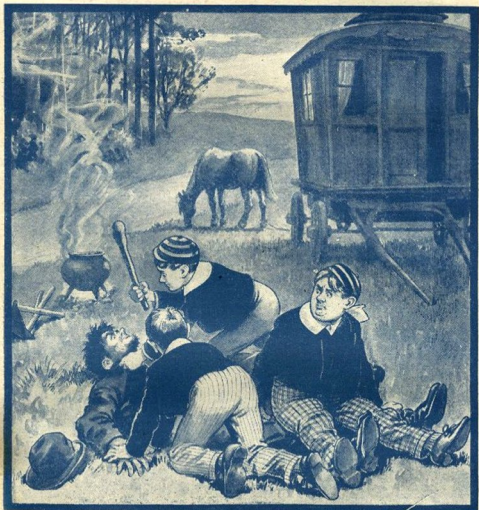


RIVALS OF THE ROAD!



DEALING WITH THE UNINVITED GUEST!

(A Scramblingly Funny Scene in the Solendid Long Complete School Tale in this Issue.)

12-7-19



Rivals of the Road

A Magnificent Long Complete Story
of TOM MERRY & CO. at St. Jim's,

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I. In Camp!

THIS is something like!" George Figgins, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, made that remark in tones of the deepest satisfaction.

And Kerr and Wynn chimed in:

"Hear, hear!"

Figgins & Co. were in clover.

The last red gleam of the sunset glimmered on green woods and meadows. Between the road and a thick, dark wood, was a stretch of grass, upon which a newly-painted caravan was drawn up. The horse was cropping the grass with great contentment. Over a crackling fire of twigs and sticks swung an iron pot, from which proceeded a savoury odour. The schoolboy caravaners were camping, and they were enjoying it.

Fatty Wynn presided over the cooking. What there was in the iron pot, only Fatty Wynn knew; but certainly it smelt very agreeably—especially to three hungry juniors. Figgins and Kerr were taking their ease in the grass, after gathering piles of brushwood for the fire.

"Nearly ready, Fatty!" asked Figgins.

"Nearly, Figgys!"

"Back up, you know! We're hungry!" said Kerr.

"So am I!" answered Fatty Wynn cheerfully. "I've had a snack or two—a few taters, and a saveloy, and some ham and cheese; but I'm ready for my supper. I can tell you! About another five minutes!"

"I wonder where those School-House bouncers are now!" remarked Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They'll be looking for us, of course," said Figgins with a grin. "It was the biggest stunt of the term—bagging their caravan. I can fancy their faces when they were ready to start, and they found that their van had been bagged by the enemy."

And the chums of the New House chorled again.

It had not been Figgins & Co.'s intention to begin the summer vacation in a

caravan. They were booked for a visit to Fatty Wynn's home in Wales. But the temptation had been too strong for them to "bag" the caravan engaged by Tom Merry & Co., their old rivals of the School House at St. Jim's.

They had bagged it, and started.

Now they were a good twenty miles from St. Jim's, camping out; and they chorled as they wondered what their old rivals were doing. It was pretty certain that Tom Merry & Co. would hunt for their missing caravan, but it did not seem likely that they would find it.

"They'll feel about as completely sold as any silly ass could feel!" continued Figgins. "They'll have to admit that we've beaten them this time. Of course, we'll let the poor chaps have their caravan back—when we've done with it!"

"When!" grinned Kerr.

"But the fact is, I rather like caravaning, and I think we may keep it for a week or two," smiled Figgins. "Besides, if they don't find us, I don't quite see how we can hand it over!"

"And they won't find us!"

"No fear!"

"I say, this is going to be a corking steer," said Fatty Wynn. "Lucky we thought of laying in supplies, when we stopped for our bags at Lexham, Figgys! Don't it smell nice?"

"Ripping!" said Figgins hoarsely. "You're a treasure, Fatty!" said Kerr, laughing. "No caravan tour would be complete without you!"

"Well, I can cook," said Fatty Wynn modestly. "If there's one thing I can do, it's cooking. If those School-House asses should drop on us, I hope it won't be before supper!"

"Oh, they won't drop on us by the end of the year!" said Figgins. "We could keep the old bus till we get back to St. Jim's for the new term, if we liked. I've a good mind to do it, too. Hallo, here comes somebody!"

Figgins glanced round at the sound of a footstep in the road.

It was quite dark now, save for the red glow and blaze of the camp-fire against the shadow of the trees.

For a moment Figgins half expected to see "the enemy"—otherwise Tom Merry & Co., of the School House. But it was not a St. Jim's junior who loomed up in the shadows.

A burly, thick-set man, in dusty attire, with a dingy fur cap, jammed on his greasy hair, came into the radius of the

light from the camp-fire, and stood staring at the three caravaners.

He was not a pleasant-looking customer, evidently being a tramp of a rough variety. There was a thick stick under his arm, and a beery leer on his stubbly face.

"Hallo!" said Figgins, rather curtly.

"Evening, gents!" said the stranger.

"Camping 'ere—what?"

"Yes."

"Caravanning, ha?" asked the fur-capped gentleman, with a glance at the van and the horse.

"Yes."

Figgins' replies were monosyllabic. He did not like the looks of the man in the fur cap.

"Rather a lonely place for youngsters to camp!" remarked the vagrant, coming a little nearer.

"Oh, yes."

"There ain't a house within three mile that I know of."

"Possibly not!"

"You feel safe here—what?"

"Quite safe."

"Course you do!" said the gentleman in the fur cap. "Who's 'urt you? Not me. You can stand a bloke a supper, I'll give!"

Figgins and Kerr rose to their feet.

Fatty Wynn was busy with his stew, and had no attention to bestow on the dusty stranger. Figgins' brows were knitted a little. It was pretty plain that the man in the fur cap was looking for trouble—unless his demands were satisfied. And the chums of St. Jim's had no intention whatever of being bullied by a tramp.

"Something nice in that there pot, ha!" asked the tramp.

"Yes."

"Well, share and share alike—that's the rule of the road!" said the stranger, with a grin. "I desay there'll be something left for you young gents when I'm finished; I'm sure I 'opo so!"

"What?" sibilated Kerr, and Fatty Wynn stared round from the fire.

"You 'ear me?" said Fur Cap, with a grin. "You 'nd me that camp-stew—your with the long legs—and 'and me my supper, and there won't be any trouble. I'm an easy-going cove!"

"Well, my hat!" murmured Figgins.

Evidently, camping in lonely spots had its drawbacks. The tramp had let his cudgel slide down into his hand, as if ready for use. Figgins & Co. were sturdy youths, and they had plenty of pluck; but a tussle with a burly tramp, armed with a cudgel, was no joke. It

was not a propitious beginning for their caravanning.

Fur Cap jerked away the camp-stool, and sat himself down on it. Then he called to Fatty Wynn.

"Urry up with that grab, young porker!"

"You cheeky rascal!" exclaimed Figgins in great wrath. "Year won't get any grab here! Out along!"

"Wot's that?"

"Get out of this—and sharp!" rapped out Figgins.

The ruffian rose to his feet again with a very ugly look on his stubbly face.

He gripped his thick cudgel, and came towards Figgins, who faced him with clenched fists.

"I'm going to 'ave my supper 'ere, and you're going to gimme all I want, and wait on me 'and and foot!" said the gentleman in the fur cap, grimly.

Now, then, wot 'ave you got to say?" Figgins made a step towards him, but Kerr caught his chum by the arm and pulled him back. It was evidently useless to tackle the ruffian's cudgel with empty hands.

"Hold on, Figgys!" murmured Kerr. "That hulking brute isn't going to bully us, Kerr," said Figgins, between his teeth.

"Hold on, I tell you!"

"Look here—"

"Go easy!" murmured Kerr. "More ways than one of killing a cat. You don't want to get your head cracked to begin the vacation, do you?"

Figgins gave a grunt; but he yielded to his Scottish chum, as he generally did. The tramp was eyeing them in a surly way.

"Well!" he growled. "Am I going to 'ave my supper, or is there going to be trouble first?"

"Sit down!" said Kerr, politely. "Will you try the stew?"

"I reckon so."

"That's better!" grinned Fur Cap. "And he sat on the camp-stool again, with his cudgel on his knees, ready to lay his wants attended to by the hapless caravanners.

CHAPTER 2.

Hop It!

FATTY WYNN blinked at Kerr as the Scottish junior ladled out stew into a large plate. Figgins looked on with a grim brow. He was giving Kerr his head, so to speak, trusting to his sagacity; but he did not feel satisfied.

"I—I say, Kerr, old chap, you're not wasting that lovely stew on that dirty rascal, are you?" gasped Fatty.

"We can spare a plateful," said Kerr, with a smile.

"One plateful won't satisfy him, nee!"

"I think it will—the way he is going to get it," murmured Kerr.

He glanced at the tramp out of the corner of his eye. Fur Cap was grinning, evidently under the impression that he had satisfied the caravanner into submitting to his demands. Kerr sank his voice in a whisper, so that the ruffian should not overhear.

"Kerr, ready, you fellows! We can't tackle the beast with that club in his hand. Watch me, and pile in as soon as I do."

"What are you going to do?" muttered Figgins.

Fur Cap's rascous voice broke in.

"Now, then, no whispering there! Bring me that there grab, or I'll warm you! I'm 'ungry, I am."

The big plate was filled with steaming stew to the brim.

Kerr gave his comrades a significant

glance and turned from the fire with the plate in his hands.

He carried it very carefully towards Fur Cap.

That gentleman grinned with satisfaction as he caught the savoury scent.

"That's our right!" he remarked. "I hope you'll like it!" murmured Kerr.

"I'll like it all right, if it's good and there's plenty of it," grinned Fur Cap. "Put it on my knee there, and gimme a fork."

Kerr stopped, as if to place the loaded plate on the ruffian's knee.

What happened next was like lightning.

Instead of placing the plate on Fur Cap's knee, Kerr jerked it suddenly forward, and the steaming contents splashed full into the stubbly face of the uninvited guest.

Solaah!

"Gurrgragh!"

There was a wild yell from the ruffian, as the hot stew smothered his face, blinding and choking him for the moment.

He tumbled backwards over the camp-stool, roaring.

His cudgel fell into the grass, and the next instant Kerr had grasped it.

Fur Cap struggled into a sitting position, goggling at the stew in his eyes and nose and mouth and gasping and gurgling frantically.

"Well done!" yelled Figgins. "Like an arrow from a bow, Figgins rushed in, and crashed on the gasping ruffian's chest. Fatty trampled resolutely on his thrashing legs. Kerr took a grip on the ruffian's collar, and tapped him gently on his red nose with the cudgel.

"Go easy!" said Kerr, soft as the cooling dove. "Go easy, unless you want your thick skull cracked, my man!"

"Grooogah! Leggo! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "This looks like turning the tables, and no mistake. Keep still, you silly brute, or you'll get hurt!"

The ruffian was rather hurt already, and he was furious. He made a fierce effort to throw off the three juniors.

Crack!

Kerr brought down the cudgel with a smart rap on the ruffian's head, and there was a dismal howl from Fur Cap.

"Yah! Oh! Ooooh!"

"Do you want another one?" asked Kerr.

"I'll limb yer!" shrieked Fur Cap. Crack!

It was a harder rap this time; Kerr was not a little on ceremony with the ruffian. If Fur Cap had got the upper hand, there would have been more trouble for Figgins & Co. But he was not likely to get the upper hand. The second rap on his bullet head quieted him considerably.

"Will you be quiet?"

"Yow-ow! Yes! Anythink! Ow! Ow!"

"Keep that club handy, Kerr!" chuckled Figgins. "If he wants any more, give it to him!"

"You bet!" said Kerr.

"Ow! Ow! 'Old on! I don't want any more!" gasped Fur Cap. "You let a man go! Oh, my eye! Ow! Ow!"

Figgins & Co. chuckled. Kerr's stratagem had been successful, and Fur Cap was reduced to submission—so long as he lived. But the fury in his stubbly face showed that he would be dangerous when he was released.

"Kick him out now!" said Figgins.

"Hold him!" answered Kerr, quickly. "We're not letting the brute loose, Figgys. He could get another stick in the wood and come back!"

"We can't sit on him all night, old scout!"

"No need! I'll fix him up. He's going to be made safe," said Kely. "Hold him while I get a rope—there's one in the van."

"Just as you like!"

"You let a man go!" whined Fur Cap. "I'll go away peaceful, on my duty! Yeh, gimme go!"

Kerr ran to the caravan and disappeared within it. Headless of Fur Cap's expostulations, Figgins and Fatty Wynn held him down—Figgins holding the cudgel now, ready for use if the ruffian resisted. Kerr reappeared in a few minutes with a coil of cord in his hand.

The ruffian eyed him apprehensively.

"You ain't going to tie a bloke up!" he gasped.

"You've got it!" answered Kerr, cheerily.

"Look 'ere—"

"Dey up! Stick his fins together, Figgys!"

Fur Cap showed signs of resistance as Figgins dragged his wrists together. But Kerr took the cudgel and gave him a gentle rap, as a reminder, and he submitted.

His wrists were bound together securely, the cord being wound round and round them and knotted.

"Oh, you wait till I git a chance at you, that's all!" growled Fur Cap.

"You won't have a chance in a hurry," smiled Kerr.

He cut off a length of the cord, and tied the end round one of the ruffian's ankles.

Having tied it, he bent Fur Cap's leg up, and tied the cord above his knee.

"Now let him go!" he said.

Fur Cap was released. With one leg tied up, he had only one for service, and he sat and glared at the clams of St. Jim's, a stream of lurid language pouring from his mouth.

"Shut up!" growled Figgins, and as the stream of eloquence did not dry up, he gave the ruffian a lunge with his boot.

"Shut up! Do you hear?"

Fur Cap shut up at last.

"Yank him up!" said Kerr.

Fur Cap was set upright—on one leg. He hopped furiously to keep his balance.

"Now you can travel," said Kerr, coolly.

"Like that!" gasped Figgins.

"He won't be able to do any harm like that," answered Kerr. "I dare say he will get somebody to loose him later on. At present he's got to be kept from doing any damage."

"Do you think I'm going to 'op away like a hopped frog?" roared Fur Cap, furiously.

"Please yourself!" said Kerr. "You'll get tape from this cudgel till you start; but please yourself."

Tan! Tap!

"Yaroooh!"

Fur Cap hopped frantically out of the way of the tapping cudgel. He hopped out of the caravanners' camp into the road, his eloquence restarting in a lurid stream.

"Travel!" grinned Figgins.

"Hop, hop, hop!"

"Are you going?" asked Kerr. "I'll keep this up as long as you do, Mr. Fur Cap! Like that—and that—and that—"

"Yeep! Stop! Stop! Oh-crikey!"

Fur Cap hopped frantically away into the shadows of the road, leaving the juniors roaring with laughter. It was a well-deserved punishment for the ruffian—and it kept him out of mischief, for the time, at least. His furious voice died away in the darkness, with the sound of his hopping boot.

"We can have supper now!" remarked Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
And the three caravanners sat down to supper in great spirits.

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy Does It!

"**W**HERE is that duffer?"
"Where's that ass!"
"Where has Gussy got to?"
"Bless him!"

Six cyclists were standing by their machines at the cross-roads near the town of Lexham—making remarks.

They were six juniors of St. Jim's; Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther of the Shell; and Blake and Herricks and Digby of the Fourth Form.

They were all making remarks, and their remarks were all upon one subject—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the St. Jim's Fourth.

"Isn't it just like him?" exclaimed Jack Blake, in tones of deep exasperation. "Isn't it!"

"It is—it is!" groaned Monty Lowther.

"I dare say he's wandering off a dozen miles away!" remarked Tom Merry. "We may have to wait here all night for him!"

"Bless him!" said Manners.

"Bless him!"

"The ass!"

"The fathead!"

Tom Merry & Co. were growing quite eloquent; and all on account of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

It was really an exasperating state of affairs.

The School House party, having left their baggage in Rycombe to be sent after them, on demand, had started out on their bicycles to hunt down the captured caravan and its captives. They had made extensive inquiries up and down, and round about, for a caravan newly-painted in dark red, picked out with green—quite a distinctive caravan, as Blake remarked. And they had fallen in luck's way—for a cartier had positively seen the missing caravan on its way to Lexham.

To Lexham, therefore, seven cyclists went at scorching speed.

At Lexham there was further news of the red-and-green caravan. It had been seen there; and inquiry at the railway-station—suggested by Manners—brought to light the fact that three schoolboys had called there for bags. Tom Merry and his comrades did not doubt that, so far, they were on the track of Figgins & Co.

They picked up the information that the caravan had been seen leaving the town on the western road late in the afternoon. From that moment, all information was lacking.

As Monty Lowther remarked, the caravan was somewhere between Lexham and New York, and it only remained to find it.

At the cross-roads a mile out of the town, there was a halt, and the caravan-hunters separated, to inquire in different directions, arranging to re-assemble at the cross-roads in an hour's time.

Six had reassembled. One was still absent, though an hour and a half had elapsed. That one, of course, was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The six had obtained no information whatever. They did not suppose that D'Arcy had obtained any, either. Probably he was still in search of some. Meanwhile, they kicked their heels at the cross-roads, and waited—making remarks that would have made Arthur Augustus' hair curl if he had heard them.

"While we're sticking here," remarked

Herricks, "the caravan is going on—some-where!"

"Further and further away—while we're waiting for Gussy!" remarked Digby. "Why didn't we shove him into a lunatic asylum before we started?"

"Echo answers why!" sighed Lowther.

It was quite dark now, and the moon had not yet risen. The juniors had filled the time by lighting their lamps, ready for a start—when Arthur Augustus returned. They were almost tempted to go on without him, so great was their exasperation.

"It would serve the ass right, to find us gone!" growled Manners.

"It would!" agreed Blake.

"Jolly good mind to go on!" said Tom Merry. "But—"

"But—abem!"

"Those New House bounders must have gone on by the high road," said Tom. "If they'd turned off, we should have heard something of them. We've asked about fifty people, I think!"

"Nearer a hundred!" grunted Herricks. "I wish I'd brought Tower along with us!"

"Blow Tower!"

"I wasn't quite satisfied with leaving him at the school," said Herricks, shaking his head. "Taggles has promised to take proper care of him, and I've made it worth his while. But—"

"Give Tower a rest, old chap!"

"He wouldn't have cared for the trip with a muzzie on," said Herricks, unheeding. "Tower doesn't like a muzzie. He might have got bitten, too—there are mad dogs about. Perhaps it was better to leave him. But he would have come in jolly useful now. He would have tracked down Figgins—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"It would simply have been necessary to show him something belonging to Figgis, you know, and then—"

"And then he would have gone to sleep!" grunted Blake.

"Look here, Blake—"

"Hallo, here comes somebody! Gussy at last!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

There was a buzz of a bicycle in a shadowy side-lane, and a lamp gleamed out of the shadows. An elegant youth pedaled up, and jumped off his machine.

"Waitin' for me, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy cheerily.

"Fathed!"

"Eh?"

"Ass!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"We've waited three-quarters of an hour, bawled Blake—"

"I trust, Blake, that you are capable of waiting three-quarters of an hour without forgettin' your mannaahs!" said Arthur Augustus calmly.

"Ass!"

"I weally wish, Blake, that you would not wear at me! It throws me into quite a fluttah when a fellow wears at me!"

"Idiot!"

"I refuse to be called an idiot, Blake—"

"Oh, let's get on!" said Manners impatiently. "We may as well keep up the hunt for an hour or two longer. We can put up at an inn somewhere if we don't find those New House rotters and the caravan!"

"Weally, Mannaahs—"

"Come on!" said Tom Merry.

"Fway wait a minute—"

"We've waited long enough, ass! Get on, you jigger!"

"Yass, but—"

"Leave him behind if he won't get a move on!" said Herricks. "I'm fed up!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Will you come along, Gussy, you chump!" roared Blake.

"I have a strong objection to bein' called a chump, Blake! I was goin' to remark—"

"Life's too short for all your remarks, Gussy! Come on!" said Tom Merry. "Gussy can follow when he's tired of wagging his chain."

"Bai Jove!"

Six impatient juniors mounted their machines, and started on the high-road. Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglasses in his eye, and looked after them in surprise.

"Bai Jove! The fellows seem wathah excited about somethin'!" he murmured. "I say, Blake, hold on—"

"Rats!"

"Where are you goin'?"

"Up the road!"

"But that is the w'ong way!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "The caravan has not gone that way, you know!"

"What's at it?"

Tom Merry & Co. slackened down. They wheeled their machines round, and rode back to Arthur Augustus, who was still standing by his jigger at the cross-roads. For the first time it occurred to them that Arthur Augustus had been more successful than themselves in his quest of news.

"Does that mean that you've heard news of the caravan?" demanded Blake.

"Certainly!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The juniors dismounted. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglasses upon them in surprise.

"I weally do not quite comprehend you fellows," he said. "We separated heah to wide wound and inqiah afth the caravan, didn't we?"

"Yes, you ass—but we never expected you to find out anything."

"Naturally!" grunted Herricks. "Have you fellows found out anythin' about the caravan?"

"Nothing!"

"Then it is wathah fortunate that I have had bettah luck!" said Arthur Augustus placidly. "I have found out a great deal. I can lead you to the precise spot where Figgins & Co. are camped."

"Well, my hat!"

Six juniors uttered that ejaculation in amazement. Arthur Augustus smiled benignantly. The impatient six had been properly impressed at last.

CHAPTER 4.

A Night Attack!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY polished his eyeglasses sedately, and replaced it in his eye. He seemed in no hurry to impart his valuable information. Tom Merry & Co. surrounded him eagerly. The swell of St. Jim's was great at that moment.

"You've got news of our caravan, Blake exclaimed, at last.

"Yass, wathah!"

"You know where it is?" asked Lowther.

"Oh, yass!"

"And you can guide us there?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Easily!"

"Well, my hat! Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—"

said Digby. "I refuse to be chawctawised as a babe and sucklin', Digby!"

"I weally do not understand you fellows. I went around lookin' for information, I found it. I wensemah wemarkin' that you could rely on me. There is nothin' surprisin' in my succeedin' where you fellows failed, is there? It is simply a matter of brains!"



"He's got the pepper!" grinned Fatty Wynn. "I thought it would fetch him! He's got it!" "Atchoo—choo—shooch!" (See Chapter 5.)

"If it needed brains, old top, you wouldn't have had much of a look-in!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Well, if you're spotted Figgins & Co., where are they?" demanded Tom Merry. "Give us cu. bearings, Gusy."

"I met a man about a mile from here who saw the caravan pass," explained Arthur Augustus. "A caravan painted red—"

"Ours is red," agreed Blake.

"With a boy drivin'—"

"That looks like ours, too—Figgins or Kerr or Wynn would be drivin'."

"Tom Merry."

"The chap called out to him," pursued Arthur Augustus, evidently greatly aided with his success. "He asked if he was right for Little Mudlington."

"Little Mudlington! Is that a village?"

"Yas; the man told me it was a village about three miles up that lane. There is a common there, where gipsies camp sometimes with their caravans. So I wathah think that Figgins' man to camp there—see?"

"Very likely," said Tom Merry. "As sounds as if it may be the caravan we're looking for."

"That is quite certain, deah boy! I described our caravan to the man, and he said it was just like the one that

passed him on the road to Little Mudlington."

"Good!" said Blake. "And now, where the merry thump is Little Mudlington?"

"Straight up this lane, deah boy. But I have not told you all yet," said Arthur Augustus calmly.

Blake had put his leg over his machine. He withdrew it.

"What else is there, fathead?" he asked. "Don't be so long-winded!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Get it off your chest!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I should have told you the whole story by this time, deah boys, if you had not kept on interwuptin' me."

"Will you come to the point?" breathed Blake.

"I am comin' to it as fast as I can, Blake, considerin' how I am bein' interwupted. Aftah losin' about the caravan from the man, I considered wathah to return heah for you fellows, or to wide on and make suah that it was our caravan. I decided that it would not matteh if you wathah a little, as your time is weally not of much value—"

"Oh!"

"So I wode on towards Little Mudlington," continued Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "I went as fah as the top of the hill on this side, and looked across at the common. There was a camp-fire

there, and a caravan camped. I saw it quite plainly by the camp-fire."

"Was it our caravan?"

"Yas."

"Sure?" asked Tom.

"I trust, Tom Merry, that I can be relied upon to know our caravan when I see it!"

"You can be relied on to wag your chin all night, anyway!" answered Tom. "This looks like a clear case, you fellows. Let's get on to Little Mudlington."

"Come on!" said Blake.

"Pray, follow my lead, deah boys!"

"Bow-wow!"

Tom Merry & Co. rode into the lane from which Arthur Augustus had appeared, and the swell of St. Jim's mounted and followed them. The cyclists put on a good speed. They had done a good deal of riding already that day; but the prospect of recapturing the red caravan, and dealing drastically with Figgins & Co., spurred them on, and they were almost unconscious of fatigue.

"Blake?" called out Arthur Augustus from the rear.

"Oh, come on!" answered Blake, over his shoulder.

"Yas, but—"

"Don't waste your breath, Gusy!"

"I am not wastin' my breath, Blake! I feel bound to remark—"

"Search!" said Tom Merry. "Even Gusey will have to shut up, if he has to put his nose into it to keep up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But, I say—" shouted Arthur Augustus.

The juniors did not heed. They bent over their handlebars and scowled, and Arthur Augustus' voice died away behind them.

For a couple of miles the six juniors rushed on at great speed, with Arthur Augustus hounding behind to overtake them. But Tom Merry slowed down at last, as a thought struck him.

"Steady, you chaps!" he called out.

"What's up?"

"Black a bit! Gusey said something about getting to the top of a hill near the village. We're riding on the level."

"Oh, my hat!"

The riders slowed down, and Arthur Augustus came whizzing up from behind at last, with a crimson and excited face.

"You utah ass!" he gasped.

"Is this the right road?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Certainly not! You passed the wight burnin' a couple of miles back!" howled Arthur Augustus.

"And you let us!" shrieked Monty Lowther.

"I tried to tell you—"

"Ass!"

"Chump!"

"I wouad atfah you, didn't I!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in great wrath and indignation. "You refused to listen to me. I regard you as a set of utah ass!"

The feelings of Tom Merry & Co. were almost too deep for words as they wheeled their machines round in the lane.

"Ponwape you will follow my lead now!" suggested Arthur Augustus mildly.

"Show us the way!" said Blake, in a sulphurous voice.

"Certainly, deah boy!"

For once, Arthur Augustus was allowed to take the lead. It was really rather unfortunate that he had not taken the lead earlier.

The juniors rode back to the turning they had missed, and Arthur Augustus led the way into a rutty, narrow lane, deep in the shadow between high hedges of may.

"Sure this is right?" growled Blake.

"Wely on me, deah boy!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I do not regard that as an intelligent wely, Blake!"

"Lead on, ass!"

"If you persist in applyin' opprobrious epithets to me, Blake—"

Arthur Augustus had no time to finish; he pedaled on quickly, in time to keep his rear wheel from a collision with Blake's front wheel. He gave a snarl of indignation as he led the way up the shadowy lane.

The road was rising before the cyclists, and they had to slacken speed. It was hard work grinding up the rutty lane, after the hard riding they had already done. The silver crescent of the moon was peeping out from the clouds as the juniors arrived at the top of the rise. They were glad enough to find themselves there.

"Now, where's the blessed camp-fire you spoke of?" asked Tom Merry, staring ahead into the darkness.

"Blessed if I can see it!" grunted Blake.

"Probably it has been put out," said Arthur Augustus. "Probably they would not keep the fah goin' atfah suppah simply to guide us, you know. That is wouly not to be expected."

"Oh, come on!" grunted Horries.

"You can two-wheed Beah, deah boys, as fah as the common."

"Mind you don't miss the camp," said Tom Merry. "Is the caravan far off the road, Gusey?"

"Not more than a hundwad yards, I think."

"Then we shall see it all right; there's moonlight enough for that."

The seven juniors free-wheeled down the road. In a few minutes more there was an open and breezy common on their right, and they kept their eyes well open for the camp of the caravaners.

Tom Merry uttered a sudden exclamation.

"There it is! Hah!"

The juniors jumped off their machines. Above the porch on the common could be seen the roof of a caravan in the distance. When they had stopped, in the silence they could hear the faint sound of a horse cropping grass. Tom Merry pushed his machine against a tree by the roadside.

"Leave the bikes here," he said. "They'll be safe enough. Now for those New House bouders!"

"We shall take the wotahs wathah by surprise," grinned Arthur Augustus.

"It is gettin' wathah late now, and it looks as if they have gone to bed."

"We'll wako 'em up!" growled Horries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The seven machines were stacked against the trees in the shadow, and Tom Merry & Co. advanced the grass on foot. The moonlight was dim, and they could barely make out the form of the caravan in the distance. As they drew nearer they observed a tent standing within a few yards of the vehicle.

"Our tent!" murmured Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Blessed if I see why they should trouble to put up the tent!" said Tom Merry. "There's room for three in the caravan. They're making themselves comfy, the cheeky bouders!"

"Quiet!" murmured Lowther. "We'll take the rotters by surprise, and bring down the tent on top of them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush!"

The School House juniors were quite restored to good-humour now. It was admitted that Gusey deserved well of his country. The enemy was tracked down at last, and vengeance was about to fall upon the devoted heads of the New House raiders.

Stepping lightly, the seven juniors approached the caravan camp in the pale glimmer of the rising moon. Evidently the caravaners had retired for the night. As they came nearer to the tent a deep and sonorous sound reached their ears from within. It was a powerful snore.

Tom Merry suppressed a chuckle.

"That's Fatty Wynn!" he murmured. "He's done too well at supper, I should think, by that row."

"Yaas, wathah!" chorled Arthur Augustus. "Dreamin' of pork-pies, vewy likely. We'll give the fat boudah pork-pies!"

"Shush!"

"Welly, Lowthah—"

"Quiet!" whispered Tom. "Get round the tent and unfasten the pegs without making a row. Let all the ropes go when I whistle, and I rather think Figgins & Co. will wake up suddenly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush!"

Tom Merry's masterly directions were carried out with great caution. While the snow resounded from the tent, reverberating in the stillness of the night, the School House juniors surrounded the

carvas silently, and dealt with the tent-ropes. In the silence the signal-whistle was heard.

"Let go all!"

Crash!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter as the tent collapsed, answered by quite a different roar from under the tumbling, flapping canvas.

CHAPTER 5.

A Slight Mistake!

"H A, ha, ha!"

"That's for you, Figgis!"

"Come out, you New House bouders! Crawl out!"

Tom Merry & Co. roared. From within the flapping canvas came wild exclamations, muffled and furious. Then a voice was heard, a deep, hoarse voice, that certainly did not belong to Figgins, or to Kerr, or to Fatty Wynn, and that made the juniors jump as they heard it.

"The dashed tent is down again! I told you how it would be!"

"Roar!" boomed another voice. "I know how to put up a tent, William Jackson. My tent never came down in Flanders, begad!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tom Merry.

The laughter of the St. Jim's juniors died away suddenly. Certainly, the forms that could be discerned through the canvas were not those of Figgins & Co., of the New House of St. Jim's. The voices were not the voices of schoolboys, that was certain.

"Who—who—who are they?" gasped Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry stared round at the caravan. On the assurance of Arthur Augustus that he had actually seen the van in the light of the camp-fire, the Co. had taken the matter for granted. But caravans, after all, looked much alike, and it was quite possible that Gusey had made a mistake; indeed, by this time it was pretty certain.

The caravan was painted a dark red, but the red was not picked out with green, on a closer inspection. It was not the caravan Tom Merry & Co. had hired in Wayland.

That dreadful fact dawned upon the juniors all at once.

Arthur Augustus' aristocratic face was a study. He realised, with awful distinctness, how fearfully he had put his noble foot in it.

"Oh, cwumbs!" he murmured. "Oh—oh, cwiky!"

"You ass!" stuttered Blake. "You champion ass! It isn't our caravan; it's not our tent; it's not the party we're looking for at all! We—we—we've brought down somebody's tent on his napper!"

"Who, I wonder!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Sounds like a man with rather peppery temper!"

"Can't you help me to get this de—"

canvas of, Jackson!" came a voice. "Can't you help! Can't you move! Have you any sense!"

"Too much sense to put up a tent in this anyhow, major!" came another excited and partly muffled voice. "Take your boot out of my ribs, you ass!"

"Hang your ribs! Dash your ribs! The leg never came down of its own accord!" roared the major. "It's a trick!"

"Rot!"

"I, told you I heard somebody laughing."

"Enough to make somebody laugh, the way you put up a tent, major!"

"They're losing their little tempers."

remarked Monty Lowther, "Don't you chaps think it would be wise to take a walk before the major and Mr. Jackson get out!"

There was a general assent to that eminently practical proposal. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his head. "Bosh! lend them a hand," he said. "They're wotkin' themselves up in that canvas. Peaxy lend a hand."

"Come on, Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mowry, we are responsible for this catastrophe, and it is up to us to lend them a hand."

Blake caught the swell of St. Jim's by the shoulder.

"Can't you hear that they're as mad as hatters!" he exclaimed. "They'll start on us if we're here when they get out. We didn't come here for a dog-fight!"

"You are responsible—"

"You are responsible, you mean, you silly ass!" exclaimed Herrie. "You told us it was Figgins & Co. camping here."

"I was unah the impresson—"

"You'll be unah the major's paws, if you hang on here much longer!" snapped Blake. "Come on, you chump!"

"Let's get back to the bikes, for goodness' sake!" said Dig.

"Come on, Gussy!"

"I hear you!" came a muffled roar from under tangled canvas. "Practical jokers, as I told you, Jackson. You scoundrels, wait till I get out of this! I'll give you practical jokes!"

"The gentleman is unah a misapprehension, dash boys," said Arthur Augustus. "We are bound to vendar assistance, and apologise for the mistake."

"Will you come on!" roared Blake.

"Undah the circus—"

"Kim on, ass! They're getting out!"

A long leg, clad in pyjamas, appeared from under the canvas. Either the major or Mr. Jackson was struggling out into liberty and open air. Blake dragged at Arthur Augustus.

The rest of the juniors were already seeing for the road and the bicycles. They would willingly have rendered assistance and apologised for the mistake, but it was only too clear that the major was not likely to listen to any explanation. He was breathing blood-curdling threats as he wriggled and struggled out. But Arthur Augustus was quite convinced that, as usual, he knew the right and proper thing to do. "Noblesse oblige" was a motto Arthur Augustus lived up to—sometimes with painful results. He jerked his shoulder out of Blake's grasp and ran towards the tumbling canvas.

"Will you come away!" shrieked Blake, glaring after him.

"Not at present, Blake. I'm going to explain—"

"Fathood!"

Blake ran after the rest of the party, and vanished into the green. If Arthur Augustus D'Arcy insisted upon explaining to an infuriated major, he could content the explanation "on his own."

Blake was not in the least desirous of re-viewing, at close quarters, the excited gentleman whose pyjamas were now coming into view.

Arthur Augustus caught hold of the tangling canvas, and knelt his aid. A fat and red-faced man rolled into view, and sat in the grass, gasping for breath and blinking at the junior.

"Thunder!" he gasped.

"My dear sir—"

The fat gentleman leaped up and grasped Arthur Augustus by the collar.

"Quick, Jackson! I've got one of them!" he roared.

"I'm coming, major!"

"Bel Jove! Peaxy release me, sir—"

"You young rascal!" thundered the major. "You impudent young scoundrel!"

"I refuse to be called a scoundrel, sir!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "A most unfortunate mistake has been made—Yawwooh!"

Boxing the noble ears of the Hon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was really an honor of proceeding. Arthur Augustus had certainly not anticipated that.

But the major was doing it! There was no doubt at all that he was doing it—and with tremendous vigour, too! A grip of iron held Gussy by the collar, while a huge, red hand that seemed like a flail boxed his ears right and left.

"Smack, smack, smack!"

"Yawwooh!"

"Smack, smack!"

"You howid wuffian!" roared Arthur Augustus, struggling wildly in the major's muscular grasp. "Wesease me at once! It was simply a mistake—yoo!"

"Smack!"

"Get me the whip, Jackson!" roared the major, as another man scrambled out from under the collapsed tent.

The whip, quick! The other young rascal gave up, but I'll make an example of you, wotkin' e'lain!"

"Smack, smack!"

"You uttah wuffian!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I refuse to explain now! Yawwooh! I shall certainly not—yoo!"

Wendah an apology! I regard you with uttah—yoo—ow—ow—contempt! Help! Wesease! Yawwooh!"

"Quick with that whip, Jackson! The young scoundrel's head is making my fingers ache!"

"Smack, smack!"

Arthur Augustus, roused to wrath quite as great as the major's, hit out, and the fat gentleman gave a gasp. Gussy did not look where he was hitting in the excitement of the moment. As a matter of fact, he landed on the major's waist, where the circumference was largest, and the fat gentleman sat down with surprising suddenness, quite winded.

"Grossooooo!" came from him in an expiring gasp.

"Oh, wesease!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"You young rascal!"

Mr. Jackson was making for the swell of St. Jim's, whip in hand, and Arthur Augustus had to dodge.

"Keep off, you water-yawwooh!"

Crack!

The whip curled round Gussy's leg, and he yelled. Even Arthur Augustus was not thinking of making any further attempt at explanation and apology. He started for the road at a run, putting on a burst of speed that surprised himself.

"Stop, you young villain!" roared the gentleman with the whip, pursuing him and making wild slashes.

Arthur Augustus was not likely to stop. He led for his life, with Mr. Jackson close behind him cutting at him with the whip. But Mr. Jackson halted suddenly, with a speechless shriek. His feet were bare, and apparently he had discovered thorns. Arthur Augustus glanced back, and discerned the unfortunate gentleman hopping on one foot, and clasping the other with both hands. And tender-hearted as he was, he did not even feel sorry for the hapless gentleman.

He rushed on and came out on the road, gasping. Tom Merry & Co. had their bicycles in the road by that time, and were ready to mount. Blake held Arthur Augustus' machine.

"Here you are, you can't be growled."

"Oh, crickey! I have been treated with the greatest disrespect and brutality—"

"Are you coming!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Fathood! There's your jigget! We're off!"

Arthur Augustus caught his bike, and the Co. rode down the road. The swell of St. Jim's mounted and followed, the swell of a booming voice from the good-winch.

"Stop! Stop, you young scoundrel! I'll thrash you within an inch of your life! Stop!"

Arthur Augustus bent over the handlebars, and rode as if he were on the cyclo-track riding for a wager.

CHAPTER 6.

Fur Cap!

"O H, dear!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Tom Merry & Co. uttered those ejaculations in breathless tones—but not until they were a good mile from Little Mudlington common and the enraged major. Until a good mile had been covered, they had put all their energy and all their breath into pedalling.

They slowed down now, feeling safe from pursuit, and commenced to rest after their exertions. The moon was fully up by this time, and silver light shone down upon seven panting juniors.

"What shall we do to him!" said Blake in measured tones, when he had recovered his breath at last.

"Weally, Blake, I consider that we ought to evablock the conduct of that fat old boundah, as he was very much exasperated. He treated me with gwoss wudeeness, but undah the ciros, I am wathah inclined to forgive him," said Arthur Augustus magnanimously.

Blake snorted.

"I'm not speaking of the major, whover the major is, you silly fathood! I'm speaking of you, know—"

"Weally, you know—"

"You dumppan ass, you led us on the wrong track, and handed us into a row with perfect strangers! You howling idiot—"

"I refuse to be called a howlin' idiot, Blake."

"What shall we do with him?" said Blake. "He ought to be boiled in oil, at least!"

"Wats! I do not regard myself as bein' to blame in any way," said Arthur Augustus. "We were looking for a wot awaway. The man said there was a boy dwivin' it. Naturally, I supposed it was Figgins or Kerr or Wynn—"

"A boy those two fat old boundahs had to look after their horse, I expect," said Tom Merry. "We might have known better than to take any advice from our champion idiot. When he said he'd found the caravan, we ought to have known he hadn't, and looked somewhere else."

"Yes, rather!"

"Weally, Tom Mowry—"

"It's your own fault," growled Blake. "Can't be helped now, anyway. We ought to have brought a crumze and chain with us for Gussy."

"You uttah ass—"

"Can't be helped!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Why grouse! We know what to expect of Gussy; and, really, he never disappoints us—"

"H, h, ha!"

"Bel Jove! I regard that remark—"

"After all, it was funny!" remarked Monty Lowther. "Still, we don't want it to happen again, so we'll let Gussy take a back seat."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Where the thump are we now?" asked Manners. "We rode through a village."

when we cleared off. I suppose that was Little Magginton. Anybody know what the time is?"

Tom Merry turned his bike lamp on his watch.

"Half-past ten!" he said.

"Oh, my hat! We shall be sleepy pretty soon!" said Manners. "I suppose we can't be out for Figgins any more to-night. We'd better look for some other place to put up till morning. I want some supper, for one."

"That is not a bad idea, Manners. We can start fresh in the morning, and I will undertake to track down those New House bounds."

"Or another fat cigar!" grunted Herries.

"What! That was a very natural mistake, as we were looking for a wood caravan, and that was a wood caravan."

"We're not going to commit assault and battery on every caravaner in the country who's got a red caravan," said Blake. "Give your chin a rest, Gossy, old son. Let's look for an inn. There must be an inn somewhere. Can anybody see an inn?"

"Blessed if I can see anything but fields and trees!" said Tom Merry, looking round. "Charming view, in the merry moonlight, but I'd rather see some sausage and chips just now."

"But Jove! What is that?" ejaculated D'Arzy suddenly.

"What's what, fellow?"

"I heard a peculiar sound on the road. There it is again! Pray listen, dear boys."

The juniors listened. Before them was a dark lane, shadowed by trees, leading where they did not know whether. From the shadows on the road came a sound that certainly was peculiar, as Arthur Augustus declared.

Thud, thud, thud!

In the night silence, the thudding on the hard road came clearly to their ears, growing clearer and clearer as it approached.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another in amazement.

"What the thump is it!" murmured Blake.

Thud, thud!

"Sounds like a man hopping on one leg," said Tom Merry.

"But Jove! A tawallah would not be likely to come along hoppin' on one leg," Tom Merry.

"I suppose not; but that's what it sounds like."

Thud, thud!

The sound was nearer now. Seven pairs of eyes were turned in the direction of it, in astonishment and some uneasiness. The strange sound was eerie enough in the silence and the solitude of the deep lane.

Thud, thud!

"It is a man hopping!" said Tom Merry, with conviction. "I'll bet my hat on that. Must be pretty, I should think."

"Nice place to meet a leucist!" murmured Lowther.

"Hallo! There he is!"

The juniors watched breathlessly as a strange figure loomed up from the shadows. It came hopping out of the darkness into a patch of moonlight between the trees.

Undoubtedly it was a man hopping on one leg—amazing as such a sight was. A man in ragged dusty attire, with a dingy fur cap on his head, came into view, with his hands behind his back, and one leg curled up, hopping on the other.

Tom Merry & Co. watched him, spell-bound. Unless he was a lunatic, they could imagine no reason why he should be travelling through the dusky lanes in this extraordinary manner.

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The dusty man caught sight of them in the glimmer of the moon, and hopped on towards them, gasping for breath.

"Lend a bloke a 'and!" he gasped.

Arthur Augustus jumped back.

"But Jove! Pray keep your distance if you see potting!" he exclaimed.

"My hat! He's tied up!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"Great Scott!"

The dusty creature stood on one leg before the astonished juniors, hopping to keep his balance.

"Lend a cove a 'and!" he spluttered.

"Get up instead, will you? I tell you I'm about done!"

"We'll help you, certainly," said Tom, Blake and Herries caught hold of the man to steady him, and Tom opened his pocket-knife. He cut through the cord which tied up the tramp's leg; and Fur Cap, with a gasp of relief, let his foot drop to the ground.

"Oh, strike me pink!" he gasped.

"That's better! Strike me blue! Now cut my 'ands loose, young gentleman."

"Certainly," said Tom, in wonder.

In a minute more, Fur Cap's wrists were released, and he rubbed his dirty hands together. The juniors stood round him, gazing at him in wondering inquiry.

"How on earth did you get like that?" asked Dig.

Fur Cap muttered an oath.

"I've been tied up!" he said. "I've been assaulted and battered, and it with my own stick, and tied up. Any them? Lettin' a man beat on the roads like this!"

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Fur Cap muttered an oath.

"ere! Why, we agin the law, 'andin' a man like that!"

"But Jove! It is wathin' hard chews!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "I presume it was a practical joke."

"I'll joke 'em!" said Fur Cap, gritting his yellow, uneven teeth. "I'll joke the young 'ounds! They ain't for away! 4 sin't 'opped it more'n a mile, looking for somebody to make 'em. Cause why? I've 'ad to work 'em in my relations, 'most with a blossoming smile in my eye, 'opping it like that 'ere. I tell you, my leg is fair done in; with 'opping!"

"But what was it done for?" asked Tom.

"Cause a man asked for a supper!" said Fur Cap indignantly. "And I let 'em 'ad plenty in the caravan. Tom, that fat cove with the stew looked as if he'd 'ad enough to eat, you can lay yer 'at on that! But I'm goin' back to look for 'em, you bet!"

The juniors exchanged a quick glance. The mention of a caravan, and a "fat cove" was quite enough to excite their interest.

"A caravan!" repeated Tom Merry.

"Some caravanning chaps—what?"

"Yes!" growled Fur Cap, still rubbing his neck.

"But Jove! Was it a wood caravan?"

exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Pray you know 'em, hay?" said Fur Cap, blinking stupidly at the juniors.

"It was a red caravan, with green lines on it, if you want to know."

"My hat! Were there three in the party?" exclaimed Tom.

"Three was!"

"One of them long-legged!" exclaimed Blake.

"That was the cove what knelt on me," said Fur Cap.

"Figgins, and no mistake," said Tom Merry. "And one of them was fat!"

"In a cove what was cooking," said Fur Cap.

"Fatty Wynn, or his ghost!" said Monty Lowther.

"And the other!" asked Tom Merry.

"Was he rather a good-looking, sandy-coloured chap?"

"I don't say he was. That was the bloke what bumped the stew on my 'ead!" said Fur Cap. "I'll bush 'em for it yet!"

"We've found them," said Tom, with great satisfaction. "It's Figgins & Co., and no mistake. Look here, my man, we're looking for that caravan. Can you guide us to where you left those fellows?"

Fur Cap scowled.

"They treated me like this 'ere!" he said. "I'm going back to bush 'em, now I've got my 'ands free!"

"You're jolly well not!" answered Tom Merry, very decidedly. "I dare say you asked for it, or Figgins wouldn't have done it."

"Yess, wathin'!"

"We'll stand you five bob to guide us to the caravan," said Tom. "We want to meet those fellows. Is it a go?"

Fur Cap hesitated. He did not know what to make of the party of schoolboys who had met in so kindly a spirit at his late an hour. But there was evidently too many of them for his raffish taste to be of any use.

"Friends of yours?" he asked at length.

"Yes, in a way, though we're jolly well going to wallop them when we meet them," said Tom, with a smile.

"They've worried our caravan without permission, and we want it back."

"Oh!" said Fur Cap.

"Well, will you guide us!" asked Blake.

"Five bob, hay?"

"Yess, as soon as we see the caravan."

"And you won't interfere if I bush

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"You see!" stammered Blake. "You've brought down the wrong tent!" "Take your best out of my ribs!" came a muffled voice from under the fallen canvas. (See Chapter 5.)

"Oh!" asked Fur Cap, with a suspicious leer at the chums of St. Jim's.

"Bah! Jovel! Yass, wathah, you tuffian!"

"If you begin bashing anybody, my man, you'll get stopped so suddenly that it will make your head swim," said Manners.

"Then it ain't a go!" said Fur Cap severely. "I'm going to bash the young rascal proper, for trying a man up like this."

"We've noticed this chap a bit too," remarked Blake. "Best thing you can do is to tie him up again."

"Now, then, sharp's the word! Which it is to be?"

The juniors closed round Fur Cap. They could see, by this time, that he was a ruffianly rascal, and they were not disposed to stand on ceremony with him. Fur Cap gave them a surly scowl.

"You let a blake alone!" he snarled. "Where's that rope?"

"It's all right; I'll guide yer!" said Fur Cap, hastily.

"Get a move on, then."

And Fur Cap suddenly got a move on, surrounded by the juniors, wheeling their bicycles.

CHAPTER 7.

Stranded!

TOM MERRY & CO. were feeling pleased with themselves, and things generally, as they started down the shadery lane with Fur Cap in their midst. Under the lead of the great Gussy, they had followed one false scent; but it was certain that they were on the right track at last. The meeting with Fur Cap had been a stroke of luck.

The chums of the School House were fatigued, and growing sleepy; but there was rest and refreshment ahead—at Fagins' camp. And they looked forward to the meeting with their rivals of the road with great joy.

Tom Merry and Blake walked on either side of Fur Cap, keeping a wary eye on him. It was pretty clear that the ruffian's keen desire was to "bash" the caravanners, who had sent him hopping; and the Co. had not the slightest intention of allowing him to carry out this amiable desire. They watched him to see that he did not dodge away in the shadows—and when Fur Cap made a movement to leave the ranks, Tom Merry caught his shoulder.

"Hold on!" he said quietly.

"Let a cove alone!" growled Fur Cap.

"Come along!"

"I wasn't going to mind."

"Well, we'll see that you don't, any way."

Fur Cap grunted savagely, and tramped on, with the watchful juniors round him. It was not only for his use as a guide, but to frustrate his "bashing" schemes, that the juniors were determined to keep the ruffian in their company. Fur Cap was evidently a gentleman who would bear watching.

"Turn to the left 'ere," growled Fur Cap, as the party came to a narrow, dark-looking road high trees.

"Left wheel!" said Tom.

The juniors turned into a narrow, rutty lane, over which the bicycles bumped and clattered. There were thick trees and hedges along the lane, through which the moonlight struggled faintly in patches. From the fields came the sounds of cattle, bleating and "mooring."

"My hat! This is a rocky road, and no mistake!" grunted Blake. "Is there much more of this, Mister Fur Cap?"

"About 'arf a mile."

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry, cheerily. "Why groan?"

"By Jigger! I'm ready for R. too!" snarled Horrie.

"Yass, wathah!"

"Don't run your bike into my back, Gussy!"

"Waddy! Mawwah! I wish you would. The Gem Library, No. 206."

"Come on! Somebody will be rattly about that hedge being burst through, when it's found out!" remarked Lowther. "We don't want to interview the farmer. Guess you stay there and sing a dirge over his trowsers by himself."

"Wait for me, you wretches!" Arthur Augustus scrambled up. Somewhere in the distance a hoarse voice was calling out, and a light flashed. It looked as if the alarm had been given. Tom Merry & Co. mounted their machines, and crept away up the lane—whither they knew not. But it was evidently not anxious to remain there and interview an enraged farmer.

"Here's a road, at any rate!" gasped Tom Merry, as they came to the end of the lane.

The juniors dismounted in the road. Tom looked at his watch. It was past midnight. The road was lonely; not a habitation appeared in sight, and there was not a glimmer of light to be seen. The juniors looked at one another with uneasy looks.

"What a night!" murmured Lowther. "I—I suppose we—we'd better get on to—somewhere!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! I don't believe there's anyway to get on to. I am fearfully sleepy, dear boys."

There was a deep yawn from Blake. "I don't think I could get on much further if there was anywhere to go to," he said. "After all, it's a warm night, and the grass is as dry as toast. Let's rest here till morning."

The suggestion was a very welcome one to the fatigued juniors. Looking for the caravan further was evidently a hopeless task. It was somewhere—and they were somewhere—that was all they knew, and that was a little too vague.

"Good egg!" said Tom. "It gets light early, and we can be up at dawn and very likely find somebody who can tell us about the caravan. It can't be far away, from what Fur Cap told us."

"Might be only a hundred yards!" grunted Blake.

"Or a dozen miles!" said Lowther. "Oh, let's camp out, and blow the caravan!"

"I'm jolly hungry!" remarked Herrie.

"Plenty of grass, if you feel inclined to understudy Nebuchadnezzar!" yawned Monty Lowther. "Otherwise, you'd better take it out in sleep."

"It will be wathah wuff on our clobber!"

"Bless your clobber!"

"Wata!"

There was nothing more to be done. The bicycles were wheeled off the road into the grass, and stacked against a tree. Then the juniors lay down to rest in the grass, and in a few minutes they were sound asleep. But the adventures of that exciting night were not yet over, as they were destined to discover before they had passed long in the arms of Morpheus.

CHAPTER 8.

Peppery.

BORGE FIGGINS yawned. Fatty Wynn, blinking at the dying embers of the camp-fire, was already half-asleep.

Kerr was looking to the horse, to make sure that the animal was secure from wandering during the night.

"Better turn in, I suppose? Yaw-aw-aw!" said Figgins.

Fatty Wynn started out of his doze.

"Eh! Good idea," he said. "I'm ruther sleepy. I say, that was a jolly good supper, Figgis!"

"Tip-top!" yawned Figgins. "Is the gogoo safe, Kerr?"

"Safe as houses," answered Kerr, coming back to the camp-fire. "You fellows ready for bed?"

"What-ho!"

Kerr stamped out the remaining red embers of the fire. Figgins rose and stretched himself.

"It's been a jolly day!" he remarked.

"Yes, rather!"

"I wonder where those School House boundaries are now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hunting for the caravan, unless they've given it up for the night!" chuckled Figgins. "I suppose we'd better sleep in the van. No need to rig up the tent. There's three bunks in the caravan."

"And we'll fasten the door, in case that fur-capped Hun comes back," said Kerr prudently.

"We tied him up pretty well."

"He may have got loose by this time—anybody would untie him that he met on the road. Come on!" said Kerr.

The three New House juniors adjourned to the caravan.

It was a roomy vehicle, and there were three bunks in it, arranged one above another—just, as Figgins remarked, as if Arthur Augustus had specially selected it for them.

The night was warm, and the juniors would have preferred to leave the door open; but Kerr's suggestion was evidently prudent. The little window was sufficient for ventilation. The door was secured, and Figgins & Co. turned in, very sleepy and very contented.

In about a minute they were sound asleep.

Silence lay upon the caravan camp in the glimmer of the moonlight. Figgins & Co. slept peacefully, and dreamed of the old school they had left behind—the tuckshop figuring prominently in Fatty Wynn's dreams.

Kerr was the first to awake.

The Scottish junior was the lightest sleeper of the three, and a slight sound at the door of the caravan was sufficient to rouse him.

He sat up in bed, and bumped his head, and expressed an exclamation. From the bunk above came Figgis' deep breathing, and from the one below the melodious snore of Fatty Wynn. And from the door came the sound of someone trying the handle from outside, and a muttered curse, as the door refused to open.

"Fur Cap!" murmured Kerr.

He slipped quietly from the bunk, and touched Figgins on the head. Figgins started and awoke.

"Gr-r-r!" he murmured. "Wharrrer marrer? 'Tain't rising-bell yet!"

"Shurrup, fathead! There's somebody fumbling at the door!" murmured Kerr.

"I think it's that rotter come back."

"Oh, my hat!"

Figgins sat up quickly.

"Mind your head!"

Bump!

The warning came too late.

"Ow! Ow! Ah! Oh! Yah!" roared Figgins.

"Hallo! What's matter?" came a drowsy voice from below, as Figgins' yell awakened Fatty Wynn. "What the bump!"

"Yaroooooh!" roared Fatty Wynn.

He, too, had sat up rather too quickly. There were drawers in the surrounding, until a fellow got used to the surrounding. Figgins & Co. were finding them out.

A harsh, savage voice was audible outside, as the exclamations of the juniors broke the silence.

"Oh! Awake, are ye, you young

'omds! Open this 'ere door, do you 'ear? I'm going to bash yer."

"Fur Cap!" said Fatty Wynn, as he rubbed his head. "The rotter! He's made me bang my napper."

"I'm jolly well bangin' my napper, the cheeky old!" exclaimed Figgins, scrambling out of the bunk.

"Yooop!"

"Eh—what? What's that up foot's on!"

"Yarook! My nose, you thumping ass! Gerroff!" roared Fatty Wynn.

"Sorry, old chap, I didn't know you were getting out—"

"Ow! Wow!"

"Better get a light!" grinned Kerr.

He groped for his electric lamp, and turned it on. Fatty Wynn was rubbing his head with one hand, and his nose with the other, and he seemed busy. Figgins and Kerr scrambled into their clothes, while the door rattled and shook, and the threatening voice of Fur Cap sounded outside.

"I tell ye, open this 'ere door! I'll limb yer! I'll smash in the thundering thing if you don't open it instanter! You 'ear me!"

"Wait a bit, you rotter!" muttered Figgins.

He sought in the little pantry of the van, and found the rolling-pin. It had not been used hitherto, and Figgins had found a new use for it. It was intended to come into contact with the hard head covered by the fur cap outside. Figgins took a business-like grip on it.

"Now we'll open the door!" he said.

"Wait till I get my bags on," said Fatty Wynn.

"Buck up, then, porpoise!"

Crash!

The caravan shook and shivered, as a terrific concussion came on the door. Fur Cap, outside, was wielding a huge stone.

"My hat! The door won't stand much of that!" said Figgins. "We don't want the van damaged, you chaps. We've got to tackle the brute."

"Get hold of something, Fatty," said Kerr, taking up a frying-pan. "We shall have a tussle."

"Right-ho! I've got a saucepan. If he gets his saucepan on his napper, he won't want it too."

"Ready!" asked Figgins.

"Quite!"

Crash!

There was another concussion on the door. Then a bump, as the heavy stone rolled under the van, escaping from the ruffian's grasp. It was not a light matter to venture out and tackle the hulking ruffian, who was evidently in a savage and revengeful mood, and freed from all restraint by the loneliness of the spot. But Figgins & Co. did not hesitate. It was, in fact, useless to remain in the shelter of the caravan, for the vehicle could certainly not have resisted for long the savage assault from without. It was not built to stand an onslaught of that kind.

Figgins unfastened the door, and threw it open. In the moonlight outside, Fur Cap was seen, his sullen face dark with rage. He uttered an oath as the door opened, and he saw the three juniors.

"Now, then!" he said, between his teeth.

Whiz!

Fatty Wynn's saucepan flew through the air, and smote the ruffian full on his stubby chin.

Fur Cap uttered a fiendish yell, and staggered back.

There was a heavy bludgeon in the ruffian's hand—with which he evidently intended to do serious damage, if he came to close quarters. But that was what Figgins & Co. intended to avoid, if they could.

As the ruffian staggered back, Figgins

leaped from the van, and ran at him, with the rolling-pin uplifted.

"Come on!" he panted.
 Fur Cap nearly fell, but he righted himself, and came at Figgins, the bludgeon sweeping through the air. Figgins dodged back, and warded the blow with his weapon; but the shock sent the rolling-pin flying from his hand.

Kerr rushed in, just in time, hitting out with the frying-pan, and catching Fur Cap on the side of the head. The bludgeon just missed Figgins as Kerr's blow landed.

Whiz!
 Fatty Wynn had another missile in his hand. It was a large pepper-pot. He hurled it with unerring aim, and it struck the ruffian on the nose, as he staggered under the swipe of the frying-pan.

The lid came off the pepper-pot with the concussion, and a flood of pepper swamped over Fur Cap's stubbly face.

There was something like a volcanic eruption from the hapless ruffian.

"Ooooooooh! Atechooooooh! Oooopoh!"
 "Got him!" yelled Fatty Wynn triumphantly.
 "Ooooooooh!"

Figgins was springing for the rolling-pin. He recaptured it, and turned on his enemy; but it was not needed. Fur Cap had dropped his bludgeon, and was staggering drunkenly, with both hands to his face, spluttering and coughing and sneezing frantically.

"Ooooh! Ooooh! Atecho—atecho—choo—choo!"

"He's got the pepper!" grinned Fatty Wynn. "I thought it would fetch him! He's got it!"
 "Atecho—choo—choooh!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr caught up the ruffian's bludgeon. Fur Cap did not even look at him. He was blinded for the moment, and sneezing to such an extent that he hardly knew where he was, or what was happening to him. He gouged at his eyes and nose, and sneezed and spluttered, heedless of the juniors.

Figgins & Co. looked on—ready to huddle him if required; but it was clear that Fur Cap required no more handling. He had come there to make a savage attack on the caravan; but he had had enough already, owing to Fatty Wynn's masterly stroke. The hapless casual was fairly doubled up with volcanic sneezes.

"Atechooh! Ooooh! Atecho—atechooh!"
 "Oh, my hat!" gasped Figgins, and he sneezed, too, as he caught a whiff of the pepper. "Oh dear! Atechooh!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh-wow-wow-wow!" came in tones of anguish from Fur Cap. "Ow! Wow!

Ooooooo! Grooooh! Atecho—atecho—atechooooo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins & Co. This, suddenly, like an echo of their laughter, came a merry shout from the shadow of the trees.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Figgins & Co. spun round.

CHAPTER 9.

Victory!

TOM MERRY awoke suddenly. The captain of the Shell had been sleeping quite comfortably in the thick grass, on the border of the wood by the roadside. The night was warm, almost sultry, and the grass dry and thick. Overhead, the moon glimmered down between leafy branches. Something had awakened the St. Jim's junior, and he sat up, rubbing his eyes, and wondering what it was.

Grass!
 "My hat! What on earth's that?"
 Tom Merry sprang to his feet.

His comrades were awakened now, and they sat up in the grass, rubbing their eyes and blinking.

"Bai Jove! What's that fearful howl?"
 "Bai asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I really trust it is not that howl'd bull a'fah us."

"It's something up the road," said Tom Merry. "Sounds like somebody trying to break in a door."

"There are no houses near here," said Blake.

"Well, there's something doing, that's certain. Sounds like a row going on, further up the road," said Tom.

The School House juniors were all on their feet now, staring in the direction of the startling sounds.

The grassy belt which lay between the roadside and the wood was patched with trees and bushes, which prevented them from seeing more than a dozen yards or so. Beyond the bushes something was going on, to that was certain. They could hear the sounds of conflict.

"Better see what's the matter," said Manners.

"Yess, wathah!"
 "Come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Seven startled juniors ran down the road in the direction of the unseen combat. As they drew nearer the spot they were astonished to hear the sound of terrific sneezing and spluttering. They came round a bunch of willows at a run, and a startling scene burst upon them in the moonlight.

"Our caravan!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Our horse!" stutered Blake.

"Figgins! My hat!"
 "And Fur Cap!"
 "Great Scott!"

Tom Merry & Co. halted, almost petrified with astonishment. There, right under their eyes, were the caravan and the New House raiders. They had settled down for the night within a hundred yards of Figgins & Co.'s camp—all unconscious of its proximity.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "This really does take the cake!"
 "It do-it does!" stutered Blake.
 "Our caravan, by Jove! We've seen it!"

The School House juniors were within a few yards of the enemy; but Figgins & Co. had their backs to them, and had not seen them yet. As for Fur Cap, he was busy with the pepper, and could not see anything.

Figgins & Co.'s yell of laughter came to them, and the chums of the School House burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn turned round as if electrified. They forgot Fur Cap then. The ruffian sneezed and spluttered unheeded. The New House juniors stared blankly at Tom Merry & Co.

"You!" stutered Figgins.

The School House juniors ran forward in great glee.

"Little use!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"We've found you!" grinned Blake.

"Yess, wathah! We've won you down, you fearful boundahs!" chortled Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Kerr.

Figgins & Co. drew together. They had defeated Fur Cap ignominiously; but the noise of the conflict had drawn an enemy to the spot whom they could not hope to defeat. The game was up, as the caravan-raiders realised at once.

"Fairly caught!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We've been hunting for you ever since we left St. Jim's, you rotters! Now we've got you!"
 "And the caravan!" said Blake.

"Yess, wathah!"

Figgins laughed rather ruefully.

"Well, all you've got us!" he said.

"Blessed if I know how you got here!"

"We swacked you down, you know!"

chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Fortunately, these fellows had sense enough to wely on me, and—"

"And you led us on a false scent!" growled Horries.

"Weally, Hewies, you can hardly deny that we have won down these New House boundahs, I presume!" said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"That was Fur Cap's doing, not yours, you ass!" said Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Collar them!" said Monty Lowther.

"Now we've found them we're going to make an example of them!"

"Yess, rather!"

Seven grinning juniors slipped away now, with water streaming from their eyes, still coughing and spluttering unheeded. He went unheeded, the ruffian was not likely to look for his trouble till he had recovered from the pepper, which was likely to be some time yet.

His volcanic sneezes died away in the distance.

"Surrender, you New House bounders!" commanded Tom Merry.

"I—I say, we'll make it pax, if you like!" said Figgins. "You can have your silly old caravan!"

"We're jolly well going to have it!" retorted Tom Merry. "And you're going to have a jolly good ragging!"

"Yess, wathah!"

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"Collar them!" exclaimed Blake.

There was a rush. Figgins & Co. promptly put up their hands; but the odds were too great. Three hapless youths bumped in the grass, and were sat upon and pinned there.

"Hurrah!"

"Victory, dear boys!" shouted Arthur Augustus, sitting on Figgins' head and waving his eyelashes in great excitement. "Victory! Hurrah!"

"Gerroff! Gerroff!" came a muffled sound under Arthur Augustus.

"Wah!"

"Groo! Ow! Gerroff!"

"Victory, dear boys—Yawwooooh!" yelled Arthur Augustus, jumping up suddenly like a jack-in-the-box. "Yoop!"

"What on earth's the matter with you?" exclaimed Blake.

"Yawwoh! I'm bitten! Oooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That foolish wuffian Figgins has bitten me! Ow! Wow! Wow!"

"You should have got off!" gasped Figgins, sitting up dazedly. "Here—leggo—leggo my neck, Blake, you rotter! Oh, my hat!"

"Keep 'em safe!" said Tom Merry, chuckling. "There ought to be some rope in the caravan. We'll give 'em field punishment till morning."

"Yass, wathah! Ow!"

"Hold on!" gasped Kerr, struggling under the weight of Herries and Dig. "Go easy! We give in!"

"You own up you're licked!" demanded Tom Merry.

Kerr gasped.

"There isn't much doubt about it, is there, fathead?" he said. "We could knock out any four or five of you—"

"Buz-zow!"

"But seven's too many, and we own up!"

"Fax it is!" said Tom Merry cheerily.

"Let the bounders get up, you fellows! They're licked to the wide, and the caravan's ours! Hurrah!"

Figgins & Co., dusty and breathless, scrambled to their feet. They looked at one another very ruefully. The captured caravan had been recaptured, and Tom Merry & Co. had come into their own again. But the chums of the New House took their defeat philosophically.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rose to the occasion. He had been bitten, but he was magnanimous.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we have defeated these cheeky bounders, and we captured our caravan. We have demonstrated once more that the School House is back home at St. Jim's—"

"Hear, hear!"

"It is up to us to be generous in the hour of victory," said Arthur Augustus.

"I propose that we invite these cheeky bounders to be our guests for a week, and start them some breakfast when we kick them out in the morning."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's a good offer!" said Figgins, with a grin. "We accept the kind invitation of the most noble and magnificent Aubrey Gustavus, and we'll jolly well get back to bed! As we're your guests, we'll have the bunks in the van—"

"Oh!"

"You are very welcome, dear boys!" said Arthur Augustus.

"All serene!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

And Figgins & Co. returned to the caravan, and the School House juniors camped round it in the grass—in a mood of the most complete satisfaction.

CHAPTER 10.

Bagged Bags!

TOM MERRY & CO. were up with the early summer dawn.

They had started the vacation with some rather trying experiences, but they were feeling very merry and bright as they turned out.

Figgins & Co. accepted the situation good-humouredly.

"Fax" having been declared, the rivals of the road were on quite good terms with one another, and by-gones were allowed to be by-gones.

All the juniors lent a hand at gathering breakfast and building a fire to cook breakfast, Fatty Wynn taking the cooking in hand.

Figgins & Co. had laid in provisions for some days—for three. And the whole supply was drawn upon to furnish breakfast for ten. It was a case of the spoils to the victors.

After breakfast Blake was despatched on his bike to Rylcombe to hire a conveyance there to bring on the School House party's baggage to the camp. The rest of the party remained with the caravan.

Figgins & Co., good-humoured, though a little rueful, packed their bags in the van. A passing waggon gave them a lift to the next town, where they were able to take to the railway.

Their caravanning had been cut suddenly short. But Figgins was not thinking about that.

"We may see you bounders on the road again," he remarked, as the bags were pitched into the waggon. "We're booked to stay at Fatty's place for a couple of weeks. After that, I rather think we shall get a caravan and start on the road. So if you come west, you may fall in with us, and then we'll give you the licking you've been asking for."

"We'll be glad to meet you, and to take all the lickings you can give us!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "If we come across you, Fatty, we shall bag your caravan, I warn you!"

"Yass, wathah! Sauce for the goose, sauce for the gander, you know!"

"Bow-wow!" was Figgins' reply.

And the waggon rolled away with the New House chums.

"Now we're ready to start, when Blake gets back with our traps," remarked Tom Merry. "Wherefore that wrinkle in your noble brow, oh, Gustavus?"

"I have been thinking, Tom Mewwy—"

"What with?" asked Monty Lowther, in surprise.

"Weally, Lowthab—"

"Thinking that it's time to give the horse a rub down?" asked Tom. "Go ahead, Gussy! We'll watch you!"

"I was not thinkin' of rubbin' down the horse, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I was thinkin' of my baggage."

"That's all right. Blake will get a trap or something to bring our bags home."

"Yass, but I was thinkin'—"

"About the bikes! We can roll them along to the next town, and send them home by railway."

"I was not thinkin' about the bikes!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I feath that you are deliberately misunderstandin' me, Tom Mewwy. You are perfectly well wish that my baggage was left at St. Jim's, owing to some wothab lookin' it up in a study when we were startin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see nothin' whatever to laugh at, in that utterly insane treatment of my baggage!" said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"I have not even a bag with me—alab peckin' two trunks!"

"My dear man, there's no room in a caravan for trunks and things."

"I presume that I shall require a change of clobbah occasionally, Tom Mewwy, and at present I have not even an extra pocket-handkerchief!"

"You can have one corner of mine!" suggested Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I regard that suggestion as utterly idiotic, Lowthab. My toppahs have been left at the school. At present I have nothin' but the straw-hat I stand up in!"

"Do you stand up in your straw-hat?" ejaculated Lowther. "Isn't that likely to damage it?"

"I am speakin' figuratively, Lowthab. Now my ideah is—"

"Oh, you have an idea?" asked Tom Merry, in surprise.

"Yass, you ass!"

"Good! This is the second time you've had an idea since you came to St. Jim's. Let's hear it!"

"Pway do not be a funny ass, Tom Mewwy. My ideah is, that we go wound by St. Jim's, and call for my baggage."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I wequish a change of clobbah already. My troushah got feashfully muddy last night in that lowwid ditch. Look at them!" said Arthur Augustus plaintively. "They will have to be sent to the cleanah's. What am I to do while they are gone to the cleanah's?"

"No fig-loves growing about here," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Wah! I insist on goin' wound by St. Jim's and callin' for my baggage. Suppose we were to meet anybody we know?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "Suppose anybody saw me in this wunpled jacket and these muddy troushahs—"

"That's all right; we'll pass you off as a stable-boy we've hired to look after the horse," suggested Lowther.

"Why, you—you—you—" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you do not go wound by St. Jim's, I insist upon your wemainin' hoah, while I cut off on my bike, and I will hire a metab-oh to bring my baggage beach."

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"I refuse to do anythin' of the sort! I have made up my mind!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I refuse to leave this spot without my baggage!"

"Hallo! Here comes Blake!"

A trap drove up, with Blake and the baggage in it. The discussion had to cease, while the bags were transferred to the caravan, and the trap dismissed. Then Arthur Augustus took up the tale again.

"What's the row?" asked Blake.

"I wequish you fellows to wait beach while I bike to St. Jim's and fetch my baggage in a cab—"

"Rate!" said Blake promptly.

"I refuse to stir without it!"

"Blake closed one eye at his comrade, "If Gussy refuses, that settles it," he said. "But you can't show up at St. Jim's in those muddy troushahs, Gussy. Get into the caravan, and chuck 'em out, and we'll clean them for you."

"Bai Jow! That is a very happy thought, Blake."

"I'm the chap for happy thoughts," answered Blake cheerily. "Get a move on, and we'll make the legs look as good as new!"

"Wightho!"

Arthur Augustus hepped into the caravan, and in a few minutes the troussers were handed out. Blake took them.

"I'll brush them, as agreed!" he said. "Must keep an agreement. You follow put the horse to the van while I do 'em."

"But—"

"We're going out, you see!" explained Blake.

"But Gusy—"

"If he likes to go to St. Jim's without his bags, he can, of course. He won't go with them—while I've got them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There was a fair of laughter. Tom Merry & Co. led the horse to the van, and harnessed him. The rattle of the harness brought Arthur Augustus' head out of the window.

"But Juv! What are you fellows up to?" he exclaimed.

"Just starting!" answered Blake.

"But I am going to St. Jim's first!" yelled Arthur Augustus excitedly.

"Your mistake—yours not!"

"Give me my trousseau!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"How-how!"

"Blake, if you do not hand me my trousseau at once, I will give you a fearful thrashing!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Start!" said Blake.

The caravan lurched and jolted through the grass to the road. Tom Merry led the horse, and the other fellows wheeled the bikes. Jack Blake walked with Arthur Augustus' trousseau over his arm, smiling sheepishly.

The caravan door opened, and Arthur Augustus appeared, with a blanket round his middle form.

"Blake, you faithful wretch! Give me my trousseau!"

"How-how!"

"If you do not give me my trousseau,

Blake, I shall wish everythin' and come out for them!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Hallo! Here are some lady cyclists coming up the road!" remarked Lowther.

Bang!

The caravan door shut hurriedly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The caravan rumbled on up the road in the merry summer sunlight, the chosen juniors-whistling as they tramped. On the window came the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arvy, in a tireless stream of eloquence. But the swell of St. Jim's was answered only by choruses from the caravanners.

THE END.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS.

A Special New Serial by the Editor of the Companion Papers.

CHAPTER 5.

Concerning Our Artists.

During the war E. J. Macdonald served as a special officer, and the record of his endeavours would fill three volumes.

The clever "Gem" artist has only recently returned to England, and has not yet resumed work for the "Gem" Library.

For the past four years the Tom Merry stories have been illustrated by a man who stands in the very front rank of artists.

I refer to Warwick Reynolds.

Some of our American friends consider that Mr. Reynolds is the finest black-and-white artist in this country.

We are, indeed, fortunate in securing the services of such a genius, whose fame chiefly rests upon his wonderful illustrations to the nature stories of F. St. Mars.

Mr. Warwick Reynolds lives and works in Glasgow, and his friendship with the Editor is one of long standing.

E. E. Britton is an artist who, although most of his work is done for other periodicals, has occasionally stepped into the breach and illustrated a "Gem" story.

I may say, quite frankly, that we have been only too glad to avail ourselves of Mr. Britton's services.

Something owing to circumstances, the regular "Gem" artist cannot keep up-to-date with his work; and it is on these occasions that Mr. Britton's aid is invaluable.

The artist in question lives at Ceterham, in Surrey, and he, too, has seen plenty of active service in the late war.

Philip Hayward has often come to the same way with "Magnet" sketches, in the same way as Mr. Briscoe has for the "Gem."

Mr. Hayward may now be numbered amongst our most valued contributors.

Who does not remember his wonderful coloured covers for our double numbers? They were indeed works of art.

In addition, Mr. Hayward has executed innumerable business and trade-cards, besides doing gracefully the whole of the artistic work for the "Geographical Herald" during its all too brief career as a halfpenny paper. Mr. Hayward lives at Croydon.

In the days—no, rather, nights—of the Empire ruled, the thoroughness in which he drew contained severe damage.

Happily, Mr. Hayward escaped without injury.

It would be impossible, in this brief summary, to give anything like a complete list of all the artists who have worked for the "Magnet" and for our coloured comic paper, "Chuckles."

From the host of names which leap to my

mind, I may mention at random the following:

Tom Wilkinson, G. W. Wakefield, J. A. Cummings, J. MacWilliam, Leonard Shiple, G. M. Dodson, Harry Lane, S. Price, Lewis K. Higgins, Val Rowley, Peter Fraser, H. K. Lewis, Ernest Wild, E. O'Neill, and Ernest Wilkinson.

These, and many others, by their untiring energy, have helped materially to shape the fortunes of the Companion Paper.

Many are still going strong; but several, alas! have passed from us to their prime.

Only this year we have lost Lewis E. Higgins and J. Abney Cummings. The former controlled "Chuckles," under my supervision, and the latter was the illustrator of the famous Jack, Sam, and Pete stories.

Lewis Higgins was a man who, though bearing a constant burden of ill-health, for which the world made no allowance, was always merry and bright.

He was a good Editor, and one of the best cartoonists of his generation.

Following upon the death of Mr. Higgins came the tragic news that J. A. Cummings had suddenly been taken from us.

Mr. Cummings lived at Paignton, Devonshire.

He was a very good fellow, and his name will always be bracketed with that of S. Clarke Hook as a partner in the creation of Jack, Sam, and Pete.

It is a very curious thing, but I have never yet "discovered" any of our artists amongst readers of the Companion Papers, as is the case with certain authors.

True, hundreds of readers have submitted pen-and-ink sketches for my consideration; but in practically every case the work thus submitted has not been of a sufficiently high standard for publication.

A reader once sent in an excellent sketch of Billy Bunter, but as he demanded a fabulous price for it, and insisted upon immediate publication, there was nothing doing! It is a mistake to suppose that an Editor and his business manager are contentless, however unscrupulous the latter may be.

I should like to state, here and now, that I am always pleased to consider any sketches submitted to me, provided they are not accompanied by blistering demands that I see them forthwith.

There are not the many smiling artists amongst my vast circle of readers; and it is quite on the card that I may one day discover a Warwick Reynolds or a Macdonald amongst them.

Who knows?

CHAPTER 6.

Stories which have Made History.

WHICH is the finest story of Geoffrey or St. Jim's ever written? This is a question which is frequently asked; and it is far from easy to give an answer.

Such a galaxy of splendid stories has appeared in the "Magnet" and the "Gem," that it is a question which is impossible to single out one particular story as a masterpiece.

Then, again, what one fellow considers the best story would be lightly esteemed by another. The tastes of my readers are so diverse and varied that it is impossible to please everybody.

Roughly speaking, the stories in the "Magnet" and the "Gem" may be divided into three categories, as follows:

- (1) Comedy.
- (2) Drama.
- (3) Sport.

To one lot, the comic story makes the most forcible appeal. Another prefers stories of the dramatic type, of which a good example is afforded by Martin Clifton's famous "Tales" series.

Others, again, place the sports story first; and it is an element of comedy is blended with the rest, as much the better. There has been a great revival of sport since the war; and the sports story, which editors used to light shy of, is now in great demand.

The popularity of a story can be gauged by two factors: (a) the circulation of the issue in which it appears; and (b) the number of complimentary letters from readers.

Nothing is more helpful to an editor than his readers' letters and opinions. They guide him in his task of selecting new stories; they show him the type of man which is popular, and the type which is less appreciated.

Some years have elapsed since this story appeared in the Companion Papers, I think I may safely say that very few have read "Jack."

The story which brought in the greatest number of congratulatory letters was "The Boy Without a Name," by Frank Richards. Some years have elapsed since this story appeared; but I shall never forget the enormous sensation it created. From all over this country and the Colonies, letters streamed in for weeks and months after the story was published.

Encouraged and encouraged by this success, Mr. Frank Richards wrote, "School and Sport"—another winner. In order to write "School and Sport," Mr. Frank Richards surrendered his usual summer holiday. He remained in his study, hard at work, for a

fortnight; and we were again besieged by glowing tributes.

"Rivals and Chums" followed, and also made a big hit, so much so that in every future story which Mr. Frank Richards wrote for the "Boys' Friend" Library was sure of a rousing reception.

No far as the "Magnet" stories are concerned, there have been so many masterpieces that it would be impossible in the limits of these Recollections to refer to all the best. But among them may be mentioned those dramatic yarns in which the Famous Five were sacked from the school in turn—*"The Sunlight," "The Boy Who Wasn't," "The Boulder,"* Bob Cherry conducted a bar-room out in the old tower, where his expelled comrades joined him; and there the Famous Five remained until their honour was vindicated, and the Boulder's diabolical plot exposed.

A Schoolboy's Crossroads, which appeared in 1911, told how Mark Linley, the Lancashire lad, came face to face with a terrible temptation. I will quote Mr. Frank Richards' own words:

"Mark Linley was at the crossroads—the crossroads of life. Upon his decision rested all that mattered to him—upon it depended whether he should go through life with his head erect, fearing to look no man in the face, or whether he should sink through it with drooping head and slumped look—a thief, fit for no honest man to touch."

Needless to relate, Mark Linley fought down the temptation, and be emerged from the ordeal with hands clean, and conscience unspotted.

Shortly after this powerfully-written story came another, which takes a very high place among "Magnet" stories. It was entitled, "Driven to the Wall" and described how Dick Russell showed himself, for a short time, to abandon the path of honour. But Russell's fall was not permanent; and toward the end of the story he showed up quite well.

Some time later, there appeared a story entitled "The Fellow Who Won" which recounted how Dick Russell went up to Abercorn and was the light-weight champion. Significantly, it was a real gem concerning Russell's ability with the gloves. He may not be the best boxer in the Greysfriars Remove—in fact, Bob Cherry is really the better man of the two—but Russell can always be counted upon to put up a plucky fight, even when the odds are heavily against him.

Dick Fenfold, the cobbler's son, made his appearance in a story entitled, "By Sheer Wits." Vernon-Smith was down on the new boy from the South, but Fenfold came to respect Fenfold as a sterling fellow.

The year 1911 was a noteworthy one in the history of the "Magnet" Library. The Christmas Number of that year contained a story which created a tremendous sensation. The title of the story was "Wingate's Folly." The captain of Greysfriars fancied himself in love—as fellows of Wingate's age frequently do. Fortunately, Wingate had the common-sense to fell out again—though not so certainly that Barton & Co. had taken up a strong line of action.

Reference must be made to that fascinating series of stories in which Vernon-Smith disputed with Wharton the position of Form captain. Wharton came through with flying colours at the finish; but the Boulder had given him many anxious moments.

Occasionally Mr. Frank Richards has given us stories dealing chiefly with fellows in the Sixth Form; and quite the best "senior" story he has written was, "A Very Gallant Gentleman"—a comparatively recent story, but one which will stand the test of time.

In this story Arthur Courtney met his death under very gallant circumstances. He died as we all would die—for another. In saving the life of the worthless Valence, he lost his own. And it is certain that a Very Gallant Gentleman will outlive all the comic stories which have appeared in our papers.

And what of Mr. Martin Clifford?

He, too, has produced stories which have won him a place in the very front rank of boys' writers.

Mention has already been made of the

The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are:
THE MAGNET, THE BOYS' FRIEND, THE GEM, THE PERRY POPULAR, SNEEDLES, Every Monday, Every Monday, Every Wed, Every Friday, Every Friday, Every Friday.

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS GLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.

For Next Wednesday:

"ON THE KING'S HIGHWAY."

By Martin Clifford.

My chums will be delighted to know that our next story will deal with the further adventures of Tom Merry & Co. on their caravan tour through England.

Arthur Warriner D'Arcy leads his companions a rare dance; but need not, I say, the juniors of St. Jim's score in the long run. Order your copy of the "Gem" Library in advance. It is the only sure way of making certain of your copy.

A JOLLY LETTER FROM WILTSHIRE

A real cheer-up letter about things in general reached me the other day from Warminster. It was not a communication of the as-it-is-leave-it-present type, any more than it was a complaining letter, one of those whose motto is:

"And the burden of my song,
 Is juke we got the things all wrong."

My correspondent lives in a delightful part of Old England, and he is well aware of the fact. Lots of people who live amidst beautiful surroundings never trouble even to look at the scenery, for all the good it does them, they might as well live in the dingiest, dreariest, most disagreeable mix-up of bricks and mortar which the builder could contrive. My friend is vastly pleased about the "Annual" and surrounding things of others—and then, after making a survey of the Companion Papers, which, by the way, come out all right, he plunges into history and industrial progress and what not. Warminster, like many another town, has made tremendous strides since the war. The stirring times brought the old town a rush of work, and though it lost some of its picturesque, for many of the old trees in the parks had to go under the axe, still that was inevitable. And this brings me to King Alfred the Great and Godfrey King Alfred did a considerable bit of fighting in this part of the world, and scored better than he did over cake-mixing, which pursuit was never really his forte at all; so what could you expect but a blazon? Of course, at the time of writing, the lack of rain is being felt in Wiltshire just as elsewhere, but the day will come—and the rain! I am very much obliged to my Warminster chum for his thoroughly interesting letter, which was just what a letter should be. It contained facts and useful ideas.

THE MODERN GIRL.

There is no critic like a girl. She is astute and very observing, and sometimes her keenest prompts her to be just a trifle exact in her strictures, especially when it is a question of what her sisters are doing in fashion or in real life. Now, of course, there are girls and girls, and then more girls, and they are all vastly different, which is really an excellent thing for it lends variety. But what some of my girl-chums take the gravest exception to is the costume of Doris Levison and cousin Ethel, and the other girl characters in the *Jarvis*. They are said to wear old-fashioned clothes; but that is hardly the fault of the artist, since fashions change so swiftly that a dress which was in the latest style when the picture was started would very likely be accounted quite old-fashioned before the ink of art was rubbed. You can never tell about those matters. There is another thing, too. It appears, according to the writer of one sparkling letter which I received the other day, that Doris Levison weeps when she goes to school, and that the young lady in question is not at all modern in her way of looking at things. I appreciate such criticisms, for they show such a splendid interest in the tales; but, at the same time, I

cannot say that they are quite in accord with facts. There are always tremendous distinctions between girls, and because one character does not represent the very newest way of accepting life, that is not to say she is out of date. She, in her quiet way, is wanted just as much as her more active sister who mirrors the more brilliant style of walking through the world. I am told that Doris is a poor, weak creature! She is "worny"! But, as stated, there are all types in the world, and Doris has many admirers, notwithstanding her alleged shortcomings.

AGAIN THE "ANNUAL."

A friend down in Surrey is afraid the forthcoming volume will sell out before he gets a chance of buying a copy. Not a bit of it. There will be a rush, I know, and book-cakes, as quick-selling items, will not really be in it along with the "Annual," "Annual" 1, Hot Cakes 2—and the rest nowhere! But, all the same, my chums all over the country and beyond will be in the know, and have full time in which to place their orders. I will attend to that point.

A BRITISH HERO.

It is good to know that Captain Fratt, the hero who died for England, and who has left a grand and inspiring memory to light others down the rough road of life, is to be given the tribute his splendid record deserves. As in the case of Nurse Cavell, so will the great woman be honoured. It may be said that it does not matter now that the captain has been rung down, or up. It was the life, the thought of what he did. But, anyway, it is good to try and do honour, even where honour and credit are there to overflowing, as here. Where a hero falls is sacred ground.

"Under the wide and starry sky,
 Dig the grave and let me lie.
 Glad did I live and gladly die,
 And I'll sleep down with a will."

"This be the verse you grave for me,
 Here be lies where be longed to be;
 Home is the sailor home from the sea,
 And the hunter home from the hill."

The poet who wrote that had the heart and mystery of the old world and of life in his soul, and we can take our hats off to the ring of it and its tenderness and truth!

H. A. H.
 (Your Editor.)

NOTICES.

Correspondence, etc., Wanted.
 Back Numbers.

Victor L. Harding, Tedburn, Richmond Road, Swanage, Dorset—"Magnets," 484, 498, 500, 501, 503, 504, 505, 522; "Gem," 576; 2d. each offered. Must be clean. Write first.

Harold Kew, 12, Moorland Road, Scarborough—"Gem," 502, 503, 506, 507.

G. Irwin, 126, Sussex Street, Brighton, Sussex—"Gem" and "Magnets" better 359 thankfully received.

J. C. Llewellyn, Sheffield Park, near Penzance, Cornwall—"Magnets" 513-519; also 571.

W. D. Walter, 70, High Street, Hiram, Glam. South Wales—"Bob Cherry's Barring Out," "Piggins' Fig Pudding"; also the double numbers of 1915 and 1916. 1d. for clean copies. Write first.

F. J. Massard, 50, Chaucer Road, Walthamstow, E. 17—"Bob Cherry's Barring Out," "Split in the Sixth"; also 25, 24, 25, and "School and Sport." 1d. each; clean. Write first.

E. L. Burnett, 3666, St. James Street, Montreal, Canada—No. 1 "Perry Popular," new series; 6d. offered. Also "Magnets" and "Gems," 1-200; 1/2d. each.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

(Continued from page 15.)

Talbot stories) and the three yarns entitled "The Call of the Past"—"Cut Out From the Past" and "Loyal to the Last" would in themselves have been sufficient to establish Martin Clifford's reputation.

But the "Gem" author's fame does not stop there. And he not least Tom Sherry, Arthur Squibbs, or Kaye, and Ralph Buckton. Clifford is known to me through all the popular No. 2 gem vignettes?

I should like to describe in detail some of the fine characters which have been worked around these vignettes, but space forbids.

And here let me say a few words concerning Mr. Owen Conquest, a young author who appeared on the scene when Messrs. Richards and Clifford were quite vigorous, so far as their output of stories was concerned.

And here let me say a few words concerning Mr. Owen Conquest, a young author who appeared on the scene when Messrs. Richards and Clifford were quite vigorous, so far as their output of stories was concerned. I am not giving Mr. Conquest a chapter in his life, however, being a man who prefers to keep out of the limelight, he has recent for nothing, and he is waiting for me on a dark night with a lantern. Besides, I am not quite so intimate with the life and habits of Mr. Conquest as I am with those of his colleagues.

The "Gem" friends in author appears and disappears in a most amazing manner. He comes and goes like a spirit—no man knows when or where.

One day, when I am sitting lonely around a table, and the editor of the "Gem" sends me a copy of the "Gem" with a story by Owen Conquest, I am not a little surprised to find that the story is by Owen Conquest, I am not a little surprised to find that the story is by Owen Conquest, I am not a little surprised to find that the story is by Owen Conquest.

Owen Conquest is never dull. Whatever his topic appears beneath the title of a story, you may take it for granted that the story will be an exciting one. His yarns of the barroom, out at Brookwood have been voted the best of their kind.

Mr. Jim's has a School House and a New House at Brookwood, has a Church and a Modern Hall. And great is the rivalry between Jimmy Silver & Co., of the former, and Tommy Dandy & Co., of the latter.

Mr. Conquest's stories are full of life and sparkling over with humor. And I am not a little surprised to find that the story is by Owen Conquest, I am not a little surprised to find that the story is by Owen Conquest, I am not a little surprised to find that the story is by Owen Conquest.

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Owen Conquest is a tall man, fairly good-looking (I have to say this, or he will probably not come up to the scratch with next week's story), and, like his colleagues, he is unimpaired. He is fond of quoting his favorite observation that "a man that's married is a man that's married," though it need not be deduced from this that he is a woman-hater.

He types his own stories, after writing them in longhand first.

"I don't believe in being lazy," he told me once. "When I've been writing Jimmy Silver stories without a break for twenty years or so, I may be able to indulge in a secretary or a stenographer, but not yet."

And how does Mr. Conquest type his own stories, you will ask, if he is hardly ever at home?

The secret is this: Mr. Conquest possesses a modest typewriter, which finds its use in a room, and which he is never without. This he can type in a railway-train, by the roadside—anywhere, in fact. But he doesn't believe in using his machine when staying at an hotel or a boarding-house. Once, when using his typewriter late at night, in an hotel overlooking the sea at Margate, his room was invaded, and the ignorant "books" at the hotel seized him of typing out wireless messages to the Home! Mr. Conquest replied to this accusation in a very forcible manner; but it was not until dawn that the excitement died down, and, meanwhile, his story remained undisturbed!

So much for Mr. Conquest, and his work in the "Gem" chapter I shall have something to say concerning some of the letters—letters of advice and observation—which have reached me during my editorship of the Companion Papers. Most of my readers will, I feel sure, turn to this chapter with a sense of anxiety. I can assure them that some of the letters will be decidedly novel.

(To be continued next Wednesday.)

Mr. Conquest is never dull. Whatever his topic appears beneath the title of a story, you may take it for granted that the story will be an exciting one. His yarns of the barroom, out at Brookwood have been voted the best of their kind.

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Greyfriars Epitaphs.

No. 10. By BOB CHERRY.

BENEATH THIS SPOT,

DEAF TO THE CLAMOR OF THE WORLD,

LIES

TOM DUTTON,

who, though not hard of heart, was slightly hard of hearing.

HE DEPARTED THIS LIFE

in a hasty and undignified manner, though failing to hear the hoof of a mule-horn at close quarters.

At Greyfriars he was the wretched and despicable of Study No. 7. When spoken to he looked sad, when shouted at, he regarded the speaker with a stammer; when followed he stepped the bellows in speech documents which disappeared, but notwithstanding the remarks of the stammerer, with the result that Study No. 7 glowered in.

BLACK EYES, SWOLLEN NOSES, AND

PUNCTURED EARS,

His last words—ere he became hopelessly mixed up with the spare parts of the motor—were:

"IT'S ALL RIGHT—I'M SOY DEAF!"

In his lifetime he was a useful fighting man and an expert at games; nevertheless, he never tried the patience of Peter Todd, who was worst in explanation.

A NEIGHBORHOOD MY KINGDOM FOR A

NEIGHBORHOOD.

We had little to read with the wretched man, giving that even the mightiest orthopedic will fail to please him.

"He'll never rise up from this mound, His schoolmates sadly fear, For when the final trumpet sound Tom Dutton will not hear!"

The World in
Maps & Pictures

It would take you years and years - I could like to see an atlas, but if you buy Harmsworth's NEW ATLAS regularly you can find out all about them in a very short time.

HARMSWORTH'S
NEW ATLAS

Published in fortnightly parts, containing 4,000 photographic views, and over 400 maps, plans, and charts. It is the only Atlas compiled since the beginning of the Great War. Parts 1 and 2 are NOW ON SALE. Price 10s.