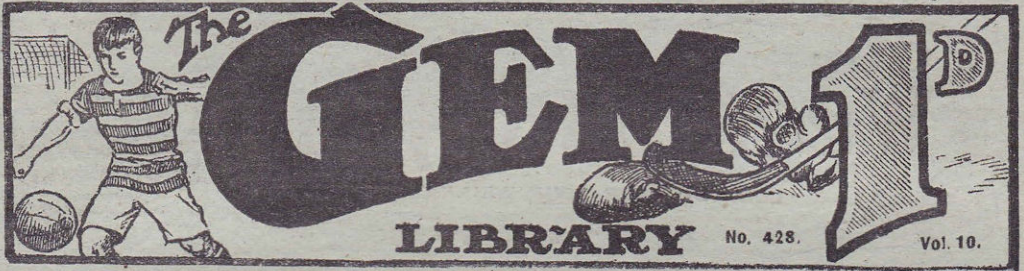


THE ST. JIM'S WAR-WORKERS!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.



THE SWELL OF ST. JIM'S DOES "HIS BIT"

(A Startling Incident in the Magnificent, Long, Complete School Tale in this issue.)

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



THE THINGS THAT MATTER.

Old Salt (to his fisherman friend, who is about to sail): "Have you taken any precautions against those submarines, Jock?"

Scotch Fisherman: "Ay, I hev! I usually takes ma money w' me, but I went and bankit it all this morning. And I'm nae taking ma best oilskins nor ma guid new sea-boots."

Old Salt: "Umph! You're all right, then. You'll have practically nothing to lose but your life!"—Sent in by Claudio Gibbons, Stoke Poges, Bucks.

A TERRIBLE THREAT.

The small boy strode into a butcher's shop, and elbowed his way through the other customers to the counter.

"Well, my boy, you're in a hurry. What do you want?" asked the butcher.

"I want a pen'orth of bones, please!" snapped the youngster. "And if there ain't no more meat on 'em than there was on the last lot, mother says she'll change her butcher!"—Sent in by C. W. Kenney, Peckham, S.E.

STRICT OBEDIENCE.

The foreman had occasion to reprove George, one of his workmen, for not fully loading his hod with bricks. The hod, he pointed out, held so many bricks, and he must take up a full complement each time he ascended the ladder. During the morning the supply of bricks ran out, and George, after gathering up every brick, found he was still short of his full load for a journey.

Suddenly a brilliant idea struck him, and he yelled to one of the bricklayers on top of the building in course of erection.

"What do you want?" asked his workmate.
"Throw me down a couple of bricks to make up my load!" shouted George.—Sent in by J. Burditt, Leicester.

A SINGING LESSON.

An Irish porter had just started work at an English station, and the head porter directed the new man to imitate him closely, and thereby learn his duties.

When the first train came into the station, the head porter shouted:

"Ferryhill; change for Hartlepool, Stockton, and Middlesbrough; change for Spennymoor, Coxhoe and Trundon; keep your seats going North!"

Pat strode behind as directed, and shouted in a loud voice:

"Farcyhill; change for Dahore, Umphumph, and Tootalooral; change for Coxcombe, Morham, and Findham; kape yer sates where you are!"

The stationmaster called the Irishman aside, and showed him the correct names of the stations on the timetable.

"Oh!" said Pat. "Shure, and I got hold of the music all right, didn't I, sorr? But I couldn't quite catch the words.—Sent in by G. Henderson, Broton, R.S.O.

ONE BY ONE.

Ten little colonies far beyond the Rhine;
New Zealand got Samoa whacked, and then there were nine.

Nine little colonies singing hymns of hate;
German New Guinea fell, then there were eight.

Eight little colonies praying hard to Heaven;
The Bismarck Archipelago was bagged—leaving seven.

Seven little colonies up to German tricks;
Australia seized the Marshall Isles, and then there were six.

Six little colonies trying to keep alive;
Kaiser Wilhelm's Land changed hands, and then there were five.

Five little colonies for help began to roar;
The Japanese smashed up Kiao-Chau, and then there were four.

Four little colonies were left beyond the sea,
But France and we took Togoland, and then there were three.

Three little colonies the German colours flew,
And so we captured Cameroons, and then there were two.

Two little colonies from Botha tried to run,
But South-West Africa was caught—thus leaving one.

One little colony remaineth to the Hun,
But General Smuts will soon have that, and then there'll be none.

—Sent in by W. J. Wyer, Norwich.

POSSIBLY!

It was Monday morning, and the rent-collector was pursuing his weekly task. His bag was getting heavier, but his heart was light.

Then he reached the house of Mrs. Brown. Here his knock was answered by Master Brown, who, with an air of having learnt his message well, said:

"Mother and father are both out. Will you please call on Friday?"

"I'm!" muttered the collector, his heart becoming almost as heavy as his bag. Then a thought struck him.

"Why on Friday, my little man?" he asked the youngster.

"That's what I don't know," said the boy. And then he added innocently: "Unless it's because we're going to move on Thursday!"—Sent in by C. W. Seddon, Manchester.

As the "GEM" Storyette Competition has proved so popular, it has been decided to run this novel feature in conjunction with our new Companion Paper,

THE BOYS' FRIEND, 1d.,

Published every Monday,

in order to give more of our readers a chance of winning one of our useful Money Prizes. If you know a really funny joke, or a short, interesting paragraph, send it along (on a post-card) before you forget it, and address it to: The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND and GEM, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, E.C. Look out for YOUR Prize Storyette in next week's GEM or BOYS' FRIEND.

EXPIRATIONS.

"Do you want the court to understand," said the magistrate sternly, "that you refuse to renew your dog licence?"

"Yes, sir; but—"

"We want no 'buts.' You must renew the licence, or be fined. You know it expired on the first of January, don't you?"

"Yes, sir. And so did the dog!"—Sent in by L. Hardingham, Seven Kings.

PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING

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COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

THE ST. JIM'S WAR-WORKERS!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Mrs. Snooper gave the swell of St. Jim's a powerful box on the ear, and he dodged round the table, holding up the sweep's brush to keep her off. The sooty brush came into contact with Mrs. Snooper's face, which turned from a fiery red to a deep black. (See Chapter 4.)

CHAPTER I.

War-Workers Wanted!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was standing on the School-House steps, with his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a thoughtful frown on his brow, when the Terrible Three came in from the playing-fields. The swell of St. Jim's was in deep thought, and Tom Merry & Co. smiled as they observed it. Monty Lowther, who had his bat under his arm, allowed it to slide down upon D'Arcy's elegant boot with a clump, and Arthur Augustus woke out of his deep reverie with a sudden howl.

"Wow! You ass, Lowthah!"

"Only waking you up, dear boy!" said Lowther. "You shouldn't go to sleep on the steps, standing up like a horse, you know!"

"I wasn't goin' to sleep, you ass! I was thinkin' out a wathah sewious mattah," said Arthur Augustus. "Peywaps

you follahs will be able to give me some advice. Would you advise me to become a bank managah?"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther jumped all at once. Arthur Augustus' question took their breath away.

"A what?" yelled Tom Merry;

"A bank managah, dear boy!"

"Off his rocker!" said Manners, in wonder.

"Weahly, Mannahs—"

"Has anybody asked you to manage a bank?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"No; I am thinkin' of offahin'."

"Thinking of offering to manage a bank!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What the merry thunder are you driving at, Gussy?"

"I mean what I say, Tom Mewwy. I am wathah in doubt, howevah. I should be willin' to manage a bank, but I think powwaps I could be of more use as a waylway diwectah."

"A railway director!" shrieked the Terrible Three.

"Yaas, wathah! A waylway diwectah requires bwains, so

Next Wednesday.

"A MISSION OF MYSTERY!" AND "THE PRIDE OF THE FILM!"

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the job would suit me pwetty well. On the other hand, pewwaps I should be weally more useful managin' the local post-office.

"The post-office!"
 "Yaas. It is weally vewy difficult to decide."
 "Great Scott!"
 Monty Lowther tapped his forehead.
 "I've seen this coming on for some time," he said. "Poor old Gussy! Does Blake know you've gone off your onion?"
 "Weally, Lowthab, this is not a time for your wibald jokes! I was askin' you fellahs for advice."
 "Well, I'd advise you to get a strait-jacket, and as soon as you've got it get into it!" said Manners.
 "And catch the next train for Colney Hatch!" said Tom Merry.

"You uttah asses!"
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned away with a disdainful sniff. But his noble brow was still wrinkled in thought, and it was evident that he was still thinking out the knotty problem whether to become a bank manager, a railway director, or to take charge of the local post-office. Tom Merry & Co., puzzled and perplexed, went into the School House to seek enlightenment from Jack Blake on the subject of D'Arcy's extraordinary state of mind.

They found Blake looking very thoughtful, too. A crowd of fellows were gathered round the notice-board in the hall, passing comments upon a paper pinned thereon. Tom Merry tapped Blake on the shoulder.

"What's the matter with Gussy?" he asked.
 "Gussy?" said Blake vaguely. "Never mind, Gussy! I suppose that in war-time a chap can't object to doing some work. What do you think? Bless if I know how I shall turn out as a grocer's assistant, though!"
 "A grocer's assistant!" gasped Tom Merry, bewildered.
 "Yes, I don't know the prices of things, and I haven't the faintest idea how much sand to mix with the sugar. I suppose a chap could soon learn, though."
 "Is this a rag?" asked Tom, in wonder. "Here, Herries, what's gone wrong with Blake and Gussy? Are they both dotty?"

Herries was looking thoughtful, too.
 "Eh?" he said. "What?—I say, I suppose I ought to turn to. It's only right in war-time. I suppose I could weigh up tea, and explain to people that I'm bound to swindle 'em with high prices because of the war, and all that."

"You, too!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Are you dotty, too? Digby—where's Dig? I say, Dig, you'd better look after these chaps!"

Robert Arthur Digby, strange to relate, also appeared deeply plunged in thought, as if seeking to solve a knotty problem.

"I don't see why not!" he exclaimed. "It would be a change from grinding Latin, anyway. I could soon learn the price of jam and things, I suppose. It's easy enough to learn war prices. Every time the cost price goes up a penny, you put sixpence on the selling price. Easy as A B C! What!"

"All potty!" said Monty Lowther.
 The Terrible Three were astounded. All Study No. 6 seemed to be taken with the same strange hallucination. D'Arcy, Blake, Herries, and Digby—all of them were babbling weird things in the same astonishing manner.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Tom Merry. "I suppose it's a rag of some sort, but where the joke comes in beats me. Hallo, Skimmy! What are you mooning about?"
 Skimpole of the Shell blinked solemnly at Tom through his big spectacles.

"I think I shall apply for a post at the War Office," he said. "With my wonderful brain-power, I should be admirably fitted for such a post. I could, perhaps, relieve Lord Kitchener of his duties, and enable him to go to the front."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I fail to see any cause for laughter, Tom Merry. With my brains, I should be admirably at home in the War Office."
 "Very likely—with your brains," agreed Monty Lowther.
 "Seen the notice, you chaps?" asked Julian of the Fourth.
 "What notice?"
 "It's on the board—notice from the Head."
 "Oh!"

The Terrible Three pushed their way through a crowd of excited juniors and reached the notice-board. Then they understood the mystery.

There was a paper on the board in the well-known handwriting of Dr. Holmes, and signed by the Head. It ran:

"WAR-HELPERS ARE WANTED."

"The conscription of men of military age has caused a serious shortage of workmen in Wayland. Many business-houses are in serious difficulties. Under the circumstances, any boys belonging to this School who desire to render tem-

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porary service may apply to their Form-Masters for permission to do so. Such volunteer war-helpers will take the places of workers who have been taken into the Army, and will be excused attendance at classes for a short period. The matter will be adjusted in time, but temporary assistance is needed, in order to enable businesses to be carried on. It is hoped that a considerable number of boys will offer their services.
 H. HOLMES (Headmaster)."

"My hat!" said Tom Merry.
 The mystery was clear now.
 "Chance for us!" said Monty Lowther, rubbing his hands.
 "Change from classes, anyway! And if our King and country need us—why, we don't want to lose ourselves, but we think we ought to go! What!"

"Hear, hear!"
 "I'm going to compete with Gussy for that bank manager's job!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "It's a ripping idea!" said Lowther enthusiastically.
 "When my grandsons say to me, 'Grandpa, what did you do in the Great War?' I shall be able to say, 'My child, I mixed sand with the sugar! I sold soapy Dutch cheese as English cheddar! I put up the price of tea!' Hurrah!"

"We're on to this!" said Tom Merry. "Gussy's welcome to his bank manager's job—if he can get it. Skimmy can go into the War Office—if they'll let him. We'll look for jobs in Blankley's Stores."

"Ripping!"

There was a buzz of excitement in the School House. The Head's notice had excited everybody, and it was easy to see that there would be a large number of volunteers. Levison and Mellish of the Fourth were planning to apply for a job at a tobacconist's. Trimble was keen to get a place at a confectioner's. Grundy of the Shell announced his intention of taking charge of the recruiting-office, so that the recruiting-officer could go to the war. Probably Grundy would not get that post. Probably, indeed, few of the fellows would get the places they had marked out for themselves. But, at all events, there was no lack of eagerness to become war-helpers, and lend a hand at helping the Old Country through the crisis.

CHAPTER 2.

No Chance for Skimpole.

TOM MERRY & CO. were full of enthusiasm. Naturally, they had long felt that they would like to do something, whatever it was, to make themselves useful to their country. It was a time for everybody to lend a helping hand. They were not slackers, and they were keen to do what they could.

And now that description had fallen upon the country there was still less excuse for slackers of any kind. There was no slacking as far as Tom Merry & Co. were concerned. And it must be admitted, too, that the idea of change and excitement appealed to them, and that they were not insensible to the pleasure of cutting lessons for a week or two. They were still discussing the matter when the bell rang for afternoon classes.

"I don't see that we want any classes this afternoon," Monty Lowther remarked. "Let's apply to Linton at once for permission. He can't refuse."

"Bai Jove, that's a jolly good idea!" said Arthur Augustus. "I will request Lathom's permish at once. Now that somethin' has turned up that we can do, it would be wroten to waste a single moment—and there's mathematics this afternoon, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, deah boys, I am quite sewious. When I look wound and see slackin' on all sides I feel disgusted and discouraged. It is shockin' to observe that the membahs of Parliament are still goin' on talkin', instead of applyin' for commissions in his Majesty's Army. I considah it a good ideah for St. Jim's to set them an example. Pewwaps they may follow it."

"Perhahs!" grinned Lowther. "As that Indian chap at Greyfriars puts it, the perhahfulness is terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Anyway, it is up to us to set an example," said Arthur Augustus. "I am willin' to go as a coal-heavah, if necessary. Only I think that, with my brain-powah and knowledge of business, I should be more useful as a bank managah or a railway diwectah. If I get a job as railway diwectah I shall insist upon lightnin' twains by electricity instead of gas, so that people will not be burned to death in case of accidents. That reform is badly needed. I shall speak to Mr. Lathom at once."

And Arthur Augustus lost no time. When the Fourth took



Mr. Linton's patience was exhausted. He seized Skimpole by the collar, and brought the cane into play. Whack! whack! whack! "Oh, dear! Yarooah! My hat! Yahi!" roared Skimpole. (See Chapter 2.)

their places in the Form-room D'Arcy marched up to Mr. Lathom's desk.

"Pway excuse me, sir—" he began.

Mr. Lathom blinked at him over his glasses.

"You may go to your place, D'Arcy."

"Pway excuse me, Mr. Lathom. I desiah to be excused ffrom lessons, in ordah to start at once as a war-helphah."

"Oh!" said Mr. Lathom.

"I believe in stwikin' the iwon while it is hot, sir. I have always regarded 'Wait and see' as awwant wubbish."

Mr. Lathom rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"I will take your name, D'Arcy."

"Mayn't I go at once, sir?"

"Not until the Head has looked over the list and considered the applications from the local tradespeople who are in need of labour."

"Oh!" said Arthur Augustus, disappointed.

"The matter will, however, be settled to-day," said Mr. Lathom kindly. "Every boy in this Form who wishes to be of service may give me his name now."

A dozen names were at once given. Figgins & Co. of the New House were among the first. Fatty Wynn was especially keen. Fatty whispered to Kerr that he was going to get a job in a tuckshop if he could. His plump face beamed at the prospect.

Arthur Augustus went reluctantly to his place. He would have preferred to strike the iron while it was hot, and dodge the mathematics lesson. But he had to wait and see.

Tom Merry & Co. received the same answer from Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell. They also had to wait and see.

However, after lessons they were able to come to business. A list was posted on the board of the tradesmen who were in need of assistance. It was a somewhat long list—there was plenty of choice. But to D'Arcy's disappointment, there seemed to be no vacancies for bank managers or railway directors. But a good many grocers, butchers, and bakers

were willing to give the St. Jim's fellows a trial. Arthur Augustus wrinkled his brows over the list.

"Nothin' heah that seems quite suitable for me," he remarked. "Pewwaps I had bottah apply on my own, iwvespective of this list."

"The list is merely local," said Skimpole, shaking his head. "I should desire a wider sphere for my abilities. I had better speak to Mr. Linton with regard to my plans for assisting the War Office."

Skimpole walked away thoughtfully. Tom Merry caught him by one of his large ears and jerked him back.

"Don't be an ass, Skimmy!" he advised.

"My dear Merry, I desire to place my great abilities where they would be most useful. I suppose nobody will deny that brains are badly wanted in the War Office."

"Not your kind of brains," said Lowthier. "They've got plenty of that kind already."

"My dear Lowther, this is not a jesting matter. You should not jest so upon a serious subject."

"Just so!" agreed Lowther.

Skimpole jerked himself away and started for Mr. Linton's study. Some of the juniors followed him, grinning, curious to hear the interview. The great Skimmy tapped at the door and entered.

Mr. Linton fixed his eyes upon him.

"Well, Skimpole?"

"If you please, sir, I do not find a place in the Head's list worthy of my abilities," said Skimpole modestly. "May I ask your advice, sir?"

"Really, Skimpole—"

"I have read in the daily papers, sir, that in this time of stress the best brains in the country should be at the service of the Government."

"Skimpole!"

"It would be false modesty on my part, sir, to be blind to the fact that my brain-power is of a somewhat unusual order," explained Skimpole, blinking at his Form-master. "My idea,

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therefore, is to obtain a post in the War Office. By doing so, I should be able to release some official who is doubtless eager to get to the Front. The higher the post, the more suitable it would be for me. May I request you to place my case before the authorities, sir?"

Mr. Linton gasped. His hand strayed towards his cane, but Skimpole did not observe it.

"I should be willing to become Air Minister, sir," he went on. "As it happens, I know a great deal about that matter, having myself invented an airship. Of course, I understand that no knowledge of that kind is required for a post of that description. Still, it would not be actually a disadvantage."

"Skimpole!" Mr. Linton picked up the cane. "You utterly ridiculous boy—"

"Excuse me, sir, there is nothing ridiculous in the right man wanting to get into the right place," said Skimpole, in surprise. "If I became Air Minister, sir, I should order aeroplanes to destroy the bridges on the Rhine, to prevent German reinforcements entering Belgium. This will be done some day, and will be greeted as a brilliant scheme reflecting great credit on the Minister concerned. I should order it to be done at once, sir, instead of next year or the year after. You will perceive, sir—"

"Hold out your hand, Skimpole!"

"Wha—a—at!"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Mr. Linton. "You are an utterly stupid boy, Skimpole. I withdraw my permission for you to leave the school for war-work of any kind."

"Pray allow me to point out that you are mistaken, sir," said Skimpole, with dignity. "Professor Balmcyrumpet says in his three-hundred-and-twentieth chapter that it is not uncommon for stupid people to suppose, erroneously, that wiser persons than themselves are stupid—"

"Skimpole!"

"It is quite a common case, sir. Under the circumstances, I repeat—Yaroooh, yowp, yow-wow!"

Mr. Linton's patience was exhausted. He seized Skimpole by the collar and brought the cane into play.

"Whack, whack, whack!"

"Oh dear! Yaroooh! My hat! Yah!"

Then Skimpole was bundled out of the study, and Mr. Linton closed the door forcibly after him.

"Got that job in the War Office?" asked Monty Lowther. "Grooch! Ow!" gasped Skimpole. "I—I do not understand Mr. Linton at all. He appears to me to have taken leave of his senses. Grooooh! For some reason he lost his temper. Yow-wow! I am considerably—yooow!—hurt. Under the yow!—circumstances, I shall not take up war-work at all—yow-ow-ow!"

CHAPTER 3. Looking for Jobs!

THE next morning quite a little army of St. Jim's juniors started for Wayland.

It was agreeable enough to walk through the woods that fresh April morning, instead of turning up in the class-rooms as usual.

The Terrible Three, Figgins & Co., Study No. 6, Kernuish and Julian and Reilly, and several more fellows, were in the party. Levison and Mellish had not succeeded in getting permission, and a good many others had been disappointed.

Somewhat to the indignation of the intended war-workers, the Form-masters had considered whether they could be spared from their lessons, and only the fellows who were well up in classes had been let off. If the experiment was a success, however, it was probable that others would follow.

Tom Merry & Co. certainly meant to do their best. Neither were they very particular as to what kind of jobs they obtained. They wanted to help, and that was the beginning and end of it. As Wayland town came in sight they paused to compare notes.

"We don't want all to go after the same job," said Tom Merry. "We'd better agree on the places we're going to apply for. Now, Mr. Hanks, the chimney-sweep, is in want of a strong, willing chap. That would suit you, Figgins."

"I'm going to the milkman's," said Figgins.

"What about you, Kerr?"

"I'm a farmer's boy," grinned Kerr.

"Fatty, would you like that job?"

"I'm going to apply at the pastry-cook's," said Fatty Wynn.

"That's my job."

"I'm after that," said Digby.

"Oh, rot! It's more suitable for me. I know all about pastry."

"Toss up for it," said Blake.

"The question is, about this sweep's job," said Tom Merry.

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"We can't very well give it a miss; it will look like slacking. After all, soot is quite healthy—you notice that sweeps always look very fit. Who wants it?"

"You go for it, old chap," said Manners.

"Well, I—I'm thinking of the grocery business," said Tom hastily. "I suppose you'd like it, Gussy?"

"What about my clobber, Tom Merry?"

"You could change that. You'd look ripping as a sweep. The soot would hide your features."

"Weally, you ass—"

"You would be black, but comely," urged Monty Lowther.

"Somebody's got to go after that job, and I think Gussy's the man."

"I refuse to do anything of the sort, Lowthah."

"It's a D'Arcy's place to lead," said Tom Merry. "You admit that, Gussy. It's been handed down in your family ever since your ancestors came over with Rothschild."

"You uttah ass, my ancestors did not come ovaah with Wotshchild! They came ovaah with the Conquewah."

"My mistake!" conceded Tom Merry. "I knew they were undesirable aliens of some sort—"

"Weally, Tom Merry—"

"It's up to Gussy," said Manners. "We look on Gussy to show us a shining example. A D'Arcy can't be a shirker. Perish the thought!"

"If you put it like that, deah boy, I will apply for the job."

"We do put it like that," said Lowther solemnly.

"Vewy well; I will take the job," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I do not like soot vewy much, but no kind of honest work is weally devogatory to a chap's dig. I will apply to Mr. Hanks."

"Head!" said Fatty Wynn. "Good—the pastry-cook job's mine."

Several other details having been settled, the juniors walked on into the town, and separated to go to their various destinations.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked for the local sweep. Mr. Hanks dwelt in River Street, which was not an aristocratic neighbourhood. D'Arcy had some difficulty in finding the place, but he stopped at last before a little building, over the door of which was a wooden board, bearing the legend:

"J. Hanks, Chimney-Sweep!"

Arthur Augustus stepped in. The swell of St. Jim's, who was a picture of elegance, from the crown of his silk hat to the tips of his polished boots, looked curiously out of place in Mr. Hanks' little shop. The chimney-sweep, who also followed the profession of a cobbler, was seated behind a little counter, at work on a boot. He rose respectfully as the elegant junior came in.

"Morning, sir! Soled and heeled, sir?" he asked.

"You are Mr. Hanks?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have not called about boots," explained Arthur Augustus. "I have called in connection with chimney-sweepin'."

"Yes, sir. Chimney at the school, sir?" asked Mr. Hanks.

"Just thing in the morning. Will that soot, sir? I've got a job on in Wayland for ten this morning."

"You misapprehend, sir. You are wantin' an assistant?"

Mr. Hanks nodded, in some surprise.

"Yes, sir—my young man's gone into the Army. And I can't get a boy from nowhere. It's 'ard on a man in a small way of business. 'Arder still if I hadn't turned forty-one myself, thank goodness!"

"I have come for the job, Mr. Hanks."

Mr. Hanks sank back upon his seat, overcome with astonishment. He blinked at Arthur Augustus, as if he doubted his ears.

"You—you have come for the job?" he stuttered.

"Yas, sir. I desiah to be taken on twial as a chimney-sweep," said Arthur Augustus.

"Haw, haw haw!"

"Bai Jove! What are you laughin' at, Mr. Hanks?"

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Meas. 5ft. 6in.

"Haw, haw, haw! Your little joke, sir."

"But I assure you that I am not jokin', Mr. Hanks. I am a war-workah, and weady to take any job, havin' my Form-mastah's permish to do so. I weally twust, sir, that you will give me a twial."

Mr. Hanks stared blankly at the elegant swell of St. Jim's. He seemed to find some difficulty in breathing, when he realised that the Honourable Arthur Augustus was in deadly earnest.

"But—but the job wouldn't soot you, sir," he stammered at last.

"Wats! I am willin' to work."

"Ye-es; but—but—"

"I twust, sir, that you will give me a twial. I weally do not think that chimney-sweepin' is vewy difficult. You have to shove a bwush up a chimney, I believe, and drag it down again, or somethin', don't you?"

"Something like that," grinned Mr. Hanks. "But—"

"I weally think I could do it. I shall be vewy disappointed if you do not give me a twial," said D'Arcy persuasively.

"But—but your clothes, sit—"

"Pewwaps you could lend me some othah clobber for the occasion. I suppose I am not dressed quite suitably for a sweep."

"Haw, haw! Not quite! Haw, haw!"

"Weally, Mr. Hanks, it is not a laughin' mattah. I have had no experience as a sweep, but I have a good deal of tact and judgment, and I can soon learn. If you can lend me some clobber, I shall be weady to come with you for your job this mornin', and I have no doubt that I shall sweep the chimneys vewy well indeed."

"If you really mean it, Master D'Arcy—"

"Honest Injun, Mr. Hanks! I am vewy anxious for the job. Owin' to my inexperience in the bizney, I shall refuse to accept any wages for the first week."

This argument appealed to Mr. Hanks very forcibly. And undoubtedly the Wayland sweep was in want of an assistant.

"Well, sir, it's a go," he said. "I'll give you a trial. There's some clothes 'ere that my lad 'ad when he was with me, afore he went on munitions. You can change in the back room."

"Thank you vewy much, sir."

Arthur Augustus went into the back room, and Mr. Hanks pointed out the clothes, and returned to the shop and left Arthur Augustus to change. Mr. Hanks was smiling very broadly. But Arthur Augustus did not smile when he looked at the professional attire of Mr. Hanks' former assistant.

The clothes were considerably large for him, and they were sooty—dreadfully sooty. The sooty smell of them made D'Arcy cough and sneeze. The idea of putting those dreadfully soiled clothes upon his immaculately clean person caused a cold shiver to run down his spine. But D'Arcy was game! He remembered that he was backing up the Empire in the hour of need—even in so humble a task as chimney-sweeping. Somewhat slowly, but very determinedly, he peeled off his beautiful clobber, and donned the garb of the sweep's assistant—which made a most striking and remarkable change in his appearance. Then he stepped into the shop and announced that he was ready.

CHAPTER 4.

D'Arcy Does His Best.

"GREAT pip!"

"Oh, Gussy!"

"Bravo!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther uttered those ejaculations together, as they encountered the swell of St. Jim's in the High Street.

The Terrible Three had not secured their jobs yet. They were discussing the matter in the bun-shop, with the help of cake and ginger-beer, when Mr. Hanks and his new assistant came along. The Shell fellows stepped out into the street just in time to meet Gussy face to face.

Mr. Hanks was carrying a large sack, as black as the ace of spades, and wore very sooty overalls. Behind him walked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in sooty attire, with dabs of soot upon his aristocratic features, carrying the sweep's brushes.

His eyeglass was screwed tightly into his eye, and he was walking with head erect and chin well up, as if fully conscious of the dignity of Labour.

He glanced loftily at the Terrible Three.

"Not at work yet, deah boys?" he asked.

"Just going to begin," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "We're on the grocery. You look rippin', Gussy."

"Nobby," said Monty Lowther. "That dab of soot on your nose sets off your complexion a treat."

Arthur Augustus hastily brushed his nose. As his hand

was sooty, he did not make matters better by that hasty dab.

"Is it off, deah boys?" he asked anxiously.

"Ha, ha! No, it's bigger now."

"Bai Jove!"

"Better hurry up," said Manners. "Your boss is looking round."

"My what?"

"Boss!" said Manners. "Your governor, you know."

"Bai Jove! I did not wegard Mr. Hanks in the light of a boss."

"Urny up, there," called out Mr. Hanks.

"Weally, Mr. Hanks—"

"Urny up!"

D'Arcy stared at his "boss." It came as rather a surprise to be spoken to in a dictatorial tone. Mr. Hanks, as a matter of fact, wanted his assistant to be an assistant. He had no room for gentlemanly amateurs in his business. Arthur Augustus opened his lips, but closed them again, and, with a nod to the Terrible Three, he hurried on after his employer.

Tom Merry & Co. grinned at one another.

"Good old Gussy!" said Tom. "Heaps of grit! But I shouldn't like to be the owner of the house where he sweeps the chimney!"

"Ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus hurried on and joined his employer.

"No time to waste!" said Mr. Hanks, more amiably. "We're doo at the Mayor's 'ouse now. Mr. Jopp's is vewy partickler. Mind you're vewy respectful to the 'ouse-keeper. She's rather a tartar!"

"I twust I shall not be wantin' in respect to a lady at any time, Mr. Hanks!"

"The 'ousekeeper ain't a lady!" explained Mr. Hanks.

"To a pwopably constituted mind, Mr. Hanks, every woman is a lady."

"My heys!" said Mr. Hanks. "Now, do you remember the instructions I've give you? You know 'ow to 'andle a brush!"

"Yaas, it is awf'ly easy!"

"You see, we shall 'ave to do the job sharp," said Mr. Hanks. "Mrs. Snooper don't like sweeps about the 'ouse. You'll take one chimney while I take the other, and you'll 'ave to be vewy careful. I may say I'm vewy glad to get an assistant for this 'ere job. Mrs. Snooper wouldn't make allowances for a man's assistant boin' conscripted, and I should have got a lot of jore. She's a bit of a tartar, she is. You be vewy respectful, and mind you wipe your boots when you go in, and don't let a spot of soot get nowhere!"

"Vewy good."

The sweep and his assistant arrived at Mr. Jopp's house. Arthur Augustus was about to mount the steps, when Mr. Hanks jerked him by the shoulder.

"Whur you going?" he gasped.

"Are we not goin' into the house, Mr. Hanks?" asked D'Arcy in surprise.

"Not by the front door, you young idiot!"

"I object to bein' called an idiot, Mr. Hanks!"

"Look 'ere, I don't 'ave any jore from my employees," said Mr. Hanks. "Come round to the back door, and hold your jore."

Arthur Augustus suppressed his feelings, and followed Mr. Hanks round to the back of the house. Mr. Hanks rang the bell there, and a trim servant opened the kitchen door, and surveyed the sweeps with a somewhat lofty look. Mr. Hanks took off his hat very respectfully, and Arthur Augustus raised his dirty cap.

"Oh, the sweep!" said the maid superciliously.

"Yes mum," said Mr. Hanks.

"You can come in."

The maid glanced at D'Arcy. Perhaps she was surprised to see a sweep's boy wearing an eyeglass. It was certainly a little uncommon. Mr. Hanks and his assistant entered, and wiped their boots very carefully on the mat. A formidable-looking lady—evidently the Mrs. Snooper whom Mr. Hanks had described as a tartar—fixed a pair of beady eyes upon them.

"Good-morning, mum!" said Mr. Hanks humbly.

"Good-mornin', madam!" said Arthur Augustus.

Mrs. Snooper appeared deaf to these polite greetings.

"Drawing-room, dining-room, and study," she said. "I have had the dust-sheds placed. You will be very careful. And please get it over as quickly as possible."

"With my noo assistant, mum—"

"This way!"

"Bai Jove, what a vewy unpleasant lady!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Weally, it is wathah wotten to be treated like a beastly dog!"

Arthur Augustus was beginning to experience the joys of occupying a lowly place on the social ladder. It had not occurred to him before that this kind of unpleasantness

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was attached to it. Arthur Augustus himself was always scrupulously polite to persons below him in station, and in the innocence of his heart he had supposed that this was the general rule. To be rude or snappish to persons whose position made it impossible for them to resent an affront seemed to Gussy the last word in bad breeding. Which was quite correct, but was not quite so clear to the formidable Mrs. Snooper as it was to the Honourable Arthur Augustus.

Mrs. Snooper was evidently anxious about the soot, and resented the fact that it was necessary to admit a sweep into the house at all.

Mr. Hanks looked relieved when the formidable lady left him to his labours.

"I'll begin on the drying-room," he said. "You start 'ere in the dining-room. Mind there ain't a speck of soot nowhere, or you'll get your 'ead jored off. I'll start the brush for you!"

"Thank you, sir!"

Arthur Augustus watched Mr. Hanks curiously as he knelt before the fireplace and started the brush. It seemed easy enough, the way Mr. Hanks did it. The sweep handed it over to D'Arcy, and went to the next room to get on with his own job. D'Arcy knelt in his place and set to work.

Arthur Augustus had told his employer that he was inexperienced. But Mr. Hanks would not have needed telling, if he had seen Gussy now.

The hearthrug had been taken away, and dust-sheets spread over the carpet to protect it from possible damage. Unfortunately, the dust-sheets were shoved away by D'Arcy in his manoeuvres. He was too intent upon his work to notice that. To his surprise, too, a considerable quantity of soot came swamping out over the hearth, perhaps owing to the way he handled the brush. And when he looked up the chimney to see how he was getting on, a mass of soot landed on his face, and he withdrew his head hastily, coughing and sneezing wildly.

"Atchoo! atchoo! atchoo!"

Soot was floating about the room now in clouds.

There was soot in Gussy's nose, and it tickled him dreadfully, and he could do nothing but sneeze and cough.

"Goodness gracious!" Mrs. Snooper sailed into the room. "Gracious goodness! The soot—the soot! What does this mean?"

"Atchoo! atchoo!"

"Boy!"

"Atchoo-choo-chooooo!"

"Mr. Hanks! Goodness gracious!" shrieked Mrs. Snooper. "Look at the state the room is in! How dare you?"

"Atchoo-choo-choo!" sneezed the unfortunate Gussy. "I am vewy sorry, madam. Atchoo-choo! Accidents will happen. Gwooooooh! It's all wight. The brush does not seem to be goin' quite wight, somehow. I will wemove it and start again!"

"Goodness gracious! Atchoo!"

Mrs. Snooper was sneezing now.

Arthur Augustus dragged the brush down from the chimney, hardly knowing what he was doing, between his violet fits of sneezing and his terror of Mrs. Snooper. The brush came out, and a dense volume of soot with it.

"Atchoo!" sneezed D'Arcy.

"Atchoo-shoo!" responded Mrs. Snooper. "Mr. Hanks, come here. Look at this. I will have you prosecuted. Grooh! Atchooooo!"

"Pway don't be watty, madam," gasped Arthur Augustus. "I am weally doin' my best, but I am wathah—gwooh!—inexperienced. Bai Jove, wharrer you at? Yaroooooh!"

To Arthur Augustus' surprise, Mrs. Snooper gave him a powerful box on the ear.

The swell of St. Jim's staggered against the sideboard. He clutched at it to save himself from falling, and caught the dust-sheet that covered it and dragged it down with him, as well as half a dozen articles that were under it. There was a loud crash, and a shriek from Mrs. Snooper. That good lady's temper was quite lost, and she made a rush at Arthur Augustus. He dodged her round the table, holding up the sweep's brush to keep her off. The sooty brush came in contact with Mrs. Snooper's face—it couldn't be helped. From fiery red it changed to sudden black, and the good lady gasped and spluttered wildly.

"Gweat Scott, I am vewy sorry, madam," gasped Arthur Augustus, still circling round the table—"vewy sorry indeed, but weally—"

"Grooh! Help! Police!"

Mr. Hanks appeared from the adjoining room, his sooty face the picture of dismay.

"You silly young ldjit!" he roared.

"Weally, Mr. Hanks—"

"You blithering loonytick!" shrieked Mr. Hanks. "Get hout!"

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"I have not finished sweepin' the chimney. Yawooooo!" Mr. Hanks rushed at Arthur Augustus and caught him by the collar. The swell of St. Jim's struggled manfully. He was doing his best, and this was no way to handle an enthusiastic work-warrior. But Mr. Hanks was purple with fury. He dragged Arthur Augustus from the room, whirled him out of the house, and planted a heavy boot behind him.

Arthur Augustus went spinning into the garden, and collapsed there.

He sat up in a dazed condition.

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott! Oh, deah! What an uttah beast! I shall absolutely wefuse to assist Mr. Hanks any more! Gwooooo!"

Arthur Augustus staggered up. His mind was made up. He was done with so violent and unreasonable an employer as Mr. Hanks. He strode away wrathfully, and shook the dust of Mr. Jopp's house from his feet. Unfortunately, he could not shake the soot.

CHAPTER 5. Trouble for Blake!

"Gussy, by Jove! Going strong?" Arthur Augustus halted, panting. Jack Blake greeted him cheerily. Blake had a basket on his arm, full of groceries. Blake was evidently in his new job.

"No, deah boy, I am not goin' stwong," gasped Arthur Augustus. "I wewget to say that I have got the sack!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to laugh at, Blake. It is vewy unfortunate. I have done my vewy best to learn chimney-sweepin'. I suppose the woom was wathah mucked up with soot; but a chap must learn, you know. The howwid beast Hanks actually kicked me out, and I wefuse to have anythin' more to do with him!"

Jack Blake roared.

Arthur Augustus wiped the soot from his eyeglass, jammed it into his eye again, and surveyed Blake frigidly.

"I fail to see any reason for this wihald mewwimont, Blake," he said. "I was gettin' on wipplynly as a work-wah, and now it is all mucked up. I shall have to look for another situation. What are you doin'?"

"I'm on with Snooks, the grocer," said Blake. "His young man's gone to the war. I'm saving people from havin' to fetch their own goods home. Jolly heavy basket, crammed with eggs, and butter, and bacon, and things. My hat! You do look a picture, Gussy!"

"Pewpaws I am a little sooty—"

"A little! Ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, you are atwactin' a cwodd with your absurd wearin'!"

Several urchins were gathering round, attracted, not so much by Blake's merriment, as by the sooty condition of Arthur Augustus. He was smothered from head to foot. His aristocratic features were almost hidden. His cap was still somewhere in Mr. Jopp's house, but his head was well covered—with soot.

"Oh, eriker!" said one youth. "Wot is it? Something out of the Zoo?"

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass indignantly upon the irrelevant youth.

"You wude young person—" he began.

"He, he, he!"

"Larf at 'im!"

"Wot a sight!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

The Wayland boys seemed to find Arthur Augustus very amusing. They gathered round him in numbers, laughing and grinning, and were evidently disposed to spend a happy ten minutes "chivvying" him.

"Here, let's get out of this!" said Blake, taking up his basket. "Clear off, you checky little bounders!"

"Who yer talking to?"

"Go 'ome!"

"Go and boil yer 'ead!"

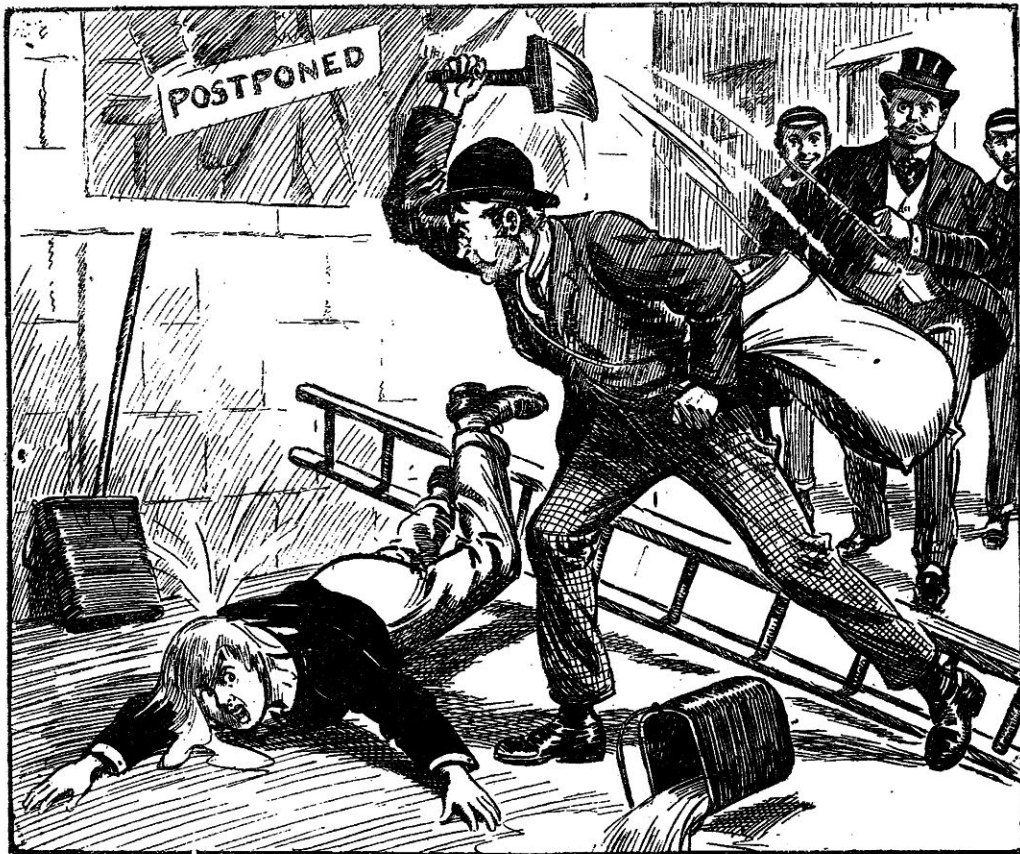
"Yah! Funnny-face!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "This is wotten, Blake! These howwid little bounders are goin' to make a scene!"

"Well, what do you expect with a face like that?" said Blake. "Here, sheer off, you little beasts, or I'll warn you!"

But the "little beasts" did not sheer off. One of them tweaked off Blake's cap, and tossed it into the road. Jack Blake hit out promptly, and the joker was laid on the pavement in the twinkling of an eye. Then there was a yell and a rush.

Blake's basket went with a crash to the ground, and there was an ominous sound of breaking eggs.



Unfortunately for Lowther, he caught his foot in the overturned steps, and fell at full length. In a twinkling the infuriated Mr. Snuckey was upon him, and his paste-brush landed on Lowther's shoulders with a crash. "Oh, crumbs! Yaroooh!" roared Lowther. "Help! Rescue! Yoop!" (See Chapter 8.)

Two or three of the cheery youths kicked the basket over, and proceeded to kick the contents along the pavement. Blake rushed furiously to the rescue of his master's goods, and Arthur Augustus backed him up heartily. But the mischievous young rascals were too many for them. Blake was pitched into the road, and his basket was jammed over his head, and Arthur Augustus reposed in the gutter. Then the yelling urchins rushed off, kicking the groceries along before them.

Blake dragged off the basket, and jumped up in utter dismay.

"Oh, crumbs!" he gasped.

"Grooooh!"

"Oh, you silly ass!" yelled Blake. "What did you want to get in a row with a gang of hooligans for?"

"Gwooh! Wooh! Ooop!"

Blake rushed desperately after the young rascals, in the vain hope of rescuing some of Mr. Snooks' property. But goods that had been kicked along in the mud and trampled on were not much worth rescuing. Blake gave it up at last, and stopped to consider. His basket was empty, and he certainly could not continue his delivery round with an empty basket.

"Oh, that ass Gussy!" he murmured. "What will old Snooks say? Oh, my hat!"

There was nothing for it but to return to his employer and explain. That Blake proceeded to do.

Mr. Snooks' grocery stores was in the High Street. The fat grocer was in the shop when Blake came in with the empty basket.

"Finished your round already!" exclaimed Mr. Snooks, in surprise. "Well, you'll do, my lad! That's quick work!"

"Ahem!" The fact is, sir—

"All right! The goods are ready for the second round," said Mr. Snooks. "You'll be useful to me at this rate, my lad!"

"Ahem! I—I haven't finished the round, sir."

"What!" said Mr. Snooks testily. "Then what have you come back for?"

"The fact is," Blake stammered, "I—I've had an accident. I got into a row with some hooligans, and—and—"

"You young idiot!"

"Ahem!"

"Anything 'appened to the goods?" exclaimed Mr. Snooks, in alarm.

"Ye-es. They're all gone!"

"Gone!" yelled Mr. Snooks.

"Every blessed thing," said Blake. "I'm sorry!"

Mr. Snooks gave a glare like a basilisk.

"You're sorry!" he bawled. "Who's going to pay for two pounds' worth of groceries, you young fool?"

"You can take it out of my wages, if you like," said Blake.

"Your—your wages! Two pounds out of five bob a week!" shouted Mr. Snooks.

"Well, I'm sorry—"

"You silly young idiot! Put down that basket and get out!"

"Eh?"

"Get out, confound you!"

"Oh, dear! Do you mean I'm sacked?" asked Blake, in dismay.

"I should say you was!" vociferated the enraged Mr. Snooks. "Two pounds' worth of groceries, and customers a-waiting for them. Get out!"

"But—but I say—"

"Do you want my boot be'ind you?" roared Mr. Snooks.
 "No, thanks!"
 And Jack Blake got out—sacked!

CHAPTER 6.

Fatty Wynn has a Good Time!

"**B**AI Jove! It's Fatty Wynn!"
 Arthur Augustus was passing Plummer's confectionery shop in the High Street, when he caught sight of a fat face through the window.
 D'Arcy had been back to Mr. Hanks' shop, where he had cleaned himself as well as he could, and resumed his own clothes. He was very glad to make the change again. Fortunately, Mr. Hanks had not yet returned there, and D'Arcy was glad to escape without another interview with his former employer.

The swell of St. Jim's was debating in his mind whether he should look for another job, or return to St. Jim's for lunch, when he caught sight of the fat Fourth-Former in the sweet-shop. He decided to enter, and see how Fatty Wynn was getting on.

Fatty Wynn was behind the counter, with a beaming face. He was serving a customer when D'Arcy came in. Fatty was looking very business-like. His customer was a lady, and Fatty Wynn was selling chocolates.

"I can recommend this milk chocolate, ma'am," Fatty Wynn was saying. "It's pure British made—not Swiss muck!"

The lady completed her purchase, and went out, and Fatty Wynn grinned at the swell of the Fourth.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asked.

"Bai Jove!"

"Our British milk chocolate is very good, sir," said Fatty Wynn. "Support home industries, you know, and don't buy stuff manufactured by beastly neutrals! And I can recommend these sugar-sticks!"

"Weally, Wynn—"

"Our bullseyes are the best value on the market," continued Fatty Wynn. "As for our lollipops, they simply take the cake!"

"Pway don't be an ass, Wynn! I have looked in to see how you are gettin' on," said Arthur Augustus. "I have been sacked myself. I was gettin' on splendidly with the sweepin', but Mr. Hanks was wathah unweasonable. Are you givin' satisfaction to Mr. Plummah?"

Fatty Wynn nodded and grinned.

"First-rate," he said. "Mr. Plummer is a brick. You see, I know all the prices already—I've bought such a jolly lot of the stuff in my time! And Mr. Plummer's got a splendid system!"

"Has he weally?"

"You see fellows employed in sweet-shops are tempted to sample the stuff," explained Fatty Wynn. "Some employers have a system of letting them have a free run of the stock at first. Then they get fed up on sweets, and wouldn't touch 'em for anything. It saves the stock in the long run!"

"Bai Jove! That's a wathah good ideah!"

"It's ripping!" said Fatty Wynn enthusiastically. "It shows that Mr. Plummer's got a lot of sense. He's trying that system with me. I've got the free run of the stock, and can eat as much as I like."

"That's toppin'!"

"Oh, it suits me down to the ground, of course. I've been sampling the things all the morning," said Fatty Wynn, beaming.

"And have you got fed up yet?"

"No fear," said Wynn promptly.

Arthur Augustus grinned.

"Pewwaps you will not get fed up as soon as Mr. Plummer expects," he remarked.

"Perhaps not," agreed Fatty Wynn. "But I'm willing to keep it up as long as Mr. Plummer does. He had a boy here before—chap's gone on munitions now—who was put on the same system. Mr. Plummer says that he ate a lot the first day, and nearly made himself sick, but after a few days he wouldn't have touched sweets or cakes if his wages had been doubled for it. It's a grand system, and suits me splendidly."

"Ha, ha! Pewwaps it will not suit Mr. Plummah so well when he knows you bettah, deah boy."

"Well, it's his own idea," said Wynn. "I'm not allowed to give anything away, of course, or I'd treat you to some of these chocs. That wouldn't be playing the game. But you can watch me eating them, if you like."

"Thank you vewy much. I'm going to look for a job," said Arthur Augustus. "I trust you will not make yourself ill, Wynn."

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"No jolly fear! I could clear out this whole shop, and not half try."

"Bai Jove, that would be wippin' for Mr. Plummah!"

Arthur Augustus sauntered out as another customer came in. Fatty Wynn was attending faithfully to his duties.

He had a great deal of cloquence in expatiating upon the excellence of the goods he was selling, for it was a subject that was very near his heart.

Fatty was enjoying his job.

Under the counter a pile of empty cardboard boxes was growing in size, discarded by Fatty after disposing of the contents internally.

Probably Mr. Plummer did not guess Fatty's wonderful powers in that line. His system—sometimes adopted by gentlemen in his line of business, was often successful; but Fatty Wynn's was a doubtful case. Fatty Wynn had no limit.

Mr. Plummer had gone out, leaving the fat Fourth-Former in charge, very pleased with the enthusiasm Fatty showed for his new business, and with his knowledge of it—knowledge founded upon long and varied experience as an extensive purchaser.

Fatty Wynn had been enjoying himself immensely, as the heap of empty boxes testified.

It was getting towards dinner-time now, but Fatty, for once, was not particularly keen about dinner.

Cakes and sugary biscuits, preserved fruits and chocolates and creams and bullseyes and all sorts of confectionery, had taken the keen edge off his appetite.

That famous appetite, however, was still in full working order.

In the intervals of dealing with customers, Fatty Wynn sat down and devoured the good things that surrounded him.

There was already a perceptible diminution in the stock.

About an hour after D'Arcy's visit Mr. Plummer came in. He was a stout and genial gentleman with a florid complexion.

"Well, how are you getting on, my lad?" he asked.

"First-rate, sir!" said Fatty Wynn cheerily.

"Like the business—what?"

"Ever so much better than school, sir. I'd like to take up this business permanently," said Fatty. "I hope it'll be a long time before you get a new assistant, sir."

Mr. Plummer smiled.

"Business seems to have been brisk this morning," he remarked, looking round. "Fifteen boxes of chocolate creams. Good! You've put all the money in the till?"

"Yes, sir, as fast as I take it."

"That's right." Mr. Plummer rubbed his fat hands.

"You are a good salesman, my boy. I've never sold fifteen half-crown boxes of chocolate creams in one day before."

Fatty Wynn coughed.

"Ahem! I've only sold one, sir."

"Only one!"

"Yes, sir!"

"But there are fifteen gone," said Mr. Plummer, puzzled.

"Have you taken them off the counter?"

"Ahem!"

"Where are they, Wynn?"

"I—I've eaten them, sir."

Mr. Plummer jumped clear of the floor.

"You—you—you've eaten them!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, sir," said Fatty Wynn. "You gave me the run of the shop, you remember, sir. I rather like chocolate creams."

"B-b-but a human being couldn't do it!" yelled Mr. Plummer. "You'll be ill! You'll be sick! You'll die!"

Fatty Wynn smiled.

"Why, that's nothing to me, sir!"

"N-n-nothing to you!" gasped Mr. Plummer. "Oh, my word! You—you've eaten fourteen boxes—half-crown boxes—of chocolate creams, you greedy young rascal!"

"But you told me—"

"I didn't know you were a human boa-constrictor!" howled Mr. Plummer, his geniality quite vanishing as he realized his loss. "Have you eaten anything else, you—you—you horrid young gormandiser?"

"Well, I've had some of the bullseyes," said Fatty Wynn.

"Only three of the iced cakes—"

"Three iced cakes—eighteen-pence each!"

"And one plum cake—"

"A half-crown cake!"

"And a few pounds of Turkish delight!"

"A—a—a few pounds," said Mr. Plummer faintly—"a—a few pounds—of Turkish delight! Where—where did you put it?"

"Inside, of course!" said Fatty Wynn, in surprise. "I hope you don't think I'd put anything in my pockets!"

"Anything else?" gasped Mr. Plummer.

TUCK HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1st.

"Well, some of the candy, and some of the milk chocolate, and a dozen meringues—"

"Oh!"

"And a dozen or so tarts, and some of the cream-puffs and doughnuts—"

Fatty Wynn had not time to finish his lengthy enumeration. Mr. Plummer leaned over the counter and seized him by the ear, and led him round.

"Out you go!" he said.

Fatty Wynn stared.

"But—but don't I suit?" he exclaimed. "I'm getting on splendidly with the business, sir. I'm getting right into the way of it. And—your system, sir, suits me down to the ground. I was just going to have another box of chocolate creams."

Mr. Plummer did not reply. He led Fatty to the door by his car.

"Good-bye!" he said.

"I—I say—"

"There's your cap! Cut off!"

"But—but I want to stay, sir!"

Slam!

The shop door closed violently behind Fatty Wynn. He blinked at it in surprise.

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly. "I like that! Sacked for nothing—nothing at all! Just when I was getting on so splendidly, too! Sacked, without even my dinner, and I'm getting-jolly peckish!"

It was really hard lines, considering how peckish Fatty Wynn must have been! He started for St. Jim's disconsolately, running most of the way, in great fear that he would be too late for dinner when he was so peckish.

CHAPTER 7.

Grundy is Discouraged.

TOM MERRY & CO. met at the bunshop to compare notes and have lunch. Not all of them turned up, however. Some of the fellows—luckier than Gussy—were in places, and keeping them. Tom Merry himself was one of the unlucky ones. Somewhat to his surprise, Blankley's did not want his services, and the local solicitor had no use for him, and the Wayland auctioneer was not yearning for a Shell fellow of St. Jim's to assist him in sales. Tom was the first at the rendezvous, but Monty Lowther soon joined him.

"Any luck?" asked Tom.

"Yes, I'm taken on, but I get my meals out," said Lowther cheerfully. "I calculate that my wages will very nearly cover the cost of the meals, and I go home to the school to sleep. War-profits don't seem to be coming my way. But there doesn't seem any chance to start as a shipowner."

"What's the business?"

"Bill-sticking."

"Great Scott!"

"I've been round with Mr. Stuckey this morning," said Lowther. "He's initiating me into the business. I'm going out with him sticking up bills this afternoon. He's got a lot of theatrical posters to shove on the hoardings, and his young man has gone to the war and left him in a hole. So he's jolly glad to have me!"

"I've had no luck," said Tom dismally. "My only chance was as a waiter in a cheap coffee-house, and—and I'm keeping that as a last resource."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake came in with Digby and Herries. They sat down at the Shell fellows' table.

"Well?" said Tom Merry and Lowther together.

"Sacked!" said Blake.

"I'm all serene," said Herries. "I've got work in a dog-fancier's. Know all about dogs, you know. The chap hasn't mentioned wages yet, but I dare say that will be all right."

"I'm a draper's errand-boy," said Dig. "Every other chap in the shop is a girl—I mean, all the others are girls, and they chip me no end, calling me every minute for something or other. Women ain't reasonable. I can't be in three places at once. How can I carry bandboxes upstairs at the same time that I'm sweeping out the passage? And how can I take a bundle home at the same blessed minute? I didn't know a draper's boy was expected to be such a giddy genius."

"We're learning a lot of things about employment," said Tom Merry, laughing. "It comes rather harder than Form work at St. Jim's. Manners seems to have got a job somewhere. I saw Reilly in a white apron at the cheesemonger's; he's all right. Julian's been taken on in the estate office; he knows all about figures. Hello, here's the great and only!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came gracefully in, and dropped into a seat at the table.

"Just wemmabehad you fellahs were heah," he remarked. "I'm sowsy to say that I was discharged by the sweep—a wathah unweasonable man. I trust you did not get into touble with Mr. Snooks, Blake?"

"Sacked!" growled Blake. "I've got to get another job this afternoon, or else go back to lessons."

"Sowsy, deah boy!"

"All your fault, fathhead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Pass the ham," said Monty Lowther. "I've got to get off in ten minutes. My master is rather punctual—one of those efficient beasts, you know!"

"Bai dove, if you're weally sacked, Blake, I will go aftah your job, if you like! You can go aftah mine, as I'm sacked, too! Exchange is no wobbewy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you can have my job," agreed Blake, "but I'm not having yours. I don't fancy myself as a sweep."

"I trust, Blake, that you are not goin' to be particulah about a twifle in war-time!" said D'Arcy severely. "I have no doubt wathewah that the Pwime Ministah himself would take a sweep's job if it were for the good of the country."

"Perhaps!" grinned Blake. "I'll give him the chance. Anyway, I'm not going to take it. But you can apply to Snooks. Have you decided not to become a railway director, after all?"

"There does not seem any woom for railway diwectahs. Apparently they do not want fellahs with bwains. Bai Jove, heah's Gwundy! How have you been gettin' on, Gwundy?"

Grundy of the Shell joined the party at lunch. Grundy was looking somewhat dissatisfied.

"I've had no luck," he said. "I've been treated with actual rudeness; I'm sure I don't know why. I called on the recruiting-officer."

"Bai Jove!"

"I told him I understood how awfully keen he must be to get to the Front, and offered to take his job off his hands so that he could go. For some reason he flew into a temper, and called a man to show me out."

"Go hon!"

"That's a fact," said Grundy. "I don't see why he got into a temper, but he did. Then I had another idea—what I thought was a ripping idea. I called on our member."

"On whom?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"The member of Parliament for Wayland," said Grundy. "I'd seen in the local paper that he was home, so I called. He was quite civil at first, when I told him I was from St. Jim's; the Head supported him at the election, you know. Said he would come and see us play football in a few weeks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose he don't know footer's over; you know what dashed idiots these members of Parliament are!" said Grundy. "Well, I came to business. I pointed out to him that, as he was forty-two, he was entitled to dodge conscription, but that he was young enough to apply for a commission."

"Did you offah to take his place in the House of Commons, Gwundy?" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, no," said Grundy. "I'd do it willingly enough, and I'd talk more sense than they're accustomed to; but, of course, I know I couldn't do that. But that's no reason why Mr. Jawkins shouldn't go to the war. There's no need for members of Parliament to go on gassing at a time like this. Of course, I thought he had overlooked the matter, and would be keen to go, when it was pointed out to him, especially as he's so keen on voting for the Compulsion Bill in the House. But he flew into a temper just like the chap at the recruiting-office—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Called me an impertinent young puppy!" said Grundy indignantly. "Me, you know, when I was doing him a good turn! I simply pointed out to him that officers were good turn! I simply pointed out to him that officers weren't, and he wanted, and that members of Parliament weren't, and he got quite ratty. Called me namca. So I had to tell him it looked to me as if he was a shirker, and then he called a footman, and I was chucked out—actually chucked out on my neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at in that!" said Grundy warmly. "I call it rotten! I've got a bump! I never did think much of these political chaps, but, really, that man Jawkins is about the limit! Pass the pie!"

George Alfred Grundy was left frowning over the pie when the rest of the party departed to look for work.

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CHAPTER 8.

Monty Lowther is Too Feany!

MR. STUCKEY, the Wayland bill-sticker, greeted Monty Lowther with a kindly nod when he turned up after lunch. Tom Merry came along with his chum. Lowther had undertaken to use his "influence" to get the captain of the Shell a job with Mr. Stuckey.

"Back on time—what?" said Mr. Stuckey. "That's right! Always stick to your work, and your work will stick to you! Who's this?"
"My pal wants a job, sir," said Lowther. "You mentioned you needed an extra hand, as both your chaps have been conscripted."

"Right! There's a chance for everybody in these days," said Mr. Stuckey. "Come in and get your overalls on. I'm just starting."

The two juniors donned the overalls, and started with Mr. Stuckey. The bill-poster carried a bundle of posters. Tom Merry carried a huge can of paste and two big brushes, and Lowther a step-ladder.

The bill-sticking party halted at a hoarding, a gigantic wooden structure outside a half-built house in the High Street. It was nearly opposite the Theatre Royal, and in a very commanding position.

"We've got the theatrical bills to put up 'ere," said Mr. Stuckey. "Begin at this end, and work along. I'll take the top sheets with the ladder, and you youngsters work below. See?"

"Yes, sir!"
The step-ladder was set up, and the bundle of posters unrolled. Mr. Stuckey stirred the paste in the big can. Then the bill-posters set to work.

A flaring announcement that Cheeky Chiplin was now appearing on the "pictures" at the Theatre Royal was posted up by the efforts of Mr. Stuckey and his two employees. Next to that came equally flaring information to the effect that the celebrated revue, "With the Milk in the Morning," was appearing nightly at the Theatre Royal. The next poster informed the public that the screaming sketch, "Mr. Thompson's Trousers," was to be seen every evening at the theatre. Stuckey & Co. worked their way along the big hoarding with these flaring and glaring posters.

Mr. Stuckey worked away steadily, and Tom Merry worked equally hard. Monty Lowther slacked down after a time when the hoarding was nearly covered.

There was a twinkle in Lowther's eye. Keen as Monty was on war-work, his sense of humour was still more rampant. The humorist of the Shell could never keep himself within bounds for long.

Among the posters unfurled on the ground were a number of slips, printed in red, with the single word "POSTPONED."

These slips were intended to be pasted on another hoarding which the bill-stickers were to visit in the afternoon.

Unfortunately, Lowther's sense of humour was too much for him.

While Mr. Stuckey and Tom Merry were working towards the end of the hoarding, Lowther started again at the beginning, with those red slips in his hand and a twinkle in his eye.

So that across the flaring announcement concerning the appearance of the famous Cheeky Chiplin on the films there was placed a prominent red slip: "POSTPONED."

"Postponed" also appeared across all the other announcements on the hoarding that told of the attractive entertainments to be found within the walls of the Theatre Royal.

Mr. Stuckey had nearly finished his work, and so had Monty Lowther, when the manager of the Theatre Royal strolled across the street. That fat and genial gentleman wished to survey the new posters, and judge of their effect on the public.

Their effect on Mr. Flippis himself was surprising when he saw that all the announcements of his marvellous attractions were marked "Postponed."

The manager stared at the posters and blinked at them, and then strode along to the step-ladder upon which Mr. Stuckey was mounted, pasting up the last section of the last poster.

He seized the steps, and shook them, to draw the bill-poster's attention.

Mr. Stuckey staggered on the steps.
"Tow-ow! Wharr— Yarooch!"
"Stuckey!" shouted Mr. Flippis.

"Don't break my neck!" roared Mr. Stuckey. "Leggo those steps!"

"What do you mean by it?" shouted Mr. Flippis.
"Leggo those steps!"
Mr. Flippis let go the steps, and shook his fat fist at the bill-poster.

"What do you mean?" he shouted.
"Mean?" gasped Mr. Stuckey.

"Yes, you dummy! What have you been sticking up?"
"Eh? I've stuck up the posters, according to orders," said Mr. Stuckey indignantly. "And a finer set of posters I never see, nor better put up, Mr. Flippis. What have you got to complain about?"

"You crass idiot!"
"Look 'ere—"

"What do you mean by saying that the performances are postponed?" demanded Mr. Flippis. "They're all for to-night!"

"Eh? Who says it's postponed?"
"You have, you crass ass!"
"Blow my buttons!" said Mr. Stuckey, in wonder. "I ain't said nothing of the sort! Look at the posters yourself! And don't you call a man names neither!"

"Look at them!" shrieked Mr. Flippis. "Are you mad? Paste up a new set of bills at once—at once! Do you hear?"
Mr. Stuckey stared down at the excited manager from the top of the steps. He had not seen Lowther's humorous additions to the posters, and his impression was that Mr. Flippis had been drinking.

"Look 'ere, Mr. Flippis!" he said seriously. "You go 'ome!"

"What!"
"Go and lie down a bit, and sleep it off," said Mr. Stuckey. "You—you—"

"Better go in quietly," urged Mr. Stuckey. "You'll be gettin' a crowd 'ere, Mr. Flippis. Go and sleep it off."

"You crass fool!" shouted Mr. Flippis. "You're drunk! You must be drunk!"

"Well, I like that!" said Mr. Stuckey warmly. "My word! The best thing you can do, Mr. Flippis, is to go 'ome and sleep it off!"

Mr. Flippis gave a gasp, and shook the steps again furiously. "Look at the posters yourself, you idiot!" he shouted.

"Yarooch!"
Mr. Stuckey had no chance of looking at the posters. The shaking of the steps brought him down with a rush.

He tumbled over, and fell fairly upon the manager, and clasped him round the neck, and they went to the ground together.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Tom Merry.
"Better slide!" murmured Monty Lowther. "I'm afraid there's going to be a row."

"Monty! You ass!" exclaimed Tom, as he caught sight of the "postponed" slips pasted across the posters. "You funny idiot!"

"Help!" yelled Mr. Flippis.
Tom Merry rushed to help up Mr. Stuckey, who was sprawling across the manager. The bill-sticker was dragged, gasping, to his feet.

"I'll have the law of you, Mr. Flippis!" he roared. "Might 'ave broken my neck, by gosh! I'll 'ave the law of yer!"

Mr. Flippis sat up breathlessly.
"You intoxicated fool! I'll never give you an order again! I'll—"

"Drunk as a lord!" said Mr. Stuckey contemptuously. "Why don't you take a friend's advice and go 'ome and sleep it off?"

Mr. Flippis staggered to his feet.
"Look!" he shrieked.

He pointed at the posters. Mr. Stuckey stared at them, and his jaw dropped.
"P-p-postponed!" he ejaculated. "Wot the thunder! Wot silly idjit has done that? You silly young hasses! Wot do you mean by it? I beg your pardon, Mr. Flippis! It was those silly young hasses! Playing a joke on me, by gum!"

The enraged bill-poster made a rush at the two juniors. He realised that he had been a victim of a practical joker. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther promptly dodged.

Unfortunately for Lowther, he caught his foot in the overturned steps, and fell at full length.

In a twinkling the infuriated Mr. Stuckey was upon him. His paste-brush landed on Lowther's shoulders with a crash.

"Oh, crumbs! Yarooch!" roared Lowther. "Help! Rescue! Yooop!"
"Whack! Whack! Whack!"
"Yarooch! Help! Chuck it! Oh, crumbs!"

The paste-brush slipped from Mr. Stuckey's hand with the last terrific whack. He grasped the can, and up-ended it over Monty Lowther. The can was still half-full of paste. In a sticky stream it came swooping out over the unfortunate joker's head.

Monty Lowther's head and face disappeared under the clinging paste.



Mr. Plummer led Fatty Wynn to the door by his ear. "Good-bye," he said. "I—I say—!" "There's your cap! Cut off!" (See Chapter 6.)

From under the paste came wild and choking gurgles. "Gerrrooogh! Groogh! Wurrghh!"

Lowther wriggled away, and jumped up. He dabbed the paste out of his eyes. Mr. Stuckey was rushing at him again, vengeance still unsatisfied. Monty Lowther took to his heels.

"Come on!" gasped Tom Merry, catching his too humorous chum by the arm.

And they fled, leaving Mr. Stuckey waving a paste-brush furiously after them. They did not stop to take breath till they were safe round a corner. Then Monty Lowther halted, and began dabbing at the paste with his handkerchief. One handkerchief was not much use on such a quantity of paste. The unhappy humorist of St. Jim's gasped and gurgled, and gurgled and gasped, and choked and spluttered, and Tom Merry laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks. Lowther blinked at him almost humbly.

"You cackling idiot, what are you cackling at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grooh! I'm smothered! I'm suffocated! Look at my clothes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tom Merry wiped his eyes.

"You're such a funny beggar, Monty!" he gasped. "I suppose you didn't expect your little joke to end like that?"

"No, you ass! No, you dummy! That horrid ruffian—Groogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped Tom Merry. "Never mind the paste, old chap! That's the cream of the joke! Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther snorted indignantly, and scraped at the paste. For the humorist of the Shell, the humour of the situation had completely departed.

CHAPTER 9.

In the Grocery Line.

"I UNDAHSTAND that you are in want of an assistant, sir?"

Mr. Snooks, the grocer, looked up from a ledger. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood before him, hat in hand.

The swell of St. Jim's was looking spick and span. He had taken care to renovate himself equal to new, so to speak, before calling on Mr. Snooks for the job Jack Blake had so unluckily lost.

"I'm in want of three assistants," said Mr. Snooks morosely. "My young man has gone to the war, and both my boys have gone on munitions. And 'ow business is to go on is more than I can say."

"Then pewpaws you will be kind enough to give me a twial, sir."

Mr. Snooks looked at him dubiously.

The swell of St. Jim's did not look as if he would be much use as a grocer's boy. But it was a case of any port in a storm.

Although Mr. Snooks had been left without assistance in his business, many of his customers were as exacting as ever, with regard to having their goods sent home at the precise moment they were required. Mr. Snooks, being fortunately married, had escaped conscription himself, otherwise his business would have disappeared altogether, and would have been "bagged" by his rival along the street, who was in the enviable position of being fifty years old. Mr. Snooks had never realised before how greatly he was indebted to Mrs. Snooks.

"I'll give you a trial with pleasure," said Mr. Snooks. "Can you keep books?"

"Yaas, wathah! I keep books in my study at St. Jim's," said D'Arcy. "I am always vevy careful with my books."

Mr. Snooks grunted.

"I mean, can you keep accounts?"

"Yaas, I think so. I have nevah twied, but I dare say I can do it all wigh," said Arthur Augustus confidently.

Mr. Snooks gave another grunt.

"I sometimes fid some little difficulty with figahs," Arthur Augustus confessed. "It is a remarkable thing that a column of figahs added from the top comes to a different result from the result obtain'd from addin' it from the bottom. I have often noticed the."

Another grunt from Mr. Snooks. He decided not to place his books in charge of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I suppose you can mind the shop?" he remarked.

"Yaas; I should find that quite easy, I think," said Arthur Augustus. "At all events, I should do my best, and at least I would twy vevy hard to give satisfaction. I am vevy anxious to do somethin'."

"I'll give you a trial," decided Mr. Snooks. "You won't do any worse than Joseph, anyway."

D'Arcy wondered who Joseph was.

"Joseph!" called out Mr. Snooks.

"I'm tired to death, dad!" came a voice from the parlour.

"Come here!" roared Mr. Snooks.

A tired-looking young man came into the shop. He was about twenty, and the reason why he was not in khaki was clear at a glance—Joseph's weedy figure and sickly face were not wanted in the Army. He was one of the unhappy rejected. He was, moreover, evidently a slacker, from the look of him, and his thin fingers were stained with cigarettes. Joseph was the son and heir of Mr. Snooks, but was apparently not a pillar of strength to the grocery business in those trying times.

"This is the new boy, Joseph!" said Mr. Snooks, gruffly.

"What's your name, my lad?"

"D'Arcy, sir."

"Then you don't want me," said Joseph, after a languid glance at Arthur Augustus.

"I want you to tell D'Arcy anything he wants to know while I'm out!" snapped Mr. Snooks. "When I come back you'll go on your round."

"Can't Tommy go on the round?"

"His name isn't Tommy. His name's D'Arcy."

"I don't care," said Joseph. "I shall call him Tommy, same as the last. I can't keep on learning their names, one after t'other. Why can't he go on the round?"

"Because you're going," said his father.

"Oh, crikey!" said Joseph dismally.

Mr. Snooks snorted and went out of the shop, taking his hat.

Arthur Augustus went behind the counter. Mr. Snooks evidently had an appointment to keep, and Arthur Augustus had arrived in the nick of time to save the languid Joseph from the terrific labour of minding the shop.

Joseph blinked dismally at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Schoolboy?" he asked, noting the Etoms.

"Yaas."

"Father taken you without a character?"

D'Arcy turned his cyeglans upon Joseph.

"Mr. Snooks knows that I belong to St. Jim's!" he said with dignity. "I am not an ordinawy gwocah's boy. I am a war-worlah."

"Do you mean to say that you're working without having to?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good Lord!" said Joseph.

Joseph seemed overcome with astonishment, and he stood staring at Arthur Augustus for some minutes, his mouth open. Arthur Augustus carefully bestowed his silk hat in a safe place.

"Can you lend me an apron?" he asked. "I believe gwocah's assistants always weah aprons."

Joseph pointed out an apron hanging on a peg, and Arthur Augustus draped it round him, and tied the strings.

"Bai Jove, that looks wathah businesslike!" he remarked.

"Have a cigarette?" remarked Joseph.

"Thank you, no."

"Don't smoke?"

"Certainly not!"

"Good heavens!" said Joseph.

He drifted back into the parlour, where there was an atmosphere of smoke. Then after a few minutes he put his head into the shop again.

"I say, Tommy!"

"My name isn't Tommy."

"Well, I suppose you chaps at the school are rather flush with money," said Joseph, with a gleam in his fishy eyes.

"Can you lend me half-a-quad?"

"Bai Jove!"

"I've got an appointment," said Joseph. "I can't keep it without that. I'll settle up this evening."

"Vevy well, deah boy."

It was not part of a grocer's boy's business to advance loans to the son of his employer, but Arthur Augustus was always obliging. He extracted a ten-shilling note from his natty little russia-leather purse and handed it to Joseph. Snooks junior took it eagerly, and immediately put on his hat and hurried out. His steps led him at once to the billiard-room of the Railway Arms. That delectable spot was a favourite haunt of Joseph.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "The boundah might have stayed in and told me somethin' about the bizney! But I suppose he's bound to keep his appointment. I shall have to guess the pwices."

Full of keeness for his new job, Arthur Augustus waited eagerly for a customer to come in. A little girl came in with a jar.

Arthur Augustus made her a profound bow behind the counter.

"Pway, what can I do for you, madam?" he asked.

"Garn!" said the little girl.

"Ahem! Pway, what do you want?"

"Three-penn'orth of treacle."

"Vevy good."

Arthur Augustus took the jar. He discovered the treacle, and paused to reflect. He had not the faintest idea how much treacle went for threepence, but he reflected that it was best to be on the safe side, and give plenty, so as not to run the risk of causing dissatisfaction among his employer's customers. So he filled the jar to the brim.

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The little girl took it with evident satisfaction. It was quite plain that D'Arcy was on the safe side. She hurried out of the shop with the jar of treacle, as if in dread that the grocer's young man might change his mind.

Arthur Augustus clinked the three pennies into the till, and smiled with satisfaction. He had made a good beginning. It seemed quite easy to become a grocer's assistant—much easier than grinding Latin in the Form-room at St. Jim's, in fact.

CHAPTER 10.

Skimpole is Taken On.

GOOD-AFTERNOON, madam!" A formidable-looking lady swept into the grocery stores. Arthur Augustus greeted her with urbane politeness, though his heart sank, for it was Mrs. Snooper, housekeeper of Mr. Jopp, the mayor of Wayland. But he breathed more freely when he found that the lady did not recognise him. On the occasion of their previous meeting Arthur Augustus had been differently attired, and had been disgraced with soot. And a great personage like Mrs. Snooper could not be supposed to notice such insignificant persons as sweeps' boys and grocers' boys.

Mrs. Snooper sailed in, with wrath in her countenance. She fixed the grocer's new young man with a beady eye.

"Is Mr. Snooks here?"
"Mr. Snooks has stepped out for a moment, madam. I am in charge of the establishment. Pwavy, what can I do for you? I can recommend this vevy good English ched-dah," said Arthur Augustus, with a dim remembrance in his mind of the manners and customs he had observed in shops.

"I have not come here for cheese."
"Pewwaps you would like to try our fweacle," said Arthur Augustus briskly. "If you have brought a jah—"

Mrs. Snooper's look caused the words to die upon his tongue. Certainly the majestic Mrs. Snooper was not likely to have brought a jar for treacle.

"Why have my goods not been sent?"
"Younah—younah goods, madam?"

"My goods!" said Mrs. Snooper, with asperity. "They were ordered this morning, and have not been sent!"

"I am vevy sowwy, madam. It is owing to the war," said D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's guessed that it was owing to the war; everything was owing to the war. "You see, we are feashfully short of labah."

"Nonsense!"
"Ahem! You see, madam, our whole staff has been conscripted," explained Arthur Augustus. "Everyone has been conscripted, and all the othahs have gone on munition work."

"These goods should have been delivered this morning. I require them."

"The new boy we took on for delivewies pwoved vevy unsatisfactory, and was sacked this mornin', madam," said D'Arcy, inwardly wondering what Jack Blake would have said to that remark if he had been present.

"Nonsense!"
"Oh, deah!"

"Unless goods ordered here are delivered promptly I shall transfer my custom to Blankley's!" said Mrs. Snooper.

"As a mattah of fact that would be a vevy good ideah," said Arthur Augustus confidentially. "Blankley's have gal portahs—"

"What!"
"They used to send a vevy chamin' gal portah with the parcels to St. Jim's, madam. In fact, they have a lot of gal portahs, all vevy nice-lookin'. Upon the whole, I wathah think I should send ordahs to Blankley's, in your place, madam."

Mrs. Snooper gave him a freezing glare. She was not in the least amenable to the charms of Blankley's girl-porters.

"Does Mr. Snooks know what an utter fool he has left in charge of his shop?" she exclaimed.

"Bai Jove!"
"When will my goods be delivered?"

"I twust mattahs will come wound at the end of the wah, madam," said Arthur Augustus.

"When?" shrieked Mrs. Snooper.

"Aftah the wah, madam, it will be all wight. Lots of fellahs will be comin' home then, and ewevythin' in the garden will be first-wate. People must be wathah patient in wah-time, madam. A chap can't bring home gwocwey goods while he's gone to Flandahs to kill Pwussians, madam."

"Is the boy a fool?" asked Mrs. Snooper, addressing space.
"Pewwaps you would like to cawwy the goods home your-self, madam?" suggested Arthur Augustus. "I will make

them up into a vevy nice package for you. Lots of ladies cawwy home their own goods in wah-time."

"Nonsense!"
"Ahem!"

"I insist upon immediate delivery of the goods ordered. Otherwise I shall transfer my custom to Blankley's."

"Weally, madam—"
"Tell Mr. Snooks so!" rasped Mrs. Snooper. "The loss will be his."

"Bai Jove! That will nevah do, madam. I twust you will continue to give us your esteemed custom. By pwompt attention to past favahs, we hope to mewit a continuance of the same," said D'Arcy, dimly recollecting the wording of some circular he had read.

"Goodness gracious! The boy is insane!"
"Weally, madam—"

"Will my goods be delivered at once, or will they not be delivered at once?" demanded Mrs. Snooper.

"Yaas, yaas, yaas!" said Arthur Augustus. "Any old thing!"

"What!"
"—I—mean, I will send them at once—immediately. I—I will send them down by special twain—"

"What!"
"I mean by special motah-caht!—Anythin' to oblige, madam."

"If they do not arrive by four o'clock, I shall deal here no longer," said Mrs. Snooper, and she founced out of the shop.

Arthur Augustus wiped his brow. Mrs. Snooper had made him perspire.

"Bai Jove, people are vevy unweasonable!" murmured the new grocer's young man. "I should weally have thought that powful-lookin' lady could have cawwed home a few gwocwevies. I pwesume she doesn't expect a gwocah's assistant to be sent home from the twenchah to cawwy home her gwocwevies. Bai Jove, heah's Skimmay!"

Skimpole of the Shell came in, and blinked at Arthur Augustus.

"Dear me! You here, D'Arcy?" he said, in surprise.

"Yaas, wathah, Skimmay, I'm workin' heah!"
The genius of the Shell blinked approval.

"I am vevy glad to see this, D'Arcy. It shows that even the brainless aristocracy can be put to use in times of stress, though only in a humble capacity."

"You uttah ass!" said Arthur Augustus wrathfully. "Do you want me to come ovah the countah and wub your head on the mat?"

"My dear D'Arcy, that is not the way a grocer's young man should speak to his master's customers."

"Ahem! Do you want to buy anythin', Skimpole?"

"Yes; I require a cake for my tea. Mrs. Taggles would not serve me at the school shop, and I have also been refused at the bun-shop."

"Bai Jove! Why wouldn't they serve you, Skimmay?"

"I cannot imagine," said Skimpole, with a shake of the head. "Unless, indeed, it was because I had no money, and wished them to give me credit. That may have been their motive—though I should be sorry to attribute such mercenary motives to anyone without proof. However, I thought Mr. Snooks might be more obliging. I will have a pound cake, Dr. Arcy."

"Not without payin' for it, you ass!"

"I trust you are not going to be mercenary, D'Arcy. Under Socialism all cakes will be nationalised."

"If you have come heah to talk Socialism, Skimmay, pwavy wethah," said Arthur Augustus. "Even a gwocah's young man is not bound to stand that."

Then a new idea occurred to Arthur Augustus.

"Are you lookin' for work, Skimmay?"

"I intended to look for war-work, D'Arcy. But Mr. Linton has unreasonably refused to allow me to apply at the War Office, where brains are so badly needed—"

"Nevah mind the Wah Office, Skimmay. How would you like a be a gwocah's boy?"

"Such a position is hardly worthy of my mental powers. However, I should be glad to be of use in these times of stress. If Mr. Snooks is in want of assistance, I will accept the post."

"Vevy good. I will take you on, subject to Mr. Snooks' approval," said Arthur Augustus, beaming. "I suppose you can cawwy a basket."

"Undoubtedly. It depends, however, on the weight of the basket," said the scientific Skimpole. "If my muscular powers are sufficient to overcome the centripetal attraction of the earth, undoubtedly I shall be able to sustain the basket."

"Bai Jove! I have to delivah some goods this aftahnoon at Mr. Jopp's. You can cawwy them wound, Skimmay. Pwavy hand ovah that basket."

Skimpole handed over the basket. Then Arthur Augustus paused to reflect. "Bai Jove! I don't know what goods Mrs. Snoopah ordahed! That is wathah a difficulty!"

CHAPTER 11. Sacked Again!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS screwed his eyeglass a little tighter into his eye, and gazed thoughtfully at Skimpole. Skimmy blinked through his big spectacles at D'Arcy. It was certainly a difficulty.

"I fail to see how you can deliver the goods, D'Arcy, without knowing the nature of the articles concerned," said Skimpole, after an effort of deep thought.

"They weally must be delivahed. I have pwomised them for this aftahnoon—by special motah-cah if necessary. I daah say I can work it out. I suppose a gwocah's young man ought to be able to do that. Aftah all, the goods must be gwoccees, as they are ordahed in a gwocah's shop. 'That's a beginnin'."

"That conclusion reflects credit upon your powers of reasoning, D'Arcy. I should certainly say that that was correct."

"It stands to weason there must have been tea on the list—ewevybody dwinks tea," said D'Arcy. "It is wathah w'ong to waste money on tea in wah-time, but ewevybody's doin' it. Suppose I put in a pound of tea. Pewwaps it would be a good ideah to put in a pound of ewevyth'n'. A pound of buttah, and a pound of cheese, and a pound of tweacle—"

"Probably the treacle would adhere to the other articles, and perhaps cause dissatisfaction," suggested Skimpole.

"Yaas, that is vevy twue. I will leave out the tweacle. Howevah, a pound of jam will do, as that is in a jah. And pound of marmalade. And a pound oake. And a pound of peppah."

Arthur Augustus placed article after article in the basket, feeling that he was getting on.

"Pewwaps I had bettah put in a pound of coffee, too, and a pound of cocoa," he went on. "If Mrs. Snoopah does not want them all, she can send them back. There, that will be enough. Can you cawwy that basket, Skimmy?"

Skimmy tried the basket on his skinny arm. "Yes, quite easily. The centripetal attraction is not sufficiently strong to draw the weight downward, when my muscular force is exerted in the opposite direction."

"Pwaj don't talk such awful wot, deah boy! Take the basket wround to Mr. Jopp's, and delivah the goods to Mrs. Snoopah!"

"Certainly!" Skimpole took up the basket and walked out with it, and Arthur Augustus breathed more freely. The terrible Mrs. Snooper was bound to be satisfied now, and Arthur Augustus felt that he deserved well of his employer. Few grocers' young men would have solved the difficulty in the way Gussy had done.

About half an hour later Skimpole came back. The sound of a loud sneeze heralded his approach. "Atchoo-choo-choo!"

Skimpole dumped the basket down—still full of goods. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon him in astonishment.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah?"

"Atchoo! Atchoo!"

"You uttah ass! You have upset the peppah!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, beginning to sneeze himself.

"I did not upset it!" gasped Skimpole, his eyes streaming under his spectacles. "I have had a most painful experience. Groogh! The maid declared that the goods were all wrong—atchoo!—and then a very ferocious-looking woman came—"

"Mrs. Snoopah, bai Jove!"

"She said Mr. Snooks must be mad to send such things, which are not at all like those ordered, and asked me what I supposed she wanted with a pound of pepper—atchoo! I replied that there were various, and indeed, multifarious uses to which that valuable product could be put—atchoo!—and she seemed to think I was speaking humorously—atchoo! which I was n't—grooh!—and she boxed my ears—yow!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I remonstrated," continued the unfortunate Skimpole. "I intended, with a few well-chosen and argumentative remarks, to bring her to a sense of the extreme unreasonableness of her action. To my amazement—groogh!—she smote me violently on the cranium with the packet of pepper—atchoo!—and slammed the grooh!—door. My olfactory nerves are in a painful condition of incessant titillation—grooh!"

"Atchoo—atchoo!" sneezed Arthur Augustus. "The beastly basket is half-full of beastly peppah— Atchoo!"

"Under the grooh—circumstances, D'Arcy, I shall decline further war-work of this—grooh—kind, and shall do no more, unless the authorities have sufficient intelligence to appoint me Air Minister— Grooh!"

And Skimpole of the Shell marched out, still sneezing.

Arthur Augustus blew his nose, and sneezed, and blew his nose, and sneezed, till his aristocratic nose was crimson in hue, and his eyes running water. Pepper was over all the goods in the basket. D'Arcy realised that it would not do for Mr. Snooks to return and find it so, and he cleared the packages out of the basket, thereby raising fresh clouds of pepper. The atmosphere of the shop swam in it. In the midst of it Arthur Augustus gasped and sneezed, and sneezed and gasped as if for a wager.

He was thus merrily occupied when Mr. Snooks came in.

Mr. Snooks stared for a moment, and then he caught the pepper, and began to sneeze, too.

"Atchoo! What the thunder— Atchoo!"

"You young idiot—choo-choo-choo—wharrer you doing with pepper all over the place? Groogh—atchoo!"

"I—sneeze!—'I weally—' Sneeze!"

To an observer at a safe distance from the pepper, the scene might have seemed comic. Arthur Augustus and Mr. Snooks were sneezing at one another, as if worked by the same spring.

The shop rang and echoed with Gargantuan sneezes.

Mr. Snooks, purple with sneezing and fury, tried to speak, but his words would not come. Only sneezes came, sneeze after sneeze. There was a rustle in the doorway, and Mrs. Snooper sailed in, with knitted brows.

"Ha! You are here, Mr. Snooks! I wish to know what you mean by— Atchoo-choo—groogh—atchoo!"

Mrs. Snooper sneezed violently.

Mr. Snooks sneezed back. Arthur Augustus gave them a running accompaniment of sneezes—a sneeze obligato, so to speak.

Mrs. Snooper tried to speak, but she could not. She shook her umbrella at Mr. Snooks, and sailed out, still sneezing. It was painfully clear that, after that incident, Mrs. Snooper's custom would be transferred to the stores!

Mr. Snooks turned on Arthur Augustus. He could not speak; but actions can speak louder than words, and Mr. Snooks felt that it was a time for action. His new assistant—with the best intentions in the world—had not given satisfaction.

"Bai Jove! Atchoo! Keep off! Gwoogh! My hat!"

Mr. Snooks seized his assistant by the collar.

Arthur Augustus, in astonishment and anger, found himself yanked to the shop door. To his still greater surprise, Mr. Snooks' boot was planted behind him, and he went flying into the street.

He landed on his knees on the pavement, wondering whether an earthquake had happened.

"Bai Jove! The feashfully impertinent beast—atchoo!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I have a gweat mind to give him a feahful thwashin'—atchoo!"

Arthur Augustus jumped up, and spun round, to find Mr. Snooks, shaking a fat fist at him in the shop doorway.

"Get out—atchoo! Gerrout—shoo-shoo—atchoo!"

"You uttah wuffian!" shouted Arthur Augustus. He tore off his apron, and hurled it at Mr. Snooks. "I wufuse to wemain in your service a moment longer. Give me my hat, you wuffian!"

"Atchoo—you come back here and I'll squash you—atchoo—"

"I wufuse to come back undah any circs. I weward you, with uttah contempt! But I absolutely decline to go without my toppah!"

Mr. Snooks hurried back into the shop, and reappeared with Arthur Augustus' topper. He hurled it at Arthur Augustus, and the swell of St. Jim's caught it with his chin.

"Yah! You uttah wapsallion! Gwooh! If you were not old enough to be my fathah, I would give you a feahful thwashin'!"

Arthur Augustus indignantly set the topper on his head, and strode away. He was marching on in great indignation, when he met Kerruish at the corner of the street. Kerruish stopped him.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah! I have been sacked again—for nothin' at all, the same as befoah," said Arthur Augustus. "I have been treated with the gweatest diswesp'ct! These twades-people seem to be all off their wockahs! If you are lookin' for a job, Kewwuish, you can try Mr. Snooks; I have done with him!"

"Good idea!" said Kerruish cheerily. "I've been watching a cricket-match, but I want to get a job before I go

back to St. Jim's, or they won't let me come out to-morrow. Sure you're done with the job, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus emphatically. Kerruish walked on cheerily to Mr. Snooks', and looked in. The pepper was clearing off now, but Mr. Snooks' fury had not cleared off. He turned a basilisk glare upon Kerruish, recognising him as a St. Jim's junior. St. Jim's juniors were not welcome to Mr. Snooks' eyes just then.

"Good-afternoon!" said the Manx junior brightly. "I hear you want a boy, Mr. Snooks— My hat!"

Mr. Snooks made one jump at the shop broom, and another jump at Kerruish. The astounded junior had just time to whip out of the shop. He fled, leaving Mr. Snooks brandishing the broom. Kerruish did not apply for that job again!

CHAPTER 12.

Mr. Snooks is Satisfied.

"WHAT'S to be done?"

"Ask me another!"

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther were discussing the situation; or, to be more exact, the want of a situation.

Lowther's sense of humour had completely "mucked up" that promising job with Mr. Stuckey the bill-poster. It had taken Lowther some time to get rid of the paste. Fortunately, Wayland Baths were near at hand, and there Lowther had been able to become newly-swept and garnished, so to speak. But he was sacked, and Tom was sacked, and the afternoon was growing old. The chums of the Shell did not want to return to St. Jim's unsuccessful. Looking for jobs might be discouraging, but it was a welcome change from grinding Latin.

They discussed the matter over buns at the bun-shop. The other fellows had been more lucky—or less humorous. Blake was in a job, with a basket to carry, and Figgins and Kerr were errand-boys. Dick Julian was ensconced in the estate-office, and Reilly at the cheesemonger's. Manners had been taken on at the photographer's, being remarkably well up in that line of business. Digby and Herries were provided for. Even Fatty Wynn had secured another berth—though not on such terms as his first job with Mr. Plummer. Tom Merry and Lowther felt left out in the cold.

Moreover, a "job" was the only way of eluding lessons on the morrow. Any old job, as Lowther remarked, would be better than that. As a last resource, there was Mr. Hanks, the sweep, still unsuited. But for reasons that will easily be understood, the chums were reserving that job to the very last.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in, and joined the two Shell fellows as he spotted them at the table. He sank into a seat with a sigh.

"Sacked again?" asked Tom.

"Yaas! Mr. Snooks is as unreasonably a beast as Mr. Hanks. I weally think there is vewy little encouragement in these days to a woally hard workah."

"Chance for us," said Monty Lowther at once. "Blake and Gussy have tried Snooks. After them, Snooks is bound to be pleased with us. It will be a big improvement, at least."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "Can we have your job, Gussy?"

"You are vewy welcome to it, Tom Mewwy. I offahed it to Kewwuish, but for some reason Mr. Snooks chased him away with a broom."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"I think he was wathah upset, owin' to the pepper gettin' into his nose. Pewwaws he has got ovah it by this time. I have given up the ideah of mindin' a shop. I feel that I am cut out for highah things. I am goin' to apply at the bank for a job," said Arthur Augustus. "If I can secure the post of a managah, I shall do so. Othahwise, I shall return to the school."

The Shell fellows chuckled.

"Let's go and see Snooks," said Monty Lowther. "If he's tried Gussy, he must be awfully hard up for an assistant."

And the two juniors left the bun-shop, and took their way towards Mr. Snooks' grocery establishment.

Master Joseph was behind the counter, looking tired of life. He was in charge of the shop; but his thoughts were in the billiard-room at the Railway Arms, where he had left D'Arcy's ten-shilling note in the pocket of a gentleman who played billiards much better than Joseph.

"Mr. Snooks at home?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, he's in the parlour, having his tea," said Joseph. "You arter the job?"

"That's it."

"I hope you'll get it," said Joseph fervently. Then he lowered his voice. "Would you like me to put a word in for you?"

"Yes, if you will."

"That's all right," said Joseph. "I'll see you through. By the way, could you lend me five bob?"

The juniors stared at him. They were not quite so careless in money matters as the Honourable Arthur Augustus.

"We could," said Monty Lowther. "But we're not going to."

Joseph looked sullen.

"Then you can go and chop chips!" he retorted.

The juniors decided to wait till Mr. Snooks came into the shop. A customer came in, and with the idea of learning the business, they watched Joseph serve. Joseph cut a pound of cheese, wrapped it up, and handed it over the counter, and took one shilling and twopence. The twopence he slid into the till and the shilling into his pocket. Then, as he found the eyes of the juniors fastened on him, he flushed, and went into the parlour at the back.

Mr. Snooks came into the shop. He frowned a little at the two juniors. But he had, fortunately, recovered from the pepper.

Tom Merry and Lowther raised their caps respectfully.

"If you please, sir, we're looking for work," said Lowther meekly.

Mr. Snooks grunted.

"I've tried two of you," he said. "Schoolboys ain't any good to me."

"We're not—ahem!—ordinary schoolboys, sir," said Monty Lowther. "We are—ahem!—a bit out of the common. If you give us a trial, sir, we'll try to give you every satisfaction."

"We're anxious for work, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Well, goodness knows, I'm in want of 'ands!" said Mr. Snooks. "Joseph ain't much use. I'll give you a trial for a few days, anyway. You'll have to sleep out."

"That's all right, sir; we shall sleep at the school."

"I shall want you at seven in the morning."

"We'll buzz over on our bikes at seven sharp."

"And up to nine at night," said Mr. Snooks.

"Good! We sha'n't have any prep to do."

"Well, I'll give you a trial. What's your names?"

"Merry, sir."

"Lowther, sir."

"Very good! You look the stronger of the two, Merry, and you can have the round," said Mr. Snooks. "I'll send Joseph with you to show you round. You can go behind the counter, Lowther, and put an apron on. You're taken on."

"Thank you, sir!" said the two war-workers, with satisfaction.

"Joseph!"

"I'm 'aving my tea!" said Joseph's aggrieved voice from the parlour.

"Well, hurry up, then! You've got to take the new lad on the round."

"I'm tired," said Joseph.

"If you ain't here in five minutes I'll come and fetch you!" snorted Mr. Snooks.

Joseph appeared in about ten minutes. Then a large basket was loaded up with the goods Mr. Snooks had been unable to get delivered earlier in the day. Tom Merry was given the basket, and Joseph was assigned the task of taking him on the round as a guide.

Monty Lowther started work behind the counter, listening cheerfully to the instructions Mr. Snooks gave him. Lowther was quick and intelligent, and he really wanted to give satisfaction. His humorous propensities being held strictly under control for the present, Mr. Snooks was quite pleased with him.

Several customers came in, and Lowther served them under Mr. Snooks' eye in quite a satisfactory way.

"You'll do," said Mr. Snooks. "I'll give you five shillings a week and your food, my boy. It's very kind of your head-master to let his boys come out and help at a time like this. If you can stay till I get a woman assistant that will be all right. P'raps you'd like to leave school and take up the grocery business permanent, though?"

Lowther grinned.

"I don't think my people would let me, sir," he said. "Otherwise, I should be—ahem!—delighted. But I'm quite at your service now. I think I shall pick this up pretty soon."

Mr. Snooks nodded, and retired to the parlour. Joseph came in presently, with his usual weary look. He came round behind the counter.

"How are you getting on, young 'un?" he asked.

"First rate."

"I hope you'll stay," said Joseph confidentially. "I'm

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not suited to this business. When there isn't an assistant I have to work, you know."

"Jolly good thing for you," said Lowther. "Why the dickens don't you take up outdoor exercises—cricket, and so on? You might have a chance of getting into the Army then."

Joseph shuddered. "Don't you be a young hass!" he said. "Look here, how much is the old man paying you?"

"Five bob a week and my grub," said Lowther demurely. "I s'pose you want to make more than that?"

"Of course, I'm looking for a chance to make my fortune, if possible," said Lowther humorously.

"Oh, don't be a hass! Look here," said Joseph, in a mysterious whisper, "I'll tell you how you can make something, and we'll go halves. See?"

"Go ahead!"

"I s'pose the governor's told you to put the money in the till?"

"Yes."

"Well, the governor's awful bad at accounts," whispered Joseph. "He gets the books in a regular muddle. When I help with the books, I get them into a muddle. Just you put half the takings in the till—"

"Half?" said Lowther.

"That's it."

"And what am I to do with the rest?" asked Lowther quietly.

"Put it in your pocket, and we'll go halves afterwards," said Joseph eagerly.

Monty Lowther looked steadily at the young rascal. "Well, what do you say?" asked Joseph.

"You miserable skunk!" said Lowther, in measured tones. "You unspeakable worm! Are you in the habit of robbing your own father? Don't talk to me! You make me sick!"

Joseph's seedy face became purple—

"Why, you cheeky young scoundrel—" he began.

"Do you want me to chuck you over the counter neck and crop?" asked Lowther. "I could do it easily! And I will do it if you speak to me again!"

Joseph gave him a furious look, and relapsed into sullen silence. Monty Lowther turned away to attend a customer who came into the shop. He was getting on quite successfully as a grocer's assistant; but he began to wish that he had not been successful in getting into Mr. Snooks' employment. Mr. Snooks' hopeful son and heir made him feel quite ill.

CHAPTER 13.

A Startling Accusation.

MR. RAILTON, the Housemaster of the School House, greeted Tom Merry and Lowther with a smile when they came in that evening, much too late for calling-over. The two juniors were tired but cheerful.

"We're in work, sir," said Tom Merry. "We weren't able to leave Mr. Snooks' till the shop closed."

The Housemaster nodded.

"Very good, Merry!"

"We shall have to leave before rising-bell in the morning, sir," said Tom. "I suppose we can go?"

"Certainly!"

There was much discussion in the dormitories that night. War work for the juniors of St. Jim's seemed to be "panning out" successfully in some respects. There was no doubt that, in some cases at least, they had filled places very creditably, and were tiding the Wayland employers over the shortage of labour.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, unfortunately, was booked for lessons instead of war work on the morrow. He had been quite unable to obtain the sought-for post as bank-manager. He related in the dormitory, with suppressed indignation, how he had been received with smiles at the bank, and smilingly shown out—unsuccessful!

Tom Merry and Lowther were up bright and early in the morning. While the rising-bell was clanging out over St. Jim's they were riding away on their bicycles for Wayland, earliest of all the schoolboy war-workers.

They arrived at Mr. Snooks' shop, and found Joseph, with a weary look, taking the shutters down. Joseph promptly went in and left them to finish with the shutters. Joseph was evidently a believer in economising labour—his own labour, at all events.

But the juniors were not slackers, and they set to work cheerfully.

The shutters were soon down, and they set to work sweeping out the shop, and soon had everything in order for the day's business.

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TUCK HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1^d.

Tom Merry went on the morning's round with a well-laden basket, while Monty Lowther remained in charge of the shop.

He was very busy that morning weighing up tea, cutting bacon and cheese, and measuring out treacle.

He manfully resisted the inclination to put pepper in the treacle and pickles in the jam, though he was strongly tempted. His experience with Mr. Stuckey had been a warning to him. At St. Jim's there was full scope for his humour, but business life offered no scope whatever.

During the day Mr. Snooks expressed his satisfaction with his new assistants more than once. The chums of the Shell felt they were getting on.

The round with the heavy basket rather told upon Tom Merry, but he was a willing worker, and never thought of complaining. Monty Lowther's task was easier, though he, too, found it tiring to keep on his feet for such long stretches at a time.

Joseph appeared on the scene occasionally, but he hardly spoke to Monty Lowther.

The dishonest young rascal had hoped to find a confederate in the new shopboy, and his disappointment evidently caused him to regard Lowther with intense dislike and contempt.

Lowther, on his side, regarded the wretched young slacker with mingled contempt and compassion.

His easy-going father allowed him to slack about instead of working, which was the very worst thing he could have done for a weak character like Joseph's.

Joseph's tastes all ran in the direction of billiards, gee-gees, and whisky-and-water, but shortage of cash prevented him from indulging them to any great extent. Hence, as Lowther had observed, the miserable young rascal had fallen into the habit of helping himself, and was on the high-road to ruin. Mr. Snooks, it could be seen, was anxious and uneasy about his son, and loud family arguments in the little parlour were sometimes audible in the shop. Lowther's idea was that Joseph would be best provided for by being shoved into the Army. The once-rejected had another chance now that all sorts and conditions of fellows were being taken in, but Joseph was grimly determined never to avail himself of that chance, if he could help it. It was the one thing that might have made a man of him. But Joseph had no desire, whatever, to be made a man of.

Monty Lowther, had he had the honour of being Joseph's father, would have taken him by the back of the neck, and marched him into the recruiting-office. But he could not very well suggest that drastic method to Mr. Snooks.

Towards evening, Mr. Snooks being absent, and Tom Merry gone on a third round, Joseph came into the shop, looking leery and sullen as usual. There was a slight atmosphere of whisky about him.

"You're wanted," he said to Lowther.

Lowther looked at him inquiringly.

"Father wants you!" growled Joseph. "He's at the Railway Arms, and he's got something for you to do. I've got to mind the shop. Rotten, ain't it?"

"It won't hurt you, I suppose?" said Lowther.

"Br-r-r-r!" said Joseph.

Lowther took his cap and left the shop.

Joseph glided behind the counter. His face was pale, and there were beads of perspiration on his brow, and his hands were trembling. Five minutes later, Joseph was gone.

In a quarter of an hour, Monty Lowther returned, looking angry.

There was a customer waiting in the shop, clinking a penny on the counter, and Lowther hastened to attend to him.

"Don't you have nobody minding this here shop?" the customer inquired sarcastically.

"Sorry, sir," said Lowther politely. "I was called away. What can I do for you, sir?"

Having served the customer, Lowther was left alone, with knitted brows. He had been to the Railway Arms, but had failed to find Mr. Snooks there.

It was evident that Joseph had been "pulling his leg," and had sent him on a fool's errand.

If it was a joke, the joke was not in the least appreciated by Monty Lowther. Like many humorists, he did not like practical jokes directed against himself.

Tom Merry came in a little later with an empty basket, looking somewhat fatigued.

"This is a bit harder than Form work," he remarked ruefully. "I'm getting pretty fagged. Hallo, what are you scowling about, Monty?"

"I'm not scowling!" growled Lowther. "That young idiot young Snooks, sent me on a fool's errand. He didn't even mind the shop while I was gone."

"Young ass!" said Tom.

"Blessed if I know what he did it for," said Lowther. "He doesn't look like a funny man. Old Snooks would be rattly if he knew the shop had been left empty for a quarter

of an hour. I can't tell him about Joseph, though. They have enough trouble in the family without any help from me.

Tom Merry nodded. "Mum's the word," he said. "The young ass ought to be bumped. But I suppose grocer's boys aren't allowed to bump their governors' sons!"

"Ha, ha! No!"
Tom Merry put on an apocryphal, and joined Lowther behind the counter. His outdoor work was done for the day.

Customers came and went, and the two juniors were kept briskly at work for some time. Towards closing-time Mr. Snooks came in.

He gave his two assistants a genial nod. "Shutters up now," he remarked. "I dessay you'll be glad to get off, young 'uns?"

"Yes, sir!"
Mr. Snooks went to the till, from which he always carefully removed the cash of a night. Then he uttered a howl.

"Here! Look here!"
"Anything wrong, sir?" asked Lowther.

"What have you been doing to the till?"
"Only putting money into it, sir!" said Lowther, in surprise.

"None of your blarney!" said Mr. Snooks wrathfully. "Who's been in charge of the shop since I left?"

"I have, sir!"
"Yes, you have!" said Mr. Snooks. "I took you in, thinking as your headmaster wouldn't send you 'ere unless you was honest."

Lowther flushed crimson. "What the dickens do you mean?" he exclaimed angrily.

"Oh, don't come it with me!" exclaimed Mr. Snooks. "The till has been broken in, and the money's gone. There's eight shillings in the till. Mean to say that's all that's been taken to-day?"

"No; three or four pounds at least!" said Lowther.

"Then where is it?"
"In the till, I suppose?"

"The till's busted, and there's eight shillings there!" roared Mr. Snooks. "And you'll hand over the rest, you young scoundrel, or I'll send for the police!"

CHAPTER 14.

Joseph's Last Chance.

MONTY LOWTHER stood rooted to the floor. Tom Merry stared blankly at the grocer.

There was no doubt that Mr. Snooks was in deadly earnest. Besides, a glance showed that his statement was correct. The till had been rifled, and only a few shillings remained on the day's takings.

Who had done it?
Like a flash it came into Lowther's mind, the reason why Joseph had sent him on that fool's errand to the Railway Arms.

It was Joseph!
There was no doubt about that in Lowther's mind. It could have been no one else, for Lowther had been present all the time, save for that short quarter of an hour when he had left the young man in charge. But getting Mr. Snooks to believe it was another matter, as Lowther quickly realised.

"This has got to be settled," said Mr. Snooks savagely. "Robbin' the till, and staying to face me out about it—my word! You're sacked, you young villain; but you'll 'and back the money before you go, and sharp!"

"You silly ass!" broke in Tom Merry savagely. "Do you think Lowther's touched your rotten money?"

"Who has, then?"
Lowther found his voice.

"I haven't touched it, Mr. Snooks," he said as calmly as he could. "I didn't even know the till had been broken."

"Likely story!" sneered Mr. Snooks. "Mean to say somebody came in and broke the till under your eyes, and you didn't see him? Tell that to the Marines—or the magistrates, if you like! You'll 'and over the money, or I'll call in a policeman. You've been in charge of the shop all the time I was out!"

"Not all the time," said Lowther quietly. "Didn't I give you orders to stay 'ere?"

"Yes; but—"
"Mean to say you went out?"

Lowther quietly explained about Joseph's message. Mr. Snooks listened with evident disbelief in his face.

"You young villain!" said Mr. Snooks fiercely. "You'd like to make me believe my own son robbed me!"

"I don't say so," said Lowther. "I only say I left your son in charge for a quarter of an hour, and when I came back, he was not here!"

"Very well, I'll ask Joseph before I call in the police," said Mr. Snooks. "Not that I believe a word of it."
Lowther bit his lip; but he kept his temper. The truth would have been too painful a shock to the unfortunate father, and it was natural that he should refuse it credence if he could.

Mr. Snooks went into the parlour, calling for Joseph. But Joseph was evidently not on the premises. The grocer came back fuming.

"Do you want us to stay till this is settled, sir?" asked Tom Merry quietly.

"Course I do!" said Mr. Snooks. "I've got to see Joseph first. Where is he, the fool? At the Railway Arms again, I'll be bound. I'll have an end put to that, so I will!"

"Joseph, indeed! I don't believe a word of it! By gum, I'll send for the police! Young Merry, cut off to the police-station and bring a constable here."

Tom Merry hesitated. "Haddin' you better wait, sir?" he said. "If the police take the matter up, they won't drop it again. You don't want to have to charge your own son, I suppose?"

Mr. Snooks snorted. "It wasn't Joseph! I know that! It was that young scoundrel, and he's trying to put it on Joseph! I'll have him locked up! Go for a policeman at once!"

Tom Merry did not move.

"Do you 'ear me?" roared Mr. Snooks.

"You may as well go, Tom," said Monty Lowther. "This will have to be thrashed out, and the sooner that scoundrel is in choko the better!"

"I won't go!" said Tom decidedly.

"Then I'll go!" said Lowther.
"You won't!" shouted Mr. Snooks, placing himself between Lowther and the door. "None of your dodging off, my fine feller! You'll stay 'ere till the police come!"

Monty Lowther shrugged his shoulders.

Tom Merry uttered a sudden exclamation as a helmeted head appeared in the shop doorway.

"Here's an officer."

Mr. Snooks spun round. The policeman came in, with a grin at Mr. Snooks. He was helping a young man who leaned heavily on his arm. It was the festive Joseph, decidedly the worse for drink.

"Good 'eavens!" gasped Mr. Snooks, in dismay.

"I thought I'd help him in, Mr. Snooks," said the constable. "I wouldn't like to run your son in, sir, and he was close here when I found him."

"Thank you!" faltered Mr. Snooks. "Joseph, you beast—"

Joseph blinked at him with lack-lustre eyes.

"I ain't drunk!" he said. "Anybody who says that three whiskies would knock me over is a liar! I'll bring an action against the landlord of the Railway Arms. Turning a gentleman out when he's perfectly sober!"

The constable grinned, leaned Joseph up against the counter, and departed. Mr. Snooks hastily closed the shop door after him, and fastened it. He did not want any belated customer to come in just then.

Joseph leaned back against the counter, blinking at his father and the two disgusted juniors.

His weak legs crumpled up, and he slid down to a sitting posture on the floor, leaning up against the counter.

"I ain't drunk," he said, with a slow and deliberate articulation. "Three whiskies—that was all! Sober as a judge!"

"Oh, you rotten young rascal!" groaned Mr. Snooks. "Where did you get the money for it? Answer me that!"

Lowther and Tom Merry exchanged glances. It looked as if the truth was dawning upon Mr. Snooks, in spite of himself.

"Money" repeated Joseph. "I'm kept too short of money! My father's an old hunk!"

"What?"

"I've got a soul above grocery!" went on Joseph dreamily. "Ought to have been a gentleman of leisure. I can beat them all at billiards when I have any luck. Look here, what's the matter with this floor? What I want to know is, why can't it keep still instead of moving about like this, and upsetting a chap?"

"You're drunk, you young rascal!"

Joseph raised his head in a very dignified manner, but it sank forward again with a jerk.

"Sober as a judge!" he said thickly. "Who are you?"

"What I want to know is, who are you?"

ANSWERS

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 428.

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

NEXT WEDNESDAY:

"A MISSION OF MYSTERY!"

"He don't know his own father!" granted Mr. Snooks.
 "My father's an old hunk!" mumbled Joseph. "He keeps me short of money. He don't understand what it is to have a gentleman for a son. He's a grocer."

"My word!"
 "He's a blessed old grocer!" repeated Joseph firmly.
 "As for you, sir," continued Joseph, addressing an imaginary landlord, "if you think I can't pay my score, you're mistaken, sir! I have plenty of money—plenty!"
 "Plenty of money, have you?" said Mr. Snooks furiously. "I fancy I know where you got it from, too! Gerrup, you young scoundrel!"

Mr. Snooks seized his hopeful young son and shook him violently. There was a loud clinking from Joseph's pockets. Evidently he had plenty of money—mostly in small silver and coppers.

"Lemme alone!" murmured Joseph. "I'm feeling queer—not drunk, but a little queer! Lemme alone!"
 Mr. Snooks fumbled in Joseph's pockets and produced several handfuls of cash—shillings, sixpences, half-crowns, and coppers.

"Where did you get that?" he gasped.
 Joseph blinked at him stupidly without replying.
 Mr. Snooks rose to his feet.
 "I'm sorry, young 'un," he said, addressing Lowther. "It's pretty plain where the money went now. It was hard to believe at first—he's my own son! I'm sorry!"
 "It's all right, sir," said Lowther. "Never mind what you said to me."

"I—I hope you won't say anything about this," said Mr. Snooks. "He's my son, rascal as he is. I—I don't want this to be talked about."

The juniors nodded at once.
 "Not a word, sir," said Tom Merry. "It's lucky I didn't fetch that constable after all, though."
 "Very lucky," said Mr. Snooks heavily.
 "Mum's the word," said Lowther.
 "As for that young rascal, I've had enough of him," said Mr. Snooks, with a glare at the unconscious Joseph. "Slacker and waster and thief! I'll turn him out to-morrow."

"There's the recruiting-office, sir," Lowther suggested. "They might make a man of him in the Army. He would be licked into shape."
 "He's been rejected."

"But they're giving the rejected another show now, sir—anyway, it's a chance, and it would be the making of him. They'll make him as fit as a fiddle, and teach him manners," said Monty Lowther.

Mr. Snooks nodded.
 "It's a chance," he said—"his last chance, too. I'll give him the choice to-morrow morning."

The juniors put up the shutters and took their leave, leaving Mr. Snooks to deal with the festive Joseph.

They rode home to St. Jim's through the darkness, in a thoughtful mood.

"Rather a queer turn to our giddy war work, Tommy," Monty Lowther remarked. "Might have been serious for me."

"Nobody would have believed it of you, Monty. But it's jolly lucky it's come out all the same."
 "Jolly lucky!" said Lowther.

Manners was waiting for them when they arrived at St. Jim's.

"I've been in an hour," he said. "I'm getting along toppingly in the photography bizney. How are the groceries panning out?"

"First rate!" said Tom.
 "Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "I am wathah surprised at you fellahs makin' a success of it. Pewwaps, on reflection, I had wathah too much brains for the grocery business aftah all."

"Or too little!" suggested Monty Lowther.
 "Weally, Lowthah!"
 "Bedtime!" said Kildare, coming along the passage.
 "Now, then, all you young butchers and bakers and grocers and candlestick-makers, off you go!"
 And the war-workers went to bed, feeling that they had well earned their night's rest for once in a way.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther arrived on time at Mr. Snooks' shop on the following morning.

That day they caught only one glimpse of Joseph. He was being marched away with his father's hand on his arm, looking the picture of woe.

The juniors guessed his destination, and though they felt some compassion for the unhappy slacker, they knew that it would be all the better for him in the long run.

Mr. Snooks came back alone, looking relieved and satisfied. "They've taken him," he told the juniors. "They're going to give him a chance. And I hope he'll make the best of it."

The next week, when the juniors' term of war work came to an end, they saw Joseph once more—this time in khaki, and looking marvellously different. The weedy young slacker looked upright, and had colour in his cheeks, and looked as if he had found his self-respect somewhere. Which was very satisfactory to the schoolboy war-workers.

THE END.

(Next Wednesday's magnificent, long, complete school tale is entitled "A Mission of Mystery," and deals with the further adventures of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. Order your copy of the GEM LIBRARY in advance. It is the only way of making certain of your copy.)

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THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to

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For Next Wednesday:

"A MISSION OF MYSTERY!"

By Martin Clifford.

In the grand, long, complete story which appears next week there occurs a mystery which is not explained until quite close to the end, and I am not going to destroy interest in an excellent yarn by giving away the secret here. This much, however, may be told. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, through a trick played by Gordon Gay & Co., is very nearly drowned. He is saved by a stranger, and is naturally very grateful. The stranger asks him to undertake a very curious mission. D'Arcy is to spend the large sum of £200 within two days. He must neither give away nor lend any part of the money; it must all be spent! Arthur Augustus has, as my readers are well aware, never had any objection to the spending of money lavishly; but he does find the task set him rather a difficult one. How he manages it, and why the stranger wanted him to undertake so queer a job, and what came of his successful accomplishment of the task, you can all read next week!

"A MISSION OF MYSTERY!"

A UNIQUE OFFER!

I think I am fairly safe in saying that probably not one of my readers is the possessor of a book which has been to the bottom of the sea, and has been recovered thence undamaged. Such a book would be worth something merely as a curiosity, even if one did not care about reading it.

Now, I am in a position to offer not one book only which has undergone this strange experience, but copies to the number of

Sixteen Hundred!

They are the books with the names of which you are all familiar. One was

"Rivals and Chums!"

Mr. Frank Richards' great school story. The other was another splendid yarn,

"The King of the Fags!"

by Geoffrey Murray.

Eight hundred copies of each of these were on their way to Canada, when the ship which carried them was

Sunk by a Cowardly Hun Submarine!

The package was recovered, along with much of the rest of the ship's cargo, by divers, and the contents were found to be quite unharmed by sea-water. But in the meantime a fresh supply had been sent across the Atlantic, and we now have here and on sale the 1600 copies which have been through this queer experience.

They will be sold at the usual price.

Fourpence in Stamps

will bring you a copy—that is, if you write to this office at once. Otherwise, you may fail to get one at all, as I feel certain that there will be.

A Big Rush for so Interesting a Memento of the Great War as one of these books will form!

AN OLD "GEM" YARN.

Some few weeks ago a lady reader living in the Isle of Wight wrote me a very nice letter, in the course of which she expressed an ardent wish to read again an old GEM

yarn, which had particularly pleased her when it appeared. The story referred to was "Figgins' Fig-Pudding," and I have no doubt that many other readers will also recall it as one of the very best examples of Mr. Clifford's humorous yarns. I could not manage to find a copy here, but I got one by asking if any readers could supply it, and, in returning it, my lady correspondent sent me some verses which I think will interest many who have themselves felt the spell which our renowned author can exercise. Here they are:

"The kindness and the courtesy thus shown
To one who up to now was all unknown,
Move me to voice my thanks to you in verse
(Which, though imperfect, might perhaps be worse).
Although I had a dozen things to do,
As soon as it arrived I read it through;
Domestic duties, mending, and the like,
They all got left—for I had gone on strike!
And, sitting by the fire, I read once more
The tale that so enthralled me years before.
Again I revelled in the merry plot,
And almost smelt those puddings, served up hot!
Again I laughed at Mr. Ratcliff's plight;
Felt, like his victims, that it served him right!
And pitied Manners, Merry, Kerr, and Wynn,
With far too much fig-pudding "taken in."
But now I'll quit, or you'll be bored to tears.
On such a subject I could write for years!
But my imagination stops the way;
It hears you yawn, and sees you turn away,
Remarking to some satellite unseen:
"Some folk's appreciation's too, too keen!"

I beg to state that I did not yawn at all; possibly it is the imagination of some folk that is too keen.

NOTICES.

J. Gibson, 8, Ridley Road, Wimbledon, wants to form a dramatic society in his neighbourhood, and would be glad to hear from any readers, boys or girls, interested.

Pioneer H. Wolfe, 78949, Royal Engineers, 14th Army Corps, Headquarters, Signal Company, B.E.F., France, asks for correspondence with a girl reader.

Private J. Hanson, 14960, care of Sergeant Curtis, K Co., Scots Guards, Caterham, would be glad to have letters from readers.

Leonard J. Haynes, 12, River View, New Ferry, Cheshire, has started a correspondence club, which readers of the GEM are cordially invited to join. He will be pleased to send full particulars on receipt of stamped addressed envelope.

Private H. J. Barker, 17987, 11th Battalion, Scottish Rifles, 2 Co., 5 Platoon, B.E.F., Salonika, Greece, would be glad to have copies of the GEM.

H. E. Webb and H. Wade, 5, Paisley View, Armsley, Leeds, want to start a small amateur journal, and will be pleased to hear from readers interested.

Claude Bradshaw, formerly of Maidstone, is asked to communicate with his old friend, Cecil A. Tower, now at 256, Livingstone Road, Marrickville, Sydney, Australia.

Your Editor

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"A MISSION OF MYSTERY!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 428.
A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE PRIDE OF THE FILM!

Our Magnificent New Adventure Serial Story,

BY

VICTOR CROMWELL.

The First Instalments.

REGGIE WHITE, an orphan, is befriended by MR. ANTHONY DELL, a millionaire film-producer, and given a position as actor in his company.

A scene is being filmed near an old house, and Silas Shock, the operator, climbs on to the roof of a shed to take the picture.

The roof collapses, and Mrs. Horace Dell—Dell's sister-in-law—who is acting in the piece, picks from the ruins a pocket-book, which is found to be full of banknotes.

A man named Stancombe then snatches the notes from her and hurries off. On being tracked down, he says he has placed the notes in the hands of the police.

Mr. Rankin, a neighbour of Mr. Dell's, who has been using the name of Startlefield, learns through some papers found with the banknotes that he has a son living of whom, owing to a quarrel with his wife, now dead, he has not previously heard. He determines, therefore, to engage detectives to find his missing boy.

Some time later Mr. Rankin introduces to Reggie a boy who professes to be his son, and the boy proves to be Hubert Nixon, an unscrupulous youth whom Reggie has met before.

"What piece of roguery is this?" asks Reggie, on being left alone with Hubert.

(Now read on.)

Reggie's Plan.

But young Nixon was quite prepared for him, and spoke in quite an unusually direct manner.

"Reggie White," he said, "I wish you wouldn't talk to me in that way. It may all be a piece of roguery, but, if so, I know nothing about it. I always thought that Mr. Nixon was my father, and I am as much astonished as anyone that now he says he isn't, and that Mr. Startlefield is. And I want you to understand that whatever happened took place when I was a little child, and cannot be reckoned my fault."

"But," said Reggie, "if nothing of the sort happened when you were a child, it is pretty clear that something is happening now, and you and your father and that gentleman you met at Charing Cross are all in it."

Hubert Nixon stared.

"Who do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean a man called Stancombe," replied Reggie.

Nixon replied boldly:

"I never heard of such a person!"

"Nor met him at Charing Cross?"

"Never!"

Reggie tried another way.

"What a pretty young boy you make! Do you still think yourself grown up?"

Here young Nixon looked just a trifle anxious. The weakest part in the whole plot—for it was a plot—was his age. He was at least eighteen months or two years too old for his part; but, unless he specially dressed older than he was, he would not have much cause for fear on this score, as he was able to assume a very juvenile look.

The real trouble was that he had always affected the style and manner of a grown-up man, and his sudden change to boyishness would be sure to cause remark among those who had seen him in his grown-up style.

Now, Reggie was not foolish. He was sure that there was some wicked plot on somewhere, and as the conviction grew his caution grew with it. In the present difficult circumstances he felt that it would be quite easy to show young Nixon that he distrusted him, but it might be better policy to make out to believe his story—not immediately, of course, but by a process of slow conversion.

Reggie was an actor, and a really good one. If he could

play a part to the camera, why, he reasoned, should he not play a part to a rogue?

And so, before the little conversation was finished, Hubert Nixon was enjoying the delight of having, as he thought, nearly converted his worst personal foe into being a believer in this new piece of fiction.

When the two boys parted, Reggie caught himself admiring Hubert, while Hubert found himself developing a greater contempt than ever for Reggie.

"That boy is a cleverer cheat even than his father," was Reggie's thought.

"That young fool is a greater idiot even than I thought!" was Hubert's comment. "He swallows it all down like milk!"

But this last opinion wasn't by any means the real state of affairs, for as soon as Reggie left Mr. Startlefield's house he went straight to Mr. Dell, and told him the whole circumstance.

The millionaire listened with very great interest. When the story was finished he became very thoughtful.

"Tell you what, Reggie," he said. "This is a case we had better leave alone. We aren't in this world to treat all humanity as lost sheep that requires mothering. From what I know of Startlefield, he is generally well able to take care of himself. At all events, if I've got to mother someone, give me a more genteel little lamb!"

"But I am sure he is being swindled," said Reggie.

"Why are you?"

"Well, the Nixons—"

"Yes, yes! I know!" retorted Dell. "The Nixons are as bad as I've ever met, but that doesn't say that the story isn't true. Nixon is just the sort of eccentric chap who would adopt a child on the off-chance of something coming out of it later; or he may even have adopted a boy out of pure good-heartedness. You never can tell."

"A man like that!" said Reggie.

"Why not?" questioned Dell. "When you are as old as I am, my boy, you will never be surprised at human nature. Some dishonest people are superstitious, and have an idea that they must do a good action to keep their luck in. Why, I heard of a burglar once who got caught up at Highgate, and he was positive it was because he had forgotten to send his usual subscription to an orphanage."

"Besides," went on Tony Dell, "this isn't all news to me. Mind, I didn't know who the boy was, or that Nixon was mixed up in the case; but, as you know, Startlefield and I are old friends, or old enemies, as the case may be—sometimes one, sometimes the other."

"We are friends just now. He dropped in yesterday and went over all the points of the case with me, and really, if ever anything looked clear and true, this case did. If it is a swindle, it is the cleverest swindle I ever met in my life. There isn't a link in the chain missing. They have that boy traced right through, from the time his mother's landlady got rid of him, and they've found witnesses who can swear to every month of his life."

"It would be easier to do that if you were making it all up than if you were searching for real proofs," said Reggie.

Tony Dell swung his seat around.

"By Jove, my boy," he said, "that's a very sensible remark! I wondered myself whether the evidence wasn't a trifle too convincing."

Crazy Sprague Gets a Job.

For the next fortnight Reggie and the other boy-actors were at Northampton, doing a photo-play in a boot-factory specially lent for the purpose.

He had come to the conclusion that the subject of Mr.

(Continued on page iii. of the cover.)

THE PRIDE OF THE FILM!

(Continued from previous page.)

Startlefield's new son-and-heir was a subject best left to the treatment of Mr. Startlefield himself.

"I may get a chance of putting in a word later," Mr. Dell had said; "but my advice is, watch, and lie low."

When he was back at the end of a fortnight, Reggie was walking past Mr. Startlefield's house, and suddenly saw—or thought he saw—that gentleman himself just ahead of him. But a moment later he discovered his error.

Yet it was a pardonable mistake, because the man was wearing a suit of clothes like one that Reggie had often seen before—a very marked suit of brown velvet corduroy that was the particularly favourite kind of garb affected by Mr. Startlefield.

Closer observed, Reggie saw that it was an old suit—probably one that had been discarded a good while ago.

As the man neared the gate, Reggie overtook him, and recognised him.

It was Johnson Sprague, the half-witted, crazy man who had assaulted Stancombe. He knew Reggie in a moment, and turned to speak to him.

"You are surprised to see me?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Reggie. Sprague beamed a little sadly.

"I lost those notes after all," he said, "and all they meant to me. I'm working here now. A man must work."

He spoke the last words with the earnestness of a new conviction.

"You see," he went on, "Mr. Startlefield heard my story, and gave me a chance. I think he was a bit sorry for me after all that disappointment. He'd lost one of his gardeners, and he wanted an odd man about the place. The work isn't very much, and the pay is good."

Reggie felt amazed. Could it be that this was another part of the Nixon and Stancombe swindle? Why was Mr. Startlefield being surrounded in this way?

Reggie put a bold question.

"I suppose Mr. Stancombe helped to get you this job?" he said.

The sudden glare in Sprague's eyes showed that he had made a big mistake in suspecting Sprague of working in collusion with the blackmailer.

"Next time I meet that man," cried Sprague, suddenly fierce, "I'll—"

He checked himself.

"I forgot," he went on. "It's no good. The money has gone."

And his eyes once again became normal and lustreless. It was quite clear, though, from this sudden outburst, that Sprague had no part in any plot against Startlefield.

Reggie tried him another way.

"Do you see much of Mr. Nixon?" he inquired.

The half-lunatic looked puzzled.

"Nixon—Nixon!" he repeated, as if trying to recall the name. "I don't know anyone called— Oh, let me see! A man called Nixon did come to see the boss one day. Dark, unpleasant looking?"

"Yes," said Reggie.

"I only saw him that once."

Then, as if in want of some subject to talk about:

"Mr. Startlefield is back again to-day. He has left his son up in the Trossachs, and he is going to join him again in a few days. It isn't the weather I'd choose for touring in Scotland."

"Do you see young Mr. Startlefield much?" asked Reggie.

"No. He gets away fairly often, I hear. He says he doesn't like Mitcham, and his health isn't good."

Reggie could guess why young Nixon didn't like Mitcham. There would be too many of Tony Dell's people about to make it quite comfortable for him.

"Well, I wish you luck in your new place!" said Reggie.

"Thank you kindly!" said the man.

Silas Shock on the Roof.

In the alterations that had been made to Tony Dell's picture-factory, one of the most important was the building of a new developing and printing building on the roof of the big old house.

This shed practically covered the whole building, and here Silas Shock reigned supreme.

Very few were allowed to climb that last flight of stairs that brought them into Shock's domain. These few were mostly his assistants; but there were two exceptions, Mr. Dell, of course, was one of these. The other was Reggie.

Here Silas not only devoted himself to his picture work, but put in a surprising amount of effort in the direction of some of his own inventions.

One of these was his new improvement on the telescope

camera, the idea being to get clearer and more detailed moving pictures at a distance.

A few days after meeting Johnson Sprague, Reggie met Silas Shock, at a time when that worthy was unusually excited.

"I've finished my new 'scope!" he said eagerly.

Silas had a way of referring to everything of the lens description by the brief title of "scope," which stood to him for microscope and telescope, and any number of other ingenious contrivances.

He led Reggie to the roof, and over to the special corner building that was more especially his den. As this had glass sides overlooking all the other buildings, he was able to test his various long-sight contrivances on a great number of distant objects.

"Of course, you know," explained Silas, "this isn't a new idea. Photography by telescope is ancient history now. I'm only an improver, but the great points of my machine are the quickness of adjustment and the sharpness of detail. Now look at that hill. That's right away beyond Reigate somewhere, yet you can almost get the details of the trees."

As soon as Reggie had looked, he switched the contrivance around.

"Now notice," he said, "just this little turn of the wheel, and I've got the focus of Mr. Startlefield's front garden, which isn't a couple of hundred yards away. There's Mr. Startlefield himself in his study. I can almost see the paper in his hand."

Reggie looked.

"He comes out remarkably well," he said. "I can see the ribs of the velvet on his coat."

Then Reggie uttered an exclamation.

"What's wrong?" questioned Silas.

"Nothing!" he said.

Yet the fact that had surprised Reggie was the discovery that it was not Mr. Startlefield who was in the study. It was the half-crazy Johnson Sprague.

There was nothing in the fact that Sprague should be in the study to cause surprise. As odd-job man about the house, he might be in his right place, and was probably doing some work which he had been commissioned to do. But Reggie was somewhat inclined to be suspicious about the manner in which certain people were grouping themselves around Mr. Dell's neighbour, and the unexpected discovery of Sprague where he had thought to see Startlefield, was just another trifle to set him thinking.

"Try and focus the lens yourself," said Silas Shock.

"Over there are the two spires at Streatham. See if you can get them. You'll have to be quick; the daylight is going."

Reggie succeeded after one or two annoying failures.

"Very good," was Shock's criticism. "Try again. Try something easy. Go for Mr. Startlefield's garden again."

Reggie did this quicker. By a surprisingly quick movement he got the elevation right, and focussed the scene almost as quickly. His first glance showed him that Johnson Sprague was still in the study.

But this was not the point that specially interested Reggie. He suddenly saw a bush near the study move as if someone were behind it.

And then from that bush a man made a swift dart across to another bush, rather nearer the back wall of the estate. The action was so quick, that even the magnifying-lens did not show him clearly.

Almost at the same moment Reggie saw a white, blinding flash spring from the window, and the study window was hurled out on the lawn, while the noise of a loud explosion echoed on the air.

"Did you see it?" yelled Silas Shock. "Let's get down!"

It was a fortunate thing that Silas made off there and then, for in another second Reggie would have spoken of the discovery he had made a moment before.

As it was, Silas was out of the building, into the road, and in Startlefield's garden a good while before the boy, for in leaving his smugery he carelessly slammed the door after him, and the latch, which was a patent self-closer, was difficult to open. Then, though Reggie ran, he lost time, as he was thinking furiously at the same time.

There is a certain time in twilight when a minute makes all the difference between afternoon and evening. Silas had chosen the dusk of the day to show the power of his lens to Reggie, and in the brief interval between leaving the top of that cinema picture factory and reaching the garden next door, the light had rapidly declined.

Already a good many people who had heard the report were mustering in the garden, and amid the confusion it was hard to know precisely what had happened.

Reggie, for some reason or other, made a detour to get around to the back door. In doing so, he passed near to the old tool-shed, in which the under-gardener had been accustomed to keep his tools.

As he passed he heard a familiar voice.

"Reggie!"

(Continued on the next page.)

THE PRIDE OF THE FILM!

(Continued from previous page.)

He stopped.

"Reggie"—it was Startlefield's voice—"there is foul work going on! I think I can guess what it means. Find out if anyone is hurt, and come and tell me. Don't speak a careless word to anyone, and don't say I am here."

Surprised, and by no means relieved in his mind by these words, Reggie set off.

A policeman, coming out of the house, was the first man he noticed. He could not get near enough to ask him any questions, but he heard some words of his.

"Dead! The poor gentleman is simply smashed to pieces!"

"That all comes from experimenting with explosives," said another voice.

Reggie started, for the last speaker was Ben Wheeler, the one-time chauffeur, but now favourite comic character of the films.

Reggie drew Ben Wheeler aside.

"What do you mean by experimenting with explosives?" he asked.

"Haven't you heard?" said Ben. "Why, it's all over the place, that Mr. Startlefield has invented a wonderful explosive that has ten times the power of dynamite. It's been regular gossip everywhere."

Reggie had not heard this rumour; or, if he had done so, it had not remained in his memory. The statement was a fact to repeat to Startlefield, however, and, though Reggie did not then dwell any further upon the subject, he made a careful note of Ben's words to the effect that a rumour had been spread about.

The next duty was to find out what actually had happened, and here Ben Wheeler was very useful to him, for he was on intimate terms with the policeman with whom he had exchanged a word or two.

And that information, when obtained, was only an enlargement of the first statement of the policeman. The man in the study had caught the full force of a terrible explosion that had not only burst the floor of the study door into the cellar beneath, and wrecked the room, but that had mangled the man out of all recognition.

The man was spoken of freely as being Mr. Startlefield. Who else would be in the study? Reggie and Ben Wheeler pursued their inquiries in several places, but this was the constantly-repeated, general opinion that no one seemed to dream of doubting.

It was a good half-hour before Reggie was sufficiently posted in all the facts of the case to go back to the toolshed in which Mr. Startlefield was hiding.

"Well?" asked Startlefield in a subdued whisper, as he came near. "Is anyone hurt?"

"Sprague, your gardener," said Reggie. "I hear that he has been blown to pieces."

"Dead?"

"Yes."

"The brutes!" cried Startlefield. "I feared it the moment I saw the flash. That was why I hid. It is all a terrible plan. Why, don't you see, they thought that they were killing me. Poor old Sprague! He was a trifle mad, but he wasn't really a criminal by nature, for he had many good points. I feel terribly cut up about his death."

Then, after a pause:

"I saw the explosion, and I saw the man who caused it. He was hiding behind a bush."

Reggie started, for he had seen the same thing from the top of Dell's factory.

"This is all a plot, my boy," went on Startlefield. "Have you heard anything about a rumour that has been going around that I am interested in high explosives?"

Reggie replied by repeating what he had heard from Ben Wheeler.

Mr. Startlefield nodded his head vigorously.

"Now," he said, "I want to explain why I was hiding, and why I am getting away quickly. It is very simple. These wretches think they have killed me."

"Yes."

"Well, I want to let them think it. I am going to drop out of sight a while, and see what happens."

The Inquest.

Mr. Startlefield's words to Reggie were remarkable, so much so, that the boy could not, at first, understand what intention lay behind them. It was quite easy for him to understand that Sprague had been mistaken for his employer, but why on this account should Mr. Startlefield prefer to keep out of the way?

He was soon enlightened.

"Reggie, my boy," went on Startlefield, "you will be most useful to me. I want someone to help me, and I don't quite know whom I can trust except you—unless it is Mr. Dell.

"I have been feeling very suspicious lately in view of certain facts that have come to my notice. For instance, it was reported all over the district lately that I am keenly interested in making a new kind of explosive."

"I heard the rumour," said Reggie; "and I didn't understand what it meant."

"Well, it meant just this," said Startlefield. "The rumour was intended to prepare the public mind for an accident. Someone has been planning foul play, and that rumour was part of the plot."

In his next few sentences Mr. Startlefield outlined a plan that had matured in his mind.

"I believe," he said, "that I have fallen in with some very undesirable characters, and that I am going to have a great deal of difficulty in bringing them to justice. My present idea is to give them plenty of rope, as I share the old idea that some people can only use such an allowance in a very wasteful manner."

But, none the less, Mr. Startlefield saw difficulties which might prevent him from carrying out his plan.

There would surely be an inquest, and evidence might come out as to the identity of the victim of the outrage. In such a case, it would be unnecessary, and probably foolish, for him to keep out of the way. People would want to know why he had done so, and any reason he could give which would be satisfactory to the public and the police, would be a good deal more against himself than against any mysterious body of conspirators.

Mr. Startlefield had a further talk with Reggie about his plans, but as all these plans depended upon the happenings of the next few days, and more particularly upon what the conspirators would do, no definite plan of action was decided.

Two days later the inquest on the unfortunate Johnson Sprague was held. Reggie attended, and found that it went off very much as Mr. Startlefield had expected that it would.

Sprague had been found in his employer's study, wearing his employer's clothes, and he met his death by an explosion. He had been so terribly damaged that his features had proved unrecognisable.

In these circumstances, it was almost the natural conclusion of everyone that the dead man must be Startlefield himself.

Curiously enough, the sudden disappearance of the recently-appointed gardener appeared to have been quite overlooked. And, though several people must have seen him wearing the unusual kind of brown velvet corduroy that was such a favourite style and colour with his employer, no one thought of mentioning the fact, nor was it even hinted that he might be, equally with his employer, the victim of the explosion.

As the inquiry went, there scarcely seemed to be any doubt about the cause of Mr. Startlefield's death. Quite apart from the rumours which had been spread about two witnesses who gave their evidence spoke convincingly on this point.

One was a gentleman called Henry Walkinglean, who gave an address at Shepherd's Bush.

Mr. Walkinglean had a confession to make.

"I feel terribly ashamed of what I have to say," he replied. "And really I cannot forgive myself. Mr. Startlefield insisted on my giving him a sample of the explosive, which is of such a dangerous nature that the slightest carelessness in handling the substance is likely to result in an accident. I warned him of this danger, but I see now that my warning was of no avail."

Mr. Walkinglean was a really excellent witness. He told the coroner how uneasy he had felt about letting the explosive go out of his hand, and how Mr. Startlefield had insisted upon having it.

"He got angry with me, sir," he said to the coroner; "and he said, 'if you don't trust me with the sample, I won't trust you with my money.' What was I to do, sir? I had searched for a capitalist for nearly two years, and I am a very poor man."

The coroner made a very proper reply, and cautioned Mr. Walkinglean against a similar action in future.

"You are morally responsible, for very much," he remarked. "I will not put it higher than that. People who own death-dealing secrets should be careful to whom they confide them. Do I understand that you are convinced that it was your poison that caused the explosion?"

Mr. Walkinglean would not like to be absolutely certain.

"I am afraid it is highly probable," he said; "but, of course, I can't be positive. I hope that it is not so."

Then suddenly he came out with a very helpful clue.

"I don't know if any blue powder was found in the room after the explosion," he suggested. "If so, that would be clear proof."

(Another long instalment of this grand serial story next Wednesday. To avoid disappointment, order your copy early.)