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THE NATURALIST OF ST. JIM'S.



BATCHER'S NOCTURNAL VISITORS!

A Startling Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers.
Address: Editor, The "Gem," The Fleetsway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

FROM THE FAR SOUTH.

It is a matter of regret with me very often indeed that I cannot give space in the Companion Papers to many subjects with which I am asked to deal. It is this way. People realise how tremendous is the circulation of the GEM, the "Magnet," and their fellow weeklies, and they send me paragraphs and hope that I will put them in.

For months past I have been receiving little articles about Queensland and the aboriginal natives in that part of Australia. There was an article about the sponge deposits on the Great Barrier Reef of Queensland. It is simply wonderful the work the Australian Government is doing in the way of scientific research. While as regards the natives of the northern territories, the utmost is done to make them come into civilisation, though in many cases the results must necessarily be poor, for the Australian native is so wild, so remote from all chance of betterment that all that can be achieved is to see that the children have as many advantages as possible, and that the race is not allowed to run short of food. If my papers were big dailies, I should be glad to give hospitality to such splendid accounts as those to which I have referred.

A SCHOOL DAILY.

The above remark made me think of what might be. I see no special reason why not—in the way of a daily paper which should be devoted to school news—to all the schools in the country. What they are doing in the way of sports, something about their amateur magazines, and with a rare lot of fiction and new-way items besides, of course, for it is all nonsense to think that boys do not take a keen interest in what is happening in the big world.

THE ARMY OF THE RHINE.

Some time since in one of the Companion Papers I printed a letter from a soldier of the Army of the Rhine. The writer spoke of the really excellent time he was having, of the entertainments organised for the pleasure of himself and his comrades, and so forth.

Since that communication appeared, other letters have dropped in assuring me that the first correspondent was mistaken. Sorry, I am sure, but anyway, he was having happy days, and he could not have been quite alone.

Of course, some fellows do not think all couleur de rose—others do not. There's the difference. Some people look at the world through a black gauze, as it were, and get a poor impression of life.

"There is nothing to do but go to bed after tea," says one writer. But he is not exactly grouching, and he hopes great things for the Companion Papers, which he dubs sporting.

I am much obliged, and I hope next time he feels dull and lonely he will find

a story about the cheery Bunter to read before he turns in, even if the theatre is not right handy. This much we do know—namely, that the military authorities are doing their best to make the sojourn in dreary old misled Germany as merry as possible to the brave chaps who are on guard, seeing that Jerry does not get up to any more mischief.

TAKEN TO TASK.

A reader assures me that I have got the age and height of Kildare all wrong. He also feels that Tom Merry has been wrongly described. He says a lot more things in the same strain, and, will you believe me, I had a hearty laugh when I read his punctilious note, for actually the writer seemed to know more about everything concerning the characters than Mr. Martin Clifford himself.

This is what the French call being plus voyaliste que le roi—more royalist than the King, and it is a bit funny, if you come to think of it, for, after all, Mr. Martin Clifford originated the characters, called them up out of nothing, and gave them such an air of reality as is apt to deceive folks. Often enough I am asked whether everybody in the yarns is real. I am ashamed to say I overlooked this question in a recent letter, and it was never answered; but I hope my inquiry will see this paragraph and find his reply in it.

And yet scores—ay, hundreds of fiction characters do live. They live in the stories and in the memories of readers. Here is where the author has his well-merited triumph.

GETTING A JOB.

Not so easy, is it? And yet it has its simple side. It may be no use seeking in a small radius for a certain category of berth, but the enterprising fellow looks further afield, and then has a full parade of his own qualifications just to see what he really could do at a pinch. And a man has reason to be surprised at his own versatility on such occasions.

I read the other day of a demobbed officer who failed to secure a post in the City. He could manage a typewriter, but he did not know shorthand. He could drive a car, too, but only knew enough of the mechanism to look after trivial running repairs. Of course, it was the lack of shorthand that made him miss the world an employer cannot take a fellow who has not got the goods. It is like asking a housewife to engage a cook who had never as much as seen a frying-pan or a saucepan.

Now, let's see what my correspondent says after thanking me for the letter which went to him. He gave up a good job, and enlisted although his age was not right. He says that was foolish. It was not. It just shows him to be of an heroic mould. Now, without a doubt there will be work for everybody before long. Not necessarily clerks.

Crowds of young chaps would despise clerkships. They would rather have one of the shirt-steeve jobs in the engineering world—jobs which lead to far more than most clerkships ever can do. Much obliged to my chum for the good things he says, and the wishes he sends from the delightful old town of Malmesbury!

SHORTHAND.

Perhaps this has nothing really to do with the Companion Papers. I said perhaps: Whichever way it is, without a doubt it touches the interests of a myriad of my readers. I was asked only to-day to give a series of articles on stenography in the "Boys' Friend." I am unable to do that, but I would say this, that it is worth any fellow's while to learn the rudiments of the art. Once he has the beginnings he will go on.

There is a fascination about shorthand. I write Pitman myself, and have found the system extremely useful for years past. It is not a difficult business to get hold of phonography.

Get a manual, and put yourself in the way of mastering the simplest words. Think in shorthand. It comes easy enough after a bit. We all think in words, you know. A thought is a strange, grey, vague thing unless it has a number of letters of the alphabet to take care of it and see that it comes to no harm. Well it is the same idea with shorthand. You speak of a chair, and you immediately in your mind's eye see the word "chair." No reason at all why you should not see the shorthand outline for chair. It is a very simple, neat little outline which can be made in such a small fraction of a second that the time hardly counts.

Shorthand is useful at all seasons. It is not just a question of taking down speeches. Learn shorthand and you can jot down things in next to no time, and with less trouble, in the train, or as you are walking along. And think how pleased an employer is when he finds he can reel off a few instructions to a chap who has them down in readable shorthand almost as the words are uttered.

Wherever a man is—at sea, in foreign lands, in an engineering shop at home, he will find shorthand useful. It gives him a certain command of things. It eases his routine work. It does for putting down favourite bits he fancies in books. It is a tremendous aid to the memory, and it opens the door to other branches of study—it really does, for the shorthand writer has the power in his pocket—or, anyhow, in his fountain-pen—to set down certain points of a lecture, in case remembrance plays him false, as remembrance has a tricky way of doing.

Your Editor

THE NATURALIST OF ST. JIM'S

A Magnificent Long Complete Story dealing with the Adventures of Tom Merry and Co., of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER 1.

Something New in New Boys.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his famous monocle in his eye, and stared hard before him.

Gussy was standing on the School House steps, and his chums, Blake, Herries, and Digby, were just behind him.

A figure had entered the gates of St. Jim's, and was approaching along the drive, bearing a large brown bag.

"Bai Jove!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby turned and looked at their noble chum.

"What are you bleating at, Gustavus?" inquired Blake.

"Deah me!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "I say, deah boys, just look at this fellah comin' across heah. Good gracious!"

The chums of the Fourth looked. As their eyes lighted upon the stranger within their gates, the eyes of Jack Blake & Co. opened wide with surprise.

"My only sainted topper!" exclaimed Blake. "Wh-what on earth is it?"

"Gug-good lor!" gasped Herries. "Am-am I dreaming?"

"It can't be real!" murmured Digby faintly.

The chums of Study No. 6 gazed blankly at the newcomer.

They were amazed.

The object of their regard was a tall, weedy youth, whose face was long, and whose forehead was broad. His nose also was a very large size in noses, and upon it was perched a pair of extremely huge horn-rimmed spectacles. From behind the spectacles a pair of eyes peered forth, and in those pale blue orbs there was a vacant far-away expression.

This strange youth's ears stuck out so far that it seemed that the slouched tribly hat he wore rested on them. From beneath this hat a mop of lank, straggly hair bulged forth in great profusion.

He was attired in tweed garments, consisting mainly of a loosely-fitting Norfolk jacket, and a pair of extremely baggy knickerbockers. Beneath his chin he wore a large black bow, the folds of which

fluttered in the breeze. His long, thin legs were garbed in heather-coloured stockings, and upon his feet were a pair of large brown brogue shoes.

Altogether, the youth who presented himself unto the startled gaze of Jack Blake & Co. was the queerest fellow they had ever set eyes on. They gazed at him in bewilderment, and gazed yet again, until the full significance of the stranger's appearance had quite sunk in.

The stranger ambled up, and just behind him, the startled Fourth-Formers became aware of Taggles, the school porter, staggering under the weight of innumerable bags and boxes.

The blue-eyed fellow in horn-rimmed spectacles halted at the base of the steps, set down his bag, and blinked at the Fourth-Form juniors.

"Ahem!" he coughed.

Jack Blake seemed to awake from the midst of a brown study. He clasped Digby's arm, gazing meanwhile at the stranger.

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "Is—is it alive?"

"Ahem!" coughed the stranger again. "I—I s-s-say!"

Blake turned to his chums with a ray of enlightenment upon his face.

"It—it talks! It is alive!" he ejaculated. "Oh, my aunt!"

Herries and Digby grinned, whilst Arthur Augustus D'Arcy regarded the stranger in astonishment through his monocle.

"I—I say," said Blake, addressing the weedy youth with the long hair and huge spectacles. "Who the merry dickens are you?"

"I—I—I—I—" stammered the stranger, rolling his eyes.

"Eh?"

"I am Th.The.The—"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Blake, gazing blankly at the stammering youth before him. "What on earth is the matter with him?"

The stranger's face was contorting itself into all manner of weird and wonderful shapes. He rolled his eyes, and seemed to have some difficulty in speaking.

"The-The-Theodore!" spluttered the newcomer, with a violent effort, and a

grotesque contortion that involved every feature on his face.

"Theodore!" murmured Blake. "Oh, so your name is Theodore?"

The weedy youth nodded vigorously, and screwed his visage up in another effort to articulate.

"Theodore who?" demanded Herries. "Anything else?"

"B-B-B-Bat—Bat-cher!"

"B-cher!" gasped the other.

"Bai Jove! Theodore Batches, deah boys!" chirruped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I am afraid the poor chap stuttahs, y'know."

"Stutters!" exclaimed Blake. "I should jolly well think he did!"

Theodore Batcher's face relaxed once more into the normal, and his pale blue eyes once more took on that vacant look.

Taggles, just behind, was gasping.

The heroes of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's stared at Theodore Batcher in amazement.

The like of him they had never seen before.

Just then three other fellows ambled up, and paused on the bottom of the steps to regard the stranger.

They were Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners, of the Shell.

The Terrible Three regarded Theodore Batcher, and blinked in astonishment.

Monty Lowther shaded his eyes, and grasped Tom Merry's shoulder for support.

"Help!" he murmured in a faint voice. "I'm going dotty. I'm seeing things!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Blake," said the captain of the Shell in perplexity. "Who is this merry merchant?"

"Theodore Batcher!" replied Blake, grinning. "For further information, apply to Batchesy."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Monty Lowther, looking Theodore Batcher up and down. "Where the thump did you come from—the Zoo?"

To the amazement of all, Theodore Batcher nodded his head vigorously, and smiled.

"Y-y-yes," he said, rolling his eyes. "I—I have j-just t-travelled d-down f-from Regent's P-Park. Muni-muni—"

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father has sent me to th-this sus-school."

"Whew!" whistled Tom Merry, opening wide his eyes. "So you are a new Johnny."

Theodore Batchelor nodded again, and grinned wondrously.

"Well, my word!" exclaimed Blake. "What's this school coming to, I wonder? This merry joker has just come from the Zoo—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. "I expect they'll put him in the Fourth—or else in the New House!"

Blake looked anxiously at Batchelor.

"Look here, Batches," he said gruffly. "Are you pulling our legs, or what? What do you mean by saying you've just come from the Zoo? Do you—or did you—live there?"

"Y-y-yes," replied Theodore, blinking at the assembled juniors. "Mum-my father lives there, too."

"Oh, crickey!" gurgled Monty Lowther. "What's your father, Batches?"

"Mum-my fit-father is the P-P-Professor C-C-Cornelius Bbb-Batches," replied Theodore, with a ray of something like pride lighting up his vacant blue orbs. "He—he is a g-g-great authority on t-t-tittlesbats."

"Professor Cornelius Batches!" murmured Monty Lowther wonderingly.

"A great authority on tittlesbats!" gurgled Blake. "My hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners. "I expect he means his pater is a professor at the Zoo—is that it?"

"Y-yes," replied Theodore Batchelor beaming. "W-we l-l-live in R-R-Regent's Park."

"Oh!"

The St. Jim's juniors gazed blankly at this school-fellow of theirs.

His speech, his manner, his strange apparel, simply took their breath away.

"Well!" said Tom Merry at last. "You are a queer specimen, I must say! Any idea what form you are going in?"

"The F-F-fourth!" said Theodore, rolling his eyes.

A chorus of dismay arose from the chums of Study No. 6.

"The Fourth!" howled Blake. "Oh, crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled the captain of the Shell. "You'd better take him into Latham, Blake! Good-bye, old scout!"

As the Terrible Threes ambled away chuckling, Jack Blake & Co. regarded Theodore Batchelor with feelings too deep for words.

"I—I say," stammered Blake. "Are you going into the New House or the School House, Batches?"

"The Sus-School House, I b-believe," replied Batchelor, beaming.

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, crickey!"

Jack Blake & Co. did not seem best pleased with this latest acquisition to the Fourth.

"B-b-but look at his clobber!" gasped Herries. "Fancy coming to St. Jim's in that merry rig-out!"

"Good Gracious!" exclaimed D'Arcy, regarding the knickerbocker suit and trimly hat of Theodore in horror.

"Haven't you any Etons, deah boy?"

Theodore Batchelor shook his head.

"Oh, my bonnet!" groaned Blake.

"Here's a giddy game!" You'd better take him up, and rig him out in some of your clobber, Gussy. We can't allow him to see Latham in that merry get-up!"

"No, wathah not," said the swell of St. Jim's emphatically. "Come on, Batches, deah boy. I'll wig you out in some respectable clobber."

"Look ere!" bellowed Taggles, making himself heard for the first time. "I've waited long enough! What I say is this

ere—wot an I to do with these boxes?"

"Oh, take 'em up to the Fourth Form dormitory, Luggy!" said Blake. "Shove 'em anywhere!"

The chums of Study No. 6, with Theodore Batchelor in their midst, made their way indoors.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took hold of Theodore's arm.

"Come up to the dorm, deah boy," he said. "I'll let you have some of my clobber."

"Th-thank you, mum-my dear fellow!" stammered Theodore Batchelor.

Blake, Herries, and Digby walked away to Study No. 6, and Gussy was left to pilot the extraordinary new boy upstairs.

Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners were standing at the foot of the stairs, in company with Talbot and Harry Noble.

"Hallo! Here he is!" grinned Monty Lowther. "I see Gussy's taken the new specimen under his wing. Good old Gustavus!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stared frigidly at the chuckling Shell juniors as he passed. He still had hold of Theodore's arm.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy," he said loftily. "I fail to see any cause wathawah for wibald mewwiment! You are all silly clumps!"

"Thanks, Gus, old bean!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Are you just taking it up to label it, Gustavus?" inquired Monty Lowther sweetly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I regard you as an ass, Lowthah!" said Gussy, with an air of d-d-dignity.

"Come on, Batches, deah boy!"

And the Hon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with his nose high in the air, piloted his protegee upstairs.

He left the heroes of the Shell chuckling.

Arriving in the Fourth Form dormitory, Arthur Augustus went over to his box and proceeded to sort out some of his spare clothing.

It was, as Blake had intimated, impossible to allow Theodore to appear in public in his present outrageous apparel.

Taggles had already deposited Theodore Batchelor's innumerable boxes at the end of the dormitory.

There was a spare bed next to Trimble's, and D'Arcy told Batchelor to appropriate that.

"Now, deah boy," said the swell of St. Jim's, holding up a pair of his fancy trousers, "just try these on, will you?"

Batchelor, who seemed very willing to please, and quite an amiable youth, complied. With a bit of a scramble he got into Gussy's nether garments.

"Now this waistcoat and coat," said Gussy.

He handed Theodore a fancy waistcoat, the pattern of which was yellow bands with violet and red flowers. It was rather a tight fit, but Theodore got it on.

Then he struggled into D'Arcy's beautiful Eton coat. That also was a tight fit, but Theodore didn't mind. He absent-mindedly did as D'Arcy bade him.

Gussy, in the fulness of his heart, enjoyed the operation of dressing another fellow. He cheerfully fished out a linen collar and fancy necktie, and bade Theodore place them round his neck. That having been done, he gave Theodore a pair of his patent-leather shoes to put on.

Theodore struggled to get them upon his feet, but in vain.

"H'm!" said D'Arcy rudely. "That's wathawah a pity! However, I think those boots of Hewwies will about fit you, Batches, deah boy!"

Gussy cheerfully appropriated a pair of

Herries' boots that were lying beside the locker.

Herries took a large size in boots—although that youth always maintained that his feet were quite the normal size.

Those boots, as D'Arcy had predicted, proved quite a good fit for Batchelor, although they looked rather clumsy.

In fact, the new boy looked dunsy altogether in D'Arcy's clothes.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy regarded Theodore Batchelor critically.

"Vas," he said, rubbing his nose, "that looks vevy much bettah, deah boy, although you weah them wathawah awkwardly."

Theodore Batchelor beamed at Gussy through his horn-rimmed spectacles. In D'Arcy's hands he was as submissive as a lamb.

"Bai Jove, you must do youah hair!" scolded D'Arcy, gazing in horror at Theodore's long, sleek locks. "Have you a school cap or a toppah, deah boy?"

"Nun-no!" replied Theodore, with a vacant grin.

"Bai Jove! That's wathawah unforch. I think, howevah, that I have a toppah to spare."

Whilst Theodore was mowing his hair with a comb Gussy unearthed the topper of which he had, in his opinion, become obsolete. This he gave to Theodore, and that willing youth placed it on his head.

The effect was rather remarkable. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy regarded Theodore, but appeared satisfied, however.

"That's wight!" he said. "You look heaps bettah nun, deah boy! I am afraid Mr. Latham would have had a great shock if you had pwsented youahself in those howwid tweed garments."

Hewwies' huge boots wathawah spoll the effect, but that cannot be helped, howevah. Come on, deah boy! You'll have to see Mr. Latham, the Form-mastah."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy marched the new boy downstairs to interview the master of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 2.

Theodore Makes His Mark.

"M Y hat!"

"What the—?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Such were the remarks that greeted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Theodore Batchelor as they reached the lower landing.

Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners, with a whole crowd of the Shell, were standing there, so were Blake, Herries, Digby, Levison, Cardew, and many other Fourth-Formers.

They gaped at Theodore as he came downstairs attired in Gussy's clobber.

"Ye gods!" howled Monty Lowther. "Look at it and drop! I say, Gussy, how on earth did he get into those trousers?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Cardew. "He's rigged up like a fourpenny-halfpenny hambone, by gad! Look at his boots! Beetle-squashers, by gad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

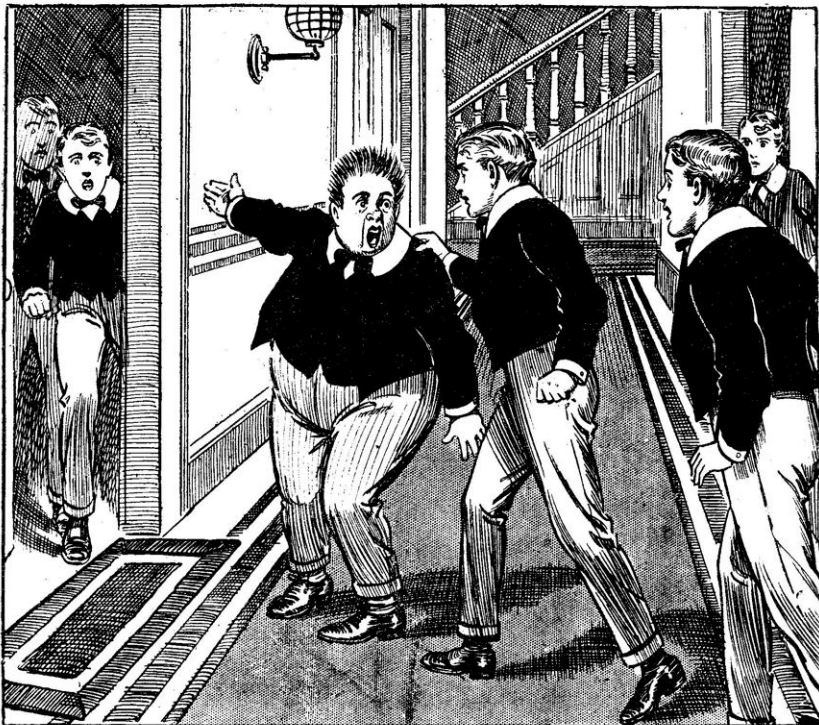
"Weally, deah boy, I wegah you as sillay asah to laugh!" said D'Arcy, with asperity. "My friend Batches, having unwived heah unprepared, without knowing the ropes, I have accommodated him with some of my own clobber."

"—But doesn't he look a guy in 'em!" shrieked Monty Lowther. "They fit where they touch! Ha, ha, ha!"

Theodore Batchelor blinked bewilderedly at the chortling juniors.

He was oblivious to the fact that he presented a rather remarkable spectacle.

Gussy's trousers, of such a striking pattern and so beautifully cut, did not fit Theodore's lanky legs so well as they did their owner's. They only reacted



"Now, then, Trimble!" said Cardew. "Where are all this noise and rumpus? What's the matter?"
 "S-serpents!" howled Trimble, struggling. "Lem me go, Cardew. We shall all be killed!" (See Chapter 3.)

half-way between his knees and his feet, and displayed his heather stockings as far as the tops of the boots.

The rest of his body seemed bunched up in the fancy waistcoat and Eton jacket, whilst he was obviously ill-at-ease in the Eton collar.

Herries glanced rather curiously at the boots that Theodore was wearing.

"I—I say, Batcher!" he exclaimed, "Where did you get those boots from? They look like mine!"

"Pway do not get excited, Hewies!" said D'Arcy gently. "I should have given Batcher a pair of my own boots, but they wouldn't fit him, because his feet are so large. However, I borrowed a pair of yonah boots, Hewies, as you have such big feet—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you—you—you—" roared Herries. "You cheeky young monkey! I'll—"

Herries made a dash forward, and would have hurled himself upon Gussy, but Blake laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Chuck it, Herries!" he grinned. "Let the ass go ahead. It's too funny for words!"

"I—I—I—"

"My hat! Look at his hair!" gasped Levison, gazing in wonder at Theodore's profusion of locks.

"And his merry gig-lamps!" gurgled Talbot. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wregahd you as a set of howlin' duffahs!" said D'Arcy, jamming his monocle into his eye and regarding the chortling crowd severely. "Pway take no notice of them, Batcher, deah boy! Come along and see Mr. Latham."

And Gussy walked away with Theodore.

"Well, this about beats the band!" sobbed Monty Lowther. "Fancy Gussy acting as chaperon to that giddy scare-crow!" My word!"

"The chump!" said Blake darkly. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Meanwhile, the swell of St. Jim's had shown the new boy Mr. Latham's study.

Theodore tapped at the door, and the voice of the master bade him enter.

The new Fourth-Former opened the door and presented himself to the Fourth Form-master.

Mr. Latham blinked in astonishment at Theodore Batcher over the rims of his spectacles.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Latham. "Are you the new boy?"

"Y-y-yes, sir," replied Theodore, rolling his eyes and stuttering horribly. "Th-Theodore Bub-Batcher."

"Theodore Batcher! Oh, yes!" said Mr. Latham, staring hard at his new pupil. "You have placed your luggage in the dormitory, Batcher?"

Theodore nodded.

"Ahem!" called the master, peering at Theodore's queerly-fitting apparel.

"Those are not your own garments, are they, Batcher?"

"Nun-no, sir," replied Theodore. "A-an obliging y-youth named Dud-D'Arcy l-lent them t-to me, s-sir."

"Ah! Indeed!" said Mr. Latham, with the semblance of a smile lurking at the corners of his mouth. "I presume, then, that you haven't a suit of Etons?"

Theodore Batcher shook his head.

"Well, Batcher, you will kindly visit the school tailor, and be measured for two suits at the earliest opportunity," said Mr. Latham. "And—ahem! As regards your quarters here, Batcher, I think you had better share Study No. 3 with Lumley-Lumley and Wyatt."

"Y-yes, sir," stammered Theodore.

"You may go, Batcher," said Mr. Latham.

And Theodore Batcher went.

As the door closed behind him, Mr. Latham set his glasses straight and coughed.

"Dear me! What an extraordinary youth!" he murmured. "Good gracious!"

Never, in the course of his whole career, had Mr. Latham encountered such a strange youth as Theodore Batcher, the new boy of the Fourth.

Outside, Theodore Batcher was greeted with a chorus of chuckles.

The St. Jim's fellows were immensely amused at this strange new fellow.

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"Oh, heah you are, deah boy!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Is it all wight?"
 "Y-y-yes!" stammered Theodore, bestowing a vacant grin upon the assembly.

"What study are you going in?" demanded Jack Blake anxiously.

"Sus-study No. 8," replied Theodore.
 "Oh, good!" breathed Blake, Herries, and Digby; and even Gussy looked immensely relieved.

"Here, what's that?" demanded Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, striding forward.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Cardow. "You are going to have the pleasure of Professor Batchy's society in your den, Lumley, old thing!"

Lumley-Lumley glared at Theodore as if he would eat him.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated the Outsider with a grimace. "What have I done to deserve it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Baggy Trimble.

"What a specimen! I say, Batchy, does your mother know you're out?" Theodore Batchy blinked vacantly at the porpoise of the Fourth.

"Y-y-yes; mum-my m-mother s-said g-good-by to me!" he stammered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My word!" gasped Trimble, grinning. "You are a jesser!"

Theodore Batchy blinked at Trimble, but said nothing.

"Weally, Twimble, I wegahd youah remarks as decidedly bad form," put in the Hon. Arthur Augustus. "I wegahd it as wotter for you boundas to wudicule my friend Batchah, because he has a slight impediment in his speech. It's a wotten twick, bai Jore!"

"Good old Gussy!" grinned Tom Merry. "He's a decent old ass!"

"Paw don't listen to these wude wotahs," said D'Arcy, turning to Theodore. "Come and have tea in Studay No. 6, deah boy."

Theodore grinned sheepishly, and suffered himself to be led away by Gussy.

Blake gasped.

"My hat!" he ejaculated. "Fancy having that merry merchant to tea in our study! I—"

"What's the odds?" grinned Monty Lowther. "I presume that Gussy's paying the piper?"

"I'm! I dare say!" said Blake thoughtfully. "I think, after all we'll condescend to entertain his nibs, the

juvenile professor. Coming, Herries and Digby?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of the Fourth made tracks for their study, where Gussy was already making the new boy comfortable.

Herries went over to the tuckshop and changed a fiver for Gussy, bringing back a goodly assortment of delicacies for tea.

It was quite a merry tea-party in Study No. 6. Although Theodore had an impediment in his speech, there was certainly nothing the matter with his gastronomic abilities, and he made a hearty meal.

By this time, Blake, Herries and Digby were quite resigned to the new fellow. He was a queer specimen, as Blake remarked, but quite harmless.

It was only his stuttering that irritated them.

CHAPTER 3.

Baggy Trimble is Too Nosy.

BAGGY TRIMBLE was thinking. It was not often that the fat boy of the Fourth exerted himself to that extent, but when he did think, Baggy's thoughts generally centred around the important problem of tuck, or cash, or of dodging lessons.

Trimble sat in the armchair in his study, whilst Theodore Batchy was closing tea with Blake & Co., thinking of the all-absorbing question of tuck.

"I—I'm hungry!" murmured Trimble. "B'low tea in hall! I don't want ditch-water and doorstep!" "Ugh! I want something substantial!"

The fat face of Trimble assumed an artful look.

"I—I wonder!" went on Trimble ruminatively. "That bounder Theodore Batchy had a lot of bags and boxes with him. I wonder if he has any tuck in them? H'm! Very likely."

The podgy Fourth-Former rose ponderously to his feet. His little round eyes were twinkling greedily.

"He's sure to have some tuck in one of those boxes," he said. "I—I'll go and have a look."

Baggy Trimble left his study and made his way upstairs towards the Fourth Form dormitory.

He was in a breathless state when he arrived there. Baggy pushed the door open, and looked in.

Only three boxes remained beside the empty bed that Batchy had been

assigned to. The rest had been taken downstairs.

Trimble growled, but went over to the three boxes, to investigate.

One was fastened by means of straps, and Trimble soon had those undone. He growled when he saw the contents.

"A rotten butterfly-net and rods!" he snorted in disdain. "Fishing-rods and bait!"

He tackled the second and third boxes, and after a struggle got them open. His little green eyes opened wide when he found some large glass cases containing butterflies inside them. Evidently, Theodore Batchy was a bit of a naturalist, and he had brought his collection of butterflies and moths with him.

"No go!" said Trimble, under his breath as he left the dormitory, after having repacked the boxes as best he could. "I'll try downstairs."

He descended to the Fourth Form passage, and tapped at the door of Study No. 8.

There came no sound from within.

With infinite caution Baggy Trimble opened the door, and peeped within.

Lumley-Lumley's study was deserted, but several bags and boxes, evidently belonging to Theodore Batchy, bestrewed the carpet.

"Oh, good!" murmured Trimble, closing the door and crossing the room. "I'll bet he's got some tuck hidden away in one of these!"

Trimble knelt down and tackled the first box. It was locked with a cheap padlock, but Baggy had a bunch of keys in his pocket, and he found that one of these opened the padlock.

He gave a snort of disgust when the contents of the box were disclosed. Several many volumes, with titles that gave Trimble inward spasms to read them, were exposed to view. These books seemed to deal with natural history; but what all the Latin inscriptions meant, Baggy Trimble did not know. Neither did he trouble.

He closed that box, and opened another.

Trimble, being rather short-sighted, did not notice that this box, which was a very large one, contained a number of air-bags.

He cheerfully tackled the padlock with his keys, and gave a grunt of satisfaction when the lid came off.

"Now!" said Trimble. "I wonder if the grub is in here? I— Oh! Mummy hat!"

Trimble now had the lid of the box off, and his eyes eagerly sought the contents.

Not a vestige of tuck was there inside the box; but what he did see, made Baggy Trimble turn pale.

For in different compartments of the box were innumerable creeping things.

There were snakes, lizards, frogs, toads, beetles, cockroaches, spiders, carwigs, ants, and all manner of horrid creeping insects.

"Gug-good lor!" gasped Trimble faintly.

He fell back, and the lid of the box rattled to the floor.

Like one in a dream, and utterly bereft of animation, Baggy Trimble gazed at the denizens of the box as they crawled about.

Fresh air seemed to have an invigorating effect upon the animals, for they began to crawl out of the box in a long, straggly procession.

Like the ancient Israelites, the insects in the box rejoiced in the release from captivity and migrated from bondage.

Then, as a small grass snake wriggled towards him and seemed about to crawl upon his trouser-leg, Baggy Trimble found his voice.

"Yow-ow-oh! Yah! Help!" he

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"Batcher! Good heavens, boy, do these loathsome creatures belong to you?" "Ye—ess, s-s-sir!" stammered Theodore, falling on his knees, and chasing an elusive frog. "Sus-somebody has l-lot mum-my s-specimens l-loose! Oh, dud-dear!" (See Chapter 4.)

roared, and, dashing to his feet, he gave one startled look at the box, dragged the study door open, and bolted for his life.

Trimble sped down the passage as if fends from the nether regions were on his track.

His roars of terror rang down the passage. Study doors opened, and startled faces peered forth, inquiring the cause of the uproar.

"Yow-wow! Woogh! Murder!" belovled Baggy Trimble, in accents of fear.

"What on earth's the matter?" demanded Levison. "Trimble, you ass!"

"Help!" wailed Trimble.

Cardew dashed out of his room and caught Baggy by his coat collar. That brought the startled youth to a stop.

"Now, then, Trimble!" said Cardew. "Wherefore all this noise and rumpus? What's the matter?"

"Serpents!" howled Trimble, struggling. "Lemme go, Cardew! We shall all be killed!"

"S-serpents!" exclaimed Cardew, taken aback. "Where are the serpents?"

"In Lumley's study—they're crawling out of Batcher's box. Hundreds of 'em!" cried the terrified Baggy. "Woogh! I believe I'm bitten!"

The Fourth-Formers gazed with startled faces at each other.

"I—I say, it c-can't be true!" stammered Percy Melish, trembling almost as much as the excited Trimble.

"He's spoofing!"

"I'm not!" yelled Trimble furiously. "I tell you Lumley's study is full of 'em! They're crawling about all over the room, and it's death to go in there!"

"Gug-good heavens!"

The Fourth-Formers looked aghast at Baggy Trimble's terrible news.

"Here, what's this?" demanded a wrathful voice; and Jerrold Lumley-Lumley strode up the Fourth-Form passage.

He looked astonished at the terror-stricken faces of the Fourth-Formers.

"Trimble says there are snakes and serpents in your study," said Kerruish. "He—"

"The place is alive with 'em!" belovled Trimble, turning an ashen face towards the Outsider. "Snakes, adders, frogs, toads, and—and—all sorts of horrid things!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Lumley-Lumley.

At that moment there came a heavy tread on the passage, and Knox, the bullying prefect of the Sixth, appeared.

"What are you kids making all this noise about?" he demanded savagely.

"What's the row?"

In breathless tones, Baggy Trimble told his tale of terror.

Knox's face went pale.

"Better go into the study and investigate, Knox," drawled Ralph Reckness Cardew, in his cold, cynical way. "Go ahead!"

"I—I—I—" stammered the prefect

awkwardly. "I believe you're telling lies, Trimble!"

"I'm not!" howled Trimble furiously. "Look!"

He pointed to the door of Study No. 8. The gaze of Knox and all the startled juniors wandered in that direction, and a gasp of horror arose as a number of ants and beetles were seen scurrying into the passage, from underneath the door.

The crowd fell back, horror and consternation depicted on their faces.

Knox looked wildly round him. "G-good heavens!" he stammered. "I—I'd better fetch Mr. Lathom!"

And the cowardly prefect hurried away, leaving the Fourth Form passage in a buzz of excitement.

CHAPTER 4.

High Jinks in the Fourth.

THE Fourth-Formers discussed the matter in wild tones.

"That utter young idiot, Theodore Batcher, is the cause of this!" said Lumley-Lumley savagely. "I'll murder him when—"

"Bai Jove! Whatevah is the mattah, deah boys?"

It was D'Arcy's dulcet voice, and Gussy poked his head out of Study No. 6, with a look of inquiry upon his aristocratic countenance.

"That howling young lunatic you've got in there!" snorted Lumley-Lumley. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 522

"He's filled my study with snakes and all manner of reptiles from what I can make out. Look—they're running along the passage."

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and peered downward.

He saw a cockroach approaching his elegant feet, and the swell of St. Jim's promptly skipped back into Study No. 6.

Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby were seated at the table with the new boy. They regarded their noble chum curiously.

"What's the matter, Gussy?" asked Blake, in surprise.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, gasping. "There are all manner of howwid creatures cawlin' up the passage, deah boys. They appear to have been let loose from Lumley's study. Good gracious. It has sent me into quite a fluttah!"

Jack Blake looked grimly at Theodore.

"Hear that?" he demanded.

The long-haired Theodore looked up absent-mindedly.

"Eh?"

"Somebody's let loose a lot of—of snakes and things!" howled Blake. "They're coming from your study. Are they—"

"Gug-great! S-Scott!" stuttered Batcher, springing into animation immediately. "Mum-my s-s-specimens! I'll have they s-s-scraped!"

"Yess, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "They are cawlin' up the passage, you uttah ass!"

Theodore made a wild leap for the door. He dragged it open, and plunged into the passage.

The passage was in an uproar.

Lumley-Lumley had opened the study door, and immediately the whole of the contents of Batcher's box had migrated into the passage.

There was a wild scramble as about half a dozen snakes of various sizes and hues came wriggling into the passage, as well as a godly number of frogs and toads, and beetles and ants and lizards.

"Look out!"

"Groogh! Gerraway!"

"Great pip! The place is infested with 'em!"

The Fourth-Formers dashed wildly out of the way of the creeping reptiles.

There was a rustle from the far end of the passage, and Mr. Latham, with an alarmed expression on his face, strode into view, followed by Knox.

"Boys! What is the meaning of this commotion? I— Good heavens!"

The master gave a jump back as a toad hopped playfully across his boot.

"Look out, sir! There's a snake behind you!"

"Good gracious! Yah! Oh, dear!" howled the hapless master, springing forward again.

Then Theodore Batcher came tearing forward, his straggly locks flowing in the wind, and Herries' boots that were on his feet clumping noisily.

"Mum-my s-s-s-specimens!"

Mr. Latham gaped for his eyeglasses and fixed a basilisk glare upon the amateur naturalist of the Fourth.

"Batcher! Good heavens, boy, do these loathsome creatures belong to you?"

"Ye-es, s-s-sir!" stuttered Theodore, falling to his knees and chasing an elusive frog "Sus-somebody has let mum-my s-s-specimens loose! Oh, dud-dear! M-mind mum-my d-d-dis-coglossus!"

"Eh?"

Theodore made a grab at his "dis-coglossus," which was a large frog, and succeeded in securing it in his hand. He plunged the kicking reptile into his

jacket-pocket, and then set out in chase of a playful snake that was careering up the passage, almost underneath Mr. Latham's legs.

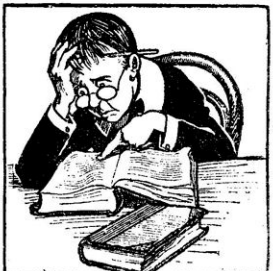
"Good heavens!" ejaculated the master, skipping back. "Batcher—"

"Dud-don't tread on mum-my tylo-poda!" wailed Theodore, reaching for the snake in question. "Oh, dud-dear!"

By this time, the Fourth Form passage was a Bedlam of noise.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus of D'Arcy, who had followed Blake, Herries, and Digby from Study No. 6. "I weghad Batcher as a dangewous ass."

No. 23—HERBERT SKIMPOLE



A brainy, weedy youth. Really has ability, but dissipates it in the pursuit of useless aims, and is looked upon with contempt by most of his schoolfellows for his absent-mindedness and impracticable ways. His inventions will never work, and all his reading serves only to fill his head with queer notions. But he is thoroughly good at heart, and has a keen sense of justice and a real desire to do good. Is happy in sharing a study with Tabbot, who likes and befriends him; but, naturally, does not get on well with Gore, his other partner. (Study No. 9—Shell.)

for bringing those howwid reptiles into the school. I— Yawooogh! Oh, dear! Gewwoff!"

The aristocratic D'Arcy broke into a wild yell and leaped into the air as a fearsome looking lizard crawled upon his boot.

He kicked the reptile from him, and immediately Theodore Batcher let out a wild yell.

"Dud-don't k-k-ick mum-my poor ophiomachus!" he wailed, springing to recapture the lizard. "And mum-mind that euphemphix, s-s-sir!"

Mr. Latham started as another toad of a larger variety, sprang at his trouser-leg.

"Groogh!" he yelled.

Having secured the lizard, Theodore Batcher made a dart at the "euphemphix." This he managed to secure, and he rammed that into his pocket.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake. "Look out for the merry beetles, chaps! There is an earwig crawling up your trousers, Gussy!"

"Oh, gwest Scott!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "Pway take it off, Blake, deah boy! Yawooogh!"

Blake cheerfully flicked off the earwig, and D'Arcy mopped his perspiring brow with a cambric handkerchief.

Beetles, spiders, and daddy-long-legs were rambling along the passage, and

up the walls.

Mr. Latham regarded those creatures in horror.

Theodore Batcher, a look of deep concentration upon his quizzical features, dragged a large magnifying glass from his pocket and went in search of the elusive insects on his hands and knees. In quite a callous manner, he picked them up in his fingers and placed them in his pockets. The snakes, of course, were non-poisonous and quite harmless.

Mr. Latham and the Fourth-Formers watched the sublime Batcher in this operation with feelings too deep for words.

"Batcher," rumbled Mr. Latham, in tense accents, "I shall require an explanation of this disgraceful scene afterwards. Secure as many of these disgusting creatures as you can!"

"Y-y-yes, sir!" gasped Theodore, energetically chasing his specimens. "Oh, mum-my g-g-goodness! Mum-my c-c-collection will be s-s-spoilt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" snapped Mr. Latham, retreating as far away from the scurrying insects as he could. "Boys, you will disperse, and leave this—this miserable youth to secure his revolting creatures. Go into your studies at once, boys!"

Chuckling, the Fourth-Formers went.

Lumley-Lumley's face was a picture of dismay as he looked into Study No. 8. One or two sleepy snakes were curled up on the carpet in front of the fire, and half a dozen frogs and toads hopped blithely round the table-legs. The study was simply infested with creeping things. Cockroaches, beetles, and daddy-long-legs scuttled merrily over the floor, upon the bookcase, and up the walls.

"Oh crumbs!" moaned Lumley-Lumley, with a shudder. "I'm not going to stand this! I'll explicate that howling lunatic when he comes in here!"

Outside, Theodore Batcher was busy pursuing his elusive specimens.

It was really a most ludicrous sight to see the tall, weedy fellow, with long hair and horn-rimmed spectacles, clad in badly-fitting garments belonging to D'Arcy, crawling along the linoleum, grabbing at frogs and lizards, and bestowing them into his pockets.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned and glowered through his monocle at the schoolboy naturalist, before entering his study.

"Bai Jove!" he said. "Batcher, you uttah ass, I weghad you as dangewous! Oh cwombs! I couldn't think of weavin' that clobbah again aftah those howwid reptiles has been in the pocket."

"Kim on, Gussy!" called Blake. "Come inside, and leave the dummy alone!"

And the Honourable Arthur Augustus retreated into Study No. 6.

Mr. Latham rustled away, frowning darkly. Knox bestowed a scowl upon Batcher, and left the Fourth Form passage.

Theodore went on with the job of gathering his runaway specimens.

Fifteen minutes later the Terrible Three ambled along.

They stopped, and stared in amazement as they saw Theodore crawling along the passage on all fours, stalking a tiny green snake.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Monty Lowther. "Look out, Tommy! Where on earth did those merry animals come from?"

Tom Merry & Co. skipped out of the way as a selection of Batcher's reptiles darted in their direction.

"Groogh!" gasped Tom Merry, shuddering. "That hurbling jabberwock has been up to something or other. Let's see Blake!"

Picking their way gingerly along the

passage, the Terrible Three tapped at Study No. 6, and entered.

There Jack Blake gave them an account of the exciting times they had just passed through.

For quite an hour afterwards, Theodore Batchier, his magnifying-glass before him, was up and down the Fourth Form passage, in search of elusive reptiles and insects.

Some of the animals had disappeared beyond recapture, but Theodore retrieved all he could see. Then he went into Study No. 8 in a very breathless state, and proceeded to gather up the specimens in there.

He was consigning the animals to the box again, when the door opened and Jerrold Lumley-Lumley strode in.

The Outsider's brow was dark, and his voice, as he addressed the new boy of the Fourth, was angry.

"You—you chortling chump!" said the indignant Lumley-Lumley. "If you think you're going to turn my room into a reptile-house, you're jolly well mistaken! For two pints, I'd chuck you out on your neck!"

"R-r-really, Lul-lumley!" remonstrated Batchier, blinking up at his incensed study-mate through his huge spectacles. "Pop-pray do n-not b-be un-reasonable. Mum my f-father, Pop-Professor C-Cor-tellus—"

"Rats on your father, the professor!" snorted Lumley-Lumley. "Back up and get those things locked up, you rotter! I want to get on with my prep!"

Ten minutes later silence reigned in Study No. 8. Lumley-Lumley was at his preparation, and Theodore Batchier was absorbed in a huge volume dealing with some obscure subject in Natural History.

Then the door opened, and Wally D'Arcy of the Third poked his cheery face within.

"Anybody by the name of Batchy here?" he inquired. "Oh, there you are! My hat, what a frump! Say, old guy, Mr. Lathom wants you, and he's in a howling temper!"

And D'Arcy minor, with a long, impatient look at Theodore Batchier, withdrew.

As Theodore left the study, Lumley-Lumley grinned.

Mr. Lathom was awaiting the amateur naturalist of the Fourth with anger on his brow.

"Ah, Batchier!" he rasped. "Have you collected all those disgusting animals of yours?"

"Y-y-yes, mum-my dear s-s-sir!"

"Miserable youth! How dare you bring those monstrosities into this school!" snorted the enraged master. "I forbid you to retain possession of them!"

The face of Theodore Batchier fell, and he blinked in dismay at Mr. Lathom through his huge glasses.

"R-r-really, s-s-sir!" he stammered. "They are v-v-valuable s-s-specimens, which t-took years to c-c-collect. I—"

Mr. Lathom waved his hand.

"That is quite immaterial, Batchier!" he said icily. "You will consign the box containing the animals to the stables, and have it removed from St. Jim's as soon as possible."

"B-b-b-but—"

"Not a word!" said Mr. Lathom matter-of-factly. "Were you not a new boy, Batchier, I should not hesitate to punish you severely. Let this be a warning to you in future, my boy! You may go!"

"I—I—I—"

"Go!" roared Mr. Lathom, pointing imperiously to the door.

And, with a doleful little blink at the master, Theodore Batchier went.

CHAPTER 5.

Monty's Little Wheeze.

THE advent of Theodore Batchier at St. Jim's caused a great deal of excitement in the old school.

Gradually, the story of the reptile-hunt up the Fourth Form passage spread, and all St. Jim's howled over the incident.

Not so the unfortunate naturalist himself. His box of specimens was consigned to the stables, and Theodore awaited with many qualms for the order to issue forth that the box should be sent away from St. Jim's.

The son of Professor Cornelius Batchier, the eminent authority on titbitwats, was an ardent naturalist, and grieved over the

No 24.—AUBREY RACKE.



The son of a war-profitier, purse-proud, snobbish, cunning, unscrupulous, and dissipated. Is the leader of the rotters' brigade, which he has led into some of the shadiest and low-down schemes that have ever been devised at St. Jim's. More dangerous than Crooke, because more reckless and less cowardly. There is a yellow streak in him, but he can show fight on occasion. Racke and Crooke share Study No. 7 in the Shell.

loss of his collection. He confided his treasuries to Skimpole of the Shell, and found in that brainy youth a ready sympathiser.

Tom Merry & Co., and Blake & Co. chuckled over the affair. They regarded it as a huge joke. They predicted some high old times for the Fourth, with the schoolboy naturalist in its ranks.

Figniss & Co. of the New House chortled mightily when they heard the news, and chuckled Theodore Batchier mercilessly.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was amused at his queer study-mate, now that his reptile pets had been safely removed.

The shock-headed Fourth-Former made an interesting study-mate.

Mr. Lathom did not seem to get on well with his new pupil, however. Theodore was an extremely absent-minded youth, and his stuttering at lessons annoyed the master.

Whereat the Fourth Form chuckled exceedingly, and made a standing joke of Theodore's Batchier, their "tame, toad tamer," as Blake humorously put it.

Theodore Batchier was dubbed "Batchy," and as "Batchy" he was known throughout St. Jim's.

The Terribles Three were at tea one afternoon, a few days after Theodore's arrival at St. Jim's, when suddenly Monty Lowther burst into a deep chuckle of delight.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "I've got it!"

Tom Merry and Manners looked at their chum in surprise.

"Got what, 'Monty'?" inquired Tom. "The flu?"

"'Nunno!" grinned Lowther. "The best joke of the season!"

"What is it, then?" demanded Tom Merry.

"A merry little jape on old Batchy!" chuckled the humorist of the Shell. "Sha'n't be a tick, you chaps! I'm off to see Glyn!"

As the door closed behind Monty Lowther, Tom Merry and Manners blinked at each other in surprise.

"Off his rocker!" said Tom, tapping his forehead significantly. "Monty's often taken like that!"

Meanwhile, Monty Lowther had hid himself in Study No. 11, which Bernard Glyn, the inventive genius of the Shell, occupied with Kangaroo and Clifton Dane.

Monty tapped at the door, and the voice of Glyn bade him enter.

The humorist of the Shell found Bernard Glyn at home by himself, tinkering away at an electric motor.

"Hallo, Lowther!" said the St. Jim's inventor, glancing up. "What's on?"

"The merriest little joke of the season!" chirruped Monty Lowther, sinking into a chair beside Glyn. "I want you to help me, Glyn. It's a jape on old Theodore Batchy, of the Fourth."

Glyn chuckled.

"Oh!" he said. "Well, go ahead, Lowther. If I can help you, I will."

"My idea is this," said Lowther enthusiastically. "You know what a beggar old Batchy is for animals—reptiles, and things like that, you know?"

Glyn nodded wonderingly.

"Well, I want you to manufacture a weird, gruesome sort of monster that will move, so that we can plant it on old Batchy one afternoon," said Lowther, with a chuckle. "He'd be after it like a shot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Glyn.

"You can't do it!" said Monty Lowther eagerly. "You've made a model of Herries' bulldog, Towser, and a life-like double of Skimpole and Gussy—"

"What-ho!" gurgled the schoolboy inventor. "I'll do it, Lowther. I'll make a fearful-looking monster, and make it crawl along and hiss and—and breath smoke—eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's the idea!" chuckled Lowther. "When can you have it finished, Glyn?"

"Lemme see," said Glyn thoughtfully.

"To-day is Tuesday. I'll have the whole merry thing complete by Friday night."

"Good egg!" said Lowther gleefully.

"We'll plant it on old Batchy in Friar-ale Wood on Saturday afternoon. My word, we'll make the fur fly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Glyn. "It's a jolly good idea, Lowther! Rely on me, old son, to make a real, terrifying monster. I'll make old Batchy shiver in his shoes!"

"Ripping!" chuckled Lowther. "Not a word about this, Glyn, mind."

"Right-ho!" grinned the inventor of the Shell. "Mum's the word!"

And Monty Lowther departed, chuckling hugely.

Arriving back at Study No. 10, he confided his scheme to his wondering chums. As Monty disclosed the details of the great jape, the eyes of Tom Merry and Manners opened wide. Then their faces broke out into smiles, and they chuckled. These chuckles gradually became guffaws, until, when Monty Lowther

finished, Tom Merry and Manners simply howled with laughter.

"Oh, my only sainted Aunt Tabitha!" roared Tom Merry, wiping salt tears of merriment from his eyes. "What a giddy joke! My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners. Monty Lowther chuckled.

"It will be the joke of the season!" he said, in immense satisfaction. "Poor old Batsy! Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 6. Glyn's Dragon!

SATURDAY afternoon duly arrived, and Bernard Glyn, true to his promise, had completed a most fearful-looking monster. It consisted of a huge, scally carcass, inside which Glyn himself was ensconced.

After dinner most of the Fourth Form and the Shell fellows repaired to Little Esde, to put in an afternoon at footee.

The "terrible three," however, had reserved themselves for the afternoon. They wanted to participate in that little jape on Theodore Batchelor.

Monty Lowther found the mighty Theodore wandering in the Cloisters in company with Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell.

Skimpole was expatiating upon the joys of Socialism to the shock-headed Fourth-Former, and Theodore was taking it all in, and nodding his head profoundly.

Monty Lowther grinned as he saw the pair. He approached with a startled look on his face.

"Batcher! Skimpole! A word!" exclaimed Monty Lowther deeply.

The two brainy youths halted in their perambulation and stared at the humorist of the Shell.

"Dear me, Lowther!" exclaimed Skimpole, blinking at the horror-stricken countenance of Lowther. "What ever has happened? I perceive, from your outward signs of perturbation, that your mental equilibrium has been somewhat upset."

"It has!" said Monty Lowther. "I—I am afraid! I am trembling!"

In proof of which Monty Lowther knocked his knees together energetically.

"Good heavens!" gasped Herbert Skimpole, in deep consternation. "What has happened?"

Monty Lowther put on a tragic air, and grasped both Skimpole and Theodore Batchelor by their respective shoulders.

"A fearful monster has entered the precincts of the quadrangle!" he said, in trembling accents. "It is a monster the like of which has never been seen on earth. It is a dragon!"

"Gug-good gracious!" exclaimed Skimpole, in horror.

The pale blue orbs of Theodore Batchelor opened wide behind his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"A dud-dragon?" he stammered. "A-a-are you s-s-sure?"

"Positive!" asserted Lowther, pointing with a shaking finger in the direction of the elms by the gates. "It is over there! It is breathing fire and brimstone!"

"Dud-dear me!" gasped Theodore Batchelor, trembling with excitement.

"C-c-can it be p-possible that s-s-some p-pre-historic mon-monster is r-r-r-ooming the c-c-country-side?" S-S-Skimpole, mum-mum-mum my dear fellow, we mum-must investigate!"

"Ahem! Y-y-yes, my dear Batchelor!" stammered Skimpole.

The schoolboy naturalist's eyes were gleaming with excitement.

"W-w-we num-must c-capture this mo-monster!" he cried. "S-S-Skimpole, you-must aid me. H-h-have no fu-fear. I have an a-a-a-a-gun."

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Monty Lowther had considerable difficulty in concealing his merriment. Inwardly bursting with suppressed glee, he exhorted Theodore to hurry, lest the unhappy inhabitants of St. Jim's were attacked.

Leaving Skimpole in company with Lowther, Theodore Batchelor hurried away to secure his air-gun.

Skimpole showed evident signs of terror.

"I—I must be going, my dear Lowther!" he gasped, turning hastily away. "I must warn Dr. Holmes of the impending danger that threatens the school. I—Yarvoogh! Leggo!"

Monty Lowther had fallen upon Skimpole, and clasped him round the neck.

"Do not forsake me, Skimmey!" sobbed Lowther, clinging fast to the genius of St. Jim's. "Leave me not in my hour of peril! Skimmey, my old pal, don't give me the giddy go-by!"

"Nunno, my dear Lowther!" gasped Skimpole, wriggling in Lowther's grasp. "Lemme go! Yowp! Let us both go to Dr. Holmes, and acquaint him with—"

"He is old, and the shock would be too great for him," said Lowther solemnly, shaking his head. "No, Skimpole, here comes Theodore! He has his air-gun, and we are safe. We three will

You can read another
Grand Long Story of
Tom Merry & Co. in
this week's issue of the

PENNY POPULAR

Also Splendid Long
Yarns of Greyfriars
and Rookwood.

seek out the fearsome dragon, and slay him!"

"Ye-es, my dear Lowther!" gasped Skimpole, his knees knocking together in real earnest.

"H-here we are," said Theodore Batchelor breathlessly, arriving with his air-gun. "Lead me to the d-d-dragon, Lowther!"

"This way!" said Lowther heroically. In his enthusiasm to capture a pre-historic dragon, Theodore Batchelor felt no fear. Herbert Skimpole, however, was trembling in every limb. He would much rather have gone in and warned the Head.

Lowther, still maintaining a demeanour of stern, led his two dupes over to the elms by the gates.

Tom Merry and Manners were lurking in the vicinity, speaking to the "dragon."

Bernard Glyn's head protruded from the mouth of the dragon, and he was explaining to the chums of Study No. 10 how the fiery breath of the "monster" was to be worked.

As soon as he saw Lowther approaching with Theodore Batchelor and Skimpole, Bernard Glyn dodged down into the carcass and shut the jaws of the serpent.

"Here they come!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Cut off, Glyn!"

And Glyn "cut off."

When they saw the fearsome-looking dragon wending its way beneath the elms, Theodore Batchelor and Skimpole halted.

"Gug-good heavens!" gasped Skimpole, trembling like an aspen. "It—it is really a dragon! It is breathing flame and smoke!"

Their startled eyes beheld a puff of smoke and sparks issue from the jaws of the terrifying monster.

"Dud-dear me!" bleated Theodore, grasping his air-gun. "It is i-i-indeed a dud-dragon! Mum-my w-w-word, w-w-won't-f-father be p-p-proud of me if I c-c-capture the mon-monster!"

Tom Merry and Manners chuckled.

"My hat!" whispered Tom to his chum. "I shouldn't care to be old Glyn inside that dragon if old Batsy starts potting at him with that air-gun!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Manners. Monty Lowther was urging Theodore on.

"See!" he cried excitedly. "The dragon is making for the gates! He is frightened of us. After him, Theodore! Kim on, Skimpole!"

Bang!

Theodore Batchelor's air-gun discharged a slug, and there was a crash from the direction of Taggles' lodge.

"Great pip!" howled Tom Merry.

"He's smashed old Taggy's window!"

A tinkling of glass denoted that the side-window of Taggles' lodge had been smashed.

Almost directly the St. Jim's porter himself came tearing out, following with rage.

"Who did that?" he roared, glaring round. "Wot I says is this ere—Woogh! 'Eip!"

Taggles caught sight of Glyn's dragon, and his eyes nearly started from his head.

Smoke and sparks belched from those gaping jaws, and Taggles stood transfixed with terror.

"Gug-good lor!" moaned the terrified porter. "Ham I drunk, hor is it alive? Yow! Yarvoogh! Geraway!"

Glyn, inside the dragon, made a playful dart at Taggles' trousers.

The porter awoke to animation immediately. He gave a terrified look at the monster outside his lodge; then, with a wild, piercing yell of horror, Taggles bounded for his front door, slammed it behind him, and furtively barred and bolted it.

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

Glyn's dragon scuttled through the gates, and wended its fiery way up Rylcombe Lane, breathing fire and sparks as it went.

"Onward, Theodore!" yelled Monty Lowther bravely. "We must rid the countryside of this nameless terror! Think of the fame and glory that awaits you if you slay the monster! After him!"

And Theodore, with the light of excitement in his pale blue optics, grasped his air-gun firmly to him and dashed after Glyn's dragon.

Monty Lowther came after him, dragging the trembling Skimpole along. Tom Merry and Manners brought up the rear, holding their sides with laughter.

"There he goes!" cried Monty Lowther. "He's making for the woods. Kim on, Skimmey!"

"R-r-r-ally, my dear Lowther, we are embarking upon a perilous enterprise, for which—"

"Rats!" said Monty Lowther, with a great show of bravery. "You'll be able



"Gug—good for!" moaned the terrified porter. "Ham I drunk, hor is it alive? Yow! Yaroooh! Gerraway!" Glyn, inside the dragon, made a playful dart at Taggles' trousers. With a wild, piercing yell of horror, Taggles bounded for his front door. (See Chapter 6.)

to write a book on it, Skimmey, when we've captured the dragon. Professor Balmcrumpt wouldn't be in it then!"

"Ye-es, my dear Lowther, but— Yaroooh! Yah! I—I'm coming!"

"Buck up, then, Skimps!" said Monty. "We must be in at the death!"

And the genius of the Shell permitted himself to be pulled along by Lowther.

CHAPTER 7.

Rough on Glyn.

THEODORE BATCHER was warming to his work. In his heart there was no fear—only a great desire to capture the mysterious monster that had appeared within the gates of St. Jim's, and thus have his name go down to posterity as the second St. George, the slayer of the twentieth-century dragon!

With his gun raised, Theodore stalked the fiery monster.

Bang!

A slug from Theodore's air-gun punctured the dragon's carcase in the rear. The dragon was seen to give a spasmodic jump, and put on considerable speed.

"I've hit him!" yelled Theodore, dancing with glee. "Nun-now I'll s-s-secure him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Tom Merry. "Go it, Theodore!"

"I wonder where Glyn got that slug?" grinned Mauners, under his breath.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Still emitting sparks and smoke from his nostrils, the dragon bolted for the

wood. It scrambled up the bank, and disappeared amongst the bracken.

Like Nemesis on the track, Theodore Batcher dived up the bank, and plunged into the wood in the wake of the dragon.

Bang! went his air-gun.

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Monty Lowther. "This is too rich! Come on, chaps! We musn't miss this for worlds!"

And the four Shell fellows followed Theodore and the dragon into the wood.

Sounds of crashing undergrowth served as a guide to them, and in a few moments they came upon Theodore, lying at full-length upon a grassy slope, ready to take aim at the dragon, which was standing in a clearing just in front.

Glyn, inside the dragon, was taking breath. He had received a dig from Theodore's slug in a tender part of his anatomy, and was beginning to feel "fed-up" with the joke already.

He had not bargained for an air-gun!

Bang!

"Yow!" moaned Glyn; and once more he started through the wood.

He meant to hold out as long as he could, but he was also determined to keep clear of Theodore's air-gun as much as possible.

Theodore, with a howl of triumph, plunged after the dragon.

Tom Merry & Co. and Skimpole followed.

Bang! Bang!

Fortunately, Theodore's aim was far from true, otherwise the pseudo dragon

would have had a very uncomfortable time.

Glyn put on speed, and simply crashed through the bushes.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Monty Lowther.

"Go it, Theodore! Good old St. George! Ha, ha, ha!"

Then there came another crashing sound on their right, and the St. Jim's juniors were surprised to see P. c. Crump, the slow-witted Rylcombe policeman, come rumbling into view.

"Oh!" panted P. c. Crump. "Wot does this firn' mean?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" sobbed Monty Lowther. "There's a dragon escaped in the wood, Mr. Crump!"

"Wot!" ejaculated, the corpulent policeman.

Bang! Bang!

"Varcoogh!" came a wail from behind a clump of brambles. And next minute the "dragon" came plunging forth, a sound, suspiciously like a human groan, coming from within it.

P. c. Crump started back in horror, and blinked at the fearsome monster.

"Good evings!" he murmured jadedly. "Ham I dreamin'?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've g-got him, mum-my dear f-f-fellows!" chirruped Theodore Batcher, springing into view, waving his air-gun aloft. "He is w-w-wounded in the p-peropodis!"

"Yew-ow-ow-ow!" came from the

dragon, as it slithered once more into the thickets.

"Good lor!" gurgled P.-c. Crump, a look of startled horror overspreading his podgy countenance. "Is it possible? It's a dragon!"

"Oh, brave Mr. Crump, please save us!" moaned Monty Lowther, tears streaming down his cheeks. "Go in pursuit of the gruesome monster and slay him!"

"Yip! Yip! Bang!"

"Yaroooh!" shrieked P.-c. Crump, clapping a hand to his leg. "Wow! I'm hit! Yow-ow!"

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

Bang! came from the wood; and once more the dragon dashed into view. It went straight for P.-c. Crump, and darted between that gentleman's legs. Down went P.-c. Crump on top of the dragon with a yell of terror.

Bang—bang! went Theodore's air-gun; and that excited youth darted into view.

"Wooogh! 'Elp! Murder!" howled P.-c. Crump; and, with a fendish yell, he sprang to his feet and plunged into the bushes.

The howls of the terrified arm of the law died away in the distance of the wood.

"S-s-stop the dud-dragon!" howled Theodore, indicating the writhing carcass, inside which was the hapless Glyn. "He's almost d-d-d-d-d!"

"Yarooogh!" came from the interior of the dragon. "Gorugh! Gug! Gug!"

Skimpole blinked at the dragon in amazement.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible that the dragon's leucity organs have the semblance of human vocal chords? This is most extraordinary!"

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

Theodore Batchelor raised his air-gun, and prepared to shoot.

A fendish roar came from inside the dragon.

"Yow-ow! Stoppit! Don't shoot! Yaroooh!"

Theodore dropped his gun in amazement.

The jaws of the dragon opened, and the red, startled face of Bernard Glyn protruded forth.

"Groooogh!" moaned Glyn. "Take that gun away from that imbecile; Lowther—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the humorist of the Shell. "How many slugs did you get, Glyn? My hat, what a giddy joke it is!"

"A giddy joke, was it?" spluttered Glyn, scrambling from the dragon's skin. "I'll show you where the joke comes in, Lowther, your burbling idiot! Lemme get hold of you!"

"Here, wharrer you up to?" gasped Lowther, backing away as Glyn bore down on him. "I say, Glyn—yaroooh! Stoppit! Yah! Wow!"

"You funny idiot!" snorted Glyn, getting Monty's head into chancery and pummeling for all he was worth. "Thought it was a fine joke, didn't you?" Thump, thump! "The best joke of the season—eh?" Thump, thump! "Got me into a fine mess, didn't you, you—your joeser! Take that!"

"Yaroooh! Draggimoff!" wailed the luckless humorist of the Shell, struggling in Bernard Glyn's grasp. "Cluck it, Glyn, you ass! I was I to know that Batchesy would bring an air-gun—yow-ow! Stoppit! Yah!"

The infuriated inventor of St Jim's went for Monty Lowther hammer and THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 622.

tongs. Skimpole and Theodore Batchelor looked on in amazement.

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Tom Merry, dashing up and separating the two. "Cluck it, Glyn! Enough's as good as a feast, you know!"

"I—I'll murder that silly booby!" shouted Glyn angrily. "I'll show him whether I'm to be pelted with slugs! Yow! Lemme go!"

"No fear!" chuckled the captain of the Shell. "Simmer down, Glyn, old top! It wasn't all Monty's fault, you know! He's a funny ass, but—"

No. 25.—GEORGE GERALD CROOKE.



George Gerald Crooke—one of the worst fellows at St. Jim's. Would be still more dangerous if he had more courage. The chief ally of Racke, who usually leads all the shady escapades. Hates Levison major for deserting the rotters' brigade. Hates Tom Merry and all his chums because they are not his sort; but even in the hating line he is inferior to Racke. (Study No. 7—Shell.)

"Yow-ow!" moaned Lowther, rubbing his head. "He—he's gone dotty!"

Glyn glared homicidally at the humorist of the Shell, and shook his fist.

"Come to me with any more of your mad-brained ideas," he gurgled, "and I—I—I'll wring your neck, Lowther!"

"Groooogh!" groaned Lowther. "You're petty, Glyn!"

Tom Merry turned to the dumbfounded Theodore and grinned.

"It's all over, Batchesy!" he chuckled. "There's your dragon!"

"B-b-but—" stammered Theodore, blinking first at Glyn, then at the dragon-skin, and then at Tom Merry. "W-w-w-wasn't there any dud-dragon?"

"No, you chump!" grinned Tom Merry. "It was a jape! You'd better cut off before Glyn goes for you!"

Glyn's wrathful eyes glared upon the astonished naturalist of the Fourth.

"I'll wring your blessed neck!" he growled.

"Hop it, Batchesy!" said Tom.

And, deeming discretion the better part of valour, and giving up all hope of ever capturing a dragon, Theodore Batchelor darted away with his air-gun, just as Bernard Glyn made a threatening move in his direction.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Better chuck it, Glyn, for this afternoon. After all, it was a ripping joke while it lasted!"

"Was it?" snorted Glyn, rubbing his wounds. "I don't think!"

"Cheer up!" said Lowther, grinning rufishly. "I'm not to blame, you know!"

"Oh rats!" growled Bernard Glyn.

"My dear fellows," began Skimpole, "I consider—"

"Blow what you consider!" grinned Tom Merry. "We'd better cut back to the school, before old Crump returns with a giddy search-party. Now, don't start rowing again, you couple of idiots! Come on!"

And the St. Jim's party moved out of the wood. Glyn glared wrathfully at Monty Lowther from time to time, but did not attempt any more assault and battery.

The humorist of the Shell was feeling extremely sore, too. He was beginning to see that the way of the humorist, as well as that of the transgressor, is hard—very hard!

And, ten minutes later, when P.-c. Crump returned to the scene of his encounter with the dragon, reinforced by half a dozen men from the village, all he found was an empty dragon's carcass, fashioned out of canvas, with a quantity of "sparklers" and smoke-bombs inside!

CHAPTER 8.

Another Idea!

"THAT idiot Batchelor was simply made to have his leg pulled!" said Monty Lowther.

It was a few days after the exciting incident of Glyn's dragon, the story of which had made St. Jim's laugh loud and long.

The Terrible Three were seated in Dame Taggles' tuckshop, discussing pineapple cordial and cake.

Tom Merry grinned as Monty delivered himself thus.

"Thinking of playing another little jape, Monty?" he inquired.

"Quite so," replied Monty Lowther, chuckling. "I've thought of another stunning jape on Theodore!"

"Better give Theodore a wide berth, old son!" cautioned the captain of the Shell. "Your japes don't always seem to pan out properly, Monty!"

Manners chuckled.

"But this is quite the latest jape!" said Monty Lowther, with a twinkle in his eye. "I—I think I'll do it!"

"Well," grinned Tom Merry, "let us what it is, old son, and then, perhaps, we can advise you better."

"That's it, Monty!" said Manners. "Fire away!"

Lowther's eyes twinkled with merriment.

"Old Batchesy is fond of animals," he began. "This morning I saw him in the

cloisters, swotting over a book called "The Evolution of the Feline Tribe," or something like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Felines are cats," said Lowther earnestly. "Tom moggies—pussies, you know!"

"Well?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Well," grinned Lowther, "I started talking to Theodore, and pumped him. He said that he was keenly interested in the evolution of the feline tribe. The silly ass thinks that there's a lot in cats."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I let him ramp on," continued Lowther, "and he said that he'd like to have a few cats at St. Jim's, for the purposes of study."

"My word!"

"He quite meant it!" grinned Lowther. "He was afraid, though, that Mr. Latham would come down heavy on him."

"I shouldn't wonder!" observed Tom Merry, with a laugh.

Monty Lowther gave a deep chuckle.

"These masters don't understand!" he said, with a sage shake of the head.

"Why should study cats be prohibited to Theodore, just because of a silly prejudice on the part of a master? Why shouldn't Theodore have a few Tom-Moggies?"

"What are you getting at, Monty?" demanded Tom Merry. "You're not thinking of making a cat collection for Theodore's benefit, are you?"

"Something like that, Tommy!" chuckled Lowther. "I'm going to put an advertisement in the 'Rylcombe Gazette,' offering a comfortable home for lost, stolen, or strayed cats."

"Wha-a-a!"

"I reckon the giddy pussies will simply romp in," said the humorist of the Shell. "Old Batches will have as many cats as he wants, then!"

"B-b-but, surely, Monty, you're not going to put Theodore's name and address to the advert, are you?" gasped Manners, in amazement.

"What-ho!" grinned Lowther. "That's the whole cream of the joke! Study No. 3 will be converted into a regular cats' home, and I predict some high old times in the Fourth when those cats begin to arrive!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You funny ass, Monty!" gasped Tom Merry, wiping his eyes. "You wouldn't have the nerve!"

"Wouldn't I!" said Lowther. "I'm only doing Theodore a good turn; aren't I? He wants cats, and I've hit on the idea to advertise for 'em!"

"My word! What will Latham say when—"

"Latham's going over to Wayland Profiteering Tribunal to-morrow afternoon!" said Lowther. "I'll work the joke for the afternoon—see?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a first-rate idea!" chuckled Lowther proudly. "Ha, ha, ha! Imagine the faces of those Fourth Form kids when the cats start romping in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll cut down to the 'Gazette' office now!" said Lowther, rising. "It won't take me long on my bike. To-day's Tuesday. The advert will be in to-morrow, and in the afternoon the cats will come! So-long, you chaps!"

And Monty Lowther left his chums in roars of merriment.

He took his cycle from the cycle-shed, and peddled swiftly down to the village.

Arriving at the offices of the "Rylcombe Gazette," he interviewed the advertisement manager.

Having negotiated the business of the advertisement to his entire satisfaction,

the humorist of the Shell remounted his bike and sped up the High Street.

Three youths emerged from the bushop at the moment when Monty left the "Gazette" office.

They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the heroes of the New House at St. Jim's.

"Hallo! There goes old Lowther!" exclaimed Figgins. "He's just come from the 'Gazette' office. What was he doing there, I wonder?"

"Putting an advertisement in, I expect," said Kerr.

"Yes, I suppose so. But what the dickens is he advertising for?"

rather worried over that advert, I'm sure it's a joke up against us!"

"Oh, don't bother!" said Kerr. "I don't suppose it's anything of the kind, old chap. Come on!"

And very reluctantly the leader of the New House juniors suffered himself to be led away up the High Street by his chums.

George Figgins was still only half-convincing that Monty Lowther's advertisement was not a joke against himself.

CHAPTER 9.

Figgins' Cat Collection.

"GREAT PIP!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Look at this!" He thrust a copy of the "Rylcombe Gazette" into Kerr's hands, and pointed out to him the advertisement he had been anxiously looking for.

Kerr's eyes opened wide as he read the following:

"WANTED, FOR THIS AFTER-NOON ONLY.—Lost, strayed, or unwanted cats.—Any species, any condition. A comfortable home offered to all unwanted felines. This offer is open for this afternoon only. Apply, between 2.30 and 4 p.m., Theodore Batcher, Study No. 8, Fourth Form, St. James' School."

"Mum-my only sainted Aunt Eliza!" ejaculated Kerr.

Fatty Wynn took the paper, and read the advert.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he gasped.

"Queer, isn't it?" said Figgins, puckering his brow. "Surely Lowther didn't put that in for old Batches?"

Kerr chuckled.

"Not much!" he said. "I don't think even Theodore would be such a burbling ass as to do that. Besides, look how it's worded. That's some of Lowther's own work."

"B-b-but what's the idea?" asked Figgins. "Is it a joke?"

"That's about it, I reckon," said the Scotch junior shrewdly. "Lowther can't give up playing jokes, you know. He's working another one on poor old Theodore."

"My word!" breathed Figgins. "The—silly ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr and Wynn.

This conversation took place in Figgins' study in the New House.

Kerr was reading, and Fatty Wynn was sampling a bag of pastries. Figgins sat at the table, his head resting upon his hands, thinking.

The mighty brain of George Figgins worked swiftly, and suddenly he gave a gasp of mirth.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

His chums looked up in surprise.

"What's the idea, Figg?" demanded Kerr.

"Oh, it's a corker!" shrieked Figgins hilariously. "Hearken unto me, my sons, and I will a plot unfold!"

Kerr and Wynn, greatly wondering, hearkened unto their leader.

"Look here," said Figgins, "is would be a ripping feather in our cap if we could score off the School House bouncers. I expect Tom Merry and his set are hugging themselves over Monty Lowther's joke, which is planned to come off this afternoon. Well, if we can stop it, they'll be simply tearing their hair in disappointment."

"Yes, that's all very well, Figg," put in Fatty Wynn. "But how are you going to stop the joke?"

"Why, we'll intercept the people bringing the cats to St. Jim's this after-

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No. 26.—FRANK LEVISON



Frank Levison—Levison minor. As good a fellow as St. Jim's holds, absolutely straight and unswervingly loyal, yet without a touch of prigishness. Has the firmest faith in his major, and a very strong affection for Ernest's chums, Clive and Cardew, and for his own leader, Wally D'Arcy A. (Third Form.)

The brow of the mighty Figgins wrinkled in thought.

"I wonder if he's up to a joke on us?" he murmured.

"Perhaps!" grinned Kerr. "Anyhow, we'll look out for the advert in the morning."

"Yes, don't trouble now, Figg," urged Fatty Wynn. "We shall be late for tea if we don't hurry back to St. Jim's."

"Why, you've just had enough tea for two!" snorted Figgins. "I—I'm

noon," explained Figgins with a chuckle. "We'll stand half-way up the lane, and stop everybody bringing a cat to St. Jim's. We'll collect the cats, and old Lowther will be wondering why on earth no cats have arrived. His scheme will all fall through. Ha, ha, ha!"

"H'm!" said Kerr. "There's not much fun in that. What are we to do with the cats when we've collected them?"

"Ha!" said Figgins. "That's where the best part of my idea comes in. I suppose you've heard that all cats are very fond of aniseed, haven't you?"

"Ye-es," said Kerr slowly. "I believe I have."

"Cats go for aniseed like—like anything!" said Figgins heartily. "They'll follow an aniseed trail like bloodhounds."

"Yes; but—"

"My little jape will be worked to-night!" chuckled Figgins. "We'll collect all these cats and keep 'em in the woodshed till to-night. We'll lay a trail of aniseed from the woodshed across the quadrangle, and up to the Fourth Form dormitory. After lights out—say, about half-past ten—we'll go down and release the merry cats from the woodshed. They'll strike the aniseed trail, and follow it to the Fourth Form dormitory—see? Jack Blake & Co. will wake up in the middle of the night, to find their dorm full of cats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you think of that for an idea?" inquired Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorused Kerr. "It's rich, Figg—too rich for words! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a corker!" said Fatty Wynn, with a fat chuckle. "My word, Figg, you're a coughdropper!"

"I rather fancy that I've hit the rippling idea of the term," said Figgins, with a smirk of satisfaction. "We'll work the giddy oracle this afternoon, and leave the cats to do the rest to-night!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Good egg!"

The chums of the New House simply hugged themselves all that morning over that great brain-wave of George Figgins.

When the afternoon arrived, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn set out down Friarald Lane, carrying several bags of stale fish they had procured surreptitiously from the pantry.

They took their stand outside Farmer Cropper's field, where an old, disused barn just stood behind them.

"I'll take the cats as the people bring 'em along," said Figgins to his chums. "You chaps shove them in the barn, and keep 'em quiet. Got that?"

"Wha-ho!"

Kerr and Wynn placed the fish in the barn, whilst Figgins took his stand by the road.

Ten minutes later a weary-looking woman came along, bearing a basket out of which a cat's bushy tail protruded, and from the interior of which some dismal howls proceeded.

Figgins stepped up to the woman and raised his hat.

"Excuse me, madam," he said politely. "Were you taking that cat to St. Jim's?"

"Yes, young man," replied the woman, struggling with the bag. "I want to get rid of this cat o' mine."

"Then I'll take the animal," said Figgins. "Hand it over, ma'am!"

The woman handed over the cat readily. Figgins took the struggling creature from the bag, and whistled Kerr over. Kerr took charge of the cat, which was a large black Tom, and bore it away to the barn.

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"Thank you, madam!" said Figgins. "I presume you don't want—"

"You can have it!" replied the woman, turning down the lane again. "It came too expensive, pinching my meat an' fish! You are welcome!"

"Much obliged, madam!" said Figgins, raising his cap again. "Good-afternoon!"

The leader of the New House chuckled.

Very soon a huge, burly labourer came striding up the lane, bearing a spitting ginger cat beneath his arm.

Figgins, with a twinkle in his eye, approached the burly gentleman, and raised his cap.

"Ahem!" he began. "Were you taking that cat to the school?"

"Yes, I was!" he said. "Are you the bloke who put that advert in?"

"I am asking charge of the cats—yes," said Figgins. "Shall I relieve you of the animal?"

"Not 'arf!" said the man, planting the fiery animal on Figgins. "I've tried to drown the little blighter five times, but bust me if 'e don't always turn hup again, sassy as ever!"

"Good!" said Figgins. "How much?"

"'Tain't as if I'm selling the warmint, but I could do wiv a drink!"

Figgins, having whistled Fatty Wynn over, and placed the cat in that youth's charge, slipped sixpence into the burly gentleman's hand.

"Thank'ee, sir!" he said, and rumbled back to Rycombe.

A minute later a grimy urchin came into view, dragging a belligerent tobby cat along by means of its tail.

"Hi, young 'un!" called Figgins. "Where are you going with that cat?"

"Hup to the skule!" replied the urchin. "Goin' to take it to one of the young gents there wot advertised!"

"Well, hand it over here!" said Figgins, in the young gent's in question. Here's sixpence for you, kid!"

The urchin grinned, and swung the unfortunate cat over to Figgins.

Figgins caught the cat, and bestowed the sixpence upon the urchin.

Kerr took the cat away just as a large, pompous woman rolled up.

She had beneath her arm a large tortoise-shell cat who seemed to find diversion in howling at the top of its voice.

Figgins, nothing daunted by the good lady's looks, approached her.

"I presume you are taking your cat to St. Jim's, madam, with regard to the advertisement that appeared this mornin'?"

"Well!" demanded the irate female, glaring at Figgins.

"Well—er—I am taking charge of the animals, ma'am," said Figgins. "May I relieve you of it?"

"Yes, take it, and welcome!" said the woman, thrusting the doleful creature into Figgins' arms. "I've been kept awake o' nights long enough with its 'owling. Glad to get rid of the animal!"

"And the owner of the musical tom-cat strote away."

"Good biz!" grinned Figgins, as he handed the cat to Kerr. "That's the fourth, and— My hat! Here comes a whole colony of 'em!"

Two seedy-looking youths staggered up the lane, dragging along some half a dozen cats of various sizes and colours, which were kept together by the very simple expedient of having their necks fastened to a rope.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Figgins. "Want to get rid of those cats?"

"Wot-ho!" said the seediest youth of the two. "These 'ere cats is stray ones,

an' we've spent a couple of hours a-collecting 'em. 'Arf-a-crown, please!"

The half-crown was duly paid, and Kerr led the struggling felines away to the barn.

Business in cats was very brisk that afternoon. It was surprising what a number of unwanted cats there were at Rycombe. Some of these Figgins got for nothing, and most of them went for a few coppers.

By four o'clock the barn was alive with cats. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn surveyed their afternoon's collection and chuckled hugely.

"Well, tip old P.e. Crump to look after them for us until it's dark," announced the enterprising leader of the New House. "There are no more customers, so let's get back to the school."

P.e. Crump having been bribed to keep an eye on the cats, the heroes of the New House returned to St. Jim's.

The first fellows they met were the Terrible Three standing at the gates, looking extremely glum.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "You three look as though you've just been to a funeral. What's the trouble?"

"Oh, rats!" suspected Lowther.

As the three New House juniors ambled away, they chuckled deeply under their breaths.

"Rats!" grinned Figgins. "Lowther should have said 'cats'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Meanwhile, the Terrible Three gave up their vigil for cats as hopeless.

"No go!" said Lowther lugubriously.

The advert appeared, but—

"You chargin' idiot!" snorted Tom Merry wrathfully. "You've made us miss our footer, waiting for the joke to commence. There's been no joke, and we've stuck here all the afternoon for nothing!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, bump the silly chump!" growled Tom Merry. "Perhaps that will knock some of the funniness out of him!"

Lowther's exasperated chums laid violent hands upon him and whirled him to the ground.

"Yaroooooooh!" howled Lowther. "Stoppit! Yah! Ow!"

Bump, bump, bump!

The humorist of the Shell was bumped severely on the hard stone flags.

"There!" said Tom Merry breathlessly. "Come to us with any more of your dotty schemes, Lowther, and I'll boil you in oil!"

And Tom Merry and Mannets, snorting with disgust, strode away.

Lowther picked himself up and rubbed his aching body.

"Ow!" he moaned. "The burbling jabberwocks! Yow!"

And the cross-gotten humorist of the Shell limped painfully and slowly away.

CHAPTER 10. Cats Galore.

F IGGINS cycled down to Rycombe that evening and purchased a stock of aniseed. Under cover of darkness he and Kerr laid the aniseed trail from the woodshed to the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House.

The fellows were at prep when Figgins and Kerr stole in, and they were comparatively safe.

The job of transferring the cats from the barn to the school woodshed was a very precarious one, and had to be done in strictest secrecy.

They found, however, that the woodshed would not hold all the cats, for, once confined in so small a space, they fought furiously with each other.

So Kerr hit on the idea of placing the animals in the gymnasium, which was a

spacious building, and making the aniseed trail lead from there, and this was accordingly done.

That night, at about half-past ten, Figgins stole out of his dormitory in the New House and crept towards the gymnasium.

A faint sound of me-owling told that the cats were getting irritable.

"Now for the feed deal!" chuckled the leader of the New House juniors, and he opened the side door of the gymnasium.

Immediately a horde of cats came pouring forth.

Kerr had laid a liberal trail of aniseed and the sagacious animals were quick to pick it up.

With purrs of delight they smelt the aniseed, and followed the trail like blood-hounds on the scent.

Figgins watched them make towards the School House; then, chuckling deeply, he retraced his footsteps towards the New House.

In the School House all was silent and peaceful.

Jack Blake & Co. had retired to rest quite an hour ago, and were sleeping the sleep of the just.

Suddenly there came a frantic scratching at the dormitory door, accompanied by a chorus of howls.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy awoke with a start and sat up in bed.

"Wow-ow-oooh! Me-ow-ow-ow!" "Bai Jove!" ejaculated the swill of St. Jim's.

"What evah is the maitain out thesh?" Blake! Blake, deah boy, wake up!"

With a sleepy grunt Blake roused himself and inquired the cause of his awakening.

Before his noble chum could answer a wild, unearthly yell broke the stillness of the night.

"Murrow-ow-ow! Wocogh!" "What the thump—" gasped Blake springing out of bed. "Good heavens!" "Spitz-zzz-zzz! Gerooowowow!"

By this time the whole dormitory was awakened. Startled faces peered through the gloom, whilst those unearthly yells continued to pulsate in the passage outside.

"Gweat Scott!" exclaimed Gussy, springing from his bed and taking a lighted candle. "It sounds like cats, bai Jove! I'll open the doah and see!"

A yell of dissent arose; but the noble Arthur Augustus, with the blue blood of the D'Arcys in his veins, did not shrink from danger, and he opened the door.

He was immediately bowled over by a horde of struggling animals.

"Yawooogh!" roared Gussy, as the claws of the excited cats tore into his flesh and ripped his elegant pyjamas.

"Gweat Scott! Deah boys, look out! Yah! Gwwoogh! Oh deah!"

"What the—" "Look out, chaps! We're attacked by—"

"Yarooogh!" shrieked Blake, as an infuriated tom-cat leapt at him and clawed at his pyjamas.

The cats poured into the Fourth Form dormitory with a wild chorus of hoots and squeals and yells.

Within the space of two minutes wild confusion reigned in the Fourth Form dormitory.

"Me-ow-ow! Spitz-zzz-zzz! Peis-ssss-iss!" shrieked the cats, of which there were about two dozen.

"Under the bedclothes, chaps!" howled Blake. "Don't go mad—they're only cats!"

"Help!" There was a hurried scramble to get into bed again.

The cats, now that the supply of aniseed had run out, began to fight spitefully. They went for each other hammer and tongs, and woe betide the luckless junior who got in the way of the claws!

"Oh, h-b-bai Jove!" stuttered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, jamming his monocle into his eye and surveying the cat-fight in horror. "Wheeh evah did those howwid sweatshaws come from? Blake, deah boy—"

"Oh deah!" groaned Blake. "They'll tear the dorny to bits! Just hark at 'em!"

The cats were, indeed, making the fur fly!

They howled at the tops of their voices as they clawed away at each other, and the startled yells of the Fourth-Formers added great weight and vociferation to the uproar.

In the midst of that whirling affray, Mr. Latham strode into the room, clad in dressing-gown and slippers, and bearing a candle.

"Good heavens, boys!" gasped the dumfounded master. "What ever has happened? Yarooogh!"

The unfortunate master of the Fourth had trodden on the tail of a particularly arrogant tabby cat, and the cat had retaliated with its claws.

Mr. Latham dropped his candle, and danced the floor of the dormitory, clasp- ing his foot, and howling with anguish.

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"Oh crumbs!" moaned Blake. "That's done it!"

"Me-ow-owwrrroo! Woough-ah-ooohoo!" shrieked the feline usurpers of the dormitory.

Mr. Lathom made a wild break for the door, and collided with another person, who was in the act of entering.

"Mr. Railton!" gasped the shivering Mr. Lathom. "There is a host of sanguinary fiends in that dormitory! If you value your existence, do not enter!"

"Nonsense!" snapped the House-master. "Boys, what does this mean? Good heavens!"

Mr. Railton carried a lamp, and he staggered back in amazement as the lamp-light showed up the fighting animals.

"This is terrible!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, his face becoming dark with anger. "Blake, do you know anything of this?"

"Nunno, sir!" replied Blake. "We were asleep, when the cats woke us up! It—!—it's awful, sir!"

"Get up, boys, and drive them out!" said Mr. Railton sternly. "Open the window!"

The Housemaster picked his way gingerly amongst the struggling animals, and flung the dormitory window wide open.

"Bai Jove! I know a wemedy, sir!" chirruped D'Arcy suddenly. "We'll drive them away with watah!"

"Water!" cried Blake. "Just the identical! Cats are frightened to death of water, sir!"

"Yes, yes! Quite so!" said Mr. Railton quickly. "You have my permission, but— Mind how you go, boys!"

"What-ho, sir!"

Several pairs of hands were laid on the wash-basins in the dormitory, and water was swept upon the combatant cats in deluges.

With wild, mournful howls they sprang for the window, and those who did not go out of their own accord, were hunted from beneath the beds, and driven out.

At last, the Fourth Form dormitory was clear of cats.

The boys were breathless with excitement, and both Mr. Railton and Mr. Lathom were bursting with suppressed fury.

The dormitory floor was swamped with water, so, indeed, were quite a lot of the beds.

"Go to bed, boys!" said Mr. Railton. "I shall hold on inquiry into this in the morning!"

"Oh, bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy, climbing upon his bed again. "My bed is wet! Oh, deah!"

"You'll have to put up with that, Gussy!" granted Blake. "Don't jaw, but let a chap get to sleep!"

Sleep, however, was impossible that night.

There were two dozen cats roaming

the quadrangle, and their mournful dirges rang upon the night air.

The fellows in their beds writhed in torture, and many were the articles that were hurled out of the windows at the cats.

Nothing daunted, however, the feline visitors raised their tuneless voices upon the moon, and pealed forth their anthems of misery until the early hours of the morning.

Monty Lowther, when he heard the sound of cats, wondered vaguely whether the midnight alarm had anything to do with his advertisement.

Figgins & Co. chuckled hugely in their own dormitory, but were not quite so pleased, however, when they found that the wails of the cats in the quadrangle kept them from their beasty sleep.

As Kerr remarked, it was a night of events, and they waited for the morning with apprehension, fearfully wondering what would transpire then.

CHAPTER 11.

Exit Theodore.

"THE'RE'S going to be a row!" Jack Blake announced that fact in worried tones to his three chums next morning.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wondah wheeah the cats came from!"

"Goodness, only knows!" said Blake. "Old Batches don't seem to know anything about it!"

Theodore Batcher came up just then, and blinked at the chums of Study No. 6 through his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"I—I—I s-s-say—" he began. "I—I had a l-l-letter from mum-my f-f-father, the Pop-Professor Cornelius Batcher, this morn-morning."

"Really?" grinned Blake.

"Y-y-yes," stammered the amateur naturalist of St. Jim's. "He—he had opened a n-new T.T.Tittlebat bub-burche of the Scilly Isles Nun-Natural H-History Society, and h-has bub-been elected Pup-President."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nun-no c-c-cause whatever for l-l-laughter," stammered Theodore severely. "Mum-my f-f-father r-r-requires mum-my s-s-services, and I-I'm l-l-leaving St. J-Jim's to-morrow, f-for the S-Scilly Isles."

The Fourth-Formers looked at Theodore Batcher in astonishment.

"Great pip!" exclaimed Blake. "Then you're leaving to-morrow?"

Theodore nodded his shock head. "My hat!" said Blake. "We were just beginning to like you, Batches! Have you told the Head?"

"Y-y-yes," replied the Nature enthusiast of the Fourth. "I leave to-mum-morrow."

"Oh!"

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's

passed just then, and he gave Jack Blake & Co. a grim look.

"I wonder what the verdict's going to be?" granted Blake. "Anyway, it wasn't our fault the cats came!"

"No, wathah not!"

Nothing, however, was said until the Fourth Form assembled for lessons. Mr. Lathom's face was grim as he looked over the class.

"Boys," he said, "a disgraceful scene was presented in the dormitory last night, wherein a number of cats were involved. I have made inquiries, and found that the animals had previously been confined in the gymnasium. I cannot conceive for what reason they were brought into this school, unless it was for some absurd purpose of study which, I believe, is the pastime of a certain youth in my Form. His love of Natural History may be very commendable in itself, but there are limits. However, in view of certain circumstances, nothing more will be said on the matter. Boys, the lesson will proceed!"

The Fourth buzzed with excitement at this momentous news.

They quite expected a "row." That Mr. Lathom should have taken things so calmly, startled them.

When lessons were over, and they congregated in the Common-room, they discussed the matter fully.

"I can't understand it," said Blake, "unless it is that Lathom puts it down to old Batches, and won't say anything about it, because the ass is leaving to-morrow."

"Yaas, that appears to be the only explanation, deah boys," said D'Arcy. "Weally, it is wippin' of old Lathom to act like that!"

Blake's explanation, as it happened, was the correct one.

Mr. Lathom, in view of his belief that Theodore was a crank on Natural History, had put it down to that youth's ardency for study. This belief was substantiated by Mr. Lathom finding Theodore absorbed in the book entitled, "The Evolution of the Feline Tribe," during lessons, and, as Theodore was leaving on the morrow, Mr. Lathom did not press the matter further.

Which was extremely fortunate for Montague Lowther of the Shell, and for George Figgins & Co. of the New House.

Next day Theodore Batcher packed his innumerable boxes, and left St. Jim's for the Scilly Isles.

His stay at St. Jim's had been a brief, but exciting one.

The boys were rather sorry at Theodore's departure, for they had had some keen amusement during the short stay of the Naturalist of St. Jim's.

THE END.

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SYNOPSIS.

Dick Danby, a stalwart lad of sixteen, obtains the promise of partnership from Captain Morgan Kidd, skipper of the auxiliary schooner Foam, and his daughter Stella, in a treasure cruise to the wrecked Pathan. Dick is the sole survivor of the Pathan, which was torpedoed, and is lying, half submerged, off an island in the South Seas. In the strong-room of the ill-fated ship is two million sterling in bar-gold and money, and the Dragon's Eye—a wonderful diamond.

Otto Schwab, posing as a Dutchman—though in reality the commander of the U-boat which sank the Pathan—and Sush Mendozza, a Malayan Malay, are their unscrupulous rivals for the treasure.

Harry Fielding and Joe Maddox join the expedition, also Wang Su, a Chinese boy. They reach the island off which the Pathan is sunk, and a fierce encounter with the Red Rover takes place, in which our friends are victorious.

Later, it is discovered that Otto Schwab and Mendozza are in league with the natives of the island. Work on the wreck is commenced.

Wang Su obtains the Dragon's Eye, unknown to the others. That night, Dick and Wang Su destroy the Islanders' war-canoes by fire. Next day, whilst at work on the wreck, a huge eel attacks Harry and Joe. Eventually Joe brings Harry Fielding to the surface safely.

(Now read on.)

The Duel Under the Sea.

STOPPING down, Dick and Stella relieved Joe of his chum's unconscious form, and tore the helmet from his head.

It was full of water, and for the moment they thought the gallant young Britisher was dead, but under their skillful administrations he recovered sufficiently to open his eyes and smile faintly ere he lapsed into unconsciousness once more.

In the meantime Wang Su had removed Joe Maddox's helmet just in time to save him from partial suffocation, for during the struggle the monster had bent Joe's air cylinder, with the result that the air had slowly leaked out until only just sufficient had remained in it to enable him to reach the surface with his chum.

Joe was deathly pale and aching from head to foot as a result of the monster eel's all too close embrace, and, after a short consultation with Stella, Dick decided to send him and Harry Fielding to the Foam and continue the salvaging operations alone.

"It was certainly a lucky day for us, Wang, when you shipped on board the Foam. But for you we would all have been crushed to pulp in that fearful creature's coils," said Dick, turning to the Chinaman.

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To his surprise, Wang Su refused his proffered hand.

"Snake misse's hand, not Wang Su's. Velly blue lady gal, misse! Poke speal though big fishes tail. Him no likee him's tail pinned to' lock," he said urbanely.

Dick turned to where Stella was rucfully regarding her white dirt coat and skirt, which had been ruined by the salt water.

"You did that?" he asked admiringly. "It seemed the only thing to do," returned the girl, glancing angrily at the Chinaman. "It was sheer luck that the spear-head got jammed in the coral."

"Very lucky for us," replied Dick drily. "Almost as lucky as having the readiest, pluckiest girl in the world at hand to do the right thing at the right time."

Stella Kidd flushed with pleasure; then, lowering her eyes before Dick Danby's admiring gaze, suggested that the sooner they got Harry Fielding on board the Foam the better.

By the time Dick Danby had repaired Joe Maddox's diving-suit, Stella and Wang Su had returned from transferring their unconscious comrade and Joe to the Foam's boat.

"I'm afraid this puts the kibosh on our hopes of getting all the gold on board the Foam to-day, Stella," said Dick, as he fitted the air-tight shoulder-piece on his shoulders, preparatory to the helmet being screwed on.

"Why not leave what we can't take away? When I was a child I always had to leave a little piece on my plate for manners," returned the girl, with a laugh.

"As manners in this instance means Mendozza and Schwab, I would not leave them so much as the bags the coin was packed up in if I could help it!" cried Dick, as he seated himself on a rock and lowered the helmet over his head, which Wang Su promptly screwed on.

Sung Su, all three were working their hardest, trying to make up for the loss of the second diver.

Dick carried the ingots from the ship to immediately beneath the derrick, whilst Wang Su would hook the rope on to the basket, then swim to the surface and help the girl wind up the precious load.

For three hours Dick Danby hauled out the heavy baskets, until the air in his helmet began to grow vitiated, and he realised that he ought to rise to the surface to rest and to have the cylinder refilled.

But he was getting to the end of his labours, and, anxious, if possible, to

secure the last bar ere rising, he stuck gaily to it.

But at length a difficulty in breathing, together with a loud humming in his ears, warned him that it would be fatal to delay returning to the surface, and he reluctantly turned towards the ladder.

Suddenly he came to an abrupt halt, and gazed incredulously at what at the first glance he took to be a reflection of himself in the water.

Coming towards him was a man in a diving-dress so like his own that the thought flashed across his mind that, in some wonderful way, they had patched up the one Harry Fielding had worn, and that Joe Maddox had descended to help him.

But this idea he dismissed when he remembered how the eel's teeth had punctured Harry's air cylinder until it resembled a colander, and that nothing would make it serviceable again.

Besides, as the figure moved towards him, with the lumbering steps of one to whom the heavy, lead-soled boots had not become familiar, he noticed various differences in the shape and make of the diving-dress which had escaped his first hurried glance.

Afterwards Dick Danby wondered how it was he had not connected the unexpected appearance of the diver with Schwab and Mendozza; but the fact was that the foul air he was inhaling was affecting his brain, and he was moving as one in a dream, until, when some five yards apart, the new-comer rounded an up-cropping piece of coral and, for the first time, Dick saw the face within the helmet.

It was that of Otto Schwab!

The discovery awoke him, as it were, from the semi-somnolent state into which he had fallen, and he braced himself for the coming struggle.

Instinctively he felt for his knife. A feeling akin to despair swept through his frame as he found the sheath empty, and he realised that Joe Maddox must have dropped it during his struggle with the monster eel.

For a moment he halted; then, as he saw Schwab unhook an axe from his belt, he sprang forward, scorning, though unarmed, to seek safety in flight.

Raising his axe above his head, Schwab advanced to meet him.

But the unaccustomed weight of the water rendered his every movement very slow, whilst Dick, who had grown quite accustomed to the surrounding element, was able to close with him ere he could bring the heavy weapon down, with the result that, instead of crashing through the glass, as the German intended, it fell on the stout brass helmet.

His right arm round his foe, his head pressed against his shoulders, Dick slid his left hand up the other's arm until his fingers closed in a vice-like grip round the hand that held the axe.

Backwards and forwards the two men swayed, Dick striving to wrench the axe from his opponent's grasp, whilst Schwab exerted all his strength to force the head of his weapon against the glass of Dick's helmet.

But Dick Danby had entered upon the struggle handicapped by the want of fresh air.

It was not long before he felt a drowsy feeling of unreality creep over his numbing brain. Despite his every effort, he felt himself being bent backwards, until at last his weakened frame collapsed, and he fell, with Schwab on the top of him.

Helpless now, he watched a look of exultation flash into his foe's face as he raised his axe to smash in the glass of Dick's helmet and allow the sea to flood.

Dick Danby gave himself up for lost. But ere the axe could fall Dick was astounded to see Schwab's legs fly upwards and his body rise swiftly to the surface.

Scarcely able to believe that he was still alive, Dick Danby struggled with his feet, and, though with uncertain step and swimming head, reached the ladder and climbed up it, to fall helpless at Stella's feet.

A rush of cool, invigorating air as his gill chum removed his helmet brought Dick back to the full possession of his senses.

Struggling to a sitting position, he looked with staring eyes at the derrick, from the end of which his late antagonist hung head downwards, his feet secured by a running noose at the end of the rope.

Then his eyes wandered to Wang Su, who was seated on the windlass, surveying the dangling man, with a complacent grin.

"What on earth has happened? How, in the name of all that's wonderful, did he get there?" demanded Dick, pointing to the swinging man.

"Blains! Heap, big, fist-chop blains!" explained Wang Su, tapping his forehead.

Dick looked inquiringly at Stella.

"Wang again!" laughed the girl. "He saw your danger, and, diving, snared the murderous villain's legs. I pulled him up—and there he is!"

Rising to his feet, Dick seized a guide-rope and drew their captive to the rock, where Wang Su tied his hands behind his back ere they lowered him and removed his helmet.

Schwab's face was almost black, but he soon recovered sufficiently to whine for mercy, as only a beaten German can.

"A fat lot of mercy you would have had on me but for Wang Su, you sneaking scoundrel!" retorted Dick angrily. "If I gave you what you deserve I would chuck you into the sea just as you are!"

"No, no! Don't kill me! I will cry my life boy! I will tell everything! If I don't you will all be murdered!" whined Schwab.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Dick.

"Swear you won't kill me, and I'll tell what Mendoza has planned!" cried the traitor.

"S'posing you no tallee, me cuttæe thloatt!" said Wang Su, drawing the back of a long, keen, murderous-looking knife across the German's throat.

A howl of terror burst from Schwab's lips.

"Mercy! Take him off! Don't let him kill me!" he whined.

"Leave the cringing coward alone, Wang!" cried Dick, turning away in disgust. "We will take him on to the Foam and hand him over to the tender mercies of Captain Kidd. I am afraid the few bars left in the strong-room must remain there until morning; I've had enough of it for one day."

"No wonder, poor old chap! I think we have all had about as much excitement as is good for us since morning," returned Stella.

As she spoke she signed to Wang Su to help her lift the German into the boat, for Dick Danby was far too weak to have been of any assistance; and, with Wang in the stern, rowed him to the reef, where he was handed over to the Kanakas for conveyance to the Foam.

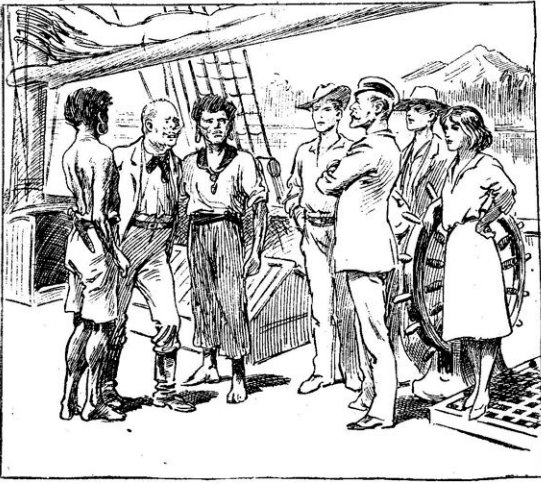
The removal of the gold Dick had recovered from the sea that afternoon

continued Captain Kidd, pointing to the Skull and Crossbones, which he had hoisted directly Schwab had been brought on board.

Otto Schwab was a true German. Having given in, he did so utterly, and would have betrayed his own brother, to say nothing of Mendoza—who, in his heart he both feared and hated—to save his own skin.

In agitated tones, and execrable English, he told how he and Mendoza had established relations with the Islanders through the Malays, and had easily persuaded the savages to help them in an attack on the Foam, by promising them whatever booty, besides the gold, the schooner contained.

As, from the summit of the mighty cliffs overlooking the Chair Rock, they had seen that the Britishers were rapidly



The old Samoan boatswain and a Kanaka grasped Otto Schwab. "Take this German scoundrel below, and fasten him to a bulkhead!" Captain Kidd ordered. (See page 19.)

necessitated another journey to the Chair Rock, then Stella returned alone to fetch Dick Danby and the diving gear.

A Momentous Decision.

"YES, yes! I will confess everything—everything if you will only spare my life!" cried Captain Otto Schwab some two hours later, as he glanced from Captain Morgan Kidd to a long plank which protruded over the schooner's low bulwarks.

The skipper's great namesake could not have frowned more terribly on a captured foe than did that worthy upon the unfortunate German.

"You'd better, my lad, or it's up the plank you go and over to the sharks!" he declared sternly.

Otto Schwab shuddered.

"Now cut your cable and get under way. Mind you steer a straight course, or, by the Jolly Roger, I'll serve supper to the sharks before I get my own!"

securing the lost gold, Schwab and Mendoza decided to wait until all, or, at least, the greater part of it, was on board the Foam ere they attacked her, being willing to allow Captain Kidd and his party to do the work, but determined that they themselves should be the only ones to profit by it.

As it was evident that the strong-room was nearly emptied of its precious contents, and they feared the Britishers, content with what they had already obtained, should set sail, they had fixed on that very morning for the attack.

But their plans had been deranged by the burning of the canoes, and Schwab and the Portuguese had drawn lots to decide which should don the only diving-dress they had been able to save from the wreck of the Red Rover, and steal to where the Britishers were working, in the hope of being able to delay their work, and thus give the natives time to collect war-canoes from the adjacent islands to replace the ones they had lost.

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As Schwab brought his revelations to a close Captain Kidd and his companions looked questioningly at each other.

The German had told a plausible tale, but how much of it was true, and how much sheer fiction, they had no means of discovering.

"According to your showing, Herr Schwab, we're in danger of being attacked by the Islanders and your rascally Malays at any moment. What would you advise us to do?" he asked; to test the German's sincerity.

Otto Schwab looked at him in amazement, not unmix'd with contempt.

He had noted, with joy, the prefix to his name, and, judging the British skipper by himself, thought that his narrative had struck terror into his heart.

"Do!" he shouted. "Dinner and blitzen, what would you not except a few do, but set out and leave the island without a moment's loss of time!"

Captain Kidd nodded, not that he was impressed by the other's advice, but because it had shown him that Schwab believed the attack of which he had spoken would be made.

"Here, Kao, take this German scoundrel below, and fasten him to a bulk-head!" he ordered.

Then, as the old Samoan boatswain and a Kanaka bundled Schwab into the hold, he turned to his companions, saying:

"Well, my lads, what is it to be? Show the blackhearted villains a clean pair of heels, or stay and fight them?"

"Fight them, sir!" replied Dick Danby promptly. "There's about half a dozen bars of gold left, but we have not found the Dragon's Eye, and I want that specially."

As he spoke, Dick's eyes chanced to fall upon Wang Su, who was seated, as was his wont, just outside the circle made by the four white men and the mate of the Foam, and was struck by the sudden look of eager interest that flashed into the Chinaman's usually passive face.

But it was gone as quickly as it had come, and, thinking he must have been tricked by the varying shadows cast from the hurricane-lamp which swung above their heads, he continued:

"I thought, perhaps, captain, that if you and my chums were willing, we might give it to Stella as a memento of our adventures."

The beautiful mate of the Foam flushed with pleasure.

"I'd love to have it, Dick!" she replied gratefully.

"Well, well, we'll talk about that when we've found it. Anyhow, I'd simply hate to see it fall into that dago's hands! So we'll stick to our anchorage, and have a look for it in the morning," agreed Captain Kidd, rubbing his hands, for perhaps the only characteristic he really shared with the bloodthirsty pirate whose name he bore was his love of a scrap of any kind, and the greater the odds the better he liked it.

Shortly afterwards their conversation was interrupted by a shower of rain such as is only met with in the Tropics, which, pouring through the awning as though it had been made of paper, speedily drove them below.

A Perilous Position.

WHETHER Dick Danby was overtired, or whether he was unable to sleep in the stuffy little cabin, after having been accustomed to the open air, it is impossible to say, but for two hours he tossed uneasily in his bunk, dozing for a few moments, then waking up to find himself less inclined for sleep than ever, until at last, despairing of wooing the drowsy god

below, he snatched a blanket off his bunk, and made his way on deck.

The rain was still coming down in torrents, beating on the schooner with a sound like snail shot, and raising a peculiar hissing sound from the waves, above which Dick was astounded to hear the roar of the waves beating against the coral reef.

This was the more extraordinary as the wind was blowing inshore.

Puzzled, though not yet alarmed, Dick Danby moved forward until he came upon a huddled figure in the bows, which he knew to be the Kanaka look-out comfortably snoozing under his grass rain-coat.

Angry at the man's neglect of duty, Dick raised his foot to arouse him. But the well-deserved kick was never administered.

With his foot in mid-air, Dick Danby paused, and gazed, in horrified dismay, over the bows.

So close, that the schooner's bowsprit seemed actually touching it, a dancing line of phosphorous shone through the darkness.

"All hands on deck! Breakers ahead!" he shouted, tumbling over the sleeping man, as he clambered on the bowsprit and peered through the curtain of rain at the ominous line which he knew but too well was caused by waves breaking on the coral reef.

Alarmed by his cries the Kanakas rolled up the forecastle-hatch, whilst the after-guard swarmed on deck from the cabin.

"Good Heavens, she's adrift!" he heard Captain Kidd shout.

For a moment there was the uttermost confusion, which, however, soon gave place to well-ordered effort as the skipper's orders sounded loud and clear above the drumming of the rain.

But Dick Danby scarce heard him.

He was hanging over the bows groping for the waxed heave-ho, from which had come a rubbing sound such as is made by a hawser grating against wood.

The next moment his fingers had closed over the anchor cable, and his worst fears were justified. The stout rope was taut; but instead of bending into the sea, stretched in a straight line towards the line of phosphorescent foam to which the schooner was being rapidly drawn.

In a flash the true meaning of his discovery burst upon him.

Whilst the look-out slept, their foes, following the sharks that infested the water round the Foam, had swum to the schooner, and, cutting the anchor cable, had bent it on to a long rope by which they were drawing the tight little craft on to the reef.

It was ebb-tide, and well Dick knew that if they succeeded the vessel would be hopelessly stranded until the next tide came to lift them off.

"An axe, quick, for your lives!" he shouted, in accents rendered shrill by anxiety.

With eager hands he threw the tarpaulin from off the Bull Pup, and, after fumbling in the shot locker by its side, drew out a shell which he thrust into the open breach.

This was but the work of a few seconds, and by the time old Kao hastened up with an axe, he had pressed the trigger and sent a shell hurtling in the direction the rope stretched.

He had not fired with the hope of inflicting injury upon their foes, but that the flash of the gun might reveal the extent of their danger.

In this he was successful, for, although the light lasted but a fraction of a second, it sufficed to show them a line of men standing knee-deep in the surf, as they hauled on the cable by which they were drawing the schooner on to the

coral, and beyond them two dark blotches on the lagoon which he knew must be canoes full of men.

Although the shell whistled high above their heads, the shot from out of the darkness was so unexpected that it caused the men hauling on the rope to cease their efforts, and ere they could put their strength into it again Kao had severed the cable with a single stroke of his axe.

But it was too late. Even as a howl of rage from the reef told that the sudden slackening of the rope had sent the haulers tumbling in the surf, the schooner grounded with a scarcely perceptible shiver, and they knew from waves breaking over her stern that she was hard and fast aground.

Followed a long silence, for the waves drowned all sounds from the reef, whilst a whispered order from Captain Kidd forbade all speaking on board the Foam lest they should guide their foes to them through the darkness.

Nevertheless, the crew of the Foam were not idle.

Silently but swiftly they rigged nets and hammocks round the sides of their craft, which would, at least, check the first impulse of a sudden attack.

This done, they stood armed with rifles, revolvers, and boarding-pikes, ready to repel boarders.

For five, ten, fifteen minutes they waited, with every sense on the alert, every muscle strung to its highest tension, until, at last, Captain Kidd sent a rocket soaring into the air, which bathed the reef and lagoon in beams of light.

Somewhat to their astonishment, and certainly greatly to their relief, not a foe, Islander, or Malay was in sight.

A puzzled frown furrowed the skipper's sunburnt brow.

"What do you make of it, Dick? You ought to know more about these Islander swabs than any of us," he said.

"I'm not surprised, for this part of the lagoon is reported to be infested by devils, and I don't think even the pleasure of cutting our throats would get the savages on its waters after dark," replied Danby.

"And small blame to them," interposed Harry Fielding, who, though still shaky from the after-effects of his fight with the eel, had turned out to do his bit in the defence of the Foam.

"Then the men who hauled us on to the reef were Malays, I suppose?" mused Captain Kidd.

Dick Danby nodded.

"That's as certain as it is that we shall have the whole crowd, Islanders and Mendoza's lot, about our ears as soon as it's light," he declared.

"True, lad; so it is up to us to get the old ship adrift before dawn," agreed the skipper. "Lively, Kao! Launch the gig, and get a Kedge anchor astern."

Willingly the Kanakas sprang to obey their head-man's orders; but though the heavy anchor was dropped well astern, and everyone on board manned the windlass save Harry Fielding, who, too weak for hard work, was keeping a sharp look-out in case of attack, the Foam would not budge, and at last Captain Kidd was reluctantly compelled to order them to give up the attempt.

"There's nothing for it, lads, but to wait for the next tide, though Heaven only knows how many of us will live to see it rise," he said more despondently than Dick had ever known him speak.

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