ass said he was going to Lyndale—that's a thousand miles off, more or less. He can't go there hatless, the howling lunatic!"

"Let's see if he's gone out," said Redfern.

"Come on!"

They ran down to the gates. Taggles, the porter, was sunning himself outside his lodge. They hurled breathless questions at Taggles.

"Have you seen D'Arcy?"

"Have you seen a hatless maniac?"

"Has he gone out?"

"Answer, can't you, Taggy—quick!"

Taggles removed his pipe from his mouth in a leisurely manner. He did not like being hurried, and he did not mean to hurry.

"Master D'Arcy!" he repeated reflectively.

"Yes, yes! Have you seen him go out, without a hat?"

"Yes," said Taggles.

"Oh crumbs! How long ago?"

"About six minutes," said Taggles calmly. "P'r'aps seven. I wouldn't swear to a minute, Master Herries. Which I asked him if he's forgotten his 'at, and he said he would have time to drop into the hatter's for a new one before the train went."

"And glad of the excuse for getting a new topper, you bet!" grinned Redfern.

Herries ran out into the road, and glared towards the village. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was out of sight. He had lost no time.

"Might catch him at the hatter's," grinned Kerr. "When Gussy gets among silk hats, he forgets time and space. He may lose the train while he's selecting a topper."

Herries hesitated, but shook his head.

"We're wanted to bat," he said. "They're yelling now—there's a wicket down. I'm next man in, too."

And Herries darted away to the cricket-field. Jack Blake was out for four runs. The Cornstalk had disposed of his wicket. Blake looked at Herries in surprise as he came up breathless, with the other juniors at his heels.

"You're next in, Herries," he said. "What have you been chasing about for, you duffer? You want your wind for taking runs."

"Gussy's gone!"

"Gone!" yelled Blake.

"He scuttled out by the window, and cleared off without his hat. He's going to buy a new one in Rylcombe, he told Taggles." And Herries took his bat, and went down to the vacant wicket, leaving Jack Blake furious.

"Oh, the cheeky bounder!" exclaimed Blake. "The awful nerve, to clear off, against his captain's orders. We'll simply massacre him when he comes back."

"He's gone to Lyndale to meet a chap from Greyfriars," said Digby.

"The crass ass! What does he want to meet a chap from Greyfriars for? That's his blessed secret, I suppose. We'll teach him to keep secrets from his uncles, and slope off when he's wanted to bat!" growled Blake. "Find young Kerruish. He can go in."

Kerruish, the Manx junior, was in the crowd, and he was glad enough to bat in the place of the missing Fourth-Former. Kerruish's opinion was that the team was decidedly improved thereby.

But Jack Blake was not to be placated. He was cricket skipper of the Fourth, and his authority had been disregarded, and he intended that the mutineer should suffer for his sins when he returned to St. Jim's; and, to judge by Blake's expression, the punishment would be very severe—at the very least, something lingering, with boiling oil in it!

CHAPTER 3.
In the Nick of Time.

"ANOTHER ginger-pop, please!"

"Yessir."

"And some more jam-tarts—a dozen!"

"Yessir."

A fat junior, whose little fat nose was adorned with a very large pair of glasses, sat at the buffet of Lyndale Station. He had a straw hat pushed on the back of a round, bullet head. Before him, on the marble-topped table, was the debris of a considerable feed. The fat youth's name was William George Bunter, and he was the ornament of the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars School. In intervals of "feeding his face" the fat junior glanced towards the doorway on the platform, as if in expectation of an arrival. At intervals, also, he glanced up at the clock. He had been feeding steadily for more than half an hour, and though his

appetite was not giving in, he was slackening down a little. Every time the waiter came to his table there was a perceptible increase of reluctance in his manner, and it was not difficult for Billy Bunter to guess that the man in evening-dress was beginning to get restive. Bunter's little bill amounted to quite a little sum by that time, and the waiter was not quite satisfied.

Once Bunter had turned out his pockets, as if in quest of money, and all he had turned out consisted of a penny, a halfpenny, a return-ticket to Friardale, a chunk of toffee—in which was embedded a pen-nib—and a piece of string. Assorted as those articles were, and useful for various purposes, they would not have been of much value towards settling Bunter's little bill; and the waiter was suspicious that he had to do with what he would have called a "bilker."

As a matter of fact, he was quite right.

Billy Bunter, of the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars, was a born bilker, and he was running up a large account, with nothing but a penny and a halfpenny, and the other articles enumerated, with which to settle it. Unless the person he was expecting should arrive, Bunter was in a decidedly awkward position.

"The duffer!" Bunter muttered, as the waiter departed for the ginger-beer and jam-tarts. "He said four, and it's a quarter-past four now. If he doesn't turn up——"

Billy Bunter turned quite cold at the thought, though it was a warm afternoon. He calculated his chances of dodging out of the buffet without being captured, in case of dire necessity. But there was hardly anybody in the place, and the waiter had plenty of time to look after Bunter, and when he was not bringing him refreshments he posted himself between Bunter and the door, as it were carelessly. He had observed Bunter's glances, and followed his mental calculations with the ease that came of long practice in dealing with all sorts and conditions of "bilkers," young and old, big and little.

Each time that the unquiet waiter came hovering near the table William George Bunter gave him a fresh order—a fresh order being an equivalent to cash, in Billy Bunter's opinion.

"Oh, the ass!" murmured Bunter again. "Why don't he come?"

The waiter set down the ginger-beer and the jam-tarts, and waited. Being a waiter, it was of course his business to wait; but Bunter would have preferred him to wait somewhere else, and without that significant expression upon his face.

"Thank you!" said Bunter.

The waiter coughed.

"Ahem! I'll have another ginger-pop," said Bunter.

"Yessir."

The waiter brought the additional ginger-pop, and waited.

Bunter's cheeks grew a little red. He knew what the waiter was waiting for, but it was of no use offering him three-halfpence.

"Lemme see. How much is that?" said Bunter, starting on the tarts, to make sure of them in case of trouble.

"Eight shillings and sixpence, sir."

"Very good. Bring me some buns—make it an even ten shillings," said Bunter, with dignity.

"Ahem!"

Bunter affected not to hear the cough, and the waiter slid off, and consulted in a whisper with the young lady behind the bar. Both of them glanced towards Bunter frequently, while the whispered colloquy went on, and the buns did not arrive.

The Greyfriar junior finished the jam-tarts, and washed them down with the ginger-beer. He was feeling almost satisfied now, so far as eating went, but he was not at all satisfied with regard to the waiter. And the waiter was still more dissatisfied. Billy Bunter glanced at the clock again.

"Nearly half-past! If that ass D'Arcy doesn't come——"

Billy Bunter rose from his seat, seeing that the waiter's back was turned. The waiter whipped round like lightning, and Bunter sat down again, making a feeble pretence that he had only been changing his position on the chair.

"Eight-and-six, sir!" said the waiter firmly, hovering over the table, with a cold, fishy eye fixed accusingly upon the fat junior.

"Yes, I know," said Bunter. "Bring me those buns."

"Yes, sir. Shall I take the money for them now?"

"I'll pay when I've finished," said Bunter, in a dignified manner.

"Yessir."

The waiter departed with great slowness, and came back with a plate of buns. He slammed them down on the marble top of the table.

"Ten shilings altogether, sir."

"Very well; you needn't wait."

Bunter blinked haughtily at the waiter through his big spectacles.

"I'm expecting a friend here," he condescended to explain. "I shall want some more when he comes. I'll settle for it altogether."

"Excuse me, sir, would you mind settling now?" said the waiter deliberately.

Bunter seemed to become suddenly deaf.

"Put the buns over here, please," he said.

"Would you mind settling now, sir? Ten shillings, please!" said the waiter, raising his voice a little, and keeping the plate of buns on his side of the table.

Billy Bunter cast a hurried glance towards the door. There was no sign of the swell of St. Jim's yet. Would he never come?

"If you please, sir!" said the waiter. "Ten shillings!"

"Yes; exactly. All right!"

"I'm waiting, sir!"

"Oh, the ass!" groaned Bunter inwardly. "Why don't he come? I was depending on him! Why don't the frabjous idiot come? How on earth am I to get rid of this chap?"

"Ten shillings, please!"

The waiter's manner was growing grimmer and grimmer. He knew now that he had to deal with a "bilk," but he did not know that he had to deal with the ventriloquist of Greyfriars. Billy Bunter's ventriloquism had often been of use to him. It was, as a matter of fact, his being a ventriloquist that had caused this appointment with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's. But the fat junior's curious gift had never been of so much service as now.

"Waiter!"

It was a sharp and angry voice, and seemed to proceed from a stout old gentleman seated in a corner, with a glass of beer before him and a newspaper held up before his face.

"Yessir! Coming, sir!"

The waiter left Bunter's table, and Bunter heaved a sigh of relief. The old gentleman did not look up from his paper. He was deep in a most important matter—the chances of Mr. Welshem and Mr. Diddlem, the rival candidates for the vacant Parliamentary seat of Slowcome. The waiter coughed.

"Yessir! Beer, sir?"

"Eh?"

"What can I get for you, sir?"

"Nothing."

"You called me, sir."

"What? Nonsense! I didn't call you! Don't bother!" said the stout gentleman testily; and he plunged again into his political article.

The waiter retreated, and came back towards Billy Bunter. But he had not reached Bunter when the sharp, peremptory voice rapped out again:

"Waiter! Waiter!"

The waiter gasped, and simply flew back to the stout gentleman.

"Yessir!" he gasped.

"What do you want?" exclaimed the stout gentleman, glaring over his paper at the unfortunate waiter. "What do you keep on bothering me for?"

"You—you called me, sir!" stammered the waiter feebly.

"I did not call you!" roared the stout gentleman. "And if you bother me again I'll call the manager. Get away!"

The waiter almost tottered away. He glanced at the young lady behind the bar, and tapped his forehead significantly, quite convinced that the old gentleman was mad. Billy Bunter grinned, but the grin faded from his fat face as the waiter bore down on him again. Bunter had started on the buns in the interval, and they were considerably reduced in number. As he was not able to pay for anything at all, Bunter thought he might as well go the whole "hog."

"Ten shillings, please!"

"Waiter!" came a snappish voice from the direction of the old gentleman in the corner. But his time the waiter turned a reaf ear. He did not intend to be snapped again.

"Waiter!"

"Yes, you can go on 'owling, you hold howl!" murmured the waiter under his breath. "But I ain't a-comin', not if I knows it!"

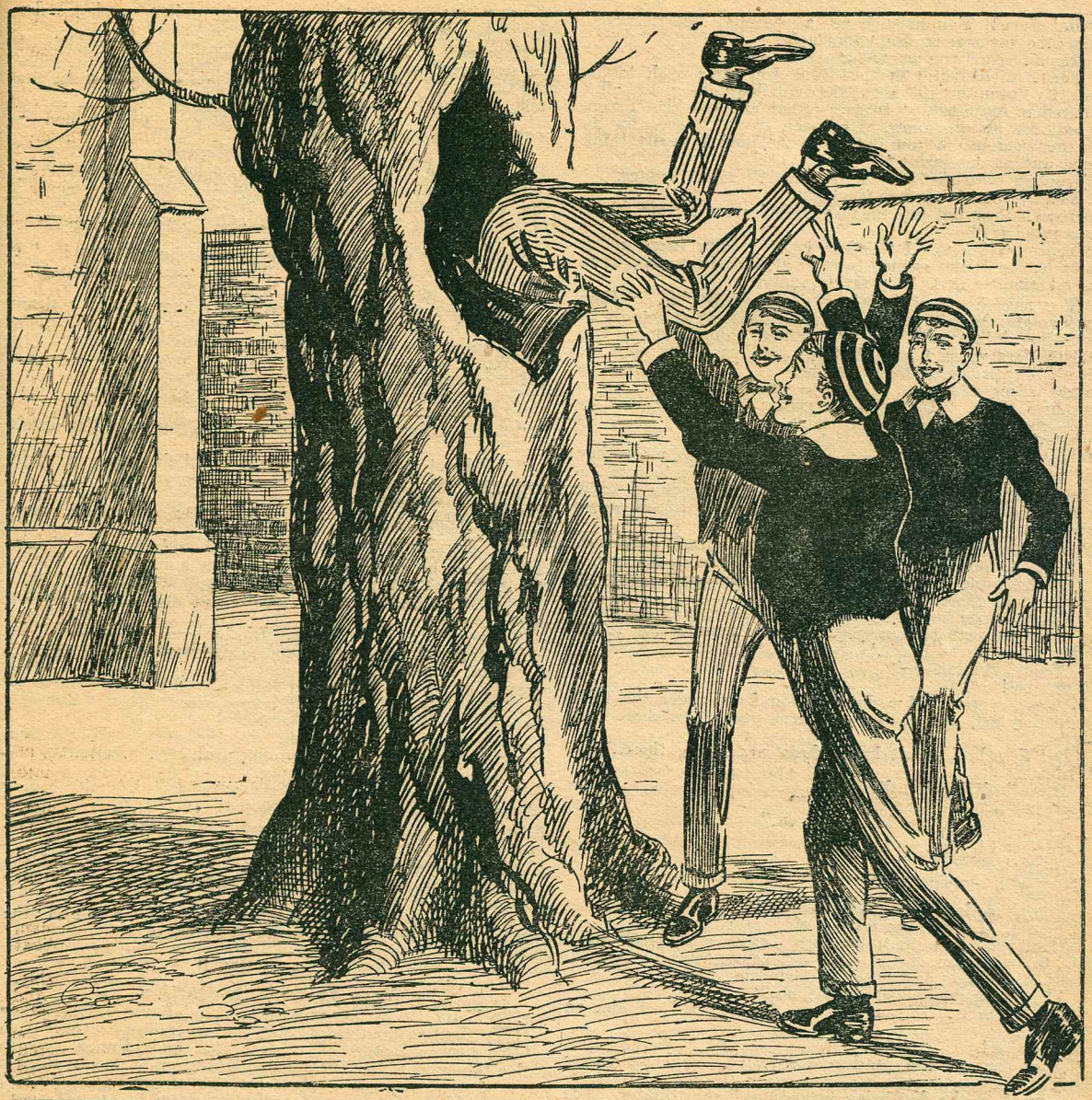
"I'll have another ginger-pop, please," said Bunter.

"Not till you've settled for that little lot, you won't, young gentleman," said the harassed waiter, whose temper was beginning to give way. "You pay up!"

"You are impertinent," said Bunter, with all the dignity he could muster. "I shall complain to your manager, fellow!"

"Fellow yourself," said the waiter angrily; "and if you don't pay hover ten bob at once, I'll call the manager myself!"

Bunter cast a desperate glance towards the door. Then a fat smile of satisfaction irradiated his face. In the doorway appeared a slim and elegant figure, in Etons that were the last word in cut and style, and a silk topper that rivalled the sunshine in its lustre. It was DA'rcy at last.



D'Arcy was suddenly seized from behind by the New House juniors. In a twinkling his legs were in the air, and in the grasp of Figgins & Co. he was sliding head first down into the hollow of the tree. "Ow! Welease me—dwag me out!" shrieked D'Arcy. "You fwightful asses, what are you up to?" *(See Chapter 10.)*

"This way, D'Arcy!" called out Bunter.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in.

"Glad to see you, deah boy," he said, shaking hands with the fat junior from Greyfriars. "I twust I haven't kept you waitin'."

"Oh, don't mench!" said Bunter. "It's all right now you've come. You'd better have some refreshment after your journey."

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy," said D'Arcy, sinking into the seat opposite Bunter. "I will have some gingah-beeah and a scone."

"Ginger-beer and a scone, waiter."

"Ten shillings," said the waiter, in reply.

Billy Bunter blinked dubiously at Arthur Augustus.

"I've left my money behind, by oversight, D'Arcy," he explained hurriedly. "Would you mind settling the little bill? I'll send you a postal-order for the amount."

"Certainly, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus opened an elegant little purse of Russian leather, revealing an array of sovereigns and half-sovereigns, the mere sight of which made Bunter's mouth water, and brought a great increase of respect into the manner of the waiter. Arthur Augustus extracted a sovereign, and dropped it on the table.

"There's your money, my man," said Bunter loftily; "and you can bring me a dozen more jam-tarts and two more gingers. You don't mind, D'Arcy? I'll settle for the lot to-morrow—ahem!—or the next day."

"Not at all, deah boy."

And the waiter slid away with the sovereign, and the order was fulfilled immediately.

And while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy partook of a little light refreshment in his elegant manner Bunter made a fresh inroad upon the tarts and the ginger-beer, growing happier and stickier with every mouthful.

CHAPTER 4.

A Worried Waiter.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY finished his light refreshment, and politely waited for Billy Bunter to finish. Bunter was a bad second. But at last he leaned back in his chair with a grunt of contentment.

"I feel better now," he announced.

"Bai Jove! You must have a splendid constitution," Arthur Augustus remarked admiringly.

"Ahem! Now you wanted to see me——"

"Yaas! Evah since the last time you came ovah to St. Jim's I've been thinkin' about the ventriloquism, on and off," said Arthur Augustus. "I have wathah an ideah that I have the gift for it, you know. I've been twyin' it accordin' to your instwuctions in your lettah to me, and I weally think it was wathah successful."

"Holding your throat as I explained?" asked Bunter.

"Yaas, pwactisin' befoah the glass."

"Good! And did you make your voice come from where you wanted it?"

"Yaas, I think so. I twied to make it come fwom undah the table, but Blake seemed to think it came fwom me, when I asked him," said D'Arcy rather ruefully.

"You need heaps of practice," explained Bunter. "Then if you've got the gift, you find yourself suddenly able to do it. That's how it was with me. The fellows chipped me no end at Greyfriars when I was starting; and now they chip me when I play tricks on them, the beasts! You must learn to imitate voices, of course. Listen to 'em carefully, and try to reproduce them. I'll keep on giving you instructions by letter—charging you only expenses."

"It's awfully good of you, deah boy!"

"Don't mench," said Bunter loftily. "I'd do more than that for a fellow I like. You'll find yourself able to ventriloquise all of a sudden some day. I've been playing a game on this blessed waiter. The rotter thought I wasn't going to pay him, you know. Me!"

Arthur Augustus could not help feeling a little surprised. It seemed to him that the waiter had been right on that point, and Bunter's indignation was a little superfluous. However, he made no remark.

"I'll show you how it's done," said Bunter, blinking round the buffet through his big spectacles. "I'll make that rotten waiter sit up for his cheek.'

"Weally, Buntah——"

Gr-r-r-r-r!

It was the growl of a dog, coming from under the table where they sat, and Arthur Augustus pushed his chair back hastily.

"Bai Jove! I didn't know there was a dog there!" he exclaimed.

"There isn't," grinned Bunter.

"Gweat Scott! Was that you?"

"Yes. Shut up, and let me get on."

"Yaas, but——"

Gr-r-r-r! Bow-wow-wow!

"Waiter!" yelled Bunter.

"Yessir!"

"There's a dog here. Turn him out!"

"Yessir! I didn't see a dorg, sir," said the waiter.

"Don't you turn that dog out!" came a snappish voice from the direction of the stout old gentleman's newspaper, behind which he was buried. "That's my dog!"

"The young gentleman objects, sir!"

"I don't care! If you turn my dog out, I'll set him on you!"

Gr-r-r-r-r-r!

"You 'ear wot the gentleman says, sir," said the waiter helplessly.

"I insist on the dog being turned out," said Bunter. "If it's his dog, let him take it away from under this table!"

The waiter crossed over to the stout gentleman. That individual glared at him, greatly incensed at this fresh interruption.

"Excuse me, sir——"

"Well?" snapped the stout gentleman.

"If you want your dog in here, sir, will you call him? The young gentleman objects to him being under his table, sir."

"My dog! What dog?"

"Your dog, sir."

The old gentleman lowered his paper, and stared at the waiter across it freezingly.

"I have no dog," he said. "What do you mean?"

"B-b-but you said it was your dog, sir," babbled the unfortunate waiter.

"What! Are you out of your senses? I did not speak!"

"Oh!"

"My belief is that you are intoxicated!" said the stout gentleman fiercely.

Gr-r-r-r-r!

It was a savage growl under the stout gentleman's chair, and he jumped to his feet in great alarm.

"Take that dog away!" he shrieked.

"Your own dog, sir——"

"It isn't my dog. I haven't a dog. I hate dogs!" shrieked the stout gentleman. "The brute was going to bite me! Take it away!"

"I—I can't see him," stammered the waiter, peering under the table and the chair. "'E—'e's gone, sir!"

"Nonsense! I heard him there this moment!" exclaimed the stout gentleman, and he seized his umbrella from the table and thrust it fiercely under the chair, and swung it under the table. "Shoo! Shoo! Get out, you beast!"

"There ain't any dog there," said the waiter helplessly. "The place seems to be 'aunted."

The stout gentleman stooped, and glared, but failed to discover a dog. He gave the waiter a fierce glance, as if he considered that unfortunate individual responsible for both the dog and the disappearance of the dog, and marched furiously out of the buffet. The waiter fanned his harassed brow.

"Where can that dorg have gone to?" he murmured. "I 'eard him—I 'eard him plain. Where is that beastly dorg?"

"Oh, you're drunk!"

The waiter spun round, towards a young man in a straw hat who was sipping lemonade at the bar, and exchanging sweet nothings with the young lady in attendance there.

"Wot's that?" said the waiter. "Who's drunk? I'll thank you not to pass sich remarks on me, sir!"

The young man turned his head and stared at him.

"Did you address me?" he asked.

"Which I did address you, sir, and if you says I'm drunk ——"

"I did not say you were drunk," said the young man, in astonishment. "It looks to me as though you are, though."

"Which you said——"

"Nonsense! I did not speak. Go away and don't bother!"

The waiter tottered to a chair and sank down. Things seemed to be proving too much for him. Billy Bunter grinned, and prepared for further experiments, but Arthur Augustus leaned over the table and tapped him on the arm.

"Pway chuck it, deah boy. It's too wuff on the chap," he said. "It's wotten—I—I mean, pway chuck it!"

"Well, the beast ought to sit up, for doubting whether I was going to pay him," said Bunter. "I'll teach him to be uncivil to a gentleman! I'll get up a row between him and the girl behind the bar. What?"

"Pway don't do anythin' of the sort," said Arthur Augustus hastily. "Let's get out, deah boy. Waitah!"

"Yessir!" groaned the waiter.

"I am sowwy you have been so wowwied," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust you will accept this!"

It was a five-shilling piece, and the waiter's eyes opened wide. There was no doubt at all about his accepting it.

"Thank you kindly, sir! Good-afternoon, sir!" said the waiter, much comforted, though still hopelessly puzzled by the mystery of the dog.

And Arthur Augustus marched Billy Bunter out of the buffet before he could play any more tricks.

CHAPTER 5.

Very Valuable Instruction.

BILLY BUNTER grinned as they left the station. They had an hour before they had to catch their respective trains homeward, and in that hour Bunter was to give the swell of St. Jim's personal instruction in the difficult art of ventriloquism. Bunter's idea of giving instruction semed chiefly to show off what he could do to D'Arcy's admiring eyes. At Greyfriars, the ventriloquist of the Lower Fourth was very much sat upon. When he played ventriloquial tricks on the juniors, they hammered him without mercy by way of reward. His genius had no scope at all at Greyfriars. Now that he was in a new quarter he was inclined to spread himself.

"I'll give you some samples, old chap," he said.

"Yaas; but I want some instwuction——"

"The best kind of instruction is to watch me do it," said Bunter. "Now, look here! Just you watch!"

Outside the station was a pillar-box—a very large box that was much used. A man was dropping a letter into the opening in the box as the two juniors came out of the station. He was about to turn away after dropping in the letter, when the sound of a deep groan came from the orifice. The man gave a jump.

"Great Scott!" the juniors heard him ejaculate, and he turned back to the pillar-box, and tried to peer into the opening.

Groan!

Two or three passers-by heard that groan, and a crowd began to collect.

"There's somebody inside the pillar-box!"

"Listen to him!"

"Good heavens! How could he have got in?"

"Help!" came feebly from the pillar-box. "I'm suffocating in here! Help!"

The crowd increased in numbers, and there were exclamations of horror and pity on all sides. How the unseen one had come into the pillar-box was a great mystery, but if he was there, there was no doubt that he was in very close and uncomfortable quarters. In two or three minutes the crowd was so thick that no one could pass, and a burly policeman came shouldering his way through.

"Pass on! Pass on 'ere!"

"There's somebody inside the pillar-box, constable."

"Nonsense! Pass on!"

"Help!"

The policeman gave a jump. He was a big, red-faced constable, with a thick moustache of a fiery ginger colour. His manner was important, but all the importance faded away from him as he heard that wailing cry from the pillar-box.

"Good 'evings!" he exclaimed. "It—it sounds as if ——"

"Help! I'm suffocating!"

"Stand back there!" exclaimed the constable, waving his hand. "Let me speak to 'im! Now, you in there! 'Ow did you get in?"

"Help!"

"You ain't no right to be in there," said the constable. "It's agin the law!"

"Help! I'm dying! I was attacked last night by a policeman, and put in here in an unconscious state!" moaned the voice.

"Oh lor'!"

"Great Scott!"

"What a shocking outrage!" exclaimed the stout gentleman who had been in the buffet, and who was foremost in the excited ground. "My poor fellow! Can you hear me?"

"Yes! Help!"

"What was the man like who attacked you?" demanded the stout gentleman, with a suspicious glance at the astounded constable.

"A big, fat policeman with a ginger moustache," came, in expiring tones, from the pillar-box. "I am fainting! I cannot speak again!"

And, true enough, the voice was heard no more. The throng round the pillar-box cast threatening glances at the big policeman, whose description had been so faithfully given by the unseen speaker.

"It's him!"

"It's that constable!"

"Ruffian!"

"Pway come away, you ass!" murmured Arthur Augustus, dragging Bunter out of the crowd. "Heah comes a postman, and when he opens the box——"

The two juniors beat a retreat, Bunter chuckling gleefully. A hundred people or more were crammed round the pillar-box now, and there were two or three policemen. It was time the ventriloquist made himself scarce.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, as he hurried Bunter away. "I shall be quite satisfied when I can thwow my voice about like that, Buntah. Now you can give me some instwuction."

"Right-ho!" said Bunter. "Come into this bun-shop."

"But——"

"Forty minutes before the trains go, and they both go at the same time," said Bunter. "Ten minutes to get back to the station. That gives us half an hour. Time for a little refreshment first."

Arthur Augustus stared. He would have supposed that Bunter had already had enough refreshment to last him until he got back to Greyfriars that evening. But apparently he was mistaken.

"Lemme see," said Bunter thoughtfully, as he sat down in the bun-shop. "I owe you the little loan to settle with that waiter."

"Pway don't mench——"

"That's all right. I'm expecting a remittance to-morrow, and I'll settle it then," said Bunter. "In fact, I'll meet you here again next half-holiday, if you like, and give you some more instruction. What I was going to say is, you may as well lend me a quid now, and I'll settle it all together."

"Certainly, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus produced the quid; though he could not help feeling that his ventriloquial instruction from Bunter was growing expensive—especially as he had not received any instruction yet.

That Billy Bunter could dispose of a sovereign's worth of eatables, after his exploits in the station buffet, seemed incredible to D'Arcy; though he had seen Fatty Wynn perform some wonderful things in that line at St. Jim's.

But Fatty Wynn's powers faded into absolute insignificance beside William George Bunter's.

For twenty minutes Bunter ate and drank steadily, and there was only a shilling change from the sovereign when he had finished. Then he rose with an effort to his feet. His face was shiny and somewhat sticky. His breath came hard and laboured.

"Now about the instwuction," said D'Arcy gently.

"I—I feel rather—rather fagged," said Bunter heavily. "I think I'd better have a bit of a walk in the open air first."

"Come on, deah boy."

Billy Bunter leaned on D'Arcy's arm as they walked out of the bun-shop. They walked towards the station, and Bunter's progress was slow. Even he felt that he had overdone it a little.

"Let's go into the buffet," he said, when they reached the station.

Arthur Augustus regarded him blankly.

"You—you're not hungwy again!" he gasped.

"Well, I could take just a snack before I start," said Bunter.

"Gweat Scott! I—I mean, all wight."

They entered the buffet. Billy Bunter expended the last shilling, and slowly devoured the proceeds, Arthur Augustus watching him as he might have watched some curious animal feed at the Zoo.

"Now I feel better," said Bunter, when the last crumb had vanished.

"Yaas. Now about the instwuction——"

"Ahem!" Bunter looked at his watch. "Train goes for Courtfield in ten minutes. If I miss that, I sha'n't get back to Greyfriars at all. And you don't want to miss your train to St. Jim's. We've got to get to our platforms, too."

"Yaas, but——"

"Lemme see, we arranged terms for instruction by post," said Bunter thoughtfully. "You pay the exes——"

"Yaas."

"And you hand over a half-guinea for the instruction?"

"Yaas."

"Well, hand it over, then," said Bunter. "You don't mind my mentioning it, do you? Short reckonings make long friends, you know. If you forgot it you'd have to send it by post, and I don't want to bother you."

"But I have alweady handed you——"

"That was a loan," explained Bunter patiently. "I'm going to pay that out of my postal-order to-morrow. This is a business transaction."

"Oh!"

Arthur Augustus silently extracted a half-sovereign and a sixpence, and passed them to Bunter. The fat junior slipped the coins into his pocket.

"Thanks!" he said. "Nothing like being businesslike, you know. It saves lots of trouble in the long run. Hallo! Time we ran for the train. We shall lose it."

"But the instruction——"

"Good-bye, old fellow," said Bunter, shaking hands heartily with the swell of St. Jim's. "I've got just time to get to my platform. Drop me a line, and I'll meet you here again next half-holiday, and give you another lesson. Good-bye!"

And Bunter dashed off.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in dismay. Bunter disappeared down the crowded platform. "Bai Jove! I weally think I might as well have stayed at home, and played in the Form match, and not made the fellows so watty. Bai Jove!"

And, somewhat disconsolately, Arthur Augustus found his way to his platform, and climbed into the train for Rylcombe, and settled down for his long journey to St. Jim's. He could not consider his afternoon's excursion, upon the whole, a success. On the journey home he made one attempt to imitate Bunter's performance in the buffet at Lyndale. There was one other passenger in the carriage, and Arthur Augustus essayed to make the gentleman believe that there was a dog under the seat.

"Gw-r-r-r-r!"

The gentleman did not look under the seat for the dog. He looked across the carriage at Arthur Augustus, with an expression of concern.

"Are you ill, my boy?" he asked.

Arthur Augustus turned red.

"Nunno!" he stammered. "I—I'm all wight."

"You were making so strange a face," said the gentleman, puzzled, "and you made such a queer groaning noise."

"Did I?" said D'Arcy feebly. "You—you don't think there's a dog undah the seat, sir, do you?"

The gentleman looked at him fixedly for some moments, and D'Arcy read in his eyes the thought that the junior was mad. The swell of St. Jim's felt his face turning crimson. At the next station the passenger hurriedly changed carriages.

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"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "It doesn't seem to have been much of a success; but if at first you don't succeed, twy, twy, twy again. I'm jolly well goin' on twyin' till I'm a ventwiloquist like Buntah, and then I'll give them a surpwise at St. Jim's."

And that prospect somewhat comforted him, though, as he neared the old school, he felt a considerable amount of uneasiness as to the greeting he would receive from Jack Blake and the rest of the junior cricket eleven.

CHAPTER 6.

In the Inquisition.

TOM MERRY was the first to spot the swell of St. Jim's when he came into the School House. Arthur Augustus was looking a little fatigued and dusty after his long railway journey, and he would gladly have escaped to the dormitory to clean up; but it was not to be.

"Here he is!" called out Tom Merry. "Here's the giddy prodigal."

"Collar him!"

Arthur Augustus made a rush for the stairs. Blake and Herries and Digby were rushing upon him from the common-room. They allowed him to reach the Fourth Form passage uncaptured, because they were freer to deal with him there, out of the ken of masters and prefects.

There they ran him down, and collared him. Blake and Herries seized him, and backed him up against the wall of the passage.

"Now, you ass——"

"Now, you fathead——"

"Pway welease me, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus plaintively. "I am wathah tired, you know—too fatigued altogethah to thwash you."

"Narrow escape for us!" grinned Blake. "But I'm not too fatigued to thrash you, which is more to the point. Do you know you left the eleven in the lurch?"

"I'm sowwy. I told you I had an important engagement. I twust you licked the Shell boundahs, deah boy."

Blake snorted.

"They beat us by two wickets!" he growled.

"Bai Jove! I suppose it was only to be expected, as I was not there——"

"Rats! If you'd been there they'd have beaten us by six or seven wickets," said Blake. "It's only on principle that we're going to slaughter you for bolting. You've got to learn to obey your skipper."

"Undah the circs.——"

"Where have you been, and what did you go for?" asked Tom Merry. "I hope it isn't another case of falling in love, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't be an ass! I wefuse to explain! Pway welease me, Blake——"

"You'll explain, on the spot," said Blake. "If you've got a good explanation to give, we may let you off with a bumping."

"I wefuse to be bumped——"

"Otherwise," said Blake sternly, "you will be boiled in oil. Now, then, explain—what have you been meeting that fat bounder Bunter for?"

"I wefuse——"

"You can't keep a secret from your kind uncles," said Monty Lowther, with a solemn shake of the head. "Gussy, let me implore you——"

"Pway don't be widiculous, Lowthah——"

"We know what Bunter met you for," said Lowther. "He met you to extract cash from you. We know him. But what did you meet him for? You must have had some object besides lending him money."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Very well!" said Blake, with a sigh. "I'm sorry! I would spare him for his tender years, if possible, but he is determined to be made an example of. Bring him into the study."

"I wefuse—— Oh!"

Arthur Augustus was brought into the study. The Terrible Three, and Blake and Herries and Digby, all had hold of him, so he had not very much choice about the matter. And five or six more juniors were crowding round to help.

"Lay him on the table," said Blake solemnly. "Gussy, you are to regard yourself as being in the inquisition at the present moment."

"I wefuse to wegard——"

"Lay him out, spread-eagle," said Blake. "This is where the unfortunate victim is put to the torture. Shut the door, Reilly. We don't want the whole giddy House to spot us in the nefarious work. Blindfold the victim."

"I decline to be blindfolded!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, struggling in the grasp of the grinning juniors who held him spread-eagled on his back on the study table. "I wefuse to submit to anythin' of the sort!"

"Are you going to reveal the dread secret?"

"It is not a dwead secwet, you ass, and I wefuse to say a word."

"We all know what a young rotter that fellow Bunter is," said Blake. "We can't have you cutting cricket-matches, and going out to meet well-known rotters, without explaining afterwards to your kind uncles."

"You uttah ass——"

"Blindfold him! The tablecloth will do."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwooh—wooh—wooh!"

"Better be blindfolded, Gussy, and not look upon the fearful preparations," said Blake. "Besides, the inquisition often blindfolded its victims. I trust that we shall not have to torture you to death, but we must do our duty. Put the poker in the fire, Dig."

"The—the poker!" ejaculated Dig.

"Yes, ass. How can we torture him without a red-hot poker?"

"Oh, of course!" Digby thrust the poker into the fire. Arthur Augustus made another ineffectual effort to break away.

"You uttah wottahs, I know perfectly well that you are only wottin'," came in muffled tones from under the tablecloth. "I wefuse to say a word. I shall thwash you all wound pwesently."

"Is that poker red-hot?"

"Not quite."

"Stir the fire, then."

"You feahful wottahs!" gurgled Arthur Augustus, as he heard the fire being stirred. "If you do not welease me, I——"

"You'll stay where you are," said Blake. "Quite so. Now that poker's hot enough. Where will you have it, Gussy? Name the place!"

"I wefuse to have it at all!" shrieked the swell of St. Jim's. "I know you are only wottin', and you cannot scare a D'Arcy with your wot! I wegard you with despision—I mean, contempt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Try it on his head," said Lowther. "That's the tenderest spot—the softest, anyway!"

"Good! Don't wriggle your head, Gussy," said Blake, pulling the poker noisily from the fire, and then laying it down quietly in the fender, and picking up a cricket-stump. "You don't want to get the hot iron on your ears, do you? Keep your head still while I torture you, you ass! They never allowed all this fuss to be made in the Inquisition!—The victims there always played the game!"

"Welease me! I——"

"Will you keep your head still?"

"Certainly not," said D'Arcy, whose head was wagging wildly under the folded tablecloth. "I wegard you as an uttah wottah, Blake! Keep that wed-hot pokah away! I know you are only wottin', but it might touch me by accident. Keep it away!"

"Well, if you won't keep your head still, I'll try it on the tip of your nose," said Blake. "It's your own funeral!"

He tapped the tip of D'Arcy's nose, pulling back the tablecloth for the purpose, with the end of the cricket-stump.

A shriek of anguish broke from the swell of St. Jim's. His imagination had been worked on to the extent of making him believe, for a second, that the red-hot poker had touched his aristocratic nose.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-wow! Murdah!"

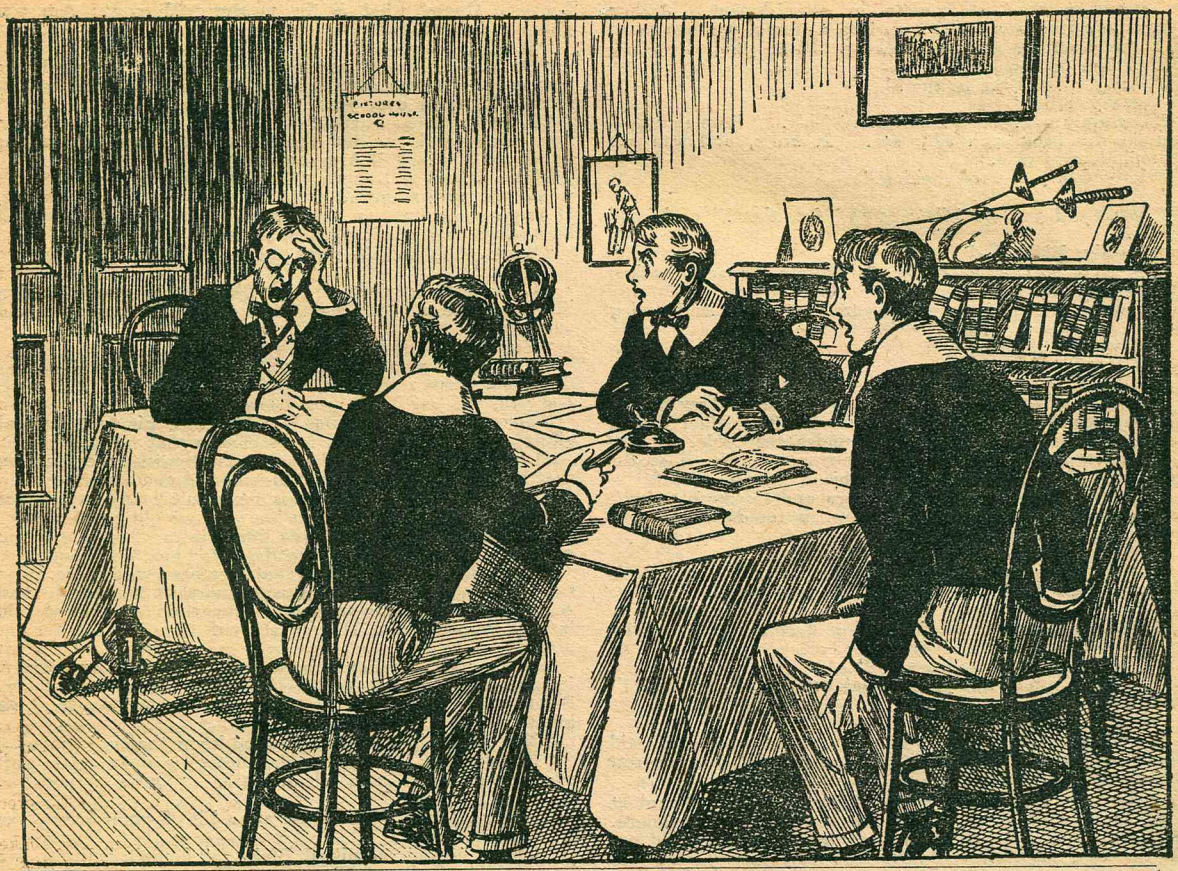
"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy broke with a wild bound from his tormentors. They crowded out of the study, yelling with laughter. Arthur Augustus rolled off the table, grasping his nose in his hand.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow! My nose! Oh, bai Jove! You feahful beasts! Ow! I am disfigahed for life! Ow, ow!"

He rushed to the glass to see the extent of the damage. Then he staggered back as he beheld his noble countenance and recognised his nose, looking exactly the same as usual, with no sign whatever of a burn upon it. He gazed at it in astonishment, and then screwed his eyeglass into his eye and stared again. Then his eye fell upon the cricket-stump, and he understood, and gave a gasp of relief.

"The wottahs! I knew they were only wottin'!" he panted. "Bai Jove! And I haven't told them anythin', aftah all! And I'm jolly well not goin' to, bai Jove!"



"Gr-r-r-r!" Blake, Herries and Digby stopped in their work, and stared at the swell of St. Jim's in astonishment. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's face was twisted up into a fearful expression, as if he were on the point of choking. "Gussy! What's the matter? Are you ill?" (*See Chapter 7.*)

CHAPTER 7.
Sudden Insanity.

WHEN Blake and Herries and Digby came into Study No. 6 to do their preparation that evening they fully expected to find the swell of the School House in a state of freezing dignity. They expected to be withered, as it were, with a staring eye behind an eyeglass.

But it was not so.

Arthur Augustus was sitting at the table, at work already, and there was a smile upon his face. Apparently he had recovered from the tortures of the inquisition, and his inward thoughts were so amusing that he could not keep smiles from bubbling up to his noble lips. The juniors were more puzzled than ever. Arthur Augustus evidently had a secret, and it was one that tickled him immensely, and his study-mates wondered what it could possibly be.

They knew that he had made a long journey to meet Bunter of the Lower Fourth at Greyfriars School, and that he had been in correspondence with him for a week or more. That was all they knew. Billy Bunter they had met, more than once, on occasion of cricket or football matches with Greyfriars, and they did not like him. With the other Greyfriars fellows they got on excellently well; but Bunter was an exception. The fat junior had once "planted" himself upon D'Arcy for a visit at St. Jim's, inviting himself for the occasion, and he had made all D'Arcy's friends feel very pleased that Greyfriars, and not St. Jim's, had the honour of sheltering him. What on earth D'Arcy could have in common with that fat little outsider was a great mystery.

"You chaps goin' to do your pwep?" asked Arthur Augustus, his features breaking again into that involuntary smile of inward merriment.

"Yes," said Blake, puzzled. "Nothing funny in that, is there? We generally do do prep in the evening, don't we?"

"Yaas, deah boy."

"Then what are you grinning at?"

"Was I gwinnin', deah boy?"

"Yes, you were. Where does the joke come in?"

"There isn't any joke, deah boy. Only I hope you won't be disturbed while you're doin' your pwep."

"Why should we be disturbed?" asked Herries. "Those New House bounders planning a raid?"

"Not that I am awah of. But—but you might be disturbed by—by a dog in the study."

Herries looked round quickly.

"Has Towser got loose?" he asked.

"Towsah! Nevah mind Towsah."

"Your minor's beastly mongrel knocking about, then? If the mingey little beast comes in here, I'll jolly soon boot him out!" said Herries.

"Wally's beastly mongwel is not heah, Hewwies."

"Then what do you mean by babbling about a dog in the study?" demanded the mystified Herries. "My bulldog and your minor's rotten mongrel are the only two dogs about the place, excepting Taggles' mastiff, and I suppose he won't come into the studies."

"My impression is," said Digby, "that Gussy is going off his dot. He's talking out of the back of his neck."

"Weally, Digby——"

"Well, don't talk any more," said Blake, sitting down. "I can't do my prep while you're wandering in your mind, Gussy, unless you do it quietly."

And the chums of the Fourth began their preparation. Once or twice they glanced at Arthur Augustus uneasily. Often and often it had been suggested, by way of a joke, that the noble youth was a little bit off his aristocratic rocker. But really it seemed to the Fourth-Formers now that there was something in it more than a joke. Arthur Augustus's remarks were utterly incomprehensible, regarded as the utterances of a sane person. And that peculiar smile that flitted at intervals over his face—without any apparent cause—it really did seem very queer. And Blake remembered, too, how oddly the swell of St. Jim's had acted that afternoon in the study—making faces and weird ejaculations before the looking-glass. Certainly it looked as though D'Arcy required looking after.

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r!"

The sound broke suddenly from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the silence of the study, interrupting the labours of the Fourth-Formers. It was a kind of imitation of the growl of a dog. Blake and Herries and Digby suspended their labours

to stare at their study-mate in astonishment. Arthur Augustus's face was twisted up into a fearful expression, as if he were on the point of choking. Blake jumped up and patted him on the back.

"Gussy, what's the matter?"

"Are you ill?"

"Certainly not!" said D'Arcy peevishly. "Stop thumpin' me on the back, you silly ass! It hurts, and you are wumplin' my jacket."

"I thought you were choking."

"Wats!"

"What did you go 'Gr--r-r-r-r-r' for, then?" exclaimed Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Is it a new trick, trying to imitate Towser?" asked Herries blankly.

"Wubbish! Are you fellows sure that there isn't a dog under the table?"

"A what?"

"Where?"

"My hat!"

"A dog undah the table, deah boys," said D'Arcy firmly. He had made that horrible sound in the firm belief that it sounded as if it proceeded from under the table. It was most annoying to find that his study-mates jumped to the conclusion that it proceeded from his, D'Arcy's, throat.

"Gussy, old man, you'd better go and lie down a bit," said Blake soberly. "Go and lie down in the dorm for a bit, and you'll feel better."

"Weally, Blake——"

"It was going out without your hat this afternoon that's done it," said Digby. "The sun was very warm."

"You uttah ass!"

"Perhaps it runs in the family," said Herries. "Are any of your relations potty, Gussy?"

"You fwabjous ass, Hewwies!"

"Well, if you're not potty, what are you doing it for?" exclaimed Blake.

"Weally, you duffah——"

"Well, shut up, and let's get on with the washing!" said Blake, sitting down again. "Don't make that horrible row in your neck again, that's all."

Arthur Augustus sniffed disdainfully. His first attempt at ventriloquism in Study No. 6 had been a hopeless failure, he had to admit that. Yet it was curious that he could not do it, when that fellow Bunter had done it so easily. He was conscious of possessing ever so much more brains than Bunter of Greyfriars.

Blake and Herries and Digby glanced at D'Arcy several times after that covertly. They were really uneasy about him. However, preparation was finished without any further sounds of alarm. Then D'Arcy rose.

"Will you come with me to post a lettah, Blake?" he asked.

"Certainly!" said Blake. "I'll take it for you, if you like."

"No; I want you to come with me," said D'Arcy, that inexplicable grin breaking out over his face again.

Blake nodded shortly. He felt that it was better not to let Gussy go anywhere alone, under the circumstances. Arthur Augustus picked up a letter he had written earlier for the purpose, and they quitted the study together. The house was closed, but they slipped out into the quadrangle to post the letter. The school letter-box was in the wall near the gate. They cut across the quad and reached the box. Arthur Augustus halted there, but he did not seem in a hurry to drop the letter into the orifice. He coughed to clear his throat. The second attempt was coming, in imitation of Billy Bunter's little ventriloquial joke at Lyndale.

Groan!

Blake jumped almost clear of the ground. That sudden terrible groan from the junior at his side startled him almost out of his wits.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "Have you got a pain, Gussy?"

"No! I haven't a pain."

"What did you groan for, then?"

"Oh, wats! Put that lettah in the box, will you?"

Blake took the letter from him and dropped it into the box. Then a voice—which D'Arcy fondly imagined to proceed from the letter-box—exclaimed:

"Ow! You've dwopped that on my head!"

Blake jumped away, his jaw falling, and his eyes opening wide.

"On your head!" he stuttered.

"Yaas!" went on the amateur ventriloquist, still believing that his voice proceeded from the letter-box. "Ow! I'm suffocatin'!"

"You look as if you were," exclaimed Blake, scanning the elegant junior's twisted and anguished face. "Good heavens, Gussy, what is the matter with you? Are you going to have a fit?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Do you feel as if you were suffocating?" asked Blake anxiously. "Come over here to the fountain. I'll swamp some cold water over you."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. Didn't it seem to you, Blake—did you not think there was someone in the lettah-box?" asked D'Arcy anxiously.

Blake almost fell down. The opening in the letter-box would not have admitted a rabbit, let alone a human being. D'Arcy's question was proof positive—to Blake's mind, at least—that he was not right in his head.

"Someone in the letter-box!" said Blake faintly.

"Yaas."

"Come indoors, Gussy," said Blake, very gently, taking his chum's arm. "It must be sunstroke. Come on, old chap!"

"You uttah duffah! I tell you——"

"Yes, yes," said Blake soothingly; "I know, I know! Come on, Gussy; come in, there's a good chap. This way. I'm your old pal Blake, you know!"

D'Arcy snorted. It was too bad that his ventriloquial efforts should simply lead to suspicions that he was insane. And he could not dispel those suspicions without explaining that he was a ventriloquist, which he did not intend to do.

"Come on, Gussy. You know me, don't you?" said Blake soothingly. "I'm Blake, you know; your old pal Jack!"

"Of course I know you, you fwightful ass! But are you quite sure there was no one in the lettah-box, deah boy?"

Blake groaned inwardly. That insanity could come on so suddenly and completely as this astounded him. But he had read that it was wise to humour lunatics, lest they should become excited, and D'Arcy showed traces of excitement already.

"Well, well, perhaps there was," he said cautiously. "You never can tell, in—in these pillar-boxes, you know. Some—some chap may have crawled in for a joke, you know."

"You uttah chump, Blake! You know that is imposs."

"Of course it is," said Blake, determined to agree with everything his insane chum said. "Quite impossible. You're quite right."

"Weally, Blake, I think you are a bit off your chump, the way you talk wot!"

"Yes, a little," admitted Blake. "I can't help it, you know. It takes me like that. Now, come indoors, old fellow!"

Arthur Augustus grunted, but he submitted to being led into the School House again. Blake marched him upstairs, but he declined to go back into Study No. 6.

"I'm goin' to see Tom Mewwy," he remarked.

"I'll come with you," said Blake.

"Wats! You stay where you are!"

And D'Arcy walked up the passage. Herries and Digby joined Blake, and the chief of Study No. 6, in great distress, confided to them that there was no further doubt that Arthur Augustus was quite "potty."

"He gave a horrible groan in the quad," said Blake, in an awed whisper. "And when I dropped the letter in the letter-box, he said I had dropped it on his head."

"Great Scott!"

"Then he said he was suffocating," groaned Blake, "and his face was twisted up very queerly. But that isn't all. He asked me whether I thought there was somebody in the letter-box."

Herries and Digby staggered.

"In the letter-box?" said Digby faintly.

"Yes."

"Must have been pulling your leg," said Herries.

"No; he was in deadly earnest. He's simply as mad as a hatter. It must be sunstroke, I suppose, through going out without his hat to-day. What on earth's to be done?" said Blake, in deep distress.

And the chums of Study No. 6 consulted in troubled whispers upon that knotty point.

CHAPTER 8.

The Lunatic.

TOM MERRY had finished his preparation when Arthur Augustus dropped into the study. Monty Lowther had finished, too, and he was roasting chestnuts. Manners was cutting films—he generally was cutting films. Tom Merry gave the swell of St. Jim's a cheerful nod as he came in.

"Just in time for the chestnuts," he remarked. "Lowther's standing chestnuts."

"Thank you, vewy much; but I have not come to pewuse Lowther's Comic Column for the 'Weekly,' deah boy," said Arthur Augustus innocently.

There was a snort from Lowther.

"I don't mean those chestnuts," said Tom Merry, laughing. "These are some fresher ones."

"Ass!" growled Lowther.

"Thanks, deah boy; I don't mind if I do," said Arthur Augustus, taking a seat. "You've got wathah a good fiah heah."

"It's a common custom to use a fire for roasting chestnuts," said Monty Lowther. "Of course, it could be done in a refrigerator, perhaps."

"I was thinkin' that it would be vewy wuff on anybody who happened to be up the chimney, you know."

The Terrible Three stared at Arthur Augustus.

"Up the chimney!" said Tom Merry, with a gasp.

"How could anybody be up the chimney?"

"Are you potty?"

"Just let me see," said Arthur Augustus, pushing the astonished Lowther away from the hearthrug, and taking his place, and he called up the chimney. "I say, is there anybody up there?"

"Yaas!" came the reply, in a far-away, squeaky voice—that is to say, far away in sound, but only too plainly proceeding from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The Terrible Three backed away from the swell of St. Jim's. The same dreadful thought came to them—that he was out of his senses.

"You heard that, deah boys?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning to them triumphantly.

"Yes," stuttered Tom Merry.

"Pwetty cleah that there's somebody up the chimney—what?"

"Oh!"

"I'll twy again," said D'Arcy. "Are you there?"

"Yaas!"

"Good heavens!" whispered Tom Merry. "Is he rotting, or is he really mad?"

"Help!" went on the amateur ventriloquist, still blissfully hoping that the voice came from up the chimney. "I'm woastin' alive! Help!"

"Gussy!"

"What's the matter, old man?"

"Are you ill?"

"Wats! Didn't you fellows heah that voice up the chimney?" demanded Arthur Augustus.

"Better call Blake," whispered Manners. "He'll have to be looked after. Poor old Gussy! We've often said in joke that he was potty, but I never really believed it till now."

"Many a true word spoken in jest," said Tom Merry.

"Jest so!" said Lowther.

"Don't be funny now, Monty; this is serious. The poor kid will have to be sent to an asylum, or something. Cut off and call Blake, while we see that he doesn't wander away," said Tom hurriedly. "He may do some damage to himself or somebody else."

"Right-ho!"

Monty Lowther hurried out of the study. Tom Merry and Manners remained near the door.

D'Arcy stared at them through his eyeglass.

"What are you fellows muttewin' about?" he demanded.

"It's all right, Gussy. Sit down, old fellow!"

"Have some chestnuts, Gussy?" said Manners feebly.

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r!"

Tom Merry and Manners jumped as D'Arcy emitted that fearful sound.

"Did you heah that?" asked D'Arcy.

"Ye-e-e-es."

"Isn't there a dog under the table?"

"A—a—a dog under the table!" faltered Tom.

"Yaas. Didn't you heah him?"

"No—yes—just so. All right!" gasped Tom Merry. "Any old thing—I mean, of course. Sit down quietly, there's a good chap."

"I thought I should surpwise you fellows," chuckled Arthur Augustus. "It's working bettah than I expected."

"Eh?"

"I can't explain at pwesent, but I'll let you into the secwet latah. I'm goin' to see Weilly now. You fellows can amuse yourselves lookin' for that dog," chuckled the swell of St. Jim's. "I twust you will find him. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Tom Merry and Manners feebly.

"Pway let me pass, deah boys!"

"Won't you wait till Blake comes?"

"Certainly not! Why should I wait till Blake comes? I'm goin' to see Weilly," said Arthur Augustus, in astonishment. "Blake isn't comin' heah, eithah."

"Yes; Lowther's gone to fetch him," stammered Tom Merry.

"What on earth for, Tom Mewwy?"

"To—to look after you, you know."

"Pway don't be an ass! If you don't allow me to pass, I shall push you!" said Arthur Augustus, very much annoyed.

"Better not excite him," whispered Manners.

And the two Shell fellows stood aside, and allowed the Fouth-Former to leave the study. Very much alarmed, they followed him. Arthur Augustus made for Reilly's study in the Fourth-Form passage. Reilly and Kerruish were there when he looked in, slogging away at their preparation.

"Gettin' on all wight, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus, entering the study, and clearing his throat with a little cough, ready for another ventriloquial effort.

"Yis," said Reilly. "Don't interrupt, you gossoon!"

"Gr-r-r-r-rhr!"

"Don't make that row here!" said Kerruish, with a stare. "What do you mean by marching into a fellow's study and making a horrible row like that?"

"Gr-r-r-r-rhr!"

"Sure, and it's off his dot he is!" said Reilly.

"Gr-r-r-r-rhr!"

"Howly smoke!"

"Why don't you dwive that dog out fwom undah the table, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus, with a grin of great enjoyment.

Reilly and Kerruish were on their feet now. They scanned Arthur Augustus's face to ascertain whether he was speaking seriously. If he was pulling their leg, they were prepared to eject him from the study on his neck; but——

"You weally ought to dwive that dog out, deah boys! Gr-r-r-r-rhr!"

"He's not rotting!" whispered Kerruish. "He's mad—that's what he is! I've suspected it before. I'm getting out of this. He might go for us!"

"Gr-r-r-r-rhrhrhr!"

Reilly and Kerruish rushed for the door.

"It's all wight; he won't bite you!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howly smoke! Come on, before he gets wild intirely!"

"My hat! We might have been murdered!" gasped Kerruish. "He was standing close to the poker, too!"

Arthur Augustus roared with laughter as they fled from the study. He fancied that it was the growl of the supposed dog that had frightened them away.

"Bai Jove! It's workin' like a charm!" he murmured. "I'll play twicks on all the chaps befoah I let them into the secwet. They'll nevah suspect that I am a ventwiloquist until I tell them! Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerruish peered cautiously into the study, and, with his eyes fastened on D'Arcy in dread, he reached around the door, and jerked out the key. Then the door was suddenly slammed, and D'Arcy heard him thrusting in the key on the outside.

"Bai Jove! They're goin' to lock me in! The wottahs!"

Arthur Augustus made a bound to the door; but the handle was firmly held from without, while Kerruish turned the key. D'Arcy thumped on the upper panels.

"Open this door, you wottahs!"

"Safe!" gasped Reilly. "Safe, be jabers! Now call Kildare!"

"Let me out, you boundahs!"

"Yis, we'll let you out when we've got a strait-waistcoat ready for yez!"

"Weally, Weilly——"

"He'll wreck the study if he gets violent," panted Reilly. "But it's better to keep him safe. He might turn homicidal; you never know with a lunatic!"

"Thank goodness he's safe!" said Manners. And he called through the keyhole, "Keep quiet, Gussy, old man!"

"I wefuse to keep quiet! Let me out!"

"Yes, yes, all in good time," said Tom Merry. "Don't get excited!"

"Look here, I will own up, if you like—there isn't a dog heah at all!"

"Yes, yes, we know," said Blake. "It's only fancy. You'll get well in time, Gussy, old man. Only keep quiet till we call Kildare!"

"You fwightful ass, I wefuse to keep quiet!"

Thump—thump—thump!

CHAPTER 9.

The Secret Out!

KILDARE of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, was chatting with Darrel in his study, when the door was thrown open without ceremony, and five or six juniors rushed in pell-mell.

The head of the Sixth stared at them angrily. He wasn't used to having his study invaded in that unceremonious manner by juniors of the Fourth and the Shell.

"You cheeky young sweeps!" he exclaimed angrily. "What——"

"Kildare!"

"Quick!"

"Gussy's gone mad!"

"Come quick!"

Kildare had picked up a cane, but he dropped it again at those excited exclamations.

The juniors were wildly excited, but they were evidently in earnest. The captain of St. Jim's looked at them blankly.

"D'Arcy—mad!" he ejaculated.

"Yes. For goodness' sake come!" panted Blake. "We don't know what to do with him! He's saying all sorts of extraordinary things, and making noises like a dog, and calling up chimneys. Do come!"

"Where is he?"

"We've got him locked up in Reilly's study now—it was safest," said Tom Merry. "We were afraid he might do somebody some harm. He's frightfully excited now!"

"I think a violent fit is coming on now," said Monty Lowther. "He's shrieking through the keyhole!"

Kildare was simply astounded; but it was evidently his duty to go and see what was the matter, and he hurried from the study with the excited juniors. Darrel followed him. If Arthur Augustus had really gone mad, he would require both the prefects to deal with him, probably.

There was no doubt that D'Arcy was, as Lowther had said, frightfully excited. There was evidence of it as they came into the Fourth Form passage. Loud thumping sounded on the inner side of Reilly's study door, and the voice of the swell of St. Jim's was audible at a great distance, shrieking through the keyhole.

"Let me out, you wottahs! I insist upon bein' let out immediately! I shall thwash you all wound! You uttah wottahs, to play a wotten twick like this! Open this beastly door!"

"Unlock the door," said Kildare quietly.

"But he's mad, Kildare," said Reilly, in alarm. "He might spring at you!"

"I'll chance it. Unlock the door at once!"

Reilly reluctantly turned the key. Kildare threw the door open, and Arthur Augustus was revealed, crimson with excitement and rage. He was about to rush through the doorway, to take summary vengeance upon Reilly for locking him in, but the stalwart form of the captain of St. Jim's blocked the way.

"Hold on!" said Kildare.

"Weally, Kildare, I am goin' to thwash those wottahs——"

"Stand back! Now, what's all this about your being mad?" demanded Kildare. "Are you mad?"

"Mad?" repeated Arthur Augustus dazedly.

"Yes. What do you mean by it?"

"I fail to gwasp your meanin'. I am certainly not mad. I wegard the question as an insult!"

"He seems sane enough," said Kildare. "I suppose the young ass has been pulling your leg, that's all!"

"He's mad," said Tom Merry, with conviction. "You should have seen him in my study. He called up the chimney, and answered himself. Then he said there was a dog under the table."

"He did!" chimed in Manners and Lowther.

"Sure, he did the same thing to us, and imitated the growling of a dog!" exclaimed Reilly. "You heard him, Kerruish?"

"Yes, rather!"

"He seems to have a dog on the brain!" said Blake. "And he thought there was somebody in the letter-box!"

"He's as mad as a hatter!"

"Quite off his dot!"

"Just you watch him—he'll begin growling like a dog again soon," said Kerruish nervously. "Don't get too near him, Kildare. If he fancies that he's a dog, he may bite!"

"You uttah ass!"

Arthur Augustus made an angry movement towards Kerruish, and the Manx junior promptly dodged back.

"Look out—he's going to bite!" he shrieked.

"Take care, Kildare!"

"Mind his teeth!"

"Gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus, overwhelmed with astonishment. "I weally believe you fellows have all gone pottay!"

"That's it—lunatics always think other people are mad," said Lowther. "It's one of the well-known signs!"

"You silly chump——"

"I think there's some mistake!" said Kildare, laughing. "D'Arcy will have to explain. What have you been talking like an idiot for, D'Arcy? Is it your idea of a joke?"

"As a mattah of fact, I've been takin' the fellows in——"

"Pretending to be mad?"

"Certainly not!" said D'Arcy indignantly.

"Then what have you been making queer noises for, and talking out of the back of your neck?" demanded Blake.

"I wefuse to explain."

"I'll take him to the Housemaster," said Kildare. "He certainly seems not quite himself, whether he's mad or not. He can't have been doing all that for nothing!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I—I'd wathah not go to the Housemastah. I'll explain if you like!"

"Buck up, then!"

"The fact is——"

Arthur Augustus paused impressively.

"Well?"

"The fact is, deah boys, I am——"

Another impressive pause.

"Mad!" said Blake.

"No, you ass; I wasn't goin' to say that! The fact is, I am—a ventriloquist!"

"A-a-a-wha-a-at!"

All the juniors gasped out the word together. It was the very last explanation they would have thought of.

The crowd of fellows in and around the doorway stared at Arthur Augustus dumbfounded. Kildare and Darrel burst into a loud laugh.

"I am a ventwiloquist," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I made my voice pwoceed fwom up the chimney, and made a gwowl like a dog pwoceed fwom undah the table. Do you compwehend now, you duffahs? That's what I've been in communication with Buntah for. He's a wippin' ventwiloquist, and I'm learnin' fwom him. Now I twust you undahstand?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A yell of laughter rang through the passage and the study. The juniors seemed on the point of convulsions. Arthur Augustus was not mad after all. But that he should fancy that he was a ventriloquist, and that his voice had proceeded from anywhere but his own mouth, was still more astonishing.

"Oh!" gasped Blake. "My only summer hat! So that's it, is it?"

"Yaas, you duffah!"

"A—a—a ventriloquist! Ha, ha, ha!"

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

"There is nothin' to laugh at, exceptin' the way you fellows have been taken in——"

"Taken in! Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you like to listen to me, Kildare, I will give you a sample. Dawwel, old man, just listen while I make my voice pwoceed fwom the chimney——"

But Kildare and Darrel were staggering away, convulsed. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked round indignantly at the throng of grinning faces.

"You uttah asses! I twust you are not wotten enough to be jealous of my powahs?"

"You blithering idiot!" shrieked Blake. "Do you think you were ventriloquising? You frabjous ass! It was plain all the time that you were making the row! Oh, my hat!"

"Wats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just you fellows keep this dark, that's all. I'm goin' to play some twicks on the New House fellows to-mowwow, and make Figgins & Co. sit up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors clung to the walls and to one another in helpless mirth at the idea of D'Arcy making Figgins & Co. sit up with his ventriloquism. The swell of St. Jim's sniffed disdainfully, and walked away with his noble nose high in the air. He left the juniors howling like hyenas.

"So that's it, is it?" sobbed Blake. "Gussy will be the death of me yet! Hallo! What's that row in the study?"

The juniors thronged round the door of Study No. 6, and looked in. Arthur Augustus was making a dreadful face before the glass, and emitting a weird and woeful:

"Gwoogh!"

"He's practising again!" gasped Tom Merry, clinging to the doorpost. "Practising ventriloquism! That's an imitation of a dying frog, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned round in exasperation.

"Pway buzz off, you duffahs! You're intewwuptin' my pwactice. I want to have this perfect to-mowwow to work off on Figgins & Co."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy slammed the door. From the closed study came weird sounds—no longer alarming, since the juniors knew the truth, but exceedingly funny.

"Gwooh! Gwr-r-rhr! Are you there? Yaas! Gwooh!"

CHAPTER 10.

Treed!

FIGGINS & CO. of the New House smiled as they spotted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the quadrangle the next morning. Arthur Augustus had been up very early, and he had practised his ventriloquism

assiduously in the dormitory, while the others were still asleep. He had wakened them with weird and gruesome sounds, and they had hurled all sorts of threats at him if he did not cease. But he did not cease; he went on his way unheeding.

He was still practising when the Fourth-Formers went down, leaving him in possession of the dormitory.

But before brekker Arthur Augustus remembered his intention of working off his new gift upon Figgins & Co., and he appeared in the quadrangle. He was anxious to take in and surprise the New House fellows with his wonderful powers as a ventriloquist.

By that time, of course, Figgins & Co., who had been down early, had heard a dozen accounts of the previous evening's happenings in the School House. They were quite prepared for Augustus's new wheeze. They would certainly not have taken him for a ventriloquist, but they might have taken him for a lunatic, as the School House fellows had done, had they not been warned in time. Now, fortunately, the swell of St. Jim's would be able to run on without rousing painful doubts as to his sanity.

Figgins & Co. grinned at one another as D'Arcy bore down upon them, but they became quite grave as he joined them, and looked as unsuspicious as they could. They intended to "rot" the elegant junior, and to pull his noble leg without mercy.

"Nice mornin'!" Arthur Augustus remarked, by way of a beginning.

"Ripping!" said Figgins. "Hallo! What's that?"

"Gw-r-r-r-r-rhr!"

It was a growl, in a more or less faithful imitation of the well-known voice of Herries' bulldog. It proceeded only too plainly from D'Arcy's mouth, which was screwed up in an extraordinary manner. But Figgins & Co. did not seem to have a suspicion of that. They did not even look at D'Arcy. Figgins looked behind him, Kerr scanned the vicinity among the elm-trees, and Fatty Wynn turned slowly round in a circle, surveying the ground on all sides.

"Where's that dog?" exclaimed Figgins, in a voice of great astonishment. "Didn't you hear a growl, you fellows?"

"I did!" said Kerr.

"Certainly!" said Fatty Wynn. "I heard it quite plainly. Did you hear it, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus gave a grin of great enjoyment. It was evidently working at last. There was no doubt now that he was a finished ventriloquist; quite up to the mark of Billy Bunter of Greyfriars. The New House Co. evidently hadn't the slightest suspicion that he, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, had emitted that growl—evidently!

"Yaas, I heard it, deah boy," said D'Arcy, hardly able to contain his merriment, but trying to keep grave. "Where did you think it came fwom?"

"Must be some silly idiot playing a trick," Kerr suggested.

"Ahem!"

"I can't see any dog, anyway," said Figgins, with great solemnity. "It's a mystery. Do you think the quad is haunted, you chaps?"

"Gr-w-w-w-rhr!"

"There it is again!" exclaimed Figgins, in amazement. "And I can't see any dog. Did you hear it that time, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But there isn't a dog here!" exclaimed Kerr.

"Wathah not! It's a mystewy, isn't it?" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "By the way, you chaps, look at that hollow twee!"

Arthur Augustus indicated one of the elms, which was of great age, and partly hollow. The New House Co. stared at it.

"What's the matter with it?" asked Figgins.

"Help!"

"Great Scott!"

"Help me out! I'm shut up in this twee!"

The squeaky, far-away ventriloquial voice proceeded almost visibly from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, but Figgins & Co. stared into the hollow of the tree with the solemnity of owls. The hollow was wide and deep, and it was large enough for a fag to crawl into, though the opening would have been a very close fit for one of the Fourth.

"Somebody inside the tree!" Figgins exclaimed.

"Help! I'm suffocating!"

"Sounds as if he was suffocating, too," said Kerr. "Chap must be suffocating, to speak in a weird squeak like that."

"Help him out, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus encouragingly.

"Who are you?" Figgins called into the hollow.

"I'm Curly Gibson!"

"What are you inside that hollow there for?" Figgins pursued, with owl-like gravity.

"I can't get out! Help me out, Figgy!"

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Figgins. "I can't see to the bottom of the hollow. But he must be there. The voice came from inside the hollow, didn't it, Gussy?"

"Yaas, it was intended to—I mean, yaas."

"Poor old Curly!" said Kerr. "Fancy being shut up in the tree to suffocate! Lucky he's only a School House kid. So it really doesn't matter to us."

"Weally, Kerr, I wegard that as wathah heartless. You fellows ought weally to help him out of that beastly fix, you know," said Arthur Augustus reproachfully. And then he gave a deep and awful groan, which was also supposed to proceed from the hollow tree.

"Poor kid!" said Figgins. "Sounds as if he's dying."

"See if you can see him, Gussy," said Kerr.

"Yaas."

Arthur Augustus put his head into the hollow of the tree.

"Are you there?" he called out.

"Yaas," came the reply. "Wescue! I'm suffocating in this pillah-box—I mean, in this hollow twee."

"Bai Jove! I—— Hallo! Wharrer you at? Leggo my legs! Yawooh!"

Arthur Augustus had been suddenly seized from behind by the New House juniors. In a twinkling his legs were in the air, and in the grasp of Figgins & Co., he was sliding down head first into the deep hollow of the tree-trunk.

"Ow! Welease me! Dwag me out!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "You fwightful asses, what are you up to? Yowwow!"

"Ain't you going to rescue Curly?" chuckled Figgins. "Grope for him! You'll find him if he's there, you know. You heard his agonised voice, didn't you?"

"Yawoooh! Let me out! Pull me out, you fatheads! He's not here!"

"Rats! He called for help!"

"You uttah asses! Pull me out! My nappah is wubbin' on this beastly wuff wood! If you don't pull me out, I will give you a feahful thwashin'!" howled Arthur Augustus.

"I don't see how you're going to do that without being pulled out!" chuckled Figgins. "However, go ahead, if you think you can manage it!"

It would certainly have been a little difficult. Arthur Augustus has disappeared into the hollow tree, only his elegant boots and ankles, in the grasp of Figgins & Co., being still outside the trunk. There was room in the hollow for him to twist round right way up, but not till his ankles were released. At present he was groping about him with his hands wildly.

"Have you found him?" asked Kerr.

"You ass! The kid is not heah!"

"But you heard his voice!"

"Wats! Welease me! You fwightful asses——"

"Release him!" grinned Figgins. "Mind you don't fall on your head, Gussy! You don't want to get a collision on your weakest spot!"

The New House chums let go, and D'Arcy slid entirely into the hollow. He squirmed round in the confined space, and righted himself, and his red and excited face and ruffled hair appeared at the opening in the trunk.

"You uttah wottahs——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The sight of Arthur Augustus exploring the hollow tree had drawn a crowd of fellows to the spot. Fifty grinning faces met the view of the swell of St. Jim's as his crimson face appeared at the hollow.

"What's the little game, Gussy?" asked Monty Lowther. "Have you mistaken yourself for a giddy dryad?"

"It's a blessed wood-nymph!" chuckled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Isn't it a bit dusty in there, Gussy?"

"You uttah asses! It is fwightfully dustay!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"But what did you get inside for?" asked Tom Merry, as the swell of St. Jim's made painful efforts to draw himself out of the opening in the trunk.

"There was a mysterious voice," said Figgins. "Somebody called for help from the inside of the tree, and Gussy went into the tree to look for him, like the noble fellow he is. It was a devoted action, worthy of the best traditions of the D'Arcy family!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you found him, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus was half-way out of the hollow, when Kerr gave him a gentle push, and sent him in again. D'Arcy disappeared into the tree once more, amid a howl of laughter from the juniors. A muffled voice was heard from within the hollow:

"Oh, you wottah! Wow-wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can't come out without Curly," said Kerr. "You've gone in to rescue him, and you're jolly well going to do it!"

The crimson face of the amateur ventriloquist appeared in the opening again.

"You silly ass, he's not heah!"

"But we heard his voice!" chorused Figgins & Co. "He was speaking with a D'Arcy accent, but he said he was Curly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There was nothin' but the voice, you wotten duffahs!"

"Then bring the voice out," said Figgins. "I don't see how Curly's voice could be there without Curly; but bring out all you can find of him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you sillay asses!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "As a mattah of fact, I was speakin' all the time!"

"You!" ejaculated Figgins & Co.

"Yaas. I am a ventwiloquist!"

Figgins & Co. shrieked with laughter.

"Oh, you sublime ass!" yelled Figgins. "Do you think we didn't know it was you? Do you think we didn't see your blessed chivvy working all the time? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You uttah wottahs, if you have been takin' me in——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. staggered away almost in hysterics. Arthur Augustus climbed out of the hollow tree, crimson with wrath and exertion and rage, and smothered with dust. He groped for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye, and stared indignantly and scornfully at the yelling crowd of juniors.

"You uttah asses! There is nothin' whatevah to laugh at! Those beastly wottahs were wottin' me, and they only pretended to be taken in, so as to shove me into that beastly, dustay hole! I wegard it as a wotten twick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I considah——"

"There goes the brekker bell," gasped Blake. "You'd better go and get a brush down, Gussy; you can't go in to brekker in that state!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus realised that that was very true, and he bolted for the School House, leaving a cloud of dust behind him as he ran, and the juniors followed him at a more leisurely pace, gasping with merriment.

"I should think this would be the end of Gussy's ventriloquism!" Blake sobbed. "I should think even Gussy would be fed-up now!"

But Blake was mistaken. When Arthur Augustus had an idea in his noble head, it was firmly fixed there, and there was no removing it. He came in late to breakfast, looking very red and flustered still, and extremely dignified.

"Going to give it a rest now, Gussy?" asked Blake, when they came out after breakfast.

"Wats! I wefuse to give it a west!" said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I am convinced that I have the gift. Buntah thinks so, too, and he is a jolly good ventriloquist! All I wequire is some pwactice—and some more lessons! You will see what you will see, deah boy!"

And that, at least, was undeniable.

CHAPTER 11.

Sweet are the Uses of Advertisement!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY wore a very thoughtful expression that morning in the Form-room. It was not his lessons that caused the thoughtful expression—indeed, Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, found him so inattentive that he rewarded him with fifty lines.

But Arthur Augustus gave no thought to the impot. He had a more important matter than lessons and impositions to think about. He breathed a sigh of relief when the Fourth were dismissed.

"I've been thinkin', deah boys," he remarked to his chums, in the Form-room passage, when the Fourth came out.

"So have I," said Blake. "I've been thinking that we'll get some cricket practice before dinner. Come on, you fellows!"

"I was goin' to say——"

"This way!" said Blake, unheeding; and he walked off with Herries and Digby.

Arthur Augustus sniffed, and joined the Terrible Three, who had just come out with the rest of the Shell. Tom Merry & Co. were also thinking of cricket, but they politely paused to hear what Arthur Augustus had to say; but Tom Merry held up his hand in warning.

"No more ventriloquism," he said. "You gave me a pain in my ribs last night, and another this morning. It isn't good for the health to laugh too much. So keep off the ventriloquism, there's a good chap!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Chuck it up, and come along to the nets, Gussy," advised Manners.

"Wats! All I wequire is some pwactice," said Arthur Augustus. "I want a weally good instwuctah to develop my gift, you know!"

"No doubt about the gift?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Certainly not! Buntah thinks I have the gift; he said so."

"Did he borrow any money about that time?"

"Yaas, as a mattah of fact he did—which weminds me that I haven't weceived a wemittance from him yet!"

"And I fancy you won't!" grinned Lowther. "The gift he was thinking of was the cash, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to belive that Buntah is a mercenawy chap. Howevah, I feel that it is no good twyin' to get instwuction fwom him. It is wathah expensive meetin' him so fah away fwom the school, and his w'itten instwuctions do not seem to work out vewy well. I weally think that the best thing I can do is to get a weally first-class pwofessah to show me how it is done!"

"They ought to have it in the curriculum here, instead of Latin or German," said Lowther gravely.

"Yaas, that would be a weally good ideah. Pewwaps you chaps can suggest a way of gettin' a ventwiloquial pwofessah's services?" asked Arthur Augustus. "There are pwobably a lot of them wound about, if one could get at them. It would be wathah expensive to have one down fwom London!"

"Go hon!"

"I was thinkin' of advertisin' for a pwofessah," said D'Arcy. "What do you think of that ideah?"

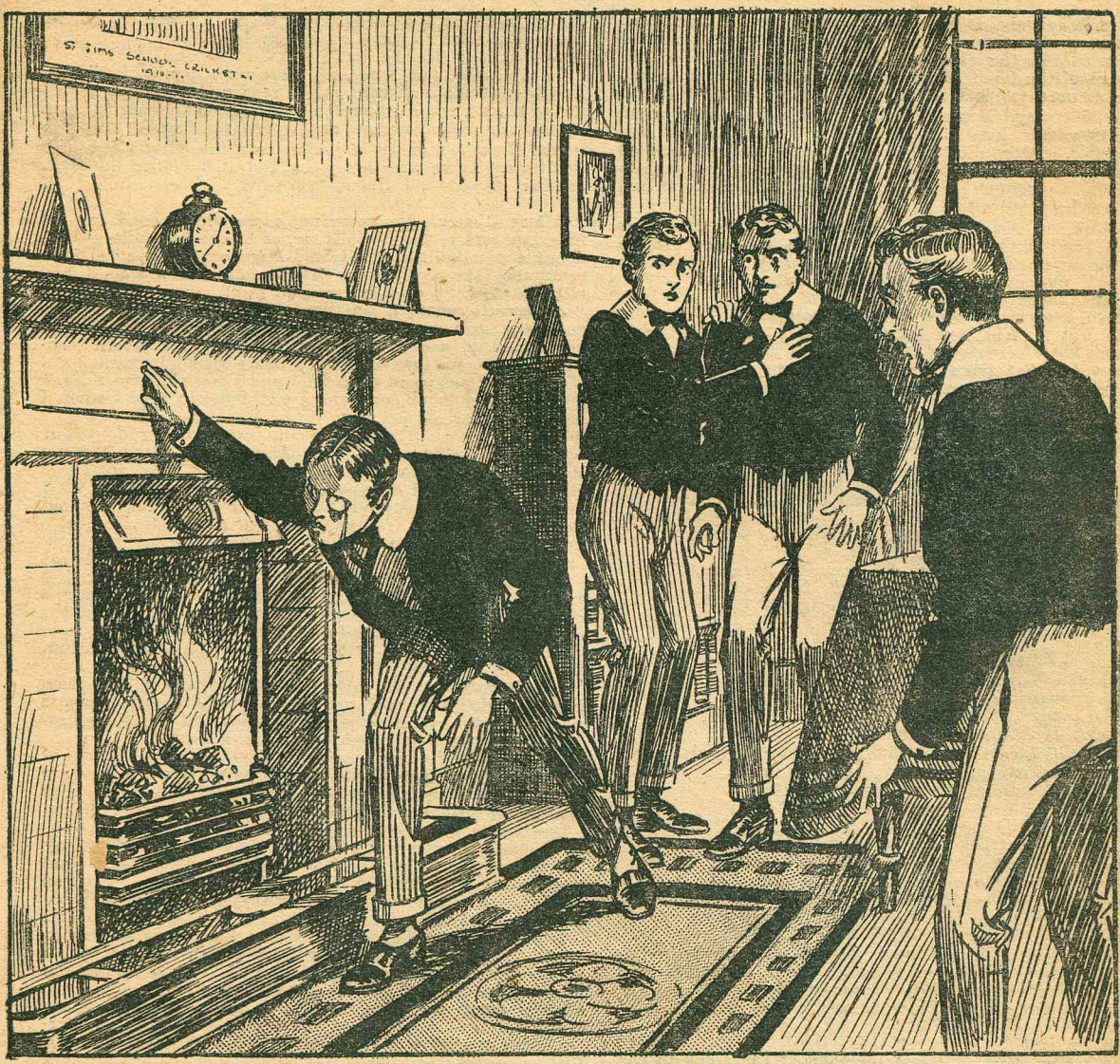
"Sweet are the uses of advertisement!" said Lowther. "Shakespeare says so, so it must be true!"

"You ass! Shakespeare said, 'Sweet are the uses of adversity,' not advertisement!"

"Did he? Well, of course, he was rather behind the times," said Lowther blandly. "Shove the advertisement in the 'Rylcombe Gazette' or the 'Wayland Times,' Gussy, and you'll have a whole host of answers. You'll have ventriloquial professors swarming in on you as thick as the giddy leaves in Vallambrosa!"

"You really think it's a good ideah?" asked Arthur Augustus, much comforted.

"It's the only way," said Lowther solemnly. "I'll tell you what I'll do, Gussy. I've got to go over to Wayland after dinner about my cricket bat—I'm going over on my bike—and if you like, I'll take the advertisement to the office of



"I say, is anybody up there?" called Arthur Augustus up the chimney. "Yaas!" came the reply, only too plainly proceeding from D'Arcy. The Terrible Three backed away from the swell of St. Jim's. The same dreadful thought came to them—that he was out of his senses. "Is he rotting, or is he mad?" whispered Tom Merry. (*See Chapter* 8.)

the 'Wayland Times,' and ask them to put it in the paper this week. The 'Times' comes out to-morrow, you know!"

"I say, that's awfully decent of you, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus gratefully.

"Not at all," said Lowther. "I shall be pleased. You fellows can go down to the cricket. I'm going to help Gussy draw up his advertisement"

Tom Merry and Manners grinned. They could see plainly enough that Monty Lowther was inwardly planning some jape upon the swell of the Fourth, though they could not guess what it was. They walked off to the cricket-ground, and Lowther accompanied D'Arcy to Study No. 6. Arthur Augustus was feeling very pleased. Being left in the lurch, as it were, by his own chums, it was very grateful and comforting to find a Shell fellow who took his aspirations seriously and was willing to lend a helping hand.

"Let me see!" said D'Arcy, dipping a pen in the ink. "Something like this: 'Wanted.—A pwofessional ventriloquist to give instwuctions. State terms.—A. A. D'Arcy, School House, St. Jim's.' That all wight, deah boy?"

"Better make it a bit plainer," said Lowther thoughtfully. "Better put in 'apply personally.'"

"But they could communicate with me by lettah."

"Yes; but then you might make arrangements with some chap who was only spoofing," said Lowther. "Better have the man here and see him, and make him give you a sample of what he can do."

Arthur Augustus nodded assent.

"Yaas, that's vewy thoughtful of you, Lowthah. I'll make 'em apply personally, then."

"And put in 'Saturday afternoon,' as that's a half-holiday, and you'll have plenty of time to attend to them," said Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! I shall have to cut the cwicket again, and that's wathah wotten, as we are playin' the New House."

"Never mind. It will give the School House a chance to win."

"What!"

"I—I mean it will give the New House a chance," said Lowther hastily. "You can't set a matter of this importance aside simply to play cricket."

"Yaas, quite so. Apply personally on Satahday aftahnoon," said Arthur Augustus. "That's all wight, Lowthah."

"Yes; write it out, and I'll take it over."

"You're awf'ly good."

"Oh, don't mench!"

And Monty Lowther left the study with the advertisement in his pocket. Arthur Augustus called after him:

"What about payin' for it, deah boy?"

"Only about a bob or two; we'll settle that afterwards," said Lowther.

"Wight-ho!"

And Arthur Augustus proceeded to practise ventriloquism until dinner. He was very pleased that Lowther was going

over to Wayland. It would have taken up his own time, which he preferred to devote to ventriloquial practice. Had he known the thoughts that were in the mind of the humorist of the Shell, however, it is probable that he would not have been so pleased.

Tom Merry and Manners looked inquiringly at their chum when they met him at dinner. But Lowther's face was inscrutable. After dinner he went round to the bike-shed and wheeled out his machine. Arthur Augustus had gone to his study to resume practice. Tom and Manners walked down to the gates with Lowther. They were puzzled.

"Look here, what's the game?" demanded Tom Merry, as they stopped at the gates. "You haven't got to go over to Wayland to see about your blessed bat. Any time would do for that. Why don't you come to the cricket?"

Lowther shook his head.

"I'm doing this to oblige Gussy," he said.

"Oh, rats! What's the little game, you duffer?" said Manners.

Monty Lowther grinned, and took D'Arcy's advertisement from his pocket. Tom Merry and Manners read it and grinned, too.

"The awful ass!" said Tom. "Are you really going to put that in the 'Wayland Times?'"

"With a slight alteration," said Lowther, taking out a pencil and sprawling the paper on his saddle. "You see, a lot of ventriloquial professors would be a worry, and Gussy will never learn, anyway. There are a lot more useful things to learn than ventriloquism. Don't you think so?"

"Ye-es; but——"

"Well, I'll give Gussy a chance to learn 'em," said Lowther. And he proceeded to make some alterations in the advertisement. When he had finished, the Terrible Three read it over, with shrieks of laughter. For the advertisement now ran:

"Wanted.—Professional instruction in Piano, Violin, Cornet, and Voice Production. Also in Golf, and in the following languages—Greek, Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Chinese. —Apply personally to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, School House, St. Jim's, on Saturday afternoon."

"That will give Gussy a chance at improving his education that anybody might envy," said Lowther. "He will learn Chinese quite as easily as ventriloquism."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "But—but he'll think they're ventriloquial professors when they arrive."

"Yes, that's where the joke comes in," said Lowther serenely. "Probably they will get ratty with him. I think I'd better put in 'expenses paid.' It's not fair they should have to pay their own fares here for nothing, is it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will be worth watching, if some old johnnie starts teaching Gussy Hebrew or Chinese, when he thinks he's going to learn ventriloquism. Those languages will come in useful if he ever goes to Palestine or China, you know, if he learns them accidentally."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I must be off," said Lowther. "I'm going to pay for this advertisement myself, as I've altered it. Gussy mightn't approve of the alteration, though it is really an improvement and something to his advantage. I'm quite anxious for Saturday afternoon. I think I shall have to miss the cricket myself. Ta-ta!"

And Monty Lowther jumped on his machine and pedalled away, leaving Tom Merry and Manners shouting with laughter. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's interviews with his visitors on Saturady afternoon promised to be very entertaining.

CHAPTER 12.

Where Ignorance is Bliss.

THERE was a letter from Billy Bunter the next day, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy opened it in the presence of all the Co. with a flourish. The Co. had expressed great doubts whether the fat junior of Greyfriars would settle those little loans, and it was a pleasure to Arthur Augustus to prove to them that it was all right. So he opened the letter to crush them, as it were, by the production of Bunter's remittance.

A change came over his face when the letter was opened. He took out a scrawled missive, but there was no sign of a remittance.

"Well, produce the cash!" said Blake, with a grin.

"Roll out the quids," said Lowther.

"Let's see the bank-notes."

"Ahem! I wathah think Buntah has forgotten to put in the wemittance," said Arthur Augustus hesitatingly. "Certainly there isn't a wemittance heah. Of course, he has simply forgotten to put it in the envelope."

"Of course! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's have the letter, if there's no remittance," said Lowther. "We'll all help you to read it, Gussy. That writing requires some deciphering, and they don't seem to teach common or garden spelling at Greyfriars, either."

And the whole crowd of juniors read the letter along with its owner. There were many chuckles as the letter was read. It ran:

"Dear D'Arcy,—I'm sorry not to be abel to send you the little lone you so kindly made me, as I have been dissapointed about a postal-order. However, I am expecting a handsom remittance shortly from a titled relation, and then I will settle in fool. I shall be glad to meet you at Lyndale on Saturday afternoon, if you like, if you will forward me the necessary exes as before. You reelly have the gift of ventriloquism, and it is a pitty that it should not be cultivated, as you are sure to becom a reelly splendid ventriloquist. If you could put in an extra half-quid along with the railway fare, I should be obliged, and I will settle it in fool when I see you.—Your old pal, WILLIAM G. BUNTER."

"Ahem!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "There is weally nothin' to gwin at, you know. The chap says plainly he has been disappointed about a wemittance. That might happen to anybody. I've been disappointed about wemittances myself. My patah sometimes fails to send me a fivah, even when I have specially w'itten to ask him for one."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howevah, I do not think I will see Buntah again; it is weally too expensive. And besides, he talks all the time and weally doesn't give me any instwuction at all. Upon the whole, I think I will stick to a wegular pwofessah."

"Oh-o!" said Blake. "You're going to have a professor, are you?"

"Yaas, wathah! My advertisement appeahs in the 'Wayland Times' this mornin', and I expect to have quite a cwowd of ventriloquial pwofessahs applyin' for the job to-morrow afteahnoon," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Oh, my hat!"

"By the way, did you wemembah to ask them to send me a copy of the papah, Lowthah? I should like to make suah that the advertisement is there all wight."

Lowther looked regretful.

"I didn't ask them to send one," he said. "Never mind; the ad's certain to be in. I made a special point of it, and they promised faithfully it should be in the 'Wayland Times' this morning. There isn't any doubt about it."

"Yaas, that's all wight, then."

Arthur Augustus walked away to write a reply to Bunter, to tell that cheerful youth as politely as possible that he had no further use for his valuable services. Blake & Co. surrounded Lowther. This was the first they had heard of the advertisement, and they wanted to know something more about it.

"Have you been pulling Gussy's leg, you Shell bounder?" Blake demanded.

"Shush! I don't mind letting you into it, if you keep it dark," said Lowther.

"Well, it's like your cheek to jape one of Study No. 6," said Blake severely. "But Gussy has been asking for it, I know; and if it's anything to help shut him up on the subject of ventriloquism, I forgive you. The rows he makes in the study are simply awful, and I'm getting afraid that he'll permanently damage the inside of his neck, if he keeps on. What's the game?"

Lowther mysteriously drew a scribbled slip of paper from his pocket, and exhibited it The chums of the Fourth stared as they read it.

"That's the advertisement," said Lowther blandly. "I've edited it, you know, since Gussy drew it up. He's going to have a chance to learn something more useful than ventriloquism. Savvy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But not a word."

"Not a giddy syllable!" chortled Blake. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Quite a number of the School House fellows were taken into the little secret, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remaining in sublime unconsciousness of the fact that there was a jape on. That evening he mentioned to Tom Merry that he would have to stand out of the junior House team on Saturday afternoon.

"I'm sowwy, deah boy," he said feelingly. "I know what a blow this is to you, as cwicket captain. But to-mowwow aftahnoon I'm expectin' a numbah of visitahs."

"I'll try to survive it," said Tom, with emotion. "It's a fearful blow, but I'll try to bear up."

"If you are wottin', you ass——"

"Not at all. I shall survive it, I think," said Tom "As a matter of fact, you have been neglecting cricket so much lately that I'm thinking of leaving you out of the House team for the whole of the season."

"I should uttahly wefuse to be left out of the House team for the whole of the season, Tom Mewwy," said the swell of St. Jim's, with dignity. "Howevah, I have a more important mattah in hand for to-mowwow aftahnoon. I will twy to come down to the ground and look on a bit to encourage you."

"You're too good, Gussy," said Tom Merry, with a sob.

"Oh, wats!" And Arthur Augustus walked away with his nose in the air.

The next day Arthur Augustus was in quite a flutter, as he would have expressed it. He had been practising hard at his new art, but he had to admit to himself that his progress had not been striking. He emitted growls and barks which bore a distant resemblance to those of a dog, but the growls and barks persisted in coming only too evidently from his mouth, and not from the various places where he sought to "throw" his voice.

He would call up the study chimney, "Are you there?" and answer "Yaas," but the "Yaas" quite plainly came from the same source as the "Are you there?" He felt that what he needed was professional instruction to develop his undoubted gift—undoubted, that is, by Arthur Augustus himself. And that afternoon he was to have a variety of competent professors to choose from; and everything in the garden, so to speak, would be lovely.

When Tom Merry & Co went down to the cricket in the afternoon, Arthur Augustus hardly noticed them go. His friend Hammond was being played in his place, but D'Arcy had not even noted it. Even the great game of cricket faded into utter insignificance beside the new art he was cultivating. After the cricketers were gone out, D'Arcy interviewed Toby, the house-page.

"I'm expectin' some visitahs this aftahnoon, Tobay," he said, slipping a half-crown into the willing hand of the page. "You will have some twouble showin' them up to the studay; but you won't mind that."

"Not at all, sir," said Toby. "Always a pleasure to do anything for a gentleman like you, sir."

"Thank you vewy much, Tobay. You are a good boy," said D'Arcy, who was considerably younger than Toby, but spoke in quite a fatherly manner. "You will be suah to show my visitahs to Study No. 6, and not take them in to the Head or Mr. Wailton by mistake. They will ask for me."

"Yessir."

"Vewy good!"

And Arthur Augustus proceeded to Study No. 6, to wait in state for the first of his visitors. He was too preoccupied to notice that some of the juniors, who might have been expected to go down to the cricket-ground to watch the House match, seemed to prefer to stay indoors that sunny afternoon. They hung about the doorway and the passage and the stairs, as if they expected to see something there more interesting even than a House match. They grinned and chuckled as they waited, their expectation being fully as keen as D'Arcy's. Nearly all the House were in the secret now, D'Arcy himself being one of the very few who did not know of Lowther's humorous change in the advertisement in the "Wayland Times."

Reilly of the Fourth, who was in the doorway, burst into a giggle as a long-haired gentleman in a Homburg hat, with a violin-case under his arm, was seen crossing the quad from the direction of the gates.

"Here comes the first of the bunch," said Reilly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The long-haired young man came into the School House and blinked round him. Toby the page hurried up. The gentleman with the long hair, whose collar hinted that he had very little more to do with laundresses than with barbers, handed Toby a card.

"Please take that to Master—er—D'Arcy — Arthur Augustus D'Arcy," he said.

"Yessir. This way, sir."

And the long-haired young man followed Toby up the stairs to Study No. 6. When he had disappeared from view there was a cackle from the juniors. The circus, as Reilly put it, was beginning.

CHAPTER 13.

A Narrow Escape!

"GEWWOOOGH!"

That weird sound was proceeding from Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage, as Toby showed the long-haired stranger up. The violin professor paused in astonishment.

"Is someone ill here, my lad?" he asked Toby.

"No, sir," said Toby, with a grin. He would have been alarmed himself, but he had heard of Arthur Augustus's latest. "It's all right, sir—only Master D'Arcy. This way, sir."

Toby threw open the study-door, and presented the card to the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus turned hastily from the looking-glass, and took the card.

"Genelman to see you, sir," said Toby.

"Pway show the gentleman in, Tobay."

Toby showed the gentleman in, and departed. Arthur Augustus glanced at the card, which bore the name, "Ethelbert Toppmoppe," and in smaller type, "Piano, Violin, Violoncello." Then he glanced at the visitor. He could not help thinking it curious that a professor of the piano, violin, and violoncello, should also be a professor of the very separate and distinct art of ventriloquism. The professor had brought his violin with him, too, and D'Arcy did not quite see what use it was to be in ventriloquial instruction. Fortunately, he had left his violoncello and piano at home.

"Good-aftahnoon," said D'Arcy graciously. "Pway take a seat, my deah sir."

Mr. Ethelbert Toppmoppe took a seat.

"You have, I undahstand, called in wefewence to my advertisement in the 'Wayland Times,'" Arthur Augustus pursued.

"Quite so, Mr. D'Arcy. I really think I shall be able to meet your requirements," said Mr. Toppmoppe. "You require instruction from a master in the art?"

"Exactly."

"And the—ahem!—terms——"

"Of course, I leave that to you," said Arthur Augustus modestly. "I weally don't know about that. You see, I have no knowledge of the mattah."

Mr. Toppmoppe's eyes gleamed. This was the kind of pupil he was looking for. He made some sort of a living teaching violin, piano, and 'cello to persons in Wayland and the district, but he had generally found them rather particular on the subject of terms—too particular on that important point, in fact.

"You have had no lessons hitherto?" he inquired.

"Well, yaas, a few fwom an amateur chap," said Arthur Augustus. "I gave him half-a-guinea a time. But I was not weally satisfied."

Mr. Toppmoppe was accustomed to give lessons at two shillings a time, and his eyes opened a little. But he tried to look indifferent.

"I should be willing to give you instruction on the same terms," he said negligently. "How many lessons would you need? I should recommend one every day to begin with."

"Ahem! I don't think the cash would wun to that," said D'Arcy confidingly. "Pewwaps if I had one evewy day for a week or so, one a week aftah that would do?"

"Certainly. That is a really excellent idea."

"Then it's a go, Mr. Toppmoppe. Pewwaps you could give me the first lesson now," said Arthur Augustus. "I am quite fwee this aftahnoon—if you are."

"With pleasure!" said Mr. Toppmoppe. "Let me see—is it piano you are studying?"

D'Arcy opened his eyes.

"Piano! No."

"Violoncello, then?"

"Certainly not."

"Very well. If it had been, of course we should have required those instruments," Mr. Toppmoppe explained pleasantly.

"Yaas, I suppose so," stammered Arthur Augustus, wondering whether his visitor was wandering in his mind. "But, undah the circs——"

"Very well; we can proceed," said Mr. Toppmoppe, opening his violin case. "I have brought my instrument with me."

Arthur Augustus looked at the violin, and looked at Mr. Toppmoppe.

"Will you wequire a violin to give me instwuction?" he asked.

Mr. Toppmoppe smiled.

"I could scarcely do it without a violin, Mr. D'Arcy," he said.

"Bai Jove, I should nevah have thought it! But I suppose you know as you are a pwofessah of the art."

"Naturally. Have you a violin of your own? My instrument is a little large for you to handle."

"There's Blake's violin—I could use that, if it is necessary. But—but I had no ideah that a violin would be necessawy."

Mr. Toppmoppe looked hard at him. He remembered the queer noise he had heard as he approached the study, and he wondered whether his pupil was quite right in his mind. A boy who made mysterious noises for no apparent reason, and who did not know that a violin was required for a violin-

lesson, was a very peculiar boy indeed, Mr. Toppmoppe thought.

"I hardly see how a lesson could be given without a violin," said Mr. Toppmoppe drily.

"Oh, vewy well—I suppose you know."

D'Arcy, in a state of great wonder, took Blake's violin-case and opened it, and produced the instrument.

"Ah! I see you know how to hold the instrument," said Mr. Toppmoppe. "That is something. Now I shall show you how to place the fingers——"

"Yaas."

"Take the bow—so——"

"Ya-a-a-as."

"Now watch me, and produce the scale in the same way," said the long-haired young gentleman, and he started.

"B-b-but——" stammered Arthur Augustus. "I am willin', of course, to do exactly as you say, but—but how am I to learn fwom that?"

"I do not see how you are to learn without it," said Mr. Toppmoppe, puzzled.

"I—I had an ideah that the first instwuction would be in thwowin' the voice."

Mr. Toppmoppe started.

"In what?" he said faintly.

"Thwowin' the voice, sir! That's what I want to do most of all. Also in imitatin' the gwowl of a dog, and makin' the sound appeah as if it comes fwom somewhah else."

Mr. Toppmoppe looked at him steadily. There was no doubt about it—he had to do with a boy who was not in his right mind. Arthur Augustus looked worried and a little excited; he felt that there was a misunderstanding somewhere, though he could not guess where.

"Suppose I show you what I can do alweady?" he suggested.

"Yes," gasped Mr. Toppmoppe, backing towards the door. "Please do!"

"Gw-r-r-r-r-rh!"

"Oh!"

"Gw-r-r-r-r-rh!"

Mr. Toppmoppe, keeping his eyes fixed on the growling junior, hastily placed his violin in its case, snapped it shut, and backed to the door, feeling behind him for the handle. He did not dare to take his eyes off Arthur Augustus, in case the lunatic should spring. He was only thinking about getting safely out of the study now.

"Did that gwowl seem to you to come fwom under the table?" asked D'Arcy.

"Oh! Yes! No! Yes!"

"Now I will call up the chimney," said D'Arcy.

"Eh?"

"I will shout up the chimney, and weceive an answah, and you can tell me your opinion, Mr. Toppmoppe."

"I—I—I——" Mr. Toppmoppe's hand was on the handle of the door now, and he was turning it cautiously, hoping to get the door open without the lunatic noticing what he was doing.

If he had to fight for his life, he had only his violin as a weapon. With great relief he saw D'Arcy turn his back to call up the chimney.

"Are you thah?" D'Arcy called, and immediately replied: "Yaas!"

Then he turned round for Mr. Toppmoppe's opinion. To his amazement he saw the study door wide open, and heard the violinist's footsteps retreating quickly down the passage. He ran to the door and looked out.

"I say!" he shouted. "Where are you going? What the dickens——"

Mr. Toppmoppe did not reply. He was making for the stairs. Arthur Augustus scudded down the passage after him. Mr. Toppmoppe heard him coming, and fairly ran. He reached the first landing; but D'Arcy, determined to have an explanation of his extraordinary conduct, slid down the banisters, and so overtook him.

"Now, then, weally——" he began. "Bai Jove!"

The excited Mr. Toppmoppe raised his violin-case desperately.

"Stand back!" he quavered. "If—if you come nearer I will strike you down! Keep your distance! Keep off! Help!"

Arthur Augustus staggered back in amazement.

"Mad, bai Jove!"

"Yes; I—I know you're mad! Keep off!" screamed Mr. Toppmoppe. And he darted for the lower stairs, and fled, before Arthur Augustus could recover from his amazement. He ran through the grinning juniors on the lower stairs, and did not pause till he was safe out in the quadrangle. There he paused to mop his fevered brow.

"Good heavens!" he murmured. "What a narrow escape! The advertisement was really very strange—violin, Sanskrit, golf, and such things all together—I might have suspected it was the work of a lunatic. But really——"

He caught sight of D'Arcy's face in the doorway of the School House, and hurried away to the gates.

"Sure, the professor hasn't stayed long, Gussy darling!" Reilly remarked.

Arthur Augustus gasped.

"He's mad!" he said. "Fancy a madman comin' heah in answah to an advertisement. He twied to teach me ventriloquism with a violin——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not a laughin' mattah—the poor chap's quite insane. He bolted fwom the studay when I started thwowin' my voice and thweatened me with his violin when I went aftah him. It's extwaordinawy. I have had a feahfully nawwow escape; just imagine bein' shut up in the studay with a lunatic!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here comes another of 'em!" chortled Kerruish.

A stout gentleman in a Norfolk jacket, with a bag of golf clubs, was coming across from the gates. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon him.

"Wats!" he said. "That chap's a golfah. I suppose a golfah isn't comin' to give me lessons in ventwiloquism, Kewwuish."

"I shouldn't wonder," grinned Kerruish. "What do you chaps think?" he added, as the Terrible Three sauntered up. They were in flannels, having been batting for the School House, and as their wickets were down, they had come over to see how Arthur Augustus was getting on with his visitors.

"He's coming here, at all events!" said Monty Lowther.

"Oh wubbish!" said D'Arcy, and he went up to his study again. The gentleman in the Norfolk jacket arrived just after he had gone.

CHAPTER 14.

The More the Merrier!

"MASTER D'ARCY?" asked the golfing gentleman, glancing round at the juniors.

"I'll take you to him, sir," said Monty Lowther politely. "He's waiting for you."

"Thank you very much!"

Lowther led the golfing gentleman into the School House, and up to Study No. 6. From that study, as they approached it, came the queer sound of——

"Gw-r-r-r-rh!"

"Bless me!" ejaculated the golfing gentleman. "What is that?"

"Oh, that's D'Arcy," said Lowther calmly. "It's one of his favourite amusements to growl like a dog."

The golfing gentleman almost fell down.

"One of his amusements?" he ejaculated.

"Yes; you'll hear him doing it a lot. You mustn't mind it," said Lowther, "otherwise, he's quite harmless and rational."

"But I—I say——" The golfing gentleman halted in the passage. "Do you mean to say that Master D'Arcy is not right in his mind?"

"Hush!" said Lowther. "He'll hear you, and it would make him excited. He's quite harmless. We hope that golf will do him good—outdoor exercise, and so on, you know. This way!"

The visitor looked decidedly disturbed. However, he followed Lowther to Study No. 6. He gave quite a jump as he looked in at the doorway. D'Arcy was before the glass, practising getting his mouth into position, and the expression of his reflection in the glass was dreadful. He turned round quickly as Lowther called to him.

"This gentleman to see you, Gussy!"

"Thank you, Lowthah! Come in, my deah sir!" said Arthur Augustus. And Monty Lowther retreated into the passage. "Let me see—you are——"

"Professor Niblick," said the golfing gentleman. "I understand that you require lessons—from your advertisement in the 'Wayland Times.'"

"Yaas, certainly!"

"I am prepared to take you as my pupil," said Professor Niblick. "I should explain that I am here in reference to the part of your advertisement that deals with my profession. I do not teach violin or piano or languages."

"I—I suppose not," said Arthur Augustus, wondering whether a lunatic asylum had broken open that afternoon, and the inmates were coming to visit him in turn. "I have no desiah to studay violin or piano or languages. I get enough languages heah—as a matter of fact, too much!"

"Indeed, from your advertisement I understood—however, that is by the way. Would you care for a lesson now, at once?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose there is no objection to my giving you instruction in the open air here?"

"Nunno; but can't you do it in the study?"

"Scarcely. There is hardly room, and it would certainly lead to breakages," said Mr. Niblick drily.

"Bweakages!"

"Certainly! There is not much room in this apartment for the use of golf clubs."

"G-g-golf clubs!" stuttered D'Arcy.

"I have brought my clubs with me," said the professor. "Shall we proceed to the open air at once? My time is rather valuable."

"One moment!" stuttered Arthur Augustus. "Am I to undahstand that golf clubs are weally necessawy in givin' me a lesson?"

"I hardly see how a lesson could be given without them," said Mr. Niblick, with a stare. "I fail to follow your meaning, Master D'Arcy."

"Well, I suppose you ought to know," said D'Arcy, hopelessly puzzled. "I weally do not know vewy much about it, I suppose. Pway let us pwoceed to the quad at once."

He led the way downstairs. He passed the Terrible Three in the passage, but he was too worried to notice that they were grinning, or that they followed on the track of himself and Mr. Niblick.

"You have played golf before?" Mr. Niblick asked, when they were in the quad.

"Yaas."

"Very good. What you require is a professional finish—what?"

"I—I—I——"

"You had better get your own clubs," said Mr. Niblick.

Arthur Augustus did not stir. He jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed Mr. Niblick in dumbfounded astonishment.

"Get my clubs!" he repeated.

"Certainly!"

"Do you mean to say that I shall wequire them?"

"Of course you will require them," said Mr. Niblick sharply. "Pray how did you intend to practise, if not with clubs?"

"With my voice, of course!" stammered Arthur Augustus.

Mr. Niblick stared hard at him.

"You intended to practise with your voice?" he gasped.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Are you—are you joking?"

"Jokin'! Certainly not!"

"Then—then what do you mean? How can you practise with your voice?" gasped Mr. Niblick.

"I will show you what I have learned alweady, if you like."

"Ye-e-es!"

D'Arcy twisted his mouth into the required position—as he fancied it—and the expression on his face made Mr. Niblick back away in alarm. Then he emitted a very passable imitation of the growl of a dog.

"Good heavens!" gasped Mr. Niblick.

"Is that all wight?" asked Arthur Augustus anxiously.

"A-a-a-all right?"

"Yaas. Did that gwowl seem to come fwom behind you?"

The golfing gentleman backed further away. He looked round at the other juniors, who were grinning with delight, excepting Monty Lowther, who shook his head at the professor, as much as to say that he had warned him what to expect.

"I—I—I think I had better go!" stammered Mr. Niblick. "I—I am afraid I shall be of no use to you, Master D'Arcy."

"I was weally beginnin' to think the same thing," said Arthur Augustus rather tartly. "I uttahly fail to see the use of goff clubs in this kind of lesson."

"Ye-e-es, quite so—ahem!—good-afternoon!" And Mr. Niblick walked quickly away towards the gates.

"Another good man gone wrong," said Monty Lowther, with a sigh. "I must say, Gussy, you seem to have bad luck with your professors."

"I weally cannot undahstand it," said D'Arcy, in dismay. "Do you think it poss., deah boys, that ventwiloquial pwactice has a detewiowatin' effect on the bwain? It weally seems like it to me. I wemembah that chap Buntah is an awful duffah. And both these pwofessahs are quite insane. One of them wanted to teach me ventwiloquism with a violin, and the other with goff clubs. It's extwaordinary. It weally looks as if ventwiloquism has a softenin' effect on the bwain, doesn't it?"

"Well, you're safe enough," said Tom Merry comfortingly. "You've reached the limit in that direction already, you know."

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus stalked into the house, much disturbed in mind. He returned to Study No. 6 in the hope that another applicant for the post would arrive, and that he would prove to be in his right senses. The juniors chuckled gleefully, and waited for the next arrival. The advertisement had been so wide in its scope that it was pretty certain that there would be more arrivals. And, in fact, ten minutes had passed, when a fat little gentleman with a silk hat and a white beard made his appearance, trotting towards the School House. Monty Lowther approached him, raising his cricket-cap with much politeness.

"You wish to see D'Arcy, sir?"

"Eh!" The old gentleman put his hand to his ear, and bent his head. "I am a little deaf. Pray speak louder."

"You want to see D'Arcy?" bawled Lowther.

"Yes, yes. I am Professor Krammer—professor of languages," the old gentleman explained. "I have called in reference to an advertisement."

"This way!" said Lowther.

"To-day? Yes, I think it was to-day the advertisement said," replied Professor Krammer. "Yes, certainly it was to-day."

"Will you follow me?"

"No, I have not had tea," said Professor Krammer, again misunderstanding. "However, that is of no importance. Is Master D'Arcy here?"

"I'll take you to him, sir!" shrieked Lowther.

"Oh, yes! Quite so! Thank you!" said the old gentleman, blinking benevolently at Lowther through his spectacles. "Thank you, my lad."

Monty Lowther led him into the School House. Tom Merry and Manners collapsed on the stone balustrade.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Gussy will have a handful with that johnny."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 15.

Still They Come.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY jumped up to receive his visitor. Lowther showed him into the study, and vanished. D'Arcy was glad to see that the old gentleman had no golf clubs or musical instruments about him. Apparently it was the genuine article at last, and Arthur Augustus was accordingly relieved.

"Pwofessah Kwammah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Glad to see you, pwofessah! Will you take a seat?"

"Not at all," said the professor. "It is indeed rather warm, but I did not notice the heat. It is quite cool in here."

It dawned upon Arthur Augustus that his visitor was a little deaf.

"Will you take a seat?" he repeated, raising his voice.

"Thanks—no. I never eat between meals."

"Oh cwumbs!" murmured Arthur Augustus; and he pushed a chair towards his visitor instead of repeating the invitation orally. Professor Krammer sat down, with a benevolent smile.

"I have called in reference to the advertisement in the 'Wayland Times,'" he explained. "You are—ahem!—rather young to be taking up so serious a study."

"I twust I shall be able to learn, all the same, sir."

"Eh!"

"I twust I shall be able to learn!" yelled D'Arcy.

"Oh, yes, decidedly. The earlier the better, really, for such a very difficult study," said Professor Krammer. "Of course, it will be many years before you are proficient. I will not conceal that from you."

"Bai Jove!"

"What languages do you study here, in the ordinary curriculum?"

"Languages?"

"Yes. French, I suppose, and German and Latin, of course?"

"Yaas."

"But not Greek?"

"They used to have Gweek," said Arthur Augustus. "But it was dwopped for German. It is an extwa now for those who want it. I don't. But what has that to do——"

"You say you study Greek?"

"No, I say I do not!"

"Ah! And you have no grounding in the language?"

D'Arcy shook his head. He found that an easier way of saying no than with his voice to the deaf old gentleman.

"And in Sanskrit, Hebrew, and Chinese—nothing as yet, I suppose?"

"Bai Jove! No!"

"Very well. Everything must have a beginning," said the professor benevolently. "I must say it is very meritorious indeed for a young gentleman of your years to wish to take up such difficult studies. If I may make a suggestion I should recommend beginning with only one of them—say, Greek at first."

"Gweek!"

"Yes, you will find that the easiest of the four."

Arthur Augustus stared at him blankly. His new theory that ventriloquism had a softening effect upon the brain had received a startling confirmation. The first man had wanted to teach him with a violin, the second with golf clubs, and now the third wanted to make the study of Greek, Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Chinese, the vehicle for the study of ventriloquism. It was simply astounding.

"But I don't want to study Gweek!" D'Arcy gasped.

"This week certainly—to-day, if you like," said the professor. "In fact, I am quite prepared to give you your first lesson now."

There was the sound of a chuckle from the passage. The professor did not hear it, but Arthur Augustus did, and he guessed that Tom Merry & Co. were there, listening to that peculiar interview with enjoyment. Arthur Augustus was not enjoying it.

"You have some books, I suppose?" asked the professor, drawing his chair up to the table.

"I have no books on ventwiloquism," said D'Arcy. "I have had some lessons fwom a chap named Buntah."

"Eh?"

"I haven't any books about it."

"Ah, then you must obtain some," said the professor. "However, we can commence without books."

"Oh, good!" said Arthur Augustus, much relieved, feeling that they were getting to business at last. "I suppose the first lesson will be in thwowin' the voice?"

"Eh! The voice? We shall study both the active and the passive voice, of course. But that will come later."

"I should have thought the voice was active all the time, sir?"

"Eh!"

"Isn't the voice always active?" shrieked D'Arcy.

"My dear boy, of course not. It is the same as in Latin—indeed, in any language—there is always an active and a passive voice," said the professor. "For instance, luo, I loose—that is active."

"Oh cwumbs! Blessed if he isn't teachin' me Gweek!" muttered Arthur Augustus. "I suppose ventwiloquists are all mad. That is the only explanation. It's uttahly imposs that it should be necessawy to learn Gweek in ordah to be a ventwiloquist. I say"—he shouted again—"is that weally necessawy, pwofessah?"

"Not now, not now," said the professor soothingly. "We shall come to the verbs later on. We must begin at the beginning, of course. Are you acquainted with the Greek alphabet?"

"The Gweek alphabet! My deah sir, I know the lettahs," said Arthur Augustus. "I don't know more than that, and I forget some of them. But is it necessawy——"

"Very good. We will commence with the definite article," said the professor. "There are thirty forms of the definite article in Greek; but that is not so difficult as it sounds, as many of them are merely repetitions of the others. We will take a simple noun of the first declension for a beginning——"

"But——"

"Xwpa"—the professor wrote it down. "Chora—land. Xwpa—hee chora," said the professor, pronouncing it for D'Arcy's benefit. "Hee chora—the land! You see?"

"B-b-but——"

"That is a feminine noun, nominative case, singular number, and therefore it takes the article——"

"Yaas, but—but I'm not studyin' Gweek!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "What has that got to do with ventriloquism? Bai Jove, you're worse than the othahs."

"Eh!"

"I weally do not undahstand."

"You will understand in time," said the professor. "It is naturally a little difficult at first, owing to the difference in the alphabet. But in a short time you will find yourself able to make the Greek letters as easily as the Roman, and to read them as easily. It is merely a question of custom. When you get to the Chinese, you will find your difficulties begin."

"Chinese! Gweat Scott!"

"But we are doing Greek at present. I will send you a list of books you had better obtain——"

"Books on ventwiloquism?"

"Eh!"

"Are you goin' to send me a list of books on ventwiloquism?" shrieked D'Arcy.

"Certainly not. What do you mean? What has ventriloquism to do with learning Greek?" the professor exclaimed in astonishment.

"What I want to know is what has learnin' Gweek to do with ventwiloquism?" groaned the unfortunate student. "I don't know what you're dwivin' at. Will you explain?"

"Eh!"

"I should like you to explain what you mean."

"Certainly, certainly. Now, for your first exercise, until you obtain your books, I will give you half-a-dozen feminine nouns."

"Oh deah!"

"And the feminine article in all cases and numbers. Note that there are three numbers in Greek—singular, dual, and plural."

"Bai Jove! But——"

"Your first exercise will be to take the noun 'chora,' and decline it."

"I shall certainly decline it. I shall decline the whole bizney!" howled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I decline to have anythin' to do with it. I weally think you must be off your wockah."

"Eh?"

"You must have come to the w'ong place. I wasn't advertisin' for a teachah of beastly Gweek. I haven't the faintest ideah what you have come heah for, unless you have escaped fwom a lunatic asylum!" Arthur Augustus exclaimed, utterly exasperated, and rising to his feet. "I wefuse to listen to any more of this on any terms."

"Terms!" exclaimed the professor, catching only the last word. "Dear me! I quite forgot to mention about terms. Shall we say half-a-guinea a lesson?"

"But I tell you," gasped D'Arcy—"I tell you I don't want to learn Gweek! There's no need for you to stay now."

"Certainly. I have no objection to your paying now—in fact, I generally receive my fees in advance," said the deaf gentleman. "If you prefer, you can pay for each lesson separately, or for a whole term in advance. I leave that entirely to you, Master D'Arcy."

"I wish you would leave my study to me."

"Yes, undoubtedly it will be a valuable study for you," agreed the professor.

"Oh cwumbs! I didn't say anythin' of the sort. I say——"

"Very well, if you wish to pay—half-a-guinea, please. But we have not finished the lesson yet."

"Will you go away?" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

The professor heard that, and he rose to his feet in astonishment and indignation. He glared at the junior over his spectacles.

"I fail to understand you. Am I to understand that you do not require these lessons, Master D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you have brought me here for nothing, and wasted my time?"

"You've been wastin' my time, I think," said the exasperated swell of St. Jim's. "Blow your beastly old Gweek! Go and buwy it!"

"Under the circumstances, I shall refuse to give you any lessons."

"Thank goodness!"

"But you will not be allowed to waste my valuable time like this, young gentleman!" thundered the indignant professor. "I shall accept payment for this lesson."

"Bai Jove! Will you?"

"Pay up, Gussy!" chortled Monty Lowther at the door. "Better let him go. There are three chaps downstairs waiting their turns."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Thwee ventwiloquial pwofessahs!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Yes; and one's got a cornet."

"My hat!"

"And the other two have sets of golf clubs!"

"Great Scott!"

"And there's a man coming across the quad with a 'cello!" yelled Reilly up the stairs.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're all insane!" gasped Arthur Augustus, utterly dismayed. "All as mad as gidday hattahs."

"Sir, you owe me half-a-guinea!" said the professor sternly. "Unless you hand me that sum, and apologise for your extraordinary behaviour, I shall go at once to your headmaster."

"Pay up, Gussy!"

"But weally—oh, vewy well! The old johnnie has made a mistake, but he is an old chap, and he can have ten-and-six if he wants it," said Arthur Augustus. And he generously handed out a half-sovereign and a sixpence. "There you are, sir. There has been a mistake. I'm sowwy!"

The professor snorted, pocketed the coins, and marched out of the study. Toby put his head in at the door.

"Four gentlemen to see you, Master D'Arcy," he sniggered.

"D-d-don't let them come up!" stuttered D'Arcy, feeling as if his head were turning round. "I can't stand any more of it! I weally can't! Dwive them away!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake came hurrying along to the study. His wicket was down, and he was keen to be on the scene. He had

spotted a long-haired gentleman with a violoncello in the quad.

"Getting your visitors, Gussy?" he inquired, looking into the study. "Hallo, what's wrong? You don't look happy."

Arthur Augustus groaned.

"I'm fed-up. I—I think I shall chuck up ventwiloquism!" he panted. "They're all mad—mad as March hattahs—I mean, hares. They want to teach me ventwiloquism with violins, golf clubs, and Gweek exahcises!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's a chap coming upstairs with a book under his arm!" yelled manners. "I can't see whether it's Hebrew or Sanskrit"

"And here comes a chap with a cornet!"

Arthur Augustus looked out of the study. As the afternoon wore on, more and more answers were coming to the advertisement. In the lower hall there were now six gentlemen waiting to see Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in various degrees of shabbiness, with violin, and violoncello, and golf clubs, and big volumes. As D'Arcy looked down, he saw two more come in from the quadrangle—one with a cornet, and the other with a 'cello. Evidently there was no lack of professors, and equally evidently, to D'Arcy's mind, they were all dotty. He retreated weakly into his study.

"I can't stand any more of it!" he gasped. "That old chap neahly turned my hair gwey. I won't see them! They can go and dwown themselves."

"But you must see them!" yelled Tom Merry. "They've come in answer to your ad, and they will want their expenses, anyway. Better take the opportunity and learn the violin, the 'cello, the piano, the cornet, and golf, and Sanskrit, and Greek!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're all dottay. Pway dwive them away. Give them their expenses—give them anythin' they ask for—only don't let them into this study!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "It's imposs for me to deal with that cwowd. Dwive them away!"

CHAPTER 16.

Saved!

"DWIVE them away, deah boys!"

The juniors shrieked with laughter.

But it was no laughing matter to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The unfortunate swell of St. Jim's felt as though his brain was in a whirl.

The Greek professor had worn him out, as it were. He had not nerve enough to face the rest of his callers. And they were increasing in numbers. A glance from the study window showed him another long-haired and shabby gentleman crossing the quadrangle with a violin-case under his arm.

Arthur Augustus fairly collapsed into the study armchair, and groaned in anguish of spirit.

"They must be pottay!" he gasped. "How can you teach ventriloquism with a beastly violin?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How can you teach it with golf clubs?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or with Gweek exahcises and things, and 'cellos and—and —— Bai Jove, one of them will be bwingin' along a gwand piano next!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The chap with the cornet's coming upstairs," chuckled Blake.

"Keep him out!"

"But——"

"Dwive him away!"

"Master D'Arcy here?" said the seedy gentleman with the cornet, looking in surprise at the almost hysterical juniors gathered round the doorway of Study No. 6. "I've called in answer to an advertisement in the 'Wayland Times.'"

"Don't let him come in!"

"What's that?" ejaculated the cornet-player.

"Ahem! Master D'Arcy is seeing a good many callers this afternoon!" gasped Lowther. "Just wait downstairs a bit, will you?"

"My time's valuable."

"Yes, yes; but wait a bit."

The gentleman with the cornet discontentedly retreated downstairs. He was met on the stairs by an equally seedy individual with a 'cello.

"I've called in answer to an advertisement——"

"Yes, yes."

"In the 'Wayland Times.'"

"Yes; but——"

"Is Master D'Arcy here?" persisted the gentleman with the 'cello. "I've brought my instrument with me, and—— I had to bring it in a cab. The advertisement stated that expenses would be paid."

"Yes, yes. Go down and wait a bit," said Blake, almost choking, and he fairly "shooed" away the gentleman with the 'cello.

"Don't let 'em come in," groaned Arthur Augustus. "I weally cannot stand any more of it. I feel as if my bwain will turn."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' whatevah to laugh it. They are all mad, mad as hattahs and March hares welled togethah, bai Jove! It's simply dangewous to have all those feahful maniacs in the house at once."

Blake clung to the doorway, in danger of an attack of hysterics.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Gussy," he gasped. "I'll get rid of the giddy crowd of them, if you'll give up ventriloquism. Otherwise, I'll bring the whole gang in here on you at once."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Is it a go?" demanded Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I was thinkin' of givin' up the beastly thing, anyway," groaned Arthur Augustus. "I am convinced that all ventwiloquists are off their gidday wockahs, aftah this. It must have some peculiah effect upon the bwain, I suppose. It's a go! Only get wid of them, deah boy. Cleah them off, somehow. Pay them anythin' they want! Only for goodness' sake don't let that awful cwowd of cwanks loose in here on me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll save you," chuckled Tom Merry. "We'll have a whip round to raise the exes for them, and Gussy shall stand us a big feed in the study to compensate."

"Yaas, wathah. Anythin' you like."

"Trust to us!" said Monty Lowther nobly. "We'll rescue you, Gussy. Quite sure, though, you wouldn't like to interview personally the lunatic with the 'cello."

"Yaas, yaas."

"Or the maniac with the golf clubs?"

"Yaas, yaas," shrieked D'Arcy. "Dwive them away!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake, nearly choking, dragged the study door shut. Then the grinning juniors hurried downstairs to deal with the crowd of applicants for the post of instructing Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in so many varied arts.

The crowd of seedy gentlemen received the unsatisfactory explanation that the advertiser did not require their services. Whereupon there was a general indignant howl for expenses, and when it was admitted that the claim for expenses would be met, it was remarkable how expensive a thing it seemed to be for a seedy gentleman to walk over from Wayland to St. Jim's.

However, terms were arranged at last, and the visitors departed with their various instruments, Arthur Augustus watching them go from his study window; and when the last of them had disappeared he drew a deep, deep sigh of relief.

. . . . . .

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not become a ventriloquist.

He was quite fed-up on that subject.

For some considerable time he remained firmly convinced that the practice of the art of ventriloquism had a deleterious effect upon the brain.

He received sudden enlightenment, however, when a copy of his famous advertisement in the "Wayland Times" came before his eyes one day. Then he understood. His indignation was great, but it only evoked chuckles in the School House. Fortunately, by that time Arthur Augustus was very keen about cricket, and he confided to Blake, on reflection, that, upon the whole, he'd decided that he'd "bettah stick to cwicket, and let ventwiloquism alone." And he did. And so Study No. 6 was troubled no more with the weird and wonderful efforts of D'Arcy, the ventriloquist.

THE END.

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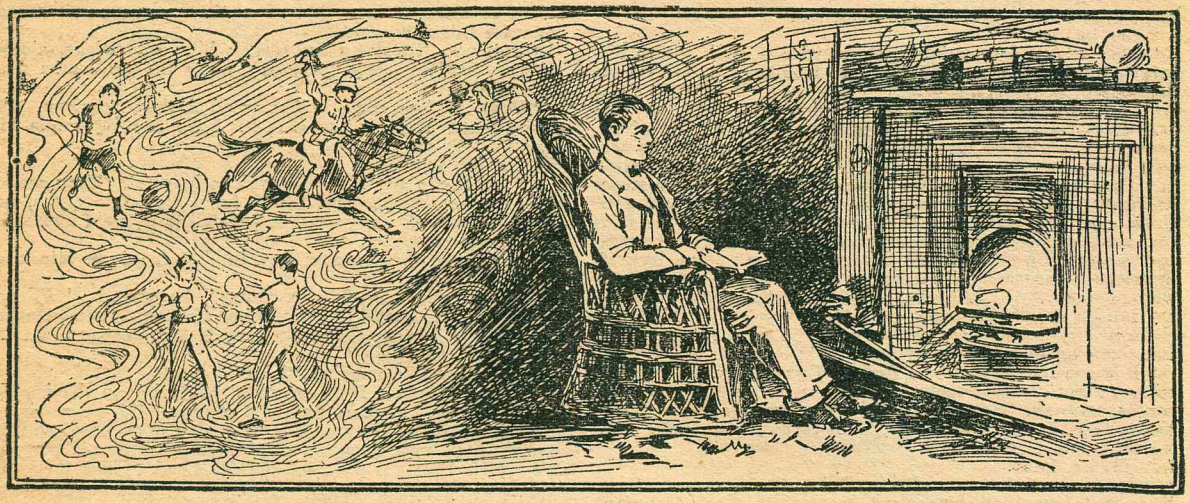


A Splendid Tale of School, Sport, and Adventure.

By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

INTRODUCTION.

Geoffrey Foster, one of the most popular members of Grovehouse School, is elected to fill a vacant place in the school cricket team. His victory earns him the enmity of Bangley Jeffcock, who tried means fair and foul to secure the coveted position for his chum Weames. Together they plot to ruin Foster. The latter's father, who controls a company with Jeffcock senior, is made responsible for the failure of the company, and a warrant is issued for his arrest. The charge preferred is that Major Foster made use of the company's money for his own purposes. After saying good-bye to his son, Major Foster flees the country. A trumped-up charge of robbery is brought against Geoffrey, and he is expelled from the school. After seeing his mother at his uncle's house, Geoffrey sets out for fame and fortune.

One night Geoffrey is instrumental in stopping a big, burly, ruffian from ill-treating a lad. A fight takes place, and Foster succeeds in knocking the other down, who, while on the ground, has his arm run over by a motor-car. He learns the assailant's name is Alf Brookes, a well-known boxer, and the crowd who witness the fight are loud in their praises of Geoffrey's prowess. A police-officer, however, sees fit to take Foster in charge, but he is dismissed the next morning, after Joe Gunning, Brookes's trainer, had given evidence in his favour. When leaving the court, he comes across Jellotson, an old Grovehouse chum, who takes the trainer and Foster to lunch.

Geoffrey, much to his dismay, learns that Alf Brookes was to have fought a man known as the Tea Taster at the National Sporting Club on Jellotson's behalf. Having indirectly caused Brooke's accident, Geoffrey offers to take his place, an offer which is gratefully accepted. The Tea Taster is backed heavily by Jeffcock. Geoffrey wins after a strenuous fight, and thus wipes off a lot of old debts against his enemy.

(Now go on with the story.)

PART III.—COUNTY CRICKET.

At the Metropole—Captain Hilton—A Question of Professionalism — Geoffrey Decides to Change His Status and Play for His County.

Seated in the comfortable lounge-chairs that are supplied for the use of their guests by the proprietors of the Hotel Metropole at Brighton, and placed at the entrance on the King's Road, were three well-known figures, Grovehouse boys all.

They were William Hewitt, sunburnt, healthy, and broadened out so that in a few months of his leaving school he had changed, as it were, from being a boy into a man; Jellotson, taller and broader than of yore, with his handsome, aristocratic features more distinguished than ever; and Geoffrey Foster, well-dressed and very boyish in appearance still, but much more the man in seriousness of thought and deliberateness of action than either of his friends.

"You still refuse the £1,000 I wish to give you?" said Jellotson in a tone of annoyance, casting a quick glance of inquiry at Geoffrey.

"Yes," answered Geoffrey emphatically; "you know I can't accept it."

"Why not?" objected Hewitt. "There's no reason on earth why you shouldn't, Foster."

"That's what I keep on telling him," said Jellotson. "If it hadn't been for him I should have had to have paid £100 to Jeffcock owing to my failure to bring a man to the scratch to face the Tea Taster. He licked Watts out of hand. I admit it was sheer bravado made me accept those bets of Jeffcock's, for, candidly, I never thought Foster had a chance—though I might have given Gunning credit for something when he told me that Foster had improved under his care so much that he had developed into a marvel—but having won all that money for me, don't you think Foster ought to take a full half-share of it?"

"I can't!" cried Geoffrey again.

"Why not?" queried Hewitt.

"It's Jeffcock's money," said the boy doggedly. "I wouldn't touch a penny of it."

"Sentiment is all very well," said the late captain of Grovehouse. "I've got a little too much of it myself, for my own happiness' sake, but it's not a commercial commodity. Take the money, and enjoy yourself with it, Foster."

"No," said the boy determinedly, "I won't touch a halfpenny of it."

"Then," said Jellotson, with a sigh, "we've simply got to blue the lot. Hewitt, my dear old chap, you ought to have been at the National Sporting in November, and seen Jeffcock's face after the defeat of his man. I never saw anyone so cut up in my life as Bangley was before they turned him out of the club. My word, it did hit him hard!"

"Where did he get the money from to pay his losses?" asked Hewitt.

"Had to make an appeal to his father, as his own money wouldn't meet half his liabilities. My word, didn't Major Jeffcock storm! But he had to part. You see, Bangley wouldn't have had half a chance in the Service if he had gone into it with the reputation of being a man whose debts of honour had not been paid.

"Look here, Foster," Jellotson went on. "I've got to do

something for you, you know. I'm under a deep obligation to you, and I always pay my debts. You've got no money, no employment that will bring you in any, and what are you going to do?"

"I don't know," said Geoffrey. "I dare say something will turn up."

But he spoke doubtfully. Although he had spent the concluding portion of the winter with Jellotson as his guest, and had passed the months of the early spring alternately looking for work and at Jellotson's home in Devonshire, nothing had turned up, and try as he would it seemed as if he must fail, though Nature had gifted him with every endowment that should lead to success. You see, Geoffrey Foster had had no experience at anything that could bring him in money, and his ambition soared far above the calling of a beggarly solicitor's clerk.

"There's the cricket season close at hand," mused Hewitt. "Jellotson has told you, of course, Foster, that both he and I will play for our county whenever we can get away from our studies at Sandhurst? The Surrey team has gone to pieces since Hayward has retired, and they are going to take desperate measures to try and win back their old position as champion county again. By the way, Jellotson, did you hear the rumour confirmed about Bangley Jeffcock?"

"Yes," said Jellotson, with a nod, diving his hands deeper into his overcoat pockets, for he was seated where he could catch the full force of the south-easterly wind. "He's going to play right enough, confound him! What a pity we are all for Surrey! Neither of us will be able to have the gratification of bowling him out."

"Well, look here," said Hewitt. "I was talking to Captain Hilton the other day—he's chairman of the committee, you know—and he happened to mention young Foster, whom he saw batting and bowling last year for Belvidere. He was wondering whether they couldn't try him as an amateur.

"Of course, I explained your position to him, Foster, and said you wouldn't be able to bear the expense. He seemed sorry. But, my dear old fellow, why the deuce shouldn't you join the team as a professional? Indeed, after your appearing in the ring professionally against the Tea Taster, I doubt whether you would be permitted to play cricket as an amateur. What do you think of the idea? You have qualified for the county for years. There would be no trouble about that. I can manage the whole thing decently, I think, if I go to Captain Hilton; and he would see that there was no trouble in committee. The whole point at issue, however, is—would you care to entertain the idea?"

Geoffrey Foster thought it over. It came to him as a welcome surprise, and though he would feel sore at the loss of his amateur status, which was doubly dear to him because he had played for his school, he recalled many instances of amateurs who were not able, through lack of means, to follow their beloved summer pastime, becoming professionals, and doing well in the field as well as socially, and at the same time retaining the respect of all their friends.

Besides, he was face to face with starvation. He could not go on accepting the hospitality of Jellotson and Hewitt—good-natured though both of them were—for ever, and he felt that the breaking point had been reached.

"Would either of you chaps think the less of me, if I did?" he asked, looking at them wistfully.

"Do you think Hewitt would have made the suggestion if there was any fear of that?" asked Jellotson. And Foster was silent.

"I have met heaps of professional cricketers," Jellotson went on, "and with but a single exception I have found them the nicest chaps you could care to meet. Of course, we should all feel a little sore at the violation of school traditions, Foster; but then, it depends upon the man. You can't very well help yourself if you wish to continue playing the game, can you? And why should you, with your great ability, not play for your county, when Hewitt, Jeffcock, and I will sport the brown of Surrey?"

Geoffrey was silent still.

"He's a sight better man than either of us, Jellotson," said Hewitt, chiming in, "and Hilton would be only too glad to accept his services. Come, Foster! After all, it's better than starving, and you're not the sort of beggar to accept anybody's charity and not resent it. What do you say?"

"Very well," responded Geoffrey. "If you can get me the engagement, I will accept it, and shall be very grateful to you."

"Spoken like a man," said Hewitt. "Your hand on it, Foster, and consider the business as good as settled."

Presently, as they sat discussing the probability of Geoffrey's playing for Surrey, a cab drove up to the hotel entrance, the porter lifted some baggage down from the front of it, and a tall, military-looking gentleman, whose hair was quite grey, and whose face was lined by the passing of the years, but who was as active and as alert as a schoolboy, sprang up the steps two at a time. But before he could enter the hotel, William Hewitt rose from his chair and extended a hand in greeting.

"Of all the coincidences in the world," he said. "We were just talking about you, Hilton, and the very next moment you appear. I was never so astonished in my life."

"I'm glad to see you, Hewitt," responded the stranger, returning Hewitt's handshake with interest. "Just a moment, while I engage a room, and I'll come out and join you, and we can have a chat and a smoke. I don't want anything to eat, as I had luncheon on the train coming down."

In a few minutes the well-groomed and well-dressed gentleman had joined them on the steps, and, offering his cigar-case round, he lit a fragrant Havana, and, leaning back with a sigh of content, asked for the news.

"I never expected to see you, Hewitt, or you, Jellotson, down here," he said. "I was bored with town, and I have had a heavy week of it, and so I came for a rest and change of air. You two will play in the first of our matches, will you not? I think we can ill spare you. I wish we had one or two promising young professionals coming on. But none of the juniors seem of the first class, the best of them, James Ryan, being only moderate. County qualification takes such a time. I've just been arranging for a Halifax man to come down, Hewitt. But even if he does come, by the time he's qualified, who is going to say he will not have lost his skill with both bat and ball?"

Hewitt laughed.

"Well," he cried, "I've got the very man you want. You remember speaking to me about Geoffrey Foster, who played for Belvidere? Well, I think he might be induced to join Surrey as a professional. I don't suppose his hand has lost cunning or his eye its quickness since last season."

"I must say I was impressed with the work I saw him do," said Captain Hilton a little doubtfully. "But are you quite sure he is good enough for county cricket of the first class, Hewitt?"

"He's a better man than I am, or Jellotson, either. We can both honestly say that," said Hewitt. "We are both decent bats; but he is a fine bat, and a splendid bowler to boot. I'm not sure that his bowling is not the better of the two."

"But then, to induce an amateur to turn professional,"

said the manager of the Surrey County Club, with a shake of the head. "It is not so easily done, Hewitt."

"Well, here he is," said the old captain of Grovehouse. "Geoffrey, let me introduce you. Captain Hilton, of the Surrey County Club—Mr. Geoffrey Foster."

The captain shot a keen glance at Geoffrey and smiled. He saw a handsome, boyish-looking youth, with a sun-tanned face and clear blue eyes. There was something entirely winning to Captain Hilton about the lad, and the story of the way in which he had stepped into the breach to save his friend Jellotson over the Tea Taster fight, which the captain had heard a dozen times over from the lips of Jellotson, appealed to him with irresistible force.

"I'm glad to meet you, Foster," he said. "And so you have seriously thought of applying for a place in the county team as a professional, eh? Well, I'm not at all sure that you can't have it. You will, of course, have a trial. You won't mind that? If satisfactory, nothing more need be said. You'd better place yourself in the hands of our instructor, Fielding. If there is anything good in you, he'll soon discover it. We are starting practice at the Oval now. When will you be prepared to come down and have some batting and bowling practice?"

"As soon as you like, sir," said Geoffrey.

"Well, I sha'n't be in town again until Monday week. Suppose you come then, Foster. And would it be rude of me to ask why you intend to take to professional cricket as a pursuit?"

"Because," said Geoffrey, quite frankly, "I have nothing to do, and at present am living on my friends. You know, my father left England over"—and Geoffrey's voice broke—"the—the London and County Building Society frauds."

"Oh, you are the son of that Foster!" said Captain Hilton, in surprise. "Well, I don't know that I feel less kindly disposed towards you because of that. I knew Major Foster to be one of the best fellows in the world, as honest and as upright as the day, and one of the finest soldiers who ever grasped a sword or sat a horse. I shall never believe that he wilfully committed a fraud, despite all the overwhelming evidence there is against him and his sudden and unexplained flight. I should have liked him to have stayed at home and faced the music. But as he didn't, I can't help thinking that there is something behind it all which we shall never know."

"That's my opinion, too, Hilton," said Jellotson. "Major Jeffcock backed out just before the crash came. He abandoned his friend in his time of need. By George, I'd sooner think of suspecting him than I would Major Foster! He is much more the type of man to commit a fraud, if one may judge at all from his precious son!"

"And so say I," chimed in Hewitt heartily. "But now, Geoffrey, will you turn up at the Oval on Monday week?"

"I shall be glad to," replied Geoffrey.

"Well, then, Hilton," cried Hewitt, "let me congratulate you on securing the services of one of the best lads in the country! By Jove, you and I will be walking on to the field by different gates, Foster, before the season is many weeks old, but I am not at all sure that yours won't be the cleaner way! We've got to share a dressing-room with Jeffcock, remember."

"And so," said Jellotson reflectively, "we three shall once more meet again. We only want Weames to play to complete the quartette."

"Weames is qualified," laughed Captain Hilton, "but we don't think him good enough."

"You're quite right," said Hewitt. "No man is good enough who would throw away a match as he threw away our school match at Grovehouse just before I went down."

Kennington Oval—Captain Hilton Tries Geoffrey to Play for Surrey Second Eleven Against Yorkshire Second—A Brilliant Century.

"Hi, Foster! Will you come and bowl for me?"

The speaker was Captain Hilton, who, clad in whites, with pads upon his legs, and bat in his hand, came striding across the well-rolled and closely-cut grass of the Oval, towards the practice nets.

Although the cricket season had not really commenced, a blazing hot sun was shining down from overhead, and the weather conditions suggested July, instead of the end of April. But there was a lot of cold and frost to come, as the hardened cricketer well knew. Sufficient unto the day, however, is the evil thereof, and they bore with this sudden influx of summer conditions philosophically.

In obedience to Captain Hilton's call, a young professional named Ryan started across the grass, but Hilton held up his hand.

"That will do, Ryan," he said; "I called to Foster, not to you. When I want you, I will ask for you."

Ryan held back abashed, and cast a glanced of ill-concealed annoyance at Geoffrey.

Geoffrey Foster had been practising at the Oval for nearly a week, and Fielding, the head professional, and instructor—who in his day had been one of the finest all-round cricketers in England—had sent most glowing accounts of his ability to Captain Hilton, who had little difficulty in bringing the club committee round to his way of thinking, and Geoffrey had been engaged at a fair salary as a member of the Surrey County Cricket Club.

Captain Hilton was a fine batsman, albeit his best cricketing days were long since gone. Like Major Poore, who one year headed the batting averages with a sensational score, he had shown promise of doing wonderful things; but being at the time in the service of her Majesty's Government, his career as a county cricketer had been cut short by the advent of war. And the Egyptian Campaign, during which he showed unexampled courage and skill, and in which he had been badly wounded, had put a period to his cricketing ambitions; and when he returned to England, after spending many years abroad, he no longer had the nerve to take up the game where he had left it off—a much stronger, and much younger man—and County cricket, in the active playing sense, saw him no more.

But that his interest in the game was as keen as ever was shown when he acceded to the position of chairman of committee of the Surrey County Club, following in the wake of many eminent men who had preceded him. Though no longer a first-class batsman, yet Captain Hilton's wrists possessed some of their old pliancy, and his eye much of its old quickness. He could wield the willow like a past-master, and, being responsible for Geoffrey's engagement, he wished to see how the lad shaped.

He smiled brightly at Geoffrey as the youngster took up a ball and prepared to bowl.

"Don't be nervous, or afraid to bowl at me," said Captain Hilton. "I'm not such a duffer as I look, and it will need a good ball to hit my stumps."

"I sha'n't be afraid, sir," said Geoffrey, after giving Captain Hilton middle.

And then, taking a few rapid strides, he sent in a ball which beat the batsman completely, but did not hit the wicket. The captain smiled.

"That was a good attempt, lad," he said; "but it will need to be straighter."

He could not criticise the next ball, however, for crash it went into the stumps, and the bails flew into the air.

Fielding, the professional, stood by, grinning as he looked on. The captain seemed pleased.

"Keep it up, Foster," he said, "and do your best."

The young professional obeyed. His bowling was of the highest order—that Captain Hilton was quick to discover. When he did get ball on bat, he found a thousand-and-one things happening, which he never had intended, and at length satisfied—as his stumps were hit for about the twentieth time he walked away from the wicket.

"Very good indeed, my boy!" he said. "If you can

bowl as well as that in a match, you will be worth your place in any eleven."

He turned to the professional.

"Fielding," he said, "let a couple of your best lads bowl at Foster; or, better still, let Williamson take the ball. He will give us a better idea of what the boy is made of."

Williamson was a fast bowler of the first class. In style, length of reach, and action, he closely resembled the famous Richardson, once the darling of Surrey, and the pace he got upon the ball and the leg and off break were other points of similarity. He was a find whose presence in the team during the last two years had prevented Surrey from sinking into second class.

He took the ball, and as Geoffrey stood ready at the wicket, he sent down some lightning deliveries with all the cunning he could command.

Geoffrey, cool and collected, played them with all the nonchalance he used to assume when undergoing practice at Grovehouse, and which had there caught Captain William Hewitt's eye, first drawing his attention to the fact that they had a good-class cricketer at the school, whose worth had been up till then totally unrecognised.

For ten minutes did Williamson bowl continuously, and then, having tired himself sufficiently to warrant a rest, he threw the ball down, and mopped his forehead.

"What do you think of him, Williamson?" asked Captain Hilton.

"A blessed stone-wall!" was the professional's answer, graphic if not polite.

"Fielding!"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you put Foster down to play for Surrey Second Eleven versus Yorkshire Second, on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, next week?"

"In place of Ryan, sir?" asked the professional.

"Yes. What do you think?"

"Well, he certainly shows better form just now, Captain Hilton," said the professional. "Indeed, I may say that I have never been so pleased with any lad that has joined Surrey for the last ten years."

"That is high praise, Fielding."

"I mean it, sir, every word. I'm not one to flatter."

"To be sure you're not. Then you agree to playing Foster?"

"I think it a wise move, sir," said the club's instructor. "It will make the youngster feel at ease at once. He will find out that county cricket is not so much more to be feared than first-class public school cricket, and if we want to make good use of him, the sooner he discovers that the better."

"Then it is settled," said Captain Hilton. "Foster, I am very pleased indeed with you, and you have every good wish from me for your complete success."

With that, Captain Hilton walked back to the pavilion; and Ryan, who heard, turned red in the face with rage.

He crossed to Geoffrey as the boy, dismissed by Fielding, was making his way to the professional's club house.

"I've got you to thank for being kept out of Surrey Second, Foster," he cried. "I sha'n't forget. You'll have no friend in me. For two pins I'd show you what I think of you here, and now!"

"I've no reason to quarrel with you, Ryan," Geoffrey returned good-naturedly, "I am a paid professional, the same as you, now, and am at the service of the club. If I am picked to play, I must play; if I were to be ignored, I should have to stand down."

"It's an infernal shame," Ryan blurted out bitterly, "for a gentleman amateur to turn professional and come and take the bread out of our mouths! Come outside and I'll fight you, Foster, if you are a man!"

"I shouldn't advise you to," put in Williamson, who had sauntered up, and who had caught the last part of the speech. "I was at the National Sporting Club the night he knocked out the Tea Taster. I don't think you would stand much chance."

Ryan's eyes bulged out of their sockets. He tried to say something, but no words would come, and, turning on his heel, he walked away.

The information Williamson had voluntarily given had put a different complexion on affairs. He had not known that this Foster was the Foster who had caused such a sensation over the Tea-Taster fight. Ryan ate his words, but for that very reason vowed that he would one day get even with Geoffrey.

"Only wait," he muttered; "only wait!"

The Surrey Second Eleven match against Yorkshire Second was played at the Oval, and a very fair crowd indeed assembled to see the future Surrey cracks play. Foster was a new name to them, but the smart and taking appearance of the lad soon won him many friends, and his performance with the ball during Yorkshire's innings being above the average sample—he taking five wickets for 41 runs—they voted him a very good capture.

Yorkshire scored, in all, 193, all out.

Surrey, in batting, started poorly. The wicket was not of the best and "kicked" a little. The first four men retired, having only put on a score of 43. Then Fielding, who was directing operations, and who acted as wicket-keeper, sent Foster in as a forlorn hope.

He hadn't tried the lad before, reckoning he would be too nervous to do himself justice; but as soon as Geoffrey got to the wicket, with the light of battle shining in his eyes, he began with that indomitable courage that was part and parcel of himself to lay about him with a will, and boundary succeeding boundary infused such spirit into the crowd that they cheered and cheered again with as much zest as if it were a first-class team match and Jessop or Hayward were at the wickets.

Three partners did Geoffrey lose, whilst he went on batting as firmly and as merrily as ever; and at last, with a mighty hit, he scored his century, the 190 going up.

Safe past this point, Geoffrey began to hit more recklessly than ever, and putting on 24 runs in one over—a boundary from each ball—he sent the crowd into an ecstasy of delight. But the end was near. When he had scored 131 he scraped a ball into the air, and was promptly caught at the wicket.

The ovation he received when he retired was tremendous, and the jealous Ryan, who was busy about the ground, heard it all with dismay.

Surrey were all out, 233, out of which total Geoffrey had scored the figures quoted above. His century won the match for Surrey, for Yorkshire were very keen, and topped the Surrey score with their second innings. The wicket, however, wore well, and the Surrey men, heartened by a well-hit 30 by Foster—who went in this time first wicket—hit off the runs and won the match with three wickets in hand.

The match established another reputation, and, to the astonishment of the whole cricketing world, Foster was chosen to play with the first team, being looked upon as the smartest capture of the year.

Surrey v. Notts—Geoffrey Plays Well—Bertha Morgan is not Ashamed to Talk to the Professional—News of Mother.

The immediate result of Geoffrey's brilliant century against Yorkshire Second Eleven was seen the following week, when, in the match with Notts at the Oval—which team, with Kent (the holders) was strongly fancied for the championship—he was selected to play for the First Eleven.

It was a proud day for Geoffrey. The weather had undergone a marked change. Instead of the brilliant sunshine which had made the previous week so pleasant, there were dull, leaden skies overhead, a cold wind blew from the north-east, and the sap which had been running freely in the branches of the trees received a severe check, and leaves began to droop and wither.

The "flannelled fools," as Rudyard Kipling in his misguided judgment presumed to call them, took the field with their sweaters on and their coats buttoned close. It was no joke standing about under such conditions, and it was not surprising that only a handful of spectators, enthusiasts all of them, should turn up to watch the play.

Nottingham batted first. They had a strong team out, consisting of A. O Jones, Iremonger, G. Gunn, Hardstaff, Payton, J. W. Day, Taylor, Hallam, Oates, and Wass.

Surrey had the following eleven: Jellotson, Hewitt, Thomas, Williamson, Foster, Mason, Wright, Turner, Gill, and G. W. Atterbury. It was a more or less speculative eleven, and the disastrous results of the previous season for Surrey robbed the club's followers of all confidence in the team.

Nottingham went in to bat upon an excellent wicket that did great credit to groundsman Fielding.

Jones and Iremonger opened the innings, and, batting with extreme confidence against the bowling of Williamson and Turner, they soon sent double figures up, and were just in the thirties when Iremonger was clean bowled by Williamson. G. Gunn followed, but before he could get set he left with a score of 5 to his credit, and J. Gunn came in.

He commenced to bat with great skill and resource, and not even the dismissal of Jones to a fine ball off Williamson—who, so far, had taken all the wickets—daunted him. He found a steady partner in Hardstaff, and steadily the score began to rise until the century was reached and passed; and 50 more runs added before the fifth wicket fell.

One hundred and fifty-one was marked upon the score-board, with five men out, and it looked as if Notts would pile up a fine total—a winning total, perhaps, upon such a wicket.

It was then that Atterbury, the Surrey captain, on a

whisper from Hewitt, put Foster on to bowl. An immediate result accrued, for he clean-bowled Hardstaff, when that batsman had totalled 24; and with Williamson having just dismissed J. Gunn for 71, matters took a turn Surreyway.

Turner, who had been hitherto severely punished, took Wass's wicket, and, getting a thorough mastery of the batting for the first time, the wickets fell like rain, only J. W. Day making a determined resistance and carrying his bat for 13; and with the last five wickets falling for the addition of but 18 runs, Notts were all out for 174.

Geoffrey had only succeeded in taking one wicket, and had 14 runs hit off him; but his analysis compared favourably with that of Williamson with six for 91, and Turner with two for 57 Hallam had the misfortune to be run out.

The question that the spectators now asked themselves was: "What would Surrey do?"

The answer came from Jellotson, who opened the innings with Atterbury. He hadn't been at the wicket ten minutes ere he had the misfortune to lose his captain, who was caught by Hallam off Wass for a duck.

Hewitt, of Grovehouse, went in next, opening with a promising two and a single, whilst Jellotson played two boundaries with splendid precision. Then there came a cry of "How's that?" and up into the air J. Gunn threw the ball, which had slipped off the shoulder of Hewitt's bat, and he retired.

Thomas, who went in next, attempted nothing, being merely content to keep his end up; and, hitting all round the wicket with splendid freedom, Jellotson began to pile up the score. Then Baker, who on one of the few occasions he had attempted to hit, as he put the ball away, called to Jellotson. The aristocrat, however, seeing the fieldsman smartly pick up the ball, held up his hand.

"No, no!" he cried. "Go back—go back!"

Thomas, flurried, did not turn at once, but hesitated in the very middle of the wicket. When he did recover his presence of mind, and made a rush for it, he was too late, and, like a flash the wicket-keeper whipped off the bails, Thomas being very foolishly run out, having contributed nothing to the total, but helping Jellotson, nevertheless, by the gallant way he had kept his wicket up.

Williamson, Mason, and Wright contributed 7, 4, and 4 to the score, while Jellotson played himself in to the top of his form; and then Geoffrey was sent to the wicket.

Geoffrey began very carefully, but he hit occasionally, nevertheless, and runs now began to come freely. Jellotson, who was now showing magnificent form, did the bulk of the scoring, but Geoffrey did his share, and when Jellotson had topped the century, and Geoffrey had reached the respectable total of 32, the young professional had the misfortune to sky a ball from J. Gunn, and was caught by Oates, to his dismay, and that of the Surrey partisans. But they had carried the score to within a couple of runs of the Notts total, and things began to look brighter for Surrey.

As Geoffrey, with his bat tucked under his arm, was passing the members' stand, and just as he raised his cap in answer to the applause with which his retirement was greeted, he heard his name called in a sweet, girlish voice, and, starting, he saw Bertha Morgan, daughter of the Head of Grovehouse, leaning over the palings, and holding out her hand to him.

The girl looked prettier than ever; her cheeks were glowing with pleasure at seeing him again.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Foster," she said, thinking nothing of the curious glances that were sent in their direction. "You are looking better than ever—more of a man, you know. But fancy your turning professional cricketer! I had a talk with Mr. Jellotson before he went in to bat, and Mr. Hewitt came and talked to me. Pa is in the stand somewhere; he came to see the Grovehouse boys bat. He said some very unkind things about you; but you will not mind that, will you, if I don't?"

"No," said Geoffrey, blushing and confused.

"I saw your mother the other day," she continued. "That was what I wished to tell you. Mother and I visited Trentham Hall, at Mr. Garside's invitation, and we met her there. She is so sweet, so sad, and so kind. I loved her."

Geoffrey's colour deepened.

"Was she well?" he asked.

"Quite well, but so sad because of you. She didn't know where you were, though she told me that you had written to her several times, saying that you were well, but giving no address. How she loves you, Mr. Foster! She is a mother to be proud of. My mamma, although she is hard and cold as a rule, quite melted towards her. And now I must say good-bye. We mustn't talk together any longer, for father has seen me, and he will think it wrong of me to speak to you at all." She pressed his hand again, and Geoffrey, turning away with sad and yet happy thoughts filling his heart, hurried to the pavilion, whilst the pretty girl joined her father.

(Another splendid instalment next Wednesday.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 328.

"THE GEM" LIBRARY FREE
CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl; English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. *Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.*

Readers wishing to *reply* to advertisements appearing in this column *must write to the advertisers direct.* No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

Victor E. Mulhall, Station Street, Seymour, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in England, age 17.

Sydney J. Sefco, Orontes, Westbourne Street, Petersham, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in postcards.

J. Robarts, 12, Steele Avenue, St. Kilda, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in England, age 13-14.

Felix C. Brown, Croydon P.O., Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Scotland, or America, age 18-22.

F. A. Wilson, care of J. F. Gough, P.O. Box 212, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England or Scotland, age about 13.

H. Friedman, 54, Chateaubriand Avenue, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps.

Miss Athole McPhee, 253, Danks Street, Albert Park, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in the United Kingdom, age 14-15.

D. H. Hoedemaker, English Mission School, Lyndoch Cape Province, South Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers.

Andrew A. Angrave, Commercial Road, Gawler, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a Scotch reader living in or near Edinburgh interested in postcards.

J. Sykes, care of 789, Landsdowne Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, would like to correspond with girl readers, age 18-21.

Harold Brooks, 807, Euclid Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England, age 16-18.

J. A. Scriven, Jun., 179, Lockman Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in postcards.

William Jellis, 12, Derrick Street, Kew, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers from all parts of the world, age 15-16.

F. E. Hammond, 89, Callope Road, Devonport, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers in the United States, Canada, and Australia, age 14-15.

Arthur Wilcox, Postal Station B., Montreal, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers living in England interested in postcards.

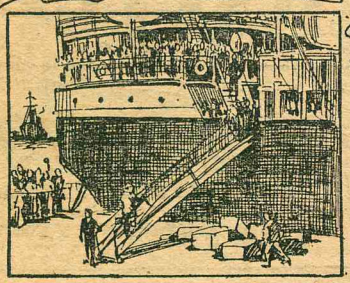
E. Harman, 20, Day Street, Leichhardt, Sydney, New South Wales, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in England interested in postcards.

Miss Freda Betts, 25, Geelong Road, Footscray, Melbourne, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in the British Isles, age 17-19.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

HOW TO GET ON IN CANADA!

BY A SUCCESSFUL EMIGRANT.



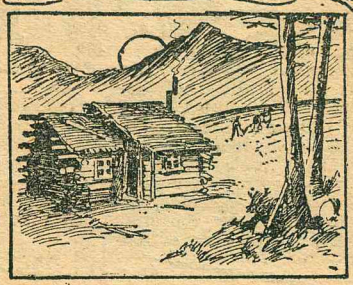
OFF TO CANADA

THIS WEEK:

Trades and Wages.

What to Wear in Winter.

A Chilly Experience.



A HOMESTEAD IN ALBERTA

The difference between an unskilled labourer and a competent tradesman is not so sharply drawn in Canada as it is in Britain. In the Old Country, for example, to be considered a painter you have to serve a long period of apprenticeship. In the Canadian West any smart young fellow can be a painter with very little practice. No great knowledge of the trade is necessary; the ability to work fast, though, counts for much. Several young Britishers of my acquaintance—and I myself too for that matter—have secured work and the full prevailing wages as painters after having had but two or three weeks' practice as brush-hands. The same easy-going conditions seem to apply generally in trades in the West.

Labourers, as I mentioned last week, find good scope in the building trade; but there are several other big industries in which thousands of unskilled hands are employed. The sawmills and timber-yards offer work to many, whilst there are often not enough men for railway construction. Many young Britishers have been induced to emigrate owing to promises of work on the railway lines at present being laid.

The development of Canada is going along very fast in this direction, and, unfortunately, to keep pace with the contracts, hundreds of foreigners have been imported from Europe. These foreign labourers, who are called "dagos" or "bohunks" by the Canadians, make conditions in some railway camps very uncomfortable for white men. However, it is quite easy to obtain a job on railway construction in the spring and summer.

The way to get taken on is either to find out the names of the contracting firms who have the work in hand and visit their offices, or else study the boards placed outside employment bureaus. There should be no difficulty at all in getting shipped to a camp from the large cities like Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver. Of course, should you happen to be in the vicinity of a camp, you could apply direct to the foreman in charge. The wages paid inexperienced men are one dollar and fifty cents to two dollars and fifty cents (6s. 3d. to 10s. 5d.) a day. Bunk-houses are provided, and board usually costs about four or five dollars (16s. 8d. or £1) a week. Often work is conducted in a slipshod way in Canada, and the loss of life is considerable on railway construction.

Many young Britishers seem anxious to become engine-drivers, station-masters, or even motor-men or conductors on the street-cars. Engine-drivers, or "locomtive engineers," as they are called in Canada, are paid from three dollars and twenty-five cents to four dollars and fifty cents (13s. 6d. to 18s. 9d.) a day. Firemen receive one dollar and seventy-five cents to three dollars (7s. 2d. to 12s. 6d.) a day; conductors on the trains from two dollars to five dollars (8s. 4d. to £1) a day; whilst porters at the stations are paid about two or three dollars (8s. 4d. to 12s. 6d.) a day. Street-car motor-men and conductors get from two dollars to three dollars and fifty cents (8s. 4d. to 14s. 7d.) a day. These are the prevalent wages in the Western provinces.

There is not any great demand for workers in the railway and street-car services, but smart young Britishers can sometimes find an opportunity for securing a position. The usual method seems to be to place your name on a list with the company whose service you desire to enter and await your turn. For the first few weeks barely a living wage will be paid.

Carpenters, painters, and bricklayers are paid about three or four dollars (12s. 6d. or 16s. 8d.) a day. Work in these trades is good only in the summer. Plumbers seem to be among the favoured workers in Canada, for their earnings sometimes reach five dollars (£1) a day. The winter weather, moreover, is a little gold-mine for them. When pipes are bursting with the severe frost the plumber wears a satisfied smile on his face, for his bank-book swells with the proceeds from much overtime.

The winter season is doubtless a great drawback to this remarkably fine country, inasmuch as the frost causes the cessation of work in some lines. Personally, though, I like the cold weather. There is nothing I know that will set the blood coursing through your veins and make you glad to be alive, like a clear, crisp winter's day in Canada. The sparkle of the sun on the snow and the rarified atmosphere—unlike anything you get in Britain—combine to give you an indescribable feeling of exhilaration. Mountains over one hundred miles away look close at hand owing to this lack of moisture in the air.

Naturally, you need a lot of warm, heavy clothing to resist the rigour of the winter climate, and often the newcomer makes mistakes he has reason to regret in purchasing his first winter outfit. During the first three winters I spent in Canada I never once wore an overcoat. This was not so much owing to any mildness in the weather as to the fact that I was engaged on outside work on which such a garment would have proved a hindrance. An ordinary suit can be worn quite comfortably throughout a Canadian winter, providing you have good thick woollen underwear beneath it. It has been well said that if you keep your hands and feet warm, the rest of the body will look after itself. Heavy mittens that resemble light boxing-gloves are worn on the hands, and a fur-lined cap with ear-protectors on the head. Personally, I found that the most satisfactory way of keeping the feet warm—no easy task at times—was by wearing sheepskin moccasins under rubber shoes. What best suits you in a case like this, though, can really only be found out by experience.

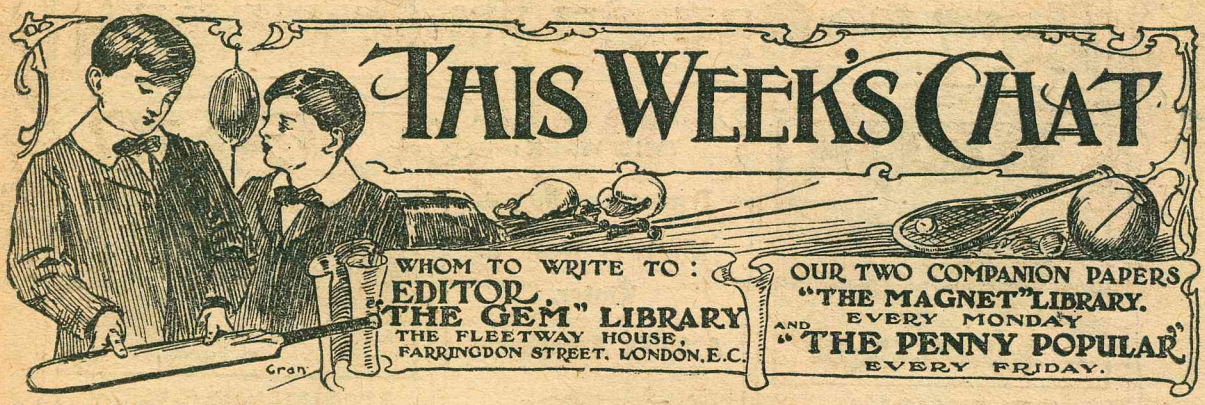
The winter opens at least one industry. Ice-cutting is commenced in some parts when the rivers are frozen to a sufficient depth. Members of ice-cutting gangs are paid about two or three dollars (8s. 4d. or 12s. 6d.) a day. Of course the work does not last long. A drawback to this employment is that rivers are usually wind-swept, and unless you are one of the fortunate ones told off to pack the ice in the shed you are apt to find it uncomfortably chilly, though I should hope not quite so chilly as a chum of mine did.

He and I were working on the same gang, and it was our first experience. The ice, which was two and a half feet thick, was sawn into squares as it lay on the river, and the blocks thus cut were broken apart and floated to the landing-shute. By some means the block of ice my chum was standing on drifted out, and, being unable to maintain his balance, off he went into the dark, icy water. We got him out, but the air temperature was 30 degrees below zero, and his clothes froze as stiff as a board almost immediately. A colder man I have never seen, and the sight of him making his way to the nearest shack with a creaking sound caused roars of unsympathetic laughter. Fortunately, no ill after-effects resulted.

The winter is the time when the majority of the logs are cut for the hundreds of sawmills. Thousands of men are kept employed in British Columbia alone. Work in the shelter of the backwoods can be most enjoyable. I will give you some particulars about this next week, when I will also fulfil my promise of telling you something about service with the Royal North-West Mounted Police, one of the finest bodies of men in the world.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 328.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday,

"THE SECRET OF THE ISLAND!"
By Martin Clifford.

In this grand long, complete school story, the Chums of St. Jim's College make a most exciting discovery, quite by accident, which leads them on to the track of an amazing mystery.

Tom Merry & Co., and Figgins & Co., of the New House, make separate investigations under thrilling circumstances, which try their courage to the utmost; but they are both on the right trail. Their pluck and determination, no less than their resentment at the way they have been treated by that suspicious character, Mr. William Brown, makes them foes to be reckoned with, and a very pretty little plot is exposed when at last they succeed in unearthing

"THE SECRET OF THE ISLAND!"

A BIRMINGHAM READER'S MESSAGE.

I am sure my chums will not begrudge the space occupied by the following letter from a fellow-reader, apropos of our latest companion paper, "Chuckles," which has achieved such a marvellous success:

"Dear Editor,—I have seen your announcements and notices in 'The Gem' and 'Magnet' Libraries about your new paper called 'Chuckles' for some time now, but it was only this week that I took the trouble to follow your advice and buy a copy. It is not too much to say that I was literally amazed by 'Chuckles'—amazed and charmed by what is, without any shadow of doubt, the brightest, best, and most splendidly printed halfpenny paper on the market. Why on earth I did not get it before I don't know. It only shows how stupid I was, because I did not know what I was missing. If you will allow me a little space in your Chat page for the purpose, I should like to send a little message to my fellow-readers of 'The Gem' and 'Magnet' Libraries, which papers I have read regularly for over five years. It is simply this: Don't delay another hour before paying your ha'pennies for the latest copy of 'Chuckles.' If you do, you are missing the finest ha'porth in the world. I say this because I honestly think that 'Chuckles' will please every single 'Gemite' and 'Magnetite' particularly; and if they don't get it now at once, one day they will want to kick themselves hard for not troubling to get it sooner.—Your sincere reader,

"A. G. B. (Edgbaston, near Birmingham)."

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"A Hackneyite."—Vernon Smith has no mother. Arthur Carlton has left Greyfriars. The age of Wally D'Arcy is 12 years old.

S. M. (Sheffield).—Silkworms' eggs can be obtained from Gamages, of High Holborn, London, W.C.

"Sparkler" (Scotland).—When undergoing the cure for knock-knees, you should exercise night and morning for about fifteen minutes. I cannot vouch for the "Wavcurl Co." not having tried them personally.

"Bucknall" (Leeds).—Many thanks for your good wishes.

Miss Blanche Forward (Liverpool).—Very many thanks indeed for your letter. I am very pleased to learn of your endeavours to get new readers, and I must offer you my sincerest thanks. Unfortunately, space will not allow me to print your letter on this page.

B. W. (Essex).—The Crystal Palace Football Ground will hold 125,000 spectators with comparative ease.

"A Loyal Reader" (Liverpool).—A cure for knock-knees: Rise on your toes, hands on hips, and slowly sink to the ground, allowing the knees to bend outwards. Do this regularly night and morning.

KEEPING FIT.

By C. D. Musgrave, M.D.

Indoor Exercise.

This is the department of exercise in which so many people go wrong. A young man is convinced of the necessity of keeping himself fit, and the way in which, as a rule, he sets about it is to practise with a pair of heavy dumb-bells before breakfast, or else to buy a developer and use it for the purpose of "getting up his muscles," as he calls it. Now, Mr. Sandow himself has always been the first to warn people against the abuse or overuse of the developer, and against practising with heavy dumb-bells. I was once amazed to hear that great authority say that he could keep his muscles in perfect condition with two-pound dumb-bells. Little wonder that men of ordinary physique, after a quarter of an hour with seven-pound ones, find themselves stale and tired for the rest of the day.

We have to bear in mind that the most important muscle in the body is the heart. There have been many instances in which young fellows have developed their limb-muscles at the expense of this vital organ, with the result that they have been more or less incapacitated afterwards. It may be very delightful to possess a biceps twice as big as your neighbour's, but beyond the gratification of contracting it for their edification, there is nothing gained. If a man needs certain muscles specially strong for his work, his work will develop them. Otherwise they are of little use to him, and he had better conduct his exercises on a sounder principle.

The main object of exercise is to keep the whole body fit and the circulation healthy, so that nourishment may be carried to all parts of the system, and waste matter kept on the move in order that it may not have the chance of accumulating at any particular part. The oftener this waste stuff circulates, the more it comes into contact with the lungs and other organs responsible for its removal.

In choosing suitable exercise, it is therefore necessary to select those which call upon all the muscles of the body, without any undue strain upon any of them. If any one group of muscles is overused, they will produce more waste matter, and will also in time begin to fall away. It is well known that in certain occupations which throw great strain on particular parts, such as the arms in the case of porters, who have to be constantly lifting heavy loads, the muscles of those parts enlarge enormously at first, but often degenerate in time, until at last it may be that the limbs in question are reduced almost to skin and bone.

(Next Week: Another Special Article on "Keeping Fit.")

The Editor

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A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.

Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE

NOTEWORTHY.

She was being taken for the first time to school by her mother. Having to have her name enrolled on the school register, her mother led her to the headmistress's desk.

"Now, my dear," said the headmistress, "and what is your name?"

"Florrie," the little girl answered politely.

"Also," continued the headmistress, "your surname?"

Florrie stood dumbfounded for a moment.

"Well, it may be Jones," she brought out nervously; "because Tommy Jones is getting very fond of me!"—Sent in by K. J. R. Arnold, Belfast.

TOO SHARP.

A countryman went to the railway-station, bound for a long journey. He went to the booking-office and purchased his ticket. Placing the ticket in the palm of his hand, he strolled on the platform, chuckling merrily. At every glance his smiles heightened and broadened. A friend, observing his merriment, asked the cause of his glee.

"Why," he said, "I've done the man that sold me this ticket!"

"Oh!" said his friend. "And how have you done him?"

"Why," he answered, producing his ticket, "I've got a return ticket, and I'm not coming back!"—Sent in by Alec McGhie, Southampton.

SAY THIS QUICKLY.

Betty Botter bought some butter.
"But," she said, "this butter's **bitter.**
If I put it in my batter
It will make my batter bitter.
But a bit of better butter
Will but make my batter better."
So she bought a bit of butter
Better than the bit of butter,
And made her bitter batter better.
So 'twas better Betty Botter
Bought a bit of better butter.

—Sent in by A. B. Peacock, Cheshire.

INQUISITIVE.

Friend: "What a splendid purse you have got there!"

Husband: "A birthday present from my wife."

Friend: "But was there anything inside it?"

Husband: "Yes, of course. The unpaid bill for the purse!"—Sent in by Florrie Perts, Cornwall.

QUITE TRUE!

Suffragette: "Yes, women, we shall soon get the vote! Men are but clay, and——"

Poor Married Man: "And that's why women make mugs of them!"—Sent in by C. King, Coventry.

FRANK OPINION.

Widower (to his daughter, aged ten): "Dora, do you know that Susanna, our housekeeper, is going to be married?"

Dora: "Oh, I'm so glad we are getting rid of the old pelican! Won't it be jolly? But who is going to marry her?"

Widower: "I am."—Sent in R. Williams, Guildford.

COVERED.

A sturdy Scotsman had been having a dispute with his wife, which resulted in his taking refuge underneath the bed.

"Ye can lam me and ye can bate me," he called lustily from his retreat to his wife, as she stood on guard with a good-sized stick in her hand, "but ye canna break ma manly spirit! I'll no come oot!"—Sent in by C. Margrave, Lincolnshire.

VERY ECONOMICAL.

"I want you to see my lovely new shopping-bag," said a young lady to a caller one afternoon. "My husband gave it me for my birthday. It's simply grand! And it's so economical! You see, you open this, and there are two compartments, and you open the compartment on this side and there is a little pocket; you then open this little pocket, and there you will find a purse for change."

"I see," said the caller. "But why do you call it economical?"

"Why," said the young lady, "it takes so long to open all the compartments and get your change when you are travelling, that by the time you have done so, the person with you has paid your fare."—Sent in by A. E. Murkin, Essex.

MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

Little Jack, who had a great dislike for having his face washed, was heard crying one night, when his grannie came into the nursery.

"Well, Jack," she said, "you are a baby to cry at having your face washed! Little Cissie never cries, and she is much smaller than you."

"Well, grannie," Jack replied, after another sob, "you see, Cissie's face isn't as big as mine!"—Sent in by William Davies, Rhodes.

SMART.

"Come and spend a day with us," wrote uncle. "Send a 'Cardiff' you accept."

"'Sligo'?" I mused. "I'll see what it 'Leeds' to."

When the "Boscombe" I got leave, and rushed to the station, and clambered into a car that was nearly full. If any "Morecambe" in here I should faint; so I "Preston" the window to close it, and locked the door with my "Newquay." Just then the train collided with some "Cowes," and the impact made the "Windermere" scrap—in fact, I never saw "Glasgow" so quick in all my life!—Sent in by R. Hawkins, Staffs.

A PAYING GAME.

Old Lady (to small boy, who is standing on the footpath): "My little man, have you no better way to spend this beautiful afternoon than by standing about idling away your time?"

Boy: "I ain't idling away my time. There's Mr. Hanke in our cottage doorway making love to my sister, and he is paying me sixpence an hour to watch for pa."—Sent in by James McKay, Greenock.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the sender will receive a Money Prize.

ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED—The Editor, "The Gem" Library, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in otherwise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

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