

READ ABOUT TOM MERRY, THE WORLD'S FAVOURITE SCHOOLBOY! IN THIS ISSUE.

The **GEM** *1*

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"THE ST. JIM'S OVERALL CLUB!" & "THE DUFFER!"

A Story of Tom Merry & Co.

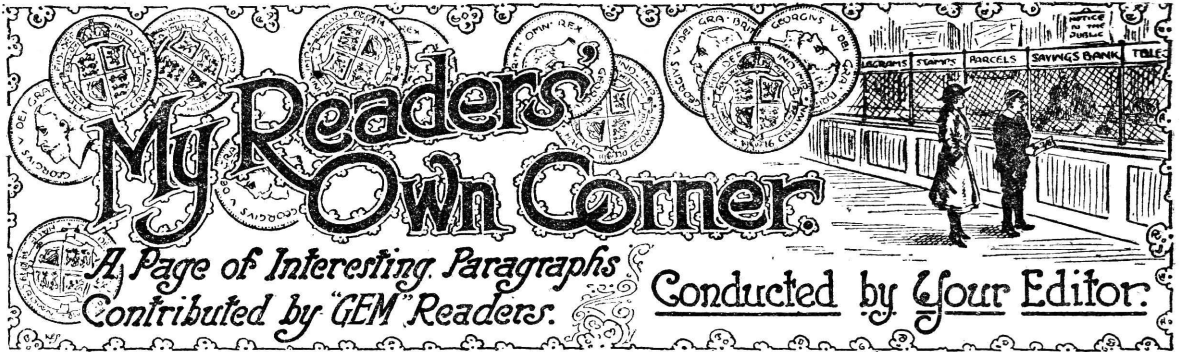
A Tale of St. Katie's.



JACK BLAKE'S OVERALL IS SEWN ON—TO HIS SKIN!

(An Amusing Incident in the Grand School Story in this Number.)

Is Your Contribution on this Page?



NOTE.—Half-a-crown will be awarded to the sender of every paragraph published on this page.

True!

Newsagent to Gemite, who has dropped his copy of the GEM in a puddle: "You won't be able to read your GEM now."

Gemite (with a smile): "Oh, that's all right! The GEM is always like that—there never is a dry page in it."—P. Cakebread, 247, Foundry Lane, Shirley, Southampton.

The Cadets.

I thought I would join a Cadet corps, and found it an easy matter. The week after filling in my application form I was supplied with my uniform and rifle, and after regular attendances for a month I soon saw how things worked. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday the Cadet Club is held. There is a spanking canteen, and plenty of games, such as billiards, bagatelle, draughts, and cards. Wednesday is drill night, Friday is band practice, and Sunday is either church parade or a field day. Field days are exciting. We had a fine church parade at St. Peter's, De Beauvoir Town. I advise those fellows who can obey orders, and who see the humour in anything, to join up.—J. Smart, 447, Hackney Road, N.E.

Edward the First.

King Edward the First, nicknamed Longshanks, and styled the "Hammer of the Scots" on his tomb in Westminster Abbey, was one of our great kings. He married, at the age of fifteen, Eleanor, a Spanish princess, who went through many of his campaigns at his side, and is reported to have saved his life from a poisonous dagger-wound in Palestine. Edward grieved for her when she died, thirty-six years later, and on the route taken by the funeral procession to Westminster he erected crosses wherever the hier rested. The last of these was Charing Cross. Edward founded the modern English Parliament in 1295. Edward's wars were numerous. He subdued Wales, and made his son Prince of the country. His Scottish campaigns were not so successful, but wise government at home made his name revered.—J. Cohen, 20, Marlboro' Road, Hightown, Manchester.

The Tip.

This word, so often used, now means a sum of money given to a waiter, taxi-driver, etc. Its origin is interesting. On the walls of the old coffee-houses there was a box marked: "To Insure Promptness." The money from this box was equally distributed to the waiters, etc. The word "tip" comes from the first letter of each word, namely, T I P.—E. Barton, 33, Gorst Road, Wandsworth Common, S.W. 11.

A Real Holiday.

The best holiday I ever had was spent under canvas. We chose a seaside district, and I lived the simple life. Everybody else did the same. We cooked our own food. True, the first experiments were not successful, but we soon gained skill. Our health improved. The beauty of the whole affair was its cheapness. The hire of tent and ground cost but a shilling or two apiece. Railway expenses were small. There was the outlay on a week's provisions, and a few shillings for odd amusements.—H. Roberts, 34, Lord Street, Grimsby.

The Oldest Tree.

Probably the oldest tree in England is the old oak in Sherwood Forest, near Nottingham. It was under this ancient tree that the famous outlaw, Robin Hood, is supposed to have lived. Also from this spot there is a subterranean way leading to the castle, which underground route was made by the celebrated robber.—A. G. Slack, 165, Birkin Avenue, Nottingham.

Stamp Collecting.

Stamp collecting is a most interesting hobby, and much concerning the modes, living, languages, etc., of the people in other countries may be learned from the stamps. Most of the European countries bear the name of their State in the margin of the stamp, such as Sverige, for Sweden; Belgique, for Belgium; Espana, Spain, etc. Stamps often give fine views. We have the Sphinx on Egyptian stamps, and the designs used in New Zealand show superb views of the country. There are the portraits, too, of kings and presidents,

and, often enough, historic events are depicted, such as the landing of Columbus. Vasco de Gama, the Portuguese explorer, is seen on some of the stamps in the little Western European States, while, frequently the artist illustrates the natural history of the land.—Jim Halsey, 20, Westerham Road, Leyton, E. 10.

Monymusk.

Monymusk is a very beautiful village in the centre of Aberdeenshire. It is situated at the foot of a hill, called Pitbichie, and is not very far from the hill of Benachie. The village is in the form of a square, and in the centre of it are some big beech-trees surrounded by a fence. At the east side of the square is the church, with a square tower about sixty feet high. This church is the second oldest in Scotland. It was built by Malcolm III. in 1173. Malcolm camped at Monymusk on his way to quell a rebellion, in Morayshire, and he promised the monks that he would build a church and priory to them if he were victorious. Victory was his, and he kept his word. Two miles out of Monymusk is Paradise—a beautiful spot with trees over 110 feet high.—Adam McGillivray, jun., 16, The Village, Monymusk, Aberdeenshire.

A Good Catch.

Ask a friend how many pennies there are in a dozen. Of course, he will say twelve. Then ask him how many half-pennies, and he will say twenty-four; but then it is your turn, for you will be able to assure him that there are still only twelve halfpennies in a dozen!—Alfred Wilson, 67, Renshaw Street, Patricroft, Manchester.

Scarabs.

On returning from Egypt my uncle brought me home a scarab. It is a small stone shaped in the form of a beetle, with a few inscriptions on the under part. It was put in the tombs of princes in Ancient Egypt, and is supposed to be a sort of talisman, bringing good fortune. The one I possess is about 3,800 years old. The date of it is 1882 B.C.—S. Ryan, St. Brendans, Cross Avenue, Booterstown, co. Dublin.

Contributions are invited from readers of the "GEM" for publication on this page. Anything will do, so long as it is interesting, short, and concise—a good joke, a description of a holiday, a bright idea for increasing the popularity of the "Gem," a good anecdote. "Pars" should not be more than three hundred words long—the shorter the better. They can be sent in on a postcard. Address all contributions to The Editor, The "Gem" Library, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and mark them "Readers' Own Corner."

St. Jim's Overall Club!

A MAGNIFICENT, LONG, COMPLETE STORY DEALING WITH
THE ADVENTURES OF TOM MERRY & Co. AT ST. JIM'S.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Gussy's Brain Wave!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was standing on the School House steps, with a letter in his hand, a thoughtful frown upon his classic brow, when Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther of the Shell came in from the playing-fields.

The Swell of St. Jim's seemed to be in the depths of deep cogitation, and the Terrible Three grinned when they saw it. Monty Lowther, who had a bat under his arm, raised it and gave D'Arcy a prod in the region of his beautiful fancy waistcoat, and Arthur Augustus woke out of his reverie with a sudden howl.

"Yow! You ass, Lowthah!"

"Only waking you up, dear boy!" chuckled Lowther. "You shouldn't day-dream on the steps, like an old cab-horse, you know!"

"I wasn't day-dreaming, you chump! I was thinkin' out wathah a sewious mattah," said Arthur Augustus warmly. "Pewwaps you fellahs will be able to give me some advice. This lettah is fwom Mistah Snippe, the school tailah. I w'ote askin' him how much he would charge for a new paiah of bags, and his weply is, that, owin' to the increased cost of ma-eivals and labah, he cannot make a paiah of twousahs undah three guinea. Three guinea is weally too much—don't you think so, deah boys?"

Tom Merry nodded sympathetically.

"It's too bad, Gussy," he said. "It will cost us fellows a small fortune for new clobber this summer. Take my advice, Gussy, and wear out all your old clothes before buying new ones!"

"Oh, write up to that M.P. Johnny in London for one of his fifty-shilling standard suits," remarked Monty Lowther, with a grin. "You'd look rather nobby in one of them, Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked doubtful.

"I wathah approve of the course that that M.P. has taken, deah boys," he said. "It is weally most monstuous the way these tailahs are pwofiteewin' now-adays, and somethin' ought to be done to stop them. I weally think that a pwotest should be made against the high pwice charged for clobber, a wotten twick which even our school tailah is guiltay of. I've been thinkin'—"

"Go hon!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"How ever did you manage it, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus glared at Lowther.

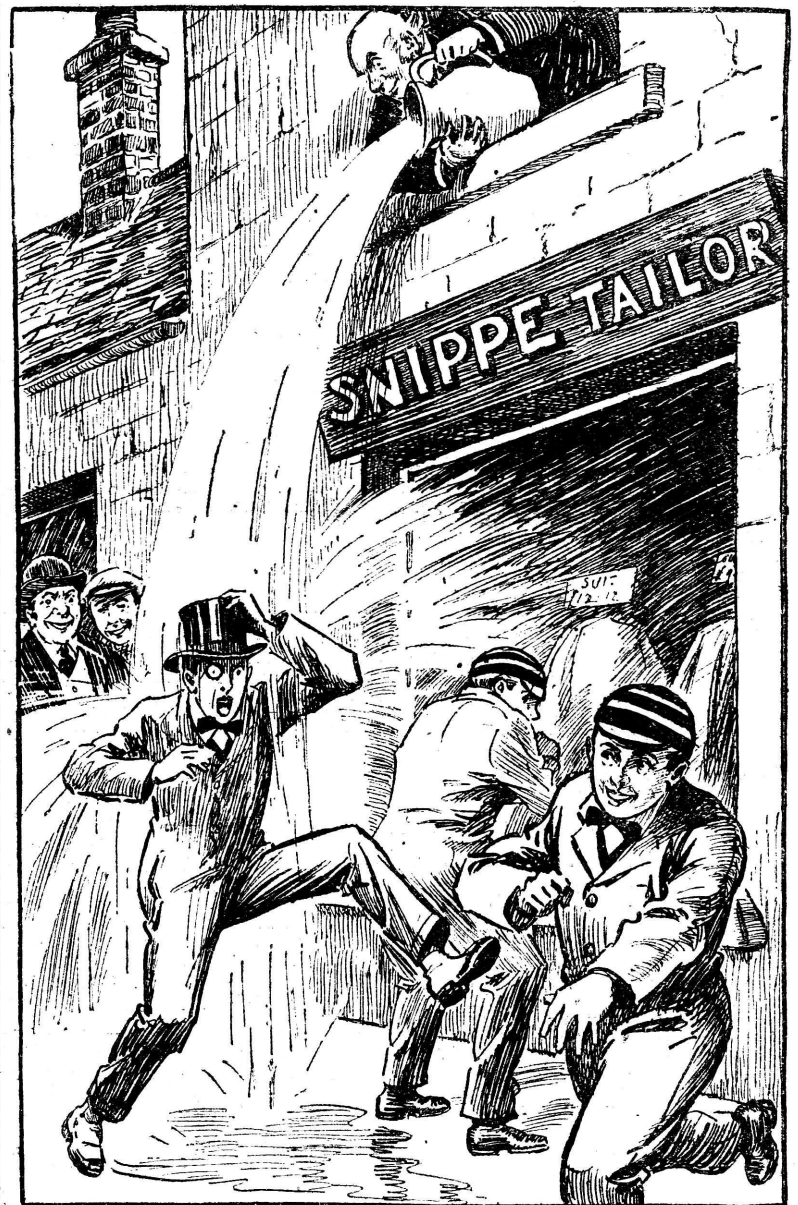
"Weally, Lowthah, this is not a subject for wibald levity!" he said severely.

"I have been thinkin'—"

"What, again?" asked Lowther.

"Mind yourself, Gussy, or you'll overdo it. It's so unusual for you, and—"

"You uttah ass, Lowthah!" exclaimed Gussy, adjusting his monocle and regarding the humorist of the Shell with quite a withering glance. "If you



"We are actin' in a vewy wight and pwopah spiwit!" cried D'Arcy-looking up at Mr Snippe. "We considah that you charge far too much for suits, and—Oh, bal Jove! Gwoooogh! Yerrugh!" Gussy broke off as a deluge of water swept down from above. (See chapter 6.)

intewwupt me again, I shall considah it my painful duty to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Tom Merry and Manners grinned.

"Chuck it, Monty!" said the captain of the Shell. "Let Gussy get on with the washing. Now, Gussy, what is it you have been thinking about?"

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"I've been thinkin' out a scheme to pwo-test against the pwofiteewin' of Mr. Snippe in Wylcome High Street, deah boys," said Gussy. "It is most intolewable—"

"Good word that, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther enthusiastically. "Did you get it from memory, or have you been sweot-ting up a dictionary?"

"Bai Jove! You unspeakable boundah, Lowthah!" exclaimed Gussy. "I shall weally have to administah that feahful thwashin'—"

"Ring off, Monty, you ass!" said Tom Merry, grinning. "Life's too short to stay and listen to you and Gussy wrang-ling. Now then, Gussy, if you've any-thing to tell us, get it off your chest quickly, because we're waiting for our tea!"

"Vewy well, deah boy!" said Gussy, casting a reproving glance at Lowther. "It is most intolewable the way we fellahs are bein' wobbled by that tailah fellah, and it's time somethin' was done. In Amewica, you know, the men are goin' about in overalls—"

"Good idea," said Tom Merry, nod-ding. "If it was started over here I reckon the tailors would look down their noses a bit!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, beam-ing. "That's just my ideah, Tom Mewwy. Why shouldn't we fellahs weah overalls instead of Etons?"

The Terrible Three jumped all at once. "Wha-a-at?" gasped Tom Merry.

"We could weah overalls, and—"

"Off his rocker!" said Manners significantly.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Where are you going to get the over-alls from?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"We could make them, deah boys!"

"Whew!"

Tom Merry & Co. stared at the elegant swell of St. Jim's in astonish-ment.

"What the merry thunder are you driving at, Gussy?" ejaculated Tom Merry. "How on earth can we make overalls, you chump?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wufuse to be called a chump!" said D'Arcy, with asperity. "My ideah is sound and per-fectly all wight. If you fellahs will listen, instead of lookin' at me like fwabjous owls, I will explain. Ovah at Wayland a shop is sellin' off some Government surplus stock of blue linen, and that is just the matewial to make overalls with, deah boys. I pwopose waisin' a subswcription among all the fellahs in the Fourth and Shell in ordah to purchase a large quantity of this linen. Then we could set to work, and make our own overalls. I can get patterns, and everythin' will be all wight. Don't you think it's a wippin' idea, deah boys?"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther drew deep breaths.

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Did you think all this out yourself, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "And I congwatulate myself, deah boys, that I have struck a weally toppin' wheeze!"

"H'm!" remarked Tom Merry. "It's not at all a bad notion, Gussy. You propose a sort of club amongst us fellows in the School House, to subscribe money to buy linen with which to make over-alls!"

"Yaas, that's pwecisely the ideah, deah boy," replied D'Arcy. "It would be a vewy effective pwotest against the high pwices for clobber bein' charged now. We could work just as comfortably in overalls, and it would save us fellahs a gwreat deal of money, bai Jove, for we

shouldn't have to buy new clothes for the summah. And once we have the linen it will be a vewy simple mattah to make the overalls."

The Terrible Three chuckled.

"Well, Gussy, you seem to have struck a good thing for once," said Tom Merry. "We'll take up the scheme, and see it through. So long as the other fellows dub up their subscriptions, and consent to wear the overalls, everything will be O.K., I should think. Hallo, here's Blake!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby, D'Arcy's study-mates, strolled up. They had just been to the tuckshop to lay in supplies for tea.

"Hallo, you bounders," said the curly-headed chief of the Fourth-Formers, "what's in the wind?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Gussy's just been explaining his latest brain-wave to us," he replied. "We thought the poor chap was off his onion at first, but now it turns out that there's something in what he says, after all."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"What's the idea?" inquired Blake wonderingly.

"Gussy suggests we start on Overall Club—"

"A whatter?"

"A giddy club for the supply of over-alls," said Tom Merry, grinning.

"Overalls!" gasped Blake. "What the merry dickens for?"

"For us to wear, old scout!" said Tom Merry. "You know, Blake, clobber is a fearful price now, and old Snippe, our school tailor, in Rylcombe High Street, is profiteering—there's no doubt about that. Twelve guineas for a suit, and three quid for a pair of trucks is too thick, and we'd be silly chumps to pay it. So Gussy, taking a leaf from the book of the giddy Americans, proposes we rig ourselves out in overalls, instead of buying new clothes."

"Oh!" gasped Blake, Herries, and Digby.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked earnestly at his chums through his monocle.

"I twust you fellahs will back me up," he said. "I'm goin' to waise a subswcription at once. I don't know quite how much it would cost to make an overwall, but I should think ten shillin's would be ample—don't you, deah boys?"

"Perhaps!" grinned Tom Merry.

"B-but," said Blake, "who's going to run this thing? Where's the giddy matewial comin' from?"

"We'll buy up some Government sur-plus linen at Wayland," said D'Arcy. "Then we could cut the linen up, and make it into overalls to measure, deah boys. It will be all vewy simple, and patwiotic, too."

Jack Blake growled.

"I suppose you'll turn our study into a tailor's shop," he said. "I don't mind wearing an overall—it's quite a nutty notion, in fact, but I'm bothered if I want our den converted into a cutting-out emporium!"

"Weally, Blake, it's for a good cause, and—"

"Rats!" snapped Blake. "A St. Jim's Overall Club is a good wheeze, but we simply can't run the thing in Study No. 6. Now, if we could get one of the box-rooms—"

"Bai Jove! That's a wippin' ideah, Blake!" said Gussy approvingly. "We'd wun the club on stwict business lines, and—"

"Here, where do we come in?" demanded Tom Merry. "I think, Gussy, you'd better leave this stunt in our hands. You are sure to make a mess of it!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Yes, better let us run the whole giddy caboodle, Gustavus," said Monty Lowther. "We fellows are simply 'cut out' for making overalls!"

"Groooogh!" gasped the others, as Monty made the funny remark.

Jack Blake & Co. and Tom Merry & Co. looked grimly at each other.

"Look here," said Tom Merry, "it's Gussy's wheeze, I know, but it requires all the Shell and Fourth to enter into it in order to make the thing a success. Let's do the thing between us, and open up business in one of the box-rooms. Fellows can fork out their cash, and we'll measure 'em and make their over-alls, when we've got the linen. I don't suppose we shall make a profit—"

"Ha, ha! Not much!"

"But, anyway, it's for a good pur-pose," said Tom Merry, waxing quite enthusiastic. "When old Snippe hears that we fellows are going about in over-alls, rather than pay his price for clobber, he'll soon climb down. So, you see, we shall save in the long run."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Gussy. "I can manage the tailowin' part of the bizny, deah boys. We'll commence on the ideah at once—shall we?"

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry. "Come up to our den, you fellows, and have tea with us. We've got a decent spread ready, and if you care to contribute your tuck, so much the better. We can jaw over the tea-table."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the heroes of the School House went indoors, and went up to Study No. 10 in the Shell passage, the head-quarters of the Terrible Three.

CHAPTER 2.

Joining Up!

"SEEN the notice, you chaps?" asked Julian of the Fourth, inserting his head in at the Common-room door that evening, and address-ing the boys assembled in the room.

"What notice?" inquired Levison.

"It's on the board—notice from Tom Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy."

"Oh!"

The juniors of the Lower School were interested at once.

"What's it all about, Julian?" asked Lumley-Lumley. "Is it a cricket notice?"

"Not much!" grinned Julian. "Better go down and read it, you chaps—it's worth a guinea a box!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quite a crowd of juniors went down-stairs, and joined the crowd that was already assembled round the notice-board, commenting upon a paper pinned thereon in excited tones.

A loud gasp of astonishment arose when the juniors read the paper, which ran thus:

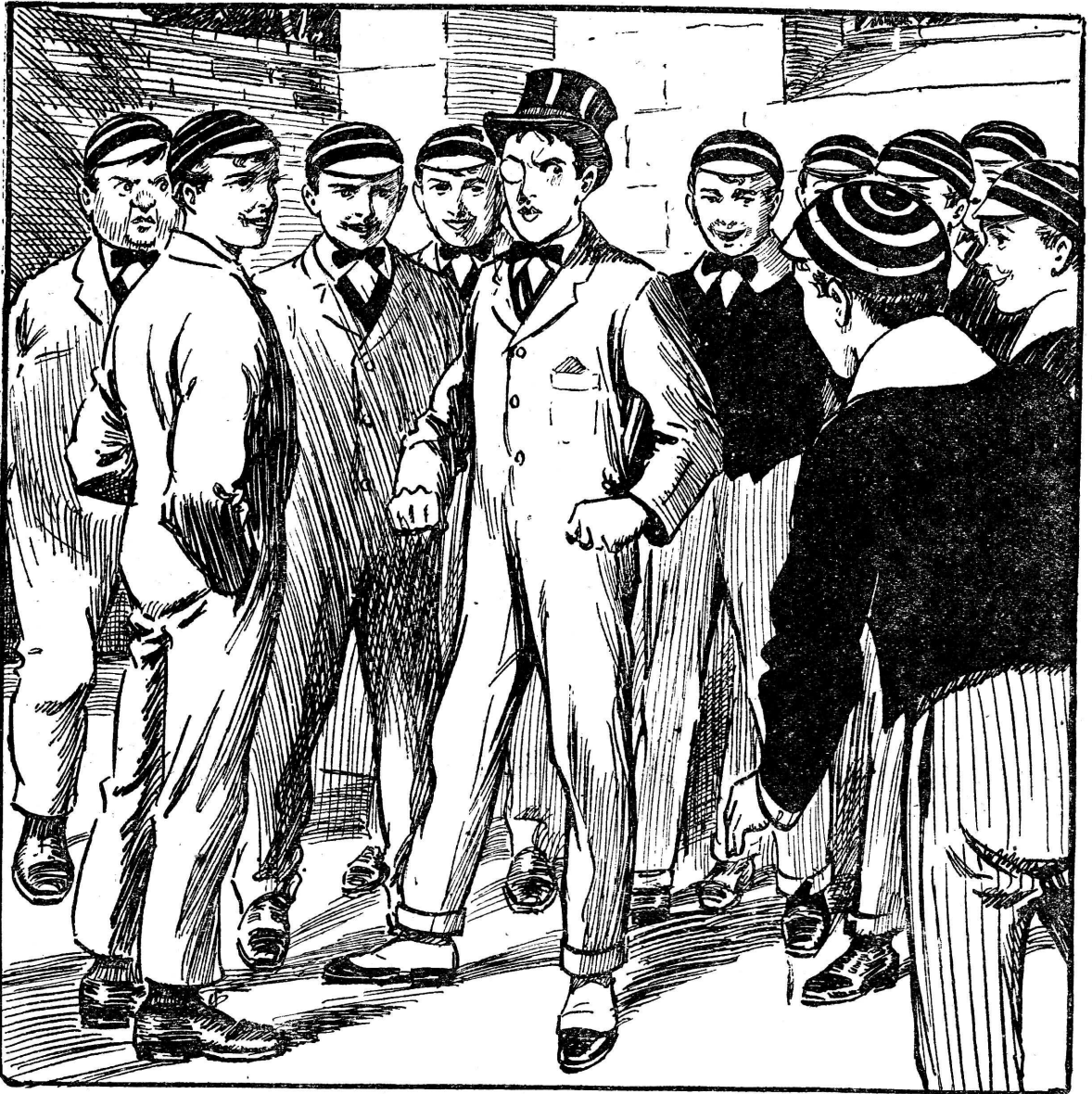
"NOTICE!

DON'T PAY THROUGH THE NOSE FOR YOUR CLOTHES—

JOIN THE ST. JIM'S OVERALL CLUB.

Snippe, the school tailor in Rylcombe High Street, is now charging excessive prices for all sorts of clothes, and neither we nor our pockets can stand it. DOWN WITH THE PROFITEERS! Help to protest against High Prices by wearing Overalls!

Overalls can be supplied by the St. Jim's Overall Club by a first subscription of 10s. All clobber made on the premises, from first-class material, to your own measurements.



A crowd of grinning fellows had collected, and they gazed at the overall-clad juniors with wondering eyes. "My word!" gasped Wally D'Arcy. "Look at 'em! Aren't they lovely? Just rest your peepers on old Gussy for a tick! I say, Guss, who's your tailor?" "Ha, ha, ha!" (See chapter 5.)

CHAPS OF ST. JIM'S, JOIN THIS CAMPAIGN AGAINST HIGH PRICES! Pay your Subscription to the Overall Club, and receive your Overall, made to measure, within three days!

Headquarters: Box-room No. 3. The Overall Club is now open!

ROLL UP! ROLL UP!! ROLL UP!!!

BE PATRIOTIC, AND GIVE THE PROFITEERS THE KYBOSH!

(Signed) TOM MERRY.
JACK BLAKE.
A. A. D'ARCY.
(Directors.)

"Great pip!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"This takes the giddy biscuit!"

Such were the expressions which followed the reading of this notice.

The juniors gathered round the notice-board read the notice, and they gasped.

George Alfred Grundy, who was in the

forefront of the throng, rubbed his hands.

"My word!" he said. "I'm going to be in this! The St. Jim's Overall Club! It's a dandy idea, but it requires the right man at the helm to make the thing go."

"Quite so!" grinned Ralph Reckness Cardew. "And who's the right man, Grundy?"

"Me!" said the mighty man of the Shell, emphatically but ungrammatically. "As boss of the show, I should be the right man in the right place. No square holes in round pegs, you know—I-I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy's face was grim and determined. He felt quite positive that with George Alfred Grundy at the head of affairs the St. Jim's Overall Club would be a roaring success.

That was Grundy's way.

"Well, this is the limit!" grinned Kangaroo of the Shell. "It's not a bad idea, chaps. I've worn overalls down

under, and they're jolly comfy things. I can tell you. No giddy Eton collars to keep clean, and no trousers to press! For my part, I quite agree with Tom Merry."

"So do I," remarked Ralph Reckness Cardew. "When I sent in my last tailor's bill to the pater, he wrote back and said he nearly had a blue fit when he saw it—or words to that effect. I was thinkin' about investing in a new rig-out, but I think I'll try an overall instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors seemed quite taken up with the idea. Discussing the subject in animated tones, they went upstairs to Box-room No. 3.

Upon the door of the box-room was pinned this notice:

**"THE ST. JIM'S OVERALL CLUB.
OVERALLS MADE TO MEASURE,
10s.**

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 651.

EXCELLENT MATERIAL, GOOD WORKMANSHIP.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED."

"My hat! They're doing things in style, I must say," observed Clifton Dane.

Upon opening the door of the box-room the juniors beheld the Terrible Three, with Jack Blake & Co., inside.

A table stood in the centre of the room, upon which was a pile of impot paper, a jar of ink, and three tape-measures.

Tom Merry was seated at the table, taking down measurements from Monty Lowther, who, with a tape-measure, was busily measuring up Robert Arthur Digby.

The occupants of Box-room No. 3 looked up and grinned as the others came in.

"Hallo, chaps!" said Jack Blake.

"Have you all come to be measured?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've just got Digby taped!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Who's next?"

The juniors assembled in the box-room chuckled.

"We've just drifted along to see what you're up to," observed Ralph Reckness Cardew. "I don't see any overalls here, though. I expected to find old Gussy rigged out in a nice new overall, acting the dummy, as usual!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look heah, Cardew, you fwabjous ass—" began Gussy wrathfully, pushing back his cuffs.

The probability is that D'Arcy would have hurled himself upon the humorous Cardew had not Tom Merry dragged him back.

"Pax, Gussy!" he said. "We're not here to rag, you know—this is a business house. Chaps, we've got no overalls to show you yet, but they'll come along as soon as we've raised enough by subscription to buy the linen. Ten bob a head isn't much, and if forty of you subscribe, that will be twenty quid. Quite a lot of linen can be purchased for twenty quid!"

"Great pip!"

"Who's going to make the overalls, Tommy?" inquired Dick Talbot.

"We are!" replied the captain of the Shell.

"Gussy and I have got out patterns, and they suit a treat. We've learned how to do needlework as Scouts, so the making of the merry overalls will be quite a simple job. We're making nothing out of it, you know. It's simply as a protest against high prices being charged by our school tailor. We'll show the rotter how independent we can be, and make him climb down!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "All patwiotic fellahs will join the Ovevall Club, and knock that beastly pwofiteeah Snippe out of the wunnin', bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

George Alfred Grundy strode forward and planted himself before the table.

"Look here, Tom Merry," he said.

"I'm the man you want to run this show. You kids are all right in your way, but you are sure to make a howling mess of it. Mind, I don't want to discourage you, but I'm just stating a bald fact!"

"Oh!"

Tom Merry & Co. stared blankly at Grundy.

"What you require at the head of this show is a fellow with brains and real organising ability," went on Grundy.

"Now, without being personal, Tom Merry, I don't think you've got sufficient brains to carry a thing like this through!"

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"Oh!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Don't you?"

"No, I don't!" said Grundy flatly. "Now, a chap like me is just what is required. I'm Grundy, and I flatter myself I can do things. Just hand over the organising of the Overall Club to me, and I promise you I'll make things hum!"

"You—you'll make things hum!" gasped Tom Merry, rising to his feet.

"Why, you—you cheeky young swab!"

"Eh?" exclaimed Grundy.

"You burbling jackass!" said Tom Merry grimly. "For two pins I'd chuck you out of this room on your neck!"

Grundy glared.

"Oh, will you!" he said. "You'd better come and try, Tom Merry. Don't you call me names. I'm Grundy, and I won't stand it. Are you going to let me run this affair, or shall I give you a whopping?"

"Wha-a-at?" said Tom Merry faintly.

"You—you give me a whopping?"

"Yes, I will!" said Grundy truculently.

"It's for your own good, you know. If you can't see sense, I shall have to knock some into you. Now, are you going to, or are you not going to?"

"Oh, we're going to!" said Tom Merry, signalling to Blake and the others.

"Good!" said Grundy. "Now you're talking! I—Yaroooogh! Hi! Wharrer you at? I—Yoooop!"

Grundy was grasped in many hands and simply swept off his feet. The others made way, and Grundy was borne, struggling desperately, towards the door.

"One, two, three—go!" said Tom Merry.

And George Alfred Grundy went sailing through the doorway, to land upon the linoleum outside with a resounding bump and fiendish yell.

"There!" said Tom Merry, grinning down at Grundy from the doorway. "If you come in here again with your cheek, Grundy, you'll go out of the window!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Tom Merry returned into the box-room chuckling.

"Now, chaps," he said, "who's going to join our Overall Club? It's the best wheeze of the season. Plank down your ten bobs, and we'll measure you!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew started the ball rolling by placing a crisp Treasury-note upon the table. Tom Merry entered his name in a little book, and Monty Lowther took up the tape-measure to take Cardew's measurements.

Outside, George Alfred Grundy had risen to his feet, and, pushing back his cuffs, he advanced into the box-room, breathing like a war-horse.

"I—I'll smash the lot of you!" he roared. "Come on—one at a time! I—Yooop!"

Herries placed his foot in front of Grundy, which caused that militant youth to trip and fall with a crash. Grundy did not have to rise himself. He was picked up by Tom Merry & Co. and hurled through the doorway again.

Crash!

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Railton's voice. "Grundy, you clumsy boy, what—"

"Yaroooogh!" roared Grundy, as he smote the floor and sat up at Mr. Railton's feet. "I've been chucked out! Me—Grundy!"

Mr. Railton assisted Grundy to his feet, and then strode into the box-room.

The Housemaster stared round him in surprise.

"Ah, Merry," he said. "I have—ahem!—seen your notice on the board, and have come to make inquiries."

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry. "As

soon as Lowther has finished measuring Cardew he can measure you!"

Mr. Railton started, and the boys chuckled softly.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "I have not come to be—ahem!—measured. I understand you boys intend wearing overalls—"

"That's it, sir!" said Blake. "As a protest against the high price of clobber. It's a ripping idea—don't you think so?"

Mr. Railton coughed, and the semblance of a smile appeared at the corners of his mouth.

"It is—um!—quite a sensible idea, boys," he said. "But I am not sure whether the Head would approve."

"Oh, sir!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped forward, and adjusted his famous monocle.

"I sincerely trust, Mr. Wailton, that the Head will waive no objections," he said. "At a time like the present, when it is every patriotic citizen's duty to fight the pwofiteahs, nobody should object to wearin' ovewalls, or to allow anybody else to wear them. I considah it a mattah of national importance—"

"Yes, my lad, I have no doubt as to your good intentions," said Mr. Railton, smiling. "But overalls are hardly—ahem!—a suitable costume for school-boys."

"Why not, sir?" demanded Tom Merry warmly. "The people in America are wearing 'em. Why shouldn't we?"

Mr. Railton smiled.

"That is a matter of opinion, Merry," he said. "However, you boys may proceed with your—ahem!—Overall Club, and if Dr. Holmes raises an objection, I will endeavour to convert him. Personally, I am quite in favour of the idea."

"Oh, how wippin'!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Would you care to ordah an overall through us, sir? Onlay ten shillin's, and the matewial and workmanship are guawanteed, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, thank you, D'Arcy!" laughed the Housemaster, turning to the door. "I wish you lads every success in your new venture, but there must be no disturbance. Grundy, kindly step downstairs. I am—ahem!—afraid you are inclined to be noisy!"

George Alfred Grundy glared at Tom Merry & Co., and followed Mr. Railton downstairs.

The heroes of the School House chuckled when the Housemaster had gone.

"All serene, chaps!" said Tom Merry. "We've got Railton's approval, and that ought to buck the thing up. Now, who's next to be measured?"

Quite a lot of fellows placed ten-shilling notes upon the table. Tom Merry entered them upon the "roll," and then their measurements were taken.

Other fellows promised to join the Overall Club next day, when remittances would probably arrive from home.

The idea seemed to have "caught on" splendidly, and Tom Merry & Co. felt gratified at the enthusiasm shown towards their scheme.

"Good biz!" chuckled Blake, when the customers had departed, and time for prep drew near. "How much are the giddy takings, Tommy?"

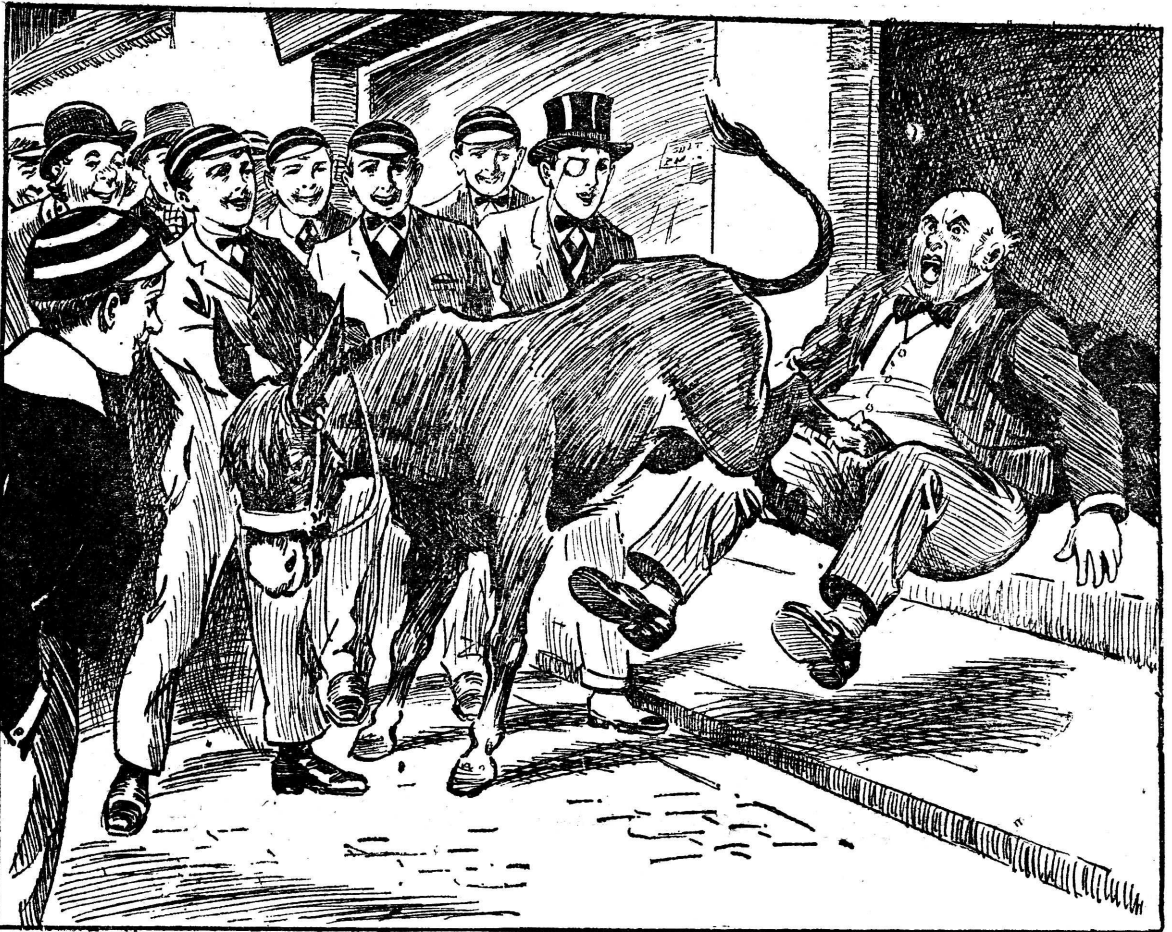
"Fourteen pounds ten!" replied Tom, consulting his book. "And there will be plenty more to-morrow, I reckon!"

"Oh, ripping!"

"We'll win ovah to Wayland on our jiggahs to-night and buy the linen, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Then we can commence work on the ovewalls to-morrow."

"What-ho!"

And the leading lights of the St. Jim's



"Get away from my shop!" howled the tailor, going over to the donkey and pushing it. Neddy evidently did not like being pushed, for he reached out with his hind legs and kicked the little tailor in the region of his waistcoat, which caused him to sit down on the hard cobblestones with a loud bump. (See chapter 6.)

Overall Club departed to their studies, feeling extremely pleased with the results of their preliminary operations in the campaign to defeat the tailor profiteers.

CHAPTER 3.

No Luck for Trimble!

"I SAY, you fellows!" Baggly Trimble rolled up the Shell passage just as the Terrible Three emerged from Study No. 10 next day.

There was an earnest look upon Baggly's podgy countenance.

The Terrible Three stopped. "Well, Baggly?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I want to joint your Overall Club," said Baggly Trimble. "I consider it a topping idea, you know."

"Bravo, porpoise!" said Monty Lowther enthusiastically. "Fork out the ten bob, and we'll put you down for an extra roomy pair of overalls. Of course, as you are about twice the size of an ordinary fellow, we ought to charge you double for the merry overall, but we'll let you off at ten bob, as we know you. Where's the tin?"

"Ahem!" coughed Baggly Trimble. "As a matter of fact, you chaps, I'm rather hard up at present—a remittance I expected to arrive this morning from Trimble Hall hasn't turned up yet. Jolly disappointing, isn't it?"

"Yes, rather!" said Monty Lowther. "I'm afraid you'll be disappointed over the overall, too, old son. Cash on the nail is our motto!"

"Oh, really, if you cannot trust me, you know—" began Baggly Trimble peevishly.

"We can't!" said Tom Merry sweetly. "Wait till your remittance comes from Trimble Arms—"

"Trimble Hall, you ass!" shrieked Baggly wrathfully.

"My mistake!" said Tom Merry blandly. "Well, Baggly, when you have the cash to plank down, we'll make you an overall—not before. We know you of old, my fat pippin!"

Baggly Trimble glowered.

"Look here, I'm not going to be left out of this!" he said indignantly.

"You're going to make the overalls today, aren't you?"

"We are—we is!" grinned Tom Merry. "We've yards and yards of linen, and as this afternoon is a half-holiday, we're going to spend it in the box-room cutting out overalls and sewing 'em up, ready for the chaps to wear. You'd better place your order early, Baggly, to avoid disappointment, as those newspaper fellows put it. There's quite a run on overalls, and we shall soon be sold out!"

"Well, I'll join your blessed club!" said Baggly eagerly. "I can't understand you fellows not trusting me. You know what a strictly honourable chap I am. Look here, just you put me down for an overall, and I'll square up at the end of the week!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"We'll remember that you want an overall, Baggly," he said. "But you

can't have one until we see the colour of your money!"

"But when my remittance comes—" "I expect that will be when the moon lays eggs!" observed Monty Lowther calmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you rotters, I want to join your Overall Club!" yelled Baggly wrathfully. "All the other fellows are joining, so why should I be left out? Will you enrol me, or won't you?"

"Yes, Baggly, we'll enrol you," said Monty Lowther, placing the accent on the last syllable of the word. "We'll enrol you down the passage—eh, chaps?"

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry and Manners.

"Here, leggo, you rotters!" yelled Baggly, as the Terrible Three advanced upon him. "I didn't mean to say— Yarooooogh!"

Whether Baggly meant to say that or not is not quite certain, but the fact remains that he did say it, and other word remarks of the same nature, as Tom Merry & Co. grasped him, bowled him over, and proceeded to roll him down the passage.

"Yah! Oooooogh! Yooooooop!" wailed Trimble, as the Terrible Three dribbled him round the corner of the passage towards the head of the stairs. "Lemme get up, you cads! I—Yerrugh!"

"Pitch him down!" said Lowther.

Bump, bump, bump!
Baggly Trimble went rolling down the

stairs with a sequence of loud thuds, and his howls rose crescendo.

He collapsed at the bottom of the stairs, and lay there gasping and groaning, and the Terrible Three, looking down, chuckled mightily, and then proceeded on their way to the box-room, which was the headquarters of the St. Jim's Overall Club.

"Yooough!" gasped Baggy, sitting up and rubbing his many sore places. "Oh, the awful rotters! Yow-ow! My napper! Gerrugh!"

Aubrey Racke, the elegant nut of the Shell, strolled in with Scrope and Mellish.

The three black sheep of St. Jim's gazed at Baggy, and grinned.

"Hallo! Here's our tame bladder of lard in trouble again," said Aubrey Racke pleasantly. "What's the matter, Baggy?"

"Yowp!" gasped Baggy, struggling painfully to his feet. "Those rotters won't let me join their Overall Club simply because I haven't got the cash at once—the blessed Ikeys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Aubrey Racke & Co.

They did not seem to bear much sympathy towards the suffering fat boy of the Fourth.

"It's a rotten shame!" hooted Baggy Trimble plaintively. "I say, Racke, old chap, be a pal and lend me ten bob. I'll pay you when my remittance comes!"

"Rats!" said Racke. "I'm not lending you money, Baggy. This Overall Club stunt is a cheap thing, anyway. You wouldn't catch me joining it, I can tell you. My pater's a millionaire, and I can afford decent clobber if the others can't!"

"Br-r-r-r!" said Baggy Trimble. "Ten bob wouldn't break you, Aubrey, old chap!"

"Go and eat coke!" said Racke. And, giving Baggy a playful dig in the ribs, he strode on up the stairs, followed by his grinning cronies.

Baggy Trimble growled, and rolled disconsolately out into the quadrangle.

A burly fellow was striding over towards the steps, and Baggy Trimble trotted up to him.

"I say, Crooke," he began. "Just a moment."

George Crooke, the cad of the Shell, stopped, and looked sourly at Trimble.

"What do you want, porpoise?" he snapped.

"I want you to lend me ten bob," said Baggy.

"Then go on wanting!" growled Crooke, striding on again. "I've got no money to chuck away on shady little wasters like you!"

"Oh, really, you rotter!" expostulated Baggy, breaking into a trot to keep up with Crooke. "Look here, old chap, I'll pay you back a quid next week—really!"

"Rats!" said Crooke. "I suppose you're thinking about backing a gee-gee, aren't you, and reckon on winning a fortune? No thanks, Trimble—I've had some!"

"I'm not going to back a horse!" spluttered Baggy. "I—I—stop a minute, you rotter—I want to explain my wheeze to you."

Crooke stopped, more to satisfy his own curiosity than to please Baggy.

"Well, you fat freak," he demanded, "what's the scheme?"

Baggy Trimble grinned artfully.

"I've got an old tailor's bill here," he said, patting his breast-pocket. "It's quite clean, but there's no receipt on it. My pater's told me to get a new rig-out for the summer, and send the bill on to him. Well, I'm not going to get a new rig-out. I'm going to have ten

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bob's worth in the Overall Club, and be in the fashion. But I'll send this bill on to my pater as if I'd just bought a new suit, and he'll send the money down. I can easily alter the date on the bill. It's for eight pounds ten and six. So, you see, I shall get eight-ten-six from my pater, who can afford to pay, and only spend ten bob on an overall. I'll be eight quid in!"

Crooke stared at Baggy in amazement.

"Don't you think it's a stunning wheeze?" asked Baggy. "My pater's worth pots of money, you know, so he won't miss the money. If it wasn't for the Overall Club he'd have to stump out more than eight-pound-ten, anyhow, for clobber's gone up a lot since that old bill was made out. Oh, I'm deep, I am! He, he, he!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Crooke. "You little cad, Trimble! Do you reckon your pater will be mug enough to let you do him like that?"

"Yes, rather!" said Baggy. "He's so short-sighted, you know. Oh, I'll do him all right! But I want the ten bob for the overall first. Now, Crooke, old chap, let me have the ten bob, and I'll pay you back a quid when my pater stumps up the eight-ten-six!"

"Yes—I don't think!" said Crooke. "I don't care to take the risk, Trimble. It's ten to one your pater will find you out, and then I'd never get my ten bob back. Better ask somebody else. I'm not having any!"

"Look here, you chump—" "Go and fry your chivvy!" said Crooke; and, turning on his heel, he strode away.

Baggy Trimble glowered after the retreating Shell fellow, and grunted in deep indignation.

"The—the measly rotter!" he growled. "Afraid of losing a mouldy ten bob! What is ten bob, anyway? But I—I wish I had it! Oh, I say, Skimpole! Just a minute, Skimmey, old chap!"

Herbert Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell, who had emerged from the door of the School House, stopped at the bottom of the steps.

"Did you address me, my dear Trimble?" he asked, blinking at Baggy through his huge spectacles.

"Yes, old fellow," said Baggy ingratiatingly. "I want to ask you to do me a favour, Skimmey."

"Most certainly, my dear Trimble," replied Skimpole. "I shall be most happy to render you any service that is compatible with my powers to do so. What is it you require?"

"Ten bob," said Baggy Trimble. "Can you advance me ten bob till next week, Skimmey?"

The genius of the Shell shook his head.

"I much regret that I am unable to comply with your request," he said.

"At the present moment, my financial resources amount to only ninepence halfpenny. But for what purpose do you require this monetary assistance?"

"I want to join the Overall Club," said Baggy peevishly. "All the other fellows are in it, and I want to join. I'm a jolly patriotic chap, you know, and consider it my duty to wear an overall and defeat old Snippe, who is a rotten profiteer!"

Herbert Skimpole beamed at Baggy through his spectacles.

"Really, my dear Trimble, it is most gratifying to hear you speak in so excellent a manner," he said. "Hitherto I have considered you inclined to be unscrupulous and utterly devoid of honour. This is a splendid change for the better, and I heartily endorse your laudable and

patriotic desires to join the Overall Club."

Baggy Trimble glared. "You—you blithering jay!" he snapped. "For two pins I'd dot you on the boko!"

Skimpole looked shocked.

"My dear fellow, pray do not have recourse to such violent and belligerent actions," he said. "Although I have not the pecuniary means to assist you to join the Overall Club, I can suggest a method which would very probably appeal to Tom Merry, and make him consent to allow you join the Overall Club. Indeed, I should very much like to join the club myself. The exorbitant price of wearing apparel is utterly incommensurate with—"

"Oh, ring off, Skimmey!" growled Baggy impatiently. "What's your scheme, anyway?"

"It is a scheme embracing one of the chief basic principles of true Socialism," said Skimpole, who was an enthusiastic Socialist, and had absorbed the complete works of the immortal Professor Balmcyrumpet upon that subject. "In short, I shall suggest to Merry that we shall be provided with overalls each for an exchange in kind—namely, our services. Do you comprehend my meaning, my dear Trimble?"

"Ye-es," said Baggy. "You mean, that Tom Merry might give us free overalls if we work for him?"

"That is precisely my meaning," said Skimpole. "Let us proceed indoors together, my dear fellow, and interview Tom Merry upon the subject. I am positive that if I explain the matter to him in a sensible way he will accede to our request."

"Come on, then!" said Baggy. "I don't mind helping to make overalls if I can get mine for nothing!"

And, feeling more or less hopeful, Baggy Trimble followed the weedy Skimpole indoors.

CHAPTER 4.

Making Overalls!

"COME in!" called Tom Merry, in response to a tap at the box-room door.

The directors of the Overall Club were busily at work that afternoon, making overalls for the fellows who had ordered them.

Yards and yards of neat blue linen stood upon the table. Tom Merry & Jack Blake & Co., armed with scissors, cut out the linen according to pattern, and the room was strewn with little pieces of linen, and larger pieces ready cut out.

The amateur tailors of the School House looked up in surprise as Herbert Skimpole stalked in, followed by Baggy Trimble.

"Oh, it's Skimmey!" said Monty Lowther. "Come to order an overall, old chap?"

"Ahem!" coughed the genius of the Shell. "I should very much like an overall, my dear fellow, but at the moment I have not sufficient funds to purchase one."

Monty Lowther pointed to a clock that had been installed upon the mantelpiece. The hands registered half-past nine, but that was because the clock was not going.

"See that?" asked Lowther. Skimpole blinked at the clock in bewilderment.

"Ye-es, my dear Lowther," he said. "I perceive that it is a clock, the mechanism of which has ceased to work. Why do you call my attention to it?"

"No tick!" said Lowther solemnly.

"Eh?"

"No tick!" said the humorist of the

Shell. "We are like that giddy clock—we don't give tick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. fairly roared.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegahd that as quite funnay, you know. Ha, ha, ha! You are wright, Lowthah—theah's no tick in this establishment. We wequiah cash wright on the nail, Skimmay, deah boy."

Skimpole blinked.

"I gather from your remarks that you do not allow credit," he said. "I have not come to request you to allow me to defer my payments—"

"Then have you come to pay cash?" asked Blake.

"N-no. I—"

"Then buzz off, Skimmey, there's a good chap!" said Tom Merry. "We're very busy, you know, and can't waste time jawing. If you pay for your overall, you can have it. You see, we can't afford to make overalls that haven't been paid for in advance."

"But, my dear Merry, I have a suggestion—"

"Go and bury it, Skimmey!" said Tom Merry.

"Look here, you rotters!" bellowed Trimble. "I'm backing up Skimpole. We've come to offer our services in exchange for an overall each."

"Wha-at?"

"That is the nature of my suggestion, my dear fellows," said Skimpole mildly. "If Trimble and I assist you in the making of these garments, I consider it a reasonable exchange for you to provide us with an overall each. According to the basic laws of Socialism—"

"Oh, help!" gasped Digby. "Skimmey's going to jaw Socialism to us now!"

"In Socialism, the principles of exchange and barter as applied to individual effort—"

"Oh, ring off, Skimpole!" gasped Tom Merry. "We've heard you jaw Socialism to us before, and it drives us balmy!"

"But if you will kindly listen to me—"

"Can't, old son!" said Tom Merry. "Life's too short, you know. If you jabber about Socialism, or any other 'ism,' I'll brain you!"

"But, my dear Merry, pray listen to reason!" said Skimpole earnestly. "I have come to offer my services as fair exchange—"

"For an overall," said Tom Merry. "Yes, Skimmey, we quite understand. Well, old son, we've found rather a lot to do ourselves this afternoon, so we might as well take you on appro. What do you say, you fellows?"

"It would be wathah a good ideah," observed D'Arcy. "We wequiah some help, and no doubt if we work economically with the linen we could spare enough for a couple of overalls for Skimpole and Twimble."

"Old Baggy would take enough material for two overalls," said Lowther, shaking his head. "I'll tell you what, though, Baggy. We'll make you up an overall of all the little pieces of linen left over. A patchwork arrangement, you know. Remember the words of old Solomon, who said, 'Waste not, want not.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, don't rot," said Tom Merry, chuckling. "We'll be able to manage Baggy an overall all right—that is, if he works to our satisfaction. Take your coats off, you two, and we'll set you to work."

"Thank you, my dear Merry!" said Skimpole, beaming.

He and Trimble removed their coats and prepared to work.

Tom Merry handed Skimpole a pair of scissors and a paper pattern.

"See that?" he said. "Well, that's a pattern, and you've got to cut out the linen to that shape. Use the linen off that new roll over there, and mind what you're up to. If you cut the linen to waste, we'll sack you—see?"

"Yes, my dear Merry, I understand," said Skimpole, and he took up the roll of material and laid it on the table.

Leaving Skimpole to snip away with the scissors, Tom Merry turned to Baggy Trimble.

"I think you'd better do some stitching, Baggy," he said. "You know how to use a needle, I suppose?"

"What-ho!" said Baggy Trimble readily. "Just push the needle in and out along the cloth, and pull the thread along behind. It's as easy as rolling off a form."

"H'm!" said Tom Merry. "It's not so easy as it looks, so don't be so jolly cocksure, Baggy. Take these pieces of material, and sew them together along the lines I've chalked. See how to do it?"

"Rely on me," said Baggy. "I'll have this overall sewn up in no time!"

And, taking a needle and cotton, Baggy Trimble commenced to sew.

Skimpole plied the scissors with vigour, and hacked at the linen as if his very life depended upon it.

"Steady, you ass!" growled Blake, viewing the first piece that Skimpole had cut out. "Don't make the edges jagged, you know. This one looks as though rats had been chewing it."

"Ye-es, my dear Blake," replied Skimpole meekly. "These scissors are somewhat hard to manipulate. I think they require oiling."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The work of the amateur overall-makers of the School House proceeded merrily.

Snip, snip, snip!

Baggy Trimble stitched away very assiduously.

When he had finished he sat up with a grunt, and surveyed the results of his handiwork with immense satisfaction.

"There you are, Tom Merry," he said. "I reckon that's sewn as well as any tailor could do it. Look!"

Tom Merry looked, and he gasped.

"Why, you ass, you've made the stitches about an inch long!" he exclaimed. "Oh, my hat! The blessed overall will fall to pieces as soon as the chap puts it on!"

"Oh, really, Tom Merry, I don't see—"

"Give it here, you burbling chump!" said Tom Merry. "Lemme see, this overall is for you, Blake, isn't it?"

"It was," replied Blake. "I don't fancy wearing the giddy thing after Trimble's been stitching it."

"Oh, it's all right—the stitches are too long, that's all!" said Tom good-humouredly. "Try it on as it is, Blake, and let Baggy stitch it on you."

"Yes, that's it," said Baggy Trimble. "I'll sew very small stitches this time. Besides, I shall know exactly what to do."

"All right!" said Blake ungraciously. "I shall have to put it on inside out, I suppose. Hand it over!"

Blake put the overall on, kept together by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's giant stitches, and Baggy Trimble again took up needle and cotton.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave him some instruction in the art of sewing seams, and Baggy, grunting, commenced work.

Blake stood up, and contained his soul

in patience, whilst Baggy stitched the overall upon him.

"I'm getting on rippingly now, you fellows!" said Baggy enthusiastically, as he finished the first seam. "It's simple, and—"

"Yow-ow-ow! Yarooooogh!" roared Blake suddenly, and he gave a wild leap into the air. "Oh, you—you clumsy ass! You stuck that needle in me! Yooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. "Now Blake's got the needle!"

"Sorry!" said Baggy. "These little things will happen, you know. Keep still, and I'll go carefully. How do you think I'm getting on, you chaps?"

"Oh, sew-sew!" ginned Monty Lowther. "But don't give Blake the needle again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake lugubriously rubbed that portion of his anatomy where the needle had penetrated, and stood still whilst Baggy proceeded with the stitching.

Skimpole, working upon the cloth, performed manful feats of valour with the scissors.

The other fellows, putting their shoulders to the wheel, "bucked" into the work, and the number of overalls ready for service gradually grew beneath the energetic labours of their hands.

"Buck up with that stitching, Trimble, you chump!" growled Blake impatiently. "Haven't you almost finished?"

"Yes, just about," replied Baggy. "There, that's the last stitch! How does it look, Tom Merry?"

The captain of the Shell surveyed Trimble's work critically.

"H'm!" he remarked. "It looks a bit straggly, but I expect the stitches will hold. Take the merry thing off, Blake!"

"What-ho!" said Blake. "Glad to get rid of it, Tommy. Why, what the dickens— Oh, my giddy aunt! The— the blessed thing's sewn to my clobber!"

"Great pip!"

"Baggy's sewn the overall to Blake's clobber underneath!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake gave a wrench at the overall, but of no avail.

Baggy had sewn it with a vengeance, and made it a fixture.

Breathing with wrath, Jack Blake performed weird and wonderful evolutions in a desperate endeavour to remove the garment from him, but in spite of his struggles, he could not burst the stitches.

Baggy Trimble blinked at Blake in deep dismay.

"Oh crumbs!" he gasped. "I—I say, Blake, won't it come off, really?"

Blake looked at Baggy Trimble with a glare like unto that of a basilisk.

"You—you burbling little cu-koo!" he stuttered. "You dunder-headed jackass! You've sewn this thing on so that it won't come off! Oh, my hat! I—I—I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry, seeing the joke. "Tug away, Blake, old chap—something's sure to go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I'll slaughter that little idiot!" roared Blake sulphurously. "Lemme get at him! I—"

"Yarooooogh!" roared Trimble, as Blake made a dash at him. "Hold him, you fellows! He'll murder me! Yoooooogh!"

Trimble dodged round the table, and Blake, picking up a large ebony ruler, dashed after him.

Round and round the table they went, and Tom Merry & Co. simply went into hysterics.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

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"Help! Fire! Murder!" wailed Trimble, his fat little legs going like clockwork. "Don't let him catch me, you fellows! He— Yaroooooh! Yah! Ow-wow-wow!"

Blake's heavy hand descended upon Baggy's shoulder, and he was whirled off his feet.

Bump!
"Yarooooooop!" screeched Trimble.
"Rescue, St. Jim's! Dragimoff! Yaroooooh!"

"I'll spifflicate you, you—you fat freak!" hissed the incensed Blake, getting Trimble's head into chancery and pommeling away for all he was worth. "Take that—and that—and that!"

"Yooooooh! Yah! Oh crumbs! Yerrugh!"

Tom Merry and the others advanced and dragged Blake away from the howling Trimble.

"Here, steady on, old son!" said Tom Merry. "Nuff's as good as a feast, you know, and Baggy's had rather a dose!"

"Gerrugh!" moaned Trimble, rubbing his head. "He's half murdered me! My backbone is broken, my nose is out of joint, and I shouldn't be surprised if I don't develop concussion of the brain! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kick that little maniac out, before I strew the floor with his bits!" said Blake grimly. "If I could get this confounded overall off I'd make him eat it!"

"Buzz off, Baggy!" said Tom Merry earthily. "You're sacked!"

"Ow! Really, Tom Merry—"

"Get out!" roared Blake, and he advanced menacingly.

Baggy Trimble took the hint.

He dragged the door of the box-room open, and skipped outside with alacrity.

As the door closed behind him, the amateur tailors—with the sole exception of Jack Blake—burst into roars of laughter.

"Shurrup, you giggling chumps!" growled the aggrieved Blake, dragging at the overall Baggy had so effectively sewn to his person. "Stop cackling, and help me get this off!"

Still chuckling, Tom Merry & Co. set to work and relieved Blake of the overall. Then they returned to their work, and spent the rest of the afternoon thus engaged.

By tea-time nearly all the required number of overalls were made. At bedtime Tom Merry & Co., with the help of others, had completed the making up of the linen they had bought, and discovered, much to their satisfaction, that they were enabled to make six more overalls than they had expected.

There were enough overalls to go round, and practically every fellow in the Fourth and Shell had one.

Even Baggy Trimble managed to get an overall, which, being made for a fellow much less plump than himself, was rather a tight fit.

But he was satisfied, and so was everybody else. The members of the St. Jim's Overall Club looked forward to the morning, when they should sally forth in their new raiment, and commence their actual campaign of frightfulness against Mr. Snippe, the school tailor.

CHAPTER 5. On Parade!

"MY goodness!"
Thus Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth Form, as he rustled into the Form-room the next morning.

His startled eyes beheld, upon looking round the Form-room, almost every boy clad in blue overalls instead of the

regulation Eton jacket and wide linen collar.

"Dud-dear me!" gasped Mr. Lathom, peering at his pupils over the rims of his eyeglasses. "Do my eyes deceive me, or—are these lads attired in blue garments which look remarkably like overalls? Blake!"

"Yes, sir?" asked Blake sweetly, standing up.

"What have you—ahem!—got on?"

"An overall, sir!" grinned Blake. "Don't you think it looks topping, sir? It's an improvement over all other garments!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" boomed Mr. Lathom. "Blake, what ever makes you enter the Form-room in that—that ridiculous attire?"

"It's not ridiculous, sir!" replied Blake warmly. "You see, we are protesting—"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, standing up and screwing his monocle into his eye. "Excuse me, Blake, but I had better explain ewythin' to Mr. Lathom. As a fellah of tact and judgment—"

"D'Arcy," rapped Mr. Lathom testily, "sit down!"

"Bai Jove! I—"

"Do you hear me, boy?" exclaimed Mr. Lathom. "I was speaking to Blake, so you will kindly take your seat, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, sir, but—"

"Take a hundred lines, D'Arcy!" snapped Mr. Lathom.

Gussy sat down, his face quite red. The Fourth-Formers chuckled, and Mr. Lathom looked grimly at Blake.

"Now, Blake," he said, "I perceive that almost every lad in this Form is garbed in an overall. What is the explanation of this unprecedented affair?"

"Well, sir," replied Blake cheerfully, "we are protesting against the high price of clobber. The school tailor is profiteering, like the unpatriotic rotter he is, but we are determined not to knuckle under to his yoke, and fling defiance at him by wearing overalls instead of buying new clobber!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Bravo, Blake!"

"Boys, be quiet!" cried Mr. Lathom excitedly. "Blake, this is the most extraordinary affair I have ever heard of! I am—ahem!—in perfect agreement with you that the school tailor has advanced his prices to an excessive figure this term; but I was not aware that any protest on the part of the boys of this school—at any rate, in such an amazing form—was contemplated. Have you the Head's sanction to wear these—er—overalls?"

"No, sir," said Blake. "But I'm sure the Head would not prohibit us from wearing these overalls, if he knew our motives. Nobody with any common-sense would stop us wearing 'em. Don't you agree with me, sir?"

"Ahem!" coughed Mr. Lathom rather confusedly. "Your motive, no doubt, is excellent, but I am not sure whether I ought to allow you to take lessons in overalls—"

"Oh, sir!"

"However," coughed Mr. Lathom, who was a meek and mild little man, "let us proceed with the lesson, and I will discuss the matter with Mr. Railton afterwards. Boys, take up your books!"

The Fourth-Formers chuckled, and took up their books, and the lesson proceeded.

When the bell rang, announcing that lessons for the morning were over, the Fourth Form trooped out of the Form-room and descended to the quadrangle.

Baggy Trimble was proud of his new

apparel. He considered that he looked rather "natty" in his overall, but his opinion might have undergone a drastic change had he been able to see himself as others saw him.

"Hallo, Baggy!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, arriving with his chums, Tom Merry and Manners, dressed, like the Fourth-Formers, in overalls. "Why, you do look a giddy spectacle, and no mistake! Just like a sausage that's grown too big for its skin!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you cackling chumps!" protested Baggy. "You're jealous of my appearance, that's what you are! Mean, I call it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Other members of the Shell and Fourth strolled up, resplendent in nice, neat overalls, and formed a group in the quadrangle.

"All serene, Tommy?" asked Jack Blake. "Lathom made a bit of a fuss at first, but he soon simpered down, and is going to talk matters over with Railton."

"Oh, Linton took it in quite a sporty manner!" said Tom Merry, smiling. "Of course, we staggered him a bit by strolling into the Form-room in overalls, but when we explained the idea to him he was quite all right. I hope to goodness the Head doesn't nip our little wheeze in the bud!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

By this time quite a crowd of other fellows had collected, and they gazed at the overall-clad juniors with wondering eyes.

"My word!" gasped Wally D'Arcy, who was there with a little army of his fellow-fags. "Look at 'em! Aren't they lovely? And just rest your peepers on old Gussy for a tick! My only sainted Aunt Sempronia! I say, Gus, who's your tailor? He's made you look like a navy's dinner tied up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned a red and wrathful countenance towards his minor, and fixed him with a stern eye.

"Weally, Wally, you howwid young wascal," he said severely, "this is not a mattah for wibald mewwiment! It is a sewious affaiih—"

"Jolly serious, I should say!" said Wally. "Why, if one of the officials from Colney Hatch saw you now, Gussy, he'd think you so serious that he'd give you your ticket straight away. Instead of an overall, you'd be wearing a straight waistcoat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gweat Scott! I shall weally have to thwash you for your cheek, young Wally—"

"Rats!" responded D'Arcy minor cheerfully. "Mind your eye, Gussy! Here comes Kildare!"

Eric Kildare, the stalwart captain of St. Jim's, strode up.

He grinned at the sight of the heroes of the Lower School clad in their overalls.

"Well, you've done pretty well so far, I must say, Merry," he said. "Are you doing this with full permission?"

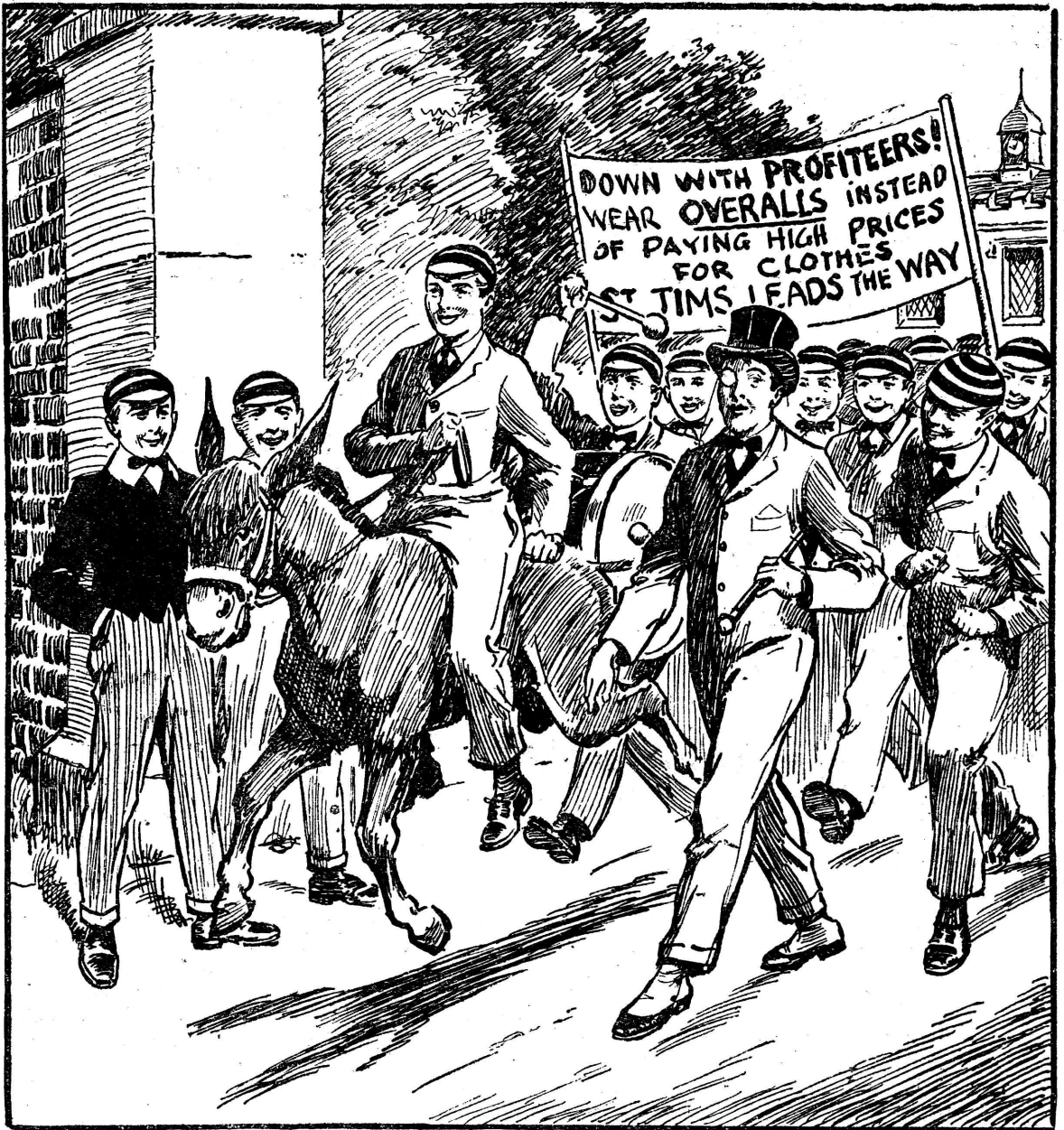
"Ahem!" said Tom Merry. "We— we haven't spoken to the Head about it yet. But Railton approves."

"Oh!" said Kildare. "You'd better see the Head, though. I don't suppose for a moment he'd quite like the idea of you kids going about in overalls. Infra dig, you know!"

"Weally, Kildare, I wefuse to considah it as infwa dig!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It is our dutay, bai Jove! and we're goin' to show the pwofiteahs up like—like anythin'!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I say, Kildare," said Tom Merry, "do you approve of our wheeze?"



Monty Lowther, mounted on a donkey, headed the procession which came streaming out of the school gates. Behind him followed other members of the Overall Club, some bearing banners, others walking four abreast, laughing and cheering. (See chapter 6.)

Kildare smiled good-naturedly.

"Yes, I think it rather good," he said. "But you kids have some cheek, I must say!"

"Oh, Kildare!"

"Well, would you like to do us a good turn, old top?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully. "You know, Kildare, we're rather funky about seeing the Head. He's so—ahem!—he's a little old-fashioned, you know. I wonder whether you'd speak to him first, and clear the way for us?"

Kildare laughed.

"Right-ho, kids!" he said. "I'll see the Head, and pour oil on the waters if I can. I dare say he'll send for you!"

"Oh, thanks, Kildare!" said Tom Merry. "We'll wait here!"

Kildare swung away, and the overall-clad juniors looked at each other and chuckled.

"Kildare will make it all right with the Head," said Jack Blake cheerfully. "He's a sport, and so is Dr. Holmes!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry & Co. amused the spectators in the quadrangle by telling them how the overalls were made, and answering their numerous questions, facetious and otherwise.

Then Curly Gibson announced the approach of Dr. Holmes and Kildare.

Dr. Holmes, the venerable Head of St. Jim's, rustled out from the School House, imposing in cap and gown.

Kildare followed, and the crowd looked expectantly at them.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Head, peering at the strangely-clad juniors.

"Are those the boys, Kildare?"

"Yes, sir," replied Kildare. "The St. Jim's Overall Club they call themselves."

"Dear me!" said Dr. Holmes. "Merry,

I have not given you permission to wear that—that unusual attire within the precincts of this school."

"N-no, sir," said Tom Merry respectfully. "But we—we thought you'd approve of the step we are taking to protest against the high price of clothes. It's a bit too thick, you know—"

"What?"

"Ahem! I—I mean, the price of clothes is much too high, sir," said Tom Merry. "Something really ought to be done to stop the profiteering of our school tailor, and we thought we'd wear overalls rather than pay excessive prices for ordinary school clothes."

"Heah, heah!"

Dr. Holmes polished his eyeglasses thoughtfully.

"Well, my lads," he said, "Mr. Railton has spoken to me upon the subject, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 651.

and Kildare has just mentioned it. I am in full sympathy with you, but—ahem!—I am afraid that the governors of this school would not regard it as befitting for you boys to wear overalls. I will consult the chairman upon the matter, with the view of coming to arrangements with the school tailor to lower his prices. Until then, my lads, you may wear the overalls you have made.”

“Oh, thank you, sir!”

“How ripping!”

The Head glanced kindly at the overall-clad juniors, and then he strode indoors.

Tom Merry & Co. grinned gleefully at each other.

“Good old Head!” chuckled Monty Lowther. “He’s a sport, and no mistake! So he’s going to see the chairman of the Board of Governors—the giddy Grand Mogul of the Ranch—and then perhaps old Snippe will cut down his prices. But we’ve got permish to wear these merry overalls, so, chaps, let us be joyful!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“You bounders!” said Figgins of the New House, who, with his henchmen, Kerr and Wynn, had been an interested spectator. “You’ve got hold of a nifty wheeze this time, haven’t you?”

“You bet!” chuckled Jack Blake. “This is one over the New House now, Figgins. Always rely on the School House for ideas. We are the brain merchants, and all others are spurious imitations!”

“Rats!”

And Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn strolled away, feeling rather out of it.

“Well, chaps,” said Tom Merry.

“We’re going to make a good thing of this, I guess. Not only have we school fellows got to pay through the nose for clobber, but the people in the village, too, are charged high prices for clothes. Let’s have a demonstration in Rylcombe outside Snippe’s shop to-morrow afternoon. Shall us?”

“Let’s!” said Monty Lowther heartily. “We’ll wake the old village, and teach the inhabitants to pull their socks up and fight the clothing profiteers!”

“Hear, hear!”

“Good idea!” said Blake. “We’ll put the kybosh on that tailor. Old Snippe is the biggest twister in the village, and we’ll show him up—eh?”

“What-ho!”

The idea was voted an excellent one, and the members of the Overall Club departed, discussing to-morrow’s demonstration, which they would hold outside Mr. Snippe’s shop, in Rylcombe High Street.

CHAPTER 6.

Victory!

BANG, bang, bang!

“My heye!” exclaimed Taggles, the St. Jim’s school porter, looking up in amazement. “Wot the—”

“Go it, ye cripples!”

“Three cheers for the Overall Brigade! Hip, hip—”

“Hurrah!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Such were the cries that greeted Taggles’ startled ears the following afternoon, and caused him to jump to his feet and hasten to the door of his little lodge.

Taggles peered forth, and beheld a spectacle such as he had never seen before in the whole course of his chequered career as porter at St. Jim’s.

He saw a procession of schoolboys, clad in overalls, surrounded by a laughing,

cheering crowd of boys in regulation Etons.

Monty Lowther, mounted upon a donkey, headed the procession. Behind him came Arthur Augustus D’Arcy, presenting a truly wonderful appearance in a glistening top-hat, an overall, and patent boots, with spats.

Behind Gussy walked Tom Merry and Jack Blake, bearing between them a huge banner, upon which were inscribed these words in huge characters:

**“DOWN WITH THE PROFITEERS!
WEAR OVERALLS INSTEAD OF
PAYING HIGH PRICES!
ST. JIM’S LEADS THE WAY!”**

Then came Robert Arthur Digby, beating a large drum, followed by George Herries, who was blowing lustily upon his cornet, and making a most horrible din between them.

Then followed the other members of the St. Jim’s Overall Club, resplendent in their overalls, some bearing banners, others merely walking two abreast, laughing and cheering. Baggy Trimble had a comb and paper, which he blew with all the lung-power he could summon.

“Hi, say, you young rips!” cried Taggles, as the procession bore down the drive and came towards the gates. Wot’s the meanin’ of these goings hon? Wot I says is this ’ere—”

“Yah! Wear an overall, old sport!” cried Monty Lowther from the donkey’s back. “Out of the way, or I’ll run you down!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Tom Merry & Co. were doing things in earnest. Neddy, the donkey, belonging to Farmer Hennesey, had been borrowed for the occasion, and Monty Lowther had elected to ride him.

The other members of the Overall Club had entered into the idea with enthusiasm, and formed a procession which was to invade the streets of Rylcombe, and, as Monty Lowther expressed it, “wake up the inhabitants, and show them how St. Jim’s could do things!”

Taggles stepped back hastily as Lowther guided Neddy towards him, and the procession left St. Jim’s, and moved down the Rylcombe Lane, to the sound of the drum, cornet, and comb and paper, and many voices raised in lusty tones.

“Well, chaps,” said Tom Merry chuckling, “we’ll hold a meeting in the village, and explain to the villagers the joys of wearing overalls—eh?”

“Yaas, wathah!” said Arthur Augustus D’Arcy. “I have pwepared a wippin’ speech, and— Gwoooogh! Hewwies, you feahful boundah, pway wefwain fwom blowin’ that howwid cornet! The noise deafens me, bai Jove!”

“Rats!” gasped Herries, and once again he applied his lips to his cornet, and blew long and lustily.

He awoke the echoes with stentorian noise.

“Cheese it, Herries, old scout!” said Tom Merry. “We’re not Sinn Feiners, you know. And go steady with that merry drum, Digby. You’ll burst it in a minute!”

“Never!” panted Digby. “I’ll drown old Herries’ rotten cornet or perish in the attempt!”

Bang, bang, bang!

“Groooogh! Stop it, you maniacs!”

The procession moved forward on the uneven tenor of its way, and at last gained the streets of Rylcombe village.

The villagers, attracted by the noise and the banners, and by the overalls of

the schoolboys, followed the procession, wondering mightily, and highly amused.

Monty Lowther guided his classic steed up the High Street, and outside the shop of Mr. Benjamin Snippe the procession halted.

“Good!” said Tom Merry. “Give a tootle on the cornet, Herries, and then ring off.”

Tar-ar-oom-toot-toot!

“Gentlemen of Rylcombe village,” called Tom Merry, mounting upon the drum, “we have come here this afternoon to protest—”

“Weally, Tom Mewwy,” exclaimed Arthur Augustus D’Arcy indignantly. “I pwopose to set the ball wollin’ by delivewin’ my speech—”

“Go and drown your speech, Gussy!” said Tom Merry. “Gentlemen—”

“Look here, Tom Mewwy, as a fellah of tact and judgment, I insist—”

“Dry up, Gussy!” snapped the hero of the Shell. “Gentlemen, we have come here this afternoon—”

“Wats!” cried Gussy warmly. “My deah fwienids, pway don’t listen to that fwabjous chump! I beg to address to you a few words, and have pleasuah in sayin’— Yawwoooogh!”

Gussy’s tone of voice as he uttered that weird expression belied his pleasure. Jack Blake and Manners grasped him and pulled him back, struggling desperately.

“Leggo, you feahful boundahs!” cried Gussy. “I insist on delivewin’ my speech— Yow-ow! Blake, you howwid wuffian—”

“Shurrup, Gussy!” said Blake severely. “Tom Merry’s going to do the jawing at first. You’re dead in this act—see?”

“I wefuse to be dead in this act!” exclaimed D’Arcy hoily. “I demand a heawin’, bai Jove! Tom Mewwy, get off that dwum, and allow me to address the audience. I am a fellah of tact and judgment, and my speech, which I pwepaiahed last night, explains the mattah weally well. It will only take me half an hour to delivah—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Look here, Gussy, just you keep off the grass!” said Monty Lowther, looking down from the donkey’s back. “You can’t expect to give a jawbone solo for half an hour—human nature couldn’t stand it. Just hold your row, and let Tommy get on with the washing!”

“Look heah, I— Yawwoogh!”

Gussy, still struggling and protesting, was rushed to the back of the crowd, and Tom Merry, standing upon the drum, was left to continue his speech.

“Gentlemen—”

“Hear, hear!”

“I have come here this afternoon, supported by my schoolfellows of St. Jim’s, to protest against the high prices of clothes—”

“Haw, haw, haw!”

“It’s no laughing matter,” said Tom Merry severely. “We have profiteers on every side of us, dunning us through thick and thin. Everything is going up, and we of St. Jim’s are up—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Up in arms against old Snippe in the High Street here, whose prices for clothes are more than we can stand.”

“Then sit down, laddie!” yelled a wag in the crowd.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Order, order!”

“On the bawl, Tommy!”

Tom Merry gesticulated wildly, and raised his voice in loud tones, in order to make himself heard.

“We’ve decided not to buy new clothes this summer, but wear overalls instead, and show Snippe that we can be

independent!" roared the captain of the Shell. "Look at our overalls—we made 'em ourselves! We're going to boycott old Snippe, and—"

"You little rascals! Clear away from my shop this instant!"

It was the harsh, snappy voice of Mr. Benjamin Snippe, the tailor. He was a short, plump little man, with a very red face and fiery eyes.

He strode out of his shop and gazed upon the schoolboys in deep wrath.

"Go away immediately, you saucy little imps!" he roared, waving his arms furiously. "I'll have you locked up. and—"

"Rats!" bawled Monty Lowther. "You ought to be locked up for charging twelve guineas for a suit!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Down with the profiteers!"

"Hooray!"

Mr. Snippe strode out into the middle of Rylcombe High Street, fairly boiling with wrath. Tom Merry & Co. cheered, and Herries blared forth upon his cornet, to give added effect.

The incensed little tailor stalked up to Tom Merry, and shook his fist up at that cheery youth.

"You are the ringleader of this—this disgraceful disturbance!" he cried. "I've never been more insulted in all my life! I'll tell your master of this—"

"Yah! Go indoors and lower your prices!"

"We're out to squash you, by gum!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Mr. Snippe choked.

Pandemonium seemed to have broken loose in the old High Street of Rylcombe.

In vain did Tom Merry endeavour to make himself heard. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy raised his voice in loud tones, but in the tumult his voice was simply drowned.

"Get away from my shop!" howled the tailor, going over to the donkey and pushing it. "Drive this animal off, and all of you follow it! You'll ruin my trade, and— Yarooogh!"

Neddy, the donkey, evidently did not like being pushed, and he showed his displeasure by reaching out his hind legs and kicking Mr. Snippe with such force in the region of his waistcoat that the excited little tailor was sent staggering backwards, to collapse with a loud bump and a howl upon the hard cobblestones of the High Street.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the St. Jim's juniors.

"Haw, haw, haw!" guffawed the villagers, immensely amused.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, that's weally too funny!"

Mr. Snippe jumped to his feet, and, glaring round upon the assembled deputation, he dashed into his shop, uttering inaudible remarks which might have shocked the schoolboys' ears had they heard them.

"Good old Neddy!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "You protested in a very striking way, didn't you? Ha, ha, ha! I say, chaps, there's old Snippe at the window now!"

"Great Scott!"

The red and wrathful countenance of the village tailor appeared at a window above his shop.

"Yah!" hooted the demonstrators below. "Who's a profiteer? Who's going to be dished, diddled, and done?"

"You young rascals—"

"Weally, my deah sir," cried D'Arcy, looking up through his monocle at the tailor, "we are actin' in a vevy wight and pwopah spiwit. We cosidath that you charge far too much for clobber, and— Oh, bai Jove! Gwoooogh! Yerrugh!"

Gussy broke off as a deluge of water swept down from above.

Mr. Snippe had brought a jug of water to the window, and he had flung it downwards.

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had caught that torrent of wetness full upon him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the onlookers.

"Oh, deah! Gwoooogh!" gasped Gussy.

"You feahful wuffian, I'll give you a thwashin' if you come down heah! Gug, gug! I'm wet, and feel most howwid— Gwoooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you go away?" roared the tailor. "I've plenty more water up here, if you don't!"

"Honk, honk, honk!"

"Out of the way, chaps!" cried Monty Lowther. "Here comes a motor-car!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Honk, honk!"

A two-seater car pushed its way through the crowd, and the tall, rosy-faced gentleman who was driving gazed upon the scene in great astonishment.

"Why, bless my soul!" he exclaimed.

"What is the meaning of this? St. Jim's boys—clad in overalls, by Jupiter!"

Tom Merry & Co. stood back, and regarded the gentleman in the car wonderingly.

"I say," whispered Ernest Levison to Blake, "I believe he is Lord Wickham, chairman of the Board of Governors of our school!"

"Whew!"

Lord Wickham—for it was he—stopped his car, and beckoned to Tom Merry, who was still standing on the drum.

"Will you explain what this means, my lad?" he asked. "Why are you boys wearing overalls?"

"As a protest against Snippe, the tailor, sir," spoke up Tom Merry readily. "He's our school tailor, and thinks he can charge us what he likes for our clothes. But we have decided not to pay what he demands, and have made these overalls, and intend to wear them, until he climbs down and lowers his prices."

"Heah, heah!"

A chorus of enthusiastic cries arose, and Herries tootled merrily on his cornet. Baggy Trimble blew loud and lustily upon his comb and paper, until he was seized by Clifton Dane and suppressed.

"Well, bless my soul!" said Lord Wickham, glancing round upon the boys, and then looking at Mr. Snippe, who had

left his upper window and had come down to the front door of his shop. "You lads are taking things into your own hands, and no mistake! Begad, I could laugh at you! You say you made those overalls yourselves?"

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "And we look wathah wippin' in them—don't you think so, deah boy—I—I mean, sir?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lord Wickham chuckled.

"Look here!" snapped Mr. Snippe, striding forward and glaring truculently at Lord Wickham. "This is no business of yours, sir, so I'll thank you not to interfere. Those boys shall be reported to their schoolmaster for creating a disturbance outside my shop, and casting aspersions upon my good name and professional reputation, and—"

"Sir," thundered Lord Wickham, his bluff face becoming stern, "are you aware that you are addressing the chairman of the Board of Directors of St. James' School?"

Mr. Snippe stepped back, overcome with astonishment, and his eyes opened wide.

"You—you are the chairman—" he stammered.

"Yes, sir," said Lord Wickham severely. "I heard from Dr. Holmes yesterday that some trouble had been caused at the school as a consequence of the school tailor having advanced his charges to an excessive figure, and I motored over this afternoon to see what can be done in the matter. Unfortunately, some tailors are among the worst type of profiteers, and I perfectly agree with these lads in giving vent to their natural indignation in this way."

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, sir!"

"I—I—I—" stammered Mr. Benjamin Snippe. "I'm sorry, sir, but I—I do not intend to profiteer. I have just had to pay greatly increased charges for my cloth—"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Lord Wickham. "I am personally connected with the Bradford woollen manufacturers who supply you with cloth, and yesterday looked up your account. I found that six months ago you were supplied with a large consignment of material at a price which is almost thirty per cent. below present-day prices. Therefore your statement is false, and I am in a position to prove that you are still using old stocks and charging prices which, even for present stocks, are excessive and unjustified."

"Oh, the rotter!"

"That's shown him up properly!"

Mr. Snippe's face went almost green.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"You boulder, Snippe! Now, what have you to say for yourself?"

The village tailor did not utter a word. "Well, my lads," said Lord Wickham, glancing round amusedly, "as it turns out, you are quite justified in protesting as you did, and you have done so in a very effective manner. But I cannot sanction the use of overalls as the regular apparel by the boys of St. Jim's. Arrangements will, however, be made with the tailor to supply clothes at reasonable prices, so it will not—ahem!—be necessary for you to wear overalls in future."

"Good egg!"

"Return to your school, my lads," said Lord Wickham genially. "It is best that no further disturbance should take place in the village here. You may rest assured that your protest has borne the fruits of success, and that in future you

(Continued on page 18.)

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CHAPTER 1.

Bottom Boy of the Transitus!

"HALLO, Kid! I've just been thinking about you!"

The Kid was strolling aimlessly across the main court at Katie's when Duff of the Transitus called out and lounged gracefully towards him.

Then he linked his arm through the Kid's and led him gently along.

"I've been wanting to have a heart-to-heart talk with you, Kid," he said. "I want advice—and help. And you're the man who can do it!"

"My giddy aunt!" the Kid gasped, and stared up into the Duffer's smiling face. "What d'you take me for, Duffer? Do I look like a society for the guidance of the young, or what? Is it five bob, Duffer? Because, if so, that sudden thinking attack of yours hasn't done you a bit of good! You've struck—"

"We'll wander down towards the river," the Duffer said calmly. "It's a terrific secret, of course; but I know you can be a jolly old oyster on a stunt of this sort. But I'll explain the whole business to you presently!"

By this time the Kid was getting interested in the Duffer and his great thoughts.

Of course, it was a little bit unfortunate for the Duffer that his parents' name was Duff. The late Mr. Shakespeare once remarked something about "What's in a name?" But if his name had been Duff he'd have got christened Duffer just the same as Jacky Duff was.

Whether this had anything to do with it or not I don't know, but it is a solemn fact that from the moment Duff entered the F.F.P., otherwise the First Form Preparatory, and commonly called Prep at Katie's, he had been the bottom boy of the Form.

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The Head wrote to Duff's father about it, and Duff senior came down post-haste. You could see he was Duff's father, because he had the same permanently fixed smile at the end of his lips, and the same queer little twinkle in his eyes, and he was a big, well-built man, and his jaw stuck out just as the Duffer's did.

There was nothing secret about that conversation, because the Head has told it to quite a lot of people. He explained again quite clearly to Mr. Duff that his son had been at the bottom of the Form for a solid year, and that the calmly-considered opinion of the masters was that he had made no effort to alter it. It was a sheer waste of time for young Duff to remain at St. Katherine's unless he made up his mind to work, and that he, Mr. Bird, would be doing less than his duty if he did not point out to Mr. Duff—and so on.

Then Mr. Duff talked. Exactly how he put it the Head himself can never quite remember, but it was something about the Duffs always having been duffers, and that every school had to have its duffers, and it was quite a good thing really when they were such decent-looking duffers as the Duffs were.

He also pointed out that there was bound to be a bottom boy in every Form, and it would be very useful if Mr. Bird had a sort of standard to go by.

That sort of talk left the Head helpless. He had ceased to worry about the Duffer. For a good many terms since then Jacky Duff had successfully remained at the bottom of every Form he had been in.

It was obvious that, when he left the Fourth, the only Form for him was the Transitus. At that time they really were a prize collection in the Trans, and under Mr. Sammy Steed the Form broke all

previous records for slackness and laziness and made its greatest reputation. It was, you will remember, at this stage that the Head brought in Mr. Roger Blunt.

Roger concentrated on the Duffer. He refused to believe that he was a duffer, and he covered him with gentle sarcasm. Then he tried kindness and patience. Failing with these, he brought out his heavy guns and prepared to pulverise the Duffer.

When he'd poured out quarts of bitterness over him, when he'd scorned him and threatened him, big Jacky Duff still smiled, and his eyes still twinkled.

"Don't grin at me, sir!" stormed Roger. Of course, it was all done for effect, but you really would have thought Roger was frightfully angry. "Will you stop smiling, sir? Stop it instantly!"

"I'm very sorry, sir," the Duffer said, in a gentle, plaintive sort of way. "It's the way my face is made—I'm not really smiling, sir. I hope it doesn't annoy you, sir?"

Roger collapsed at that. He did it gracefully and in his well-known manner, of course, but the Duffer remained at the bottom of the Transitus—and smiled.

Nor did the Duffer shine in the athletic world, except when it came to leading the cheers for Katie's or for the Trans at footer or cricket or on the towing-path. Normally his voice was a gentle, tired affair, but on these special occasions he could put on a very good imitation of a steamship's siren on a foggy night at sea.

His amusements, too, were totally different from any other fellow's. Sometimes he dragged other chaps in with him; but after you'd been nearly blown to bits by a patent motor-boat which the Duffer had partly bought and partly made, or been stranded miles away from

Dulchester in a car whose ownership was complicated, you began to feel a bit doubtful about the Duffer's ideas on pleasure.

So when he strolled up to the Kid and began to talk about a secret, Dickie Dexter made a pretty average sort of guess as to what was coming.

"Now," said the Kid, when they had chosen a secluded spot in the copse above the river-bank, "what's the scheme this time, Duffer? You haven't bought a second-hand aeroplane—or what about that giddy motor-bike someone told me about? I'm getting old and a bit weary of the monotony of things, but I don't want to die yet. I'm only pointing this out to you—"

"Of course, Kid!" The Duffer was slowly twisting a piece of copper wire round his fingers. "I quite understand how you feel; but this is different. This is a job that will appeal to you. Romance, adventure—love! I'll tell the story, and you'll be interested!"

"Go on!" said the Kid weakly. "I've never told you about my brother, have I?" the Duffer began slowly. "He's a lot older than I am, and he's—he's the finest chap you ever met, Kid! He's been all over the world, and discovered no end of gold-mines and things of that sort."

"That's rather jolly," said the Kid; "Does he bring them back with him?"

"No," The Duffer ignored the sarcasm. "He does it for the company, and he's one of their pet engineers. He was going to get married quite a long time ago, but it had to be put off because of the war and things of that sort. And then old Quin—that's Sylvia's father—made about twenty fortunes all at once. He's a double-barrelled millionaire these days, is old Quin."

"Quin?" The Kid began to think about the name. "Isn't that the chap who's been living at Hartford Towers, and put the park out of bounds to us?"

"That's the fellow!" the Duffer cried. "Anyhow, now he's got this money he warns old Jimmy off, and Sylvia's going to marry a duke, or something like that—so old Quin says. But Jimmy says she isn't, and Sylvia says she isn't, and it's a pretty fierce mix-up, with all the family keeping their little eyes on Sylvia so that she can't wander out and meet old Jimmy, even if he could come and live in Hartford Woods, which of course he can't. And that's where you and I come in, Kid!"

"I?" The Kid stared at the Duffer. "What on earth have I got to do with it? You're not suggesting—"

"I saw Sylvia yesterday afternoon," the Duffer went on, taking not the slightest notice of Dexter's interruption. "We've fixed it all up. I'll tell you how it comes about."

He explained, and the Kid listened, but the more he heard the more he became convinced that the Duffer was several kinds of a prize idiot. Jimmy Duff was in London, forty or fifty miles away, and Sylvia repined at Hartford Towers, but they managed to communicate with each other from time to time.

In the end they had come to the conclusion that the only way out of their difficulty was for Sylvia to bolt.

"So to-night—this very night, Kid—you and I are going to see Sylvia off the premises, and we're collecting all the luggage she's been able to smuggle out, and then we're taking her up to London to an aunt of hers who knows all about it. I've got the car—it's a little beauty, Kid, and— Of course, you needn't come to London if you don't want; but we might as well have a decent night of it. We're not letting Jimmy know until she's there, because he's the

sort of chap who'd rather die than let Sylvia have any worry; but her aunt knows all about it, and I've wired her this morning to let her know we're coming, and ought to be there about one or two o'clock in the morning. We won't have to stay there long, and then we'll slip back, put the bus up, and get into Katie's again—and there you are!"

He would never have had a chance to make such a long speech if the Kid hadn't been dazed in the very beginning. In his time Richard Dexter had done quite a number of foolish stunts, but never, never had he struck anything quite so hopelessly mad as this.

Slowly he rose, and looked at the Duffer sorrowfully.

"You're coming?" asked the Duffer gently.

"Oh, of course!" said the Kid in his double-concentrated, extra-strong, sarcastic tone of voice. "Just mention it to the Beak and Roger. They'll be so pleased! Or are we going to file through the bars of the dormy windows? Just as you like, Duffer. I shall be there—but not to-night, Duffer! It's Wednesday, and they say it's very unlucky to get the sack from Katie's on a Thursday morning! Good-bye-ee!"

And the Kid began to wander away. He liked to hear of new stunts, but this sort of wild nightmare merely bored him!

CHAPTER 2.

A Night of Adventure!

OF course, anybody with one-fiftieth grain of common-sense in his make-up would agree with the Kid. The idea which the Duffer had got tucked away under his cap was the sort of thing that—well, it simply isn't done!

The Duffer called out to the Kid as he began to stroll away, and ambled slowly after him.

"I've got the whole thing mapped out, Kid," he said calmly. "But if you think there's any flaw—let's have it!"

Straightaway the Kid let him have it. He gave him in quick succession fifty different flaws. It was simply impossible for anyone in Katie's to get out at night and come back about five in the morning without being discovered. It was a dead certainty. Further, it was an equally solemn and certain fact that on the morrow they would get the order of the boot from Katie's.

"But I often go out," the Duffer said plaintively. "I went up to London and saw Jimmy a week ago. And—well, it's the only chance I get of trying out the bus. There's nothing in it, Kid."

Have you ever had that funny, sinking sort of feeling that comes when you've told a yarn about a thrilling experience you had in dodging a chicken when riding a bike, and, having impressed the stranger with your coolness and bravery, you discover he's a V.C. airman who's had fifty really hair-breadth escapes?

At first, of course, the Kid thought that the Duffer was merely lying, and hadn't got the knack of putting on the proper gilt-edging to make them sound real. Then, inside an hour, he learned that it was the plain, unvarnished truth. It left the Kid a little dazed and weak, and he began to see the Duffer in a new light.

"I mean to say, Kid," said the Duffer, as they stood in the garage in Dulchester and saw the car which partly belonged to the Duffer—or would do when he'd paid all the instalments—"you're not really interested in that stuff Jolly Roger dishes out? It never worries me, of course. My brother Jim

always told me to stick to the bottom of the Form, and then you're safe. They don't worry you then, and nobody gets jealous. You'll come to-night?"

"How are you going to get out?" asked the Kid. "The bars across the windows—"

"I always go by that fire-escape," said the Duffer. "You know the one I mean? The door's got big patent bars on it, and I've oiled them once or twice, so that they won't creak when I open it."

The Kid did know, but to the best of his knowledge the curious locking arrangement had never been unfastened since the door was put in. The sheer, blinding audacity of the Duffer in using this means of getting out left him gasping!

They walked back to the school, and again the Duffer put his question.

"I'll come!" said the Kid, and drew in his breath quickly.

"I thought you would," the Duffer said calmly. "That's why I fixed on you. You're not the sort to funk a bit of excitement. You want to leave your bed so that anybody who happens to come in will think you're buried away quite snug and cosy. I'll show you the idea."

He did. His knowledge impressed Dexter.

"Be at the dormitory door at ten-thirty," whispered the Duffer, as they went up to bed that night. "Carry your boots. Going to be a jolly night!"

At half-past ten the Kid had crept cautiously from his cot, and on hands and knees sought the dormy door. He was fully dressed, but without a cap, and his bed had been left arranged in the fashion patented by the Duffer.

Jacky Duff was already waiting for him, and led the way quietly and cautiously along several corridors. He had some sort of a spanner, with which he operated the bar-locks on the emergency escape door.

"Close it when we come back," he whispered to the Kid, as he gently drew the door to after him.

After that it was child's play. By eleven o'clock they were at the garage in Dulchester, and the man in charge didn't seem in the least surprised to see the Duffer. He helped him into a big leather coat and handed him a furry cap, and after that the Kid was nearly lost in similar garments.

Even now he didn't really believe they were going on this hare-brained stunt. But the Duffer was a different fellow somehow. He talked to the man at the garage as an old friend, and played about with the inside works of the little car as though he loved it.

"We're having a pretty long run to-night, Bill," he said cheerily to the man. "Probably be close on four before we get back again."

He climbed into the two-seater, and bade the Kid to follow him. A few minutes later they were speeding through the darkened streets of Dulchester and away on to the open road.

"This is the game, Kid!" the Duffer yelled out, and Dexter began to laugh joyously.

It really was something to make you sit up and wonder. The Duffer sat at the wheel, and the Kid had the feeling that he knew all about the car, and that nothing could possibly go wrong.

But the game was only just beginning. After they had gone about four miles the car slowed down, and Duff ran it on to the grass at the side of the road.

"Hop out, Kid!" he commanded. "Here's where I want your help."

"Why?" asked the Kid. "Something gone wrong?"

"No fear!" Duff laughed. "But I've got to go and find out various packages, because Sylvia's bound to take some luggage with her. She's smuggled 'em out one by one, but I know where they are. You'll have to go and find Sylvia."

"My hat!" gasped the Kid. "How on earth—"

"We can crawl through the hedge all right here," the Duffer went on. "You go to the right until you strike the drive. Keep to the left then, and don't make any noise. But here's a pocket-lamp. Just flash that now and again, and you'll find Sylvia all right. Come on!"

He pushed a pocket electric-lamp into the Kid's hand, then dived into what seemed to be an impenetrable, thick-set hedge. Dexter followed, and, somehow, found himself on the other side and in the wood.

"That way, Kid. We'll all meet at the car." The Duffer gave him a gentle push, and then he seemed to be lost in the blackness.

Now, Richard Dexter had just about as much pluck in him as any two normal chaps at St. Katie's. But when it came to being dumpee in the middle of a black wood somewhere about half-past eleven at night, you'll admit it was time to draw the line.

"This is the giddy limit!" the Kid told himself. "Where do I go? Right into I strike the drive, and then left till I find Sylvia. What a life!"

Nevertheless, he followed instructions, and presently he was in the drive, where the going was easier. Once or twice he flashed his lamp.

Then, suddenly, a lamp flashed in his face, and he felt someone grip him. Just for an instant Dickie had visions of all manner of terrible things. You do get queer ideas, under such circumstances.

"You've come, you dear boy!" someone whispered. "You're Jacky's friend, Dexter, aren't you? He's brought the car? Isn't he splendid!"

"My hat!" gasped the kid. "I mean, you're Sylvia, aren't you—Miss Quin? I'm Dexter. We get back to the car now. The Duffer—old Duff, you know—he'll be there."

Now that he had really found Sylvia Quin, the Kid's spirits began to rise again. The journey back to the car was something like a real adventure. If you were leading some unknown lady through a dark forest with the aid of a small pocket-torch, and knew all the time that you ought to be asleep in Dormitory C at St. Katie's, wouldn't you feel a bit of a giddy adventurer?

There was no sign of the Duffer when, after a bit of a struggle, they managed to break through the hedge near the car. In the light of the lamps on the car the Kid looked more carefully at Sylvia Quin.

She was dressed in a big fur coat, and a little fur hat was on her head, but her face was quite clear and white in the powerful lights. And she really did look a jolly sort of a girl. She smiled at Dickie, and didn't seem to have the least touch of fear or doubt, and that made the Kid feel that he would go through with the game at all costs.

"Jacky's looking for my parcels, I suppose," she said gently. "Isn't he a splendid boy? He really thought out all this scheme. Of course, I could go up to London by train, but that wouldn't give dad the shock he needs. But Jacky will have told you. Here he comes!"

Through the hedge came the big, hefty, leather-coated form of the Duffer, his arms grasping two or three parcels and a small leather case.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 551.

"Got them all right, Sylvia!" he said triumphantly. "I knew Dexter would bring you along all right. He's the only chap in the school who would be any use on a job of this sort. The rest of 'em are just infants."

It was very queer to hear the Duffer talking in this strain, because although everybody had an idea that he wasn't quite such a hopeless dud as the class-lists made out, yet it was generally recognised that he was a little bit slow and dense in the place where Roger said they kept their grey matter.

The Duffer was not stowing away the parcels; then he went to the back and got out the dicky-seat and fixed everything up.

"You don't want to be dropped in Dulchester, do you?" he said to the Kid. "You'll be quite comfortable here, and it's a topping night for a ride. You're coming, Kid?"

"Of course!" said the Kid. Even if he'd felt a tremor of doubt he wouldn't have dropped out of the show now for worlds.

He clambered up into the seat at the back, and in a very short time the Duffer was at the wheel again, and Sylvia Quin was sitting in the seat the Kid had occupied on the journey out here.

"Hurrah for the open road!" the Duffer called out to Dexter, as the car began to move off the grass and on to the broad highway again.

That ride was one of the finest things the Kid remembered. At the wheel the Duffer was singing in a deep, crooning sort of voice, which floated back to the Kid, who, presently, found himself joining in.

"Oh, who will o'er the downs so free?
Oh, who will with me ride?"

And the Kid thought it was a ripping song, and yelled it out just for the sheer joy of the thing.

Through little villages and on and on until they came to where the villages all seemed to join together, and then they struck the tram-lines. The Kid never worried now about the things that had troubled him earlier on; such questions as to whether the Duffer knew the way, or what would happen if anything went wrong with the car were completely forgotten.

"We're in Kensington," the Duffer turned round for a moment to call to the Kid, who hadn't the remotest idea where they were.

They turned shortly after that, and ran along various odd streets at a much slower pace.

Presently they were barely crawling along, and the Duffer was evidently waiting for the order to stop from Sylvia Quin.

They pulled up in front of a tall house where a light was still burning in the hall. Sylvia Quin jumped out and ran up the steps of the house almost immediately.

"Jump down, Dexter!" the Duffer commanded, as he stepped to the ground. "We won't stay long, but we've done the job. I'll bet Jimmy will be pleased when he knows!"

Just as Dexter jumped to the ground, a big man came dashing out of the house.

"Hallo, Jacky, you young scoundrel!" he laughed, and began to shake the Duffer's hand.

"Why, Jimmie," gasped the Duffer, "I thought you didn't know—"

"I didn't, until to-night," retorted the older edition of the Duffer. "Come on inside! This is your chum? How are you?"

He was nearly shaking the Kid's hand off, and in a sort of a whirlwind the Kid

and the Duffer were swept into the house.

There was an elderly lady here, and, of course, like all elderly ladies that the Kid had ever met, she had to call the Kid a "dear, sweet boy," but apart from that she seemed a jolly sensible sort.

"You're two of the best and bravest boys I've met!" she told the Kid, and that bucked him up considerably, even though he didn't quite see why she should call him that. "We could never have done it but for you and Jacky. And it had to be done this way, or else my brother Alfred, Sylvia's father, would never get a proper shock. He's a very hard-hearted man, but this will soften it a great deal."

Then Jimmie Duff came to the Kid, and he said very much the same thing, only he had to explain that he really knew nothing at all about the stunt until to-night.

"Still, I think it will work all right," he said cheerfully. "Jacky's told you the idea, of course? It will give old Quin a sixty horse-power shock when he wakens up to-morrow and hears that Sylvia has run away. He'll think the worst has happened, and will get frightfully excited, and by the time he finds out that Sylvia simply motored to London and is staying with her aunt—well, he'll be jolly glad to let us get married, and everything in the garden will be lovely! You'll come to the wedding, of course?"

"I—I don't know," the Kid murmured.

"Oh, you will!" said the elder Duff. "You're both coming, aren't you, Jacky?"

"Of course!" said the Duffer. "I've arranged all that with Sylvia. She'll explain to you. But we'd better quit now, because they are frightfully particular about the hours we keep at Katie's—aren't they, Dexter?"

They finished their coffee and sandwiches, and shook hands with everybody and made all sorts of wild promises. Then everybody came to the door to see them off, and Dexter climbed up by the side of the Duffer again.

"Right ahead for Dulchester and Katie's!" the Duffer cried, and the machine moved forward. "It's better than lying asleep, this is, Kid. But it's often struck me—wouldn't old Jolly Roger have a shock if he really knew as much as he thinks he knows!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Scorn of Jolly Roger!

JUST for a few moments after they started on the return journey the Kid had a vague, uneasy feeling rumbling round in his mind.

It was the Duffer's remark about Jolly Roger which did it. The Kid had had more than his fair share of Roger's attention, and he knew that the Form-master of the Transitus had an uncanny knack of finding out things which he ought not to find out.

He mentioned this sad thought to the Duffer as they sped along.

"Yes, of course," the Duffer agreed. "I've often felt sorry for you, Kid. You don't have a chance to get as much fun as you deserve."

"My hat!" said the Kid. "Why do you say that, Duffer?"

It came as something of a surprise to him to find that the Duffer was feeling sorry for him. The Kid's own impression was that when it came to fun he got as much of it as most fellows at Katie's.

"Everybody knows you," the Duffer said, as they swung round a corner.

"Every time you move Roger begins to puzzle that mighty intellect of his and wonder what game you're up to, and if you wink an eyelid he's on you like a shot. Me—he never worries about me any more than Sammy Steed did. They just hope for the best and leave me alone. What do you think would happen if you got a share in a motor-car, and went for giddy night-rides?"

"It would be me for the high jump!" the Kid answered.

"Of course! Roger would nab you straight away. But you'll be all right to-night; and you've been jolly useful, Kid. I'm glad you came!"

"So am I," agreed the Kid, and fell to wondering.

It was a ripping run back, and dawn was just beginning to break as the Duffer ran the car into the garage in Dulchester. They took off their great-coats and their furry caps, and, after the Duffer had settled one or two minor details with the man in charge of the night department, they wandered forth.

Not a soul saw them as they climbed up the iron stairs which were tucked away in an out-of-the-way corner at Katie's.

Carefully the Duffer worked the barlocks again with the spanner he carried.

"Just in nice time," he whispered to the Kid. "I've run it finer than this once or twice, but old Blott and his gang of cleaners are on the war-path pretty early these mornings, you know."

Cautiously they crept back to their dormitories.

"Cheerio!" whispered the Duffer, as they reached Dormitory C. "Straight to bed! See you in an hour or two!"

Everyone was sound asleep in the Kid's dormy, and he slipped into bed in a few minutes. For a time he had no desire to sleep, but presently he dozed, and the next thing that happened was Bill Strong commanding him to rise.

He struggled up, but it was a slightly dazed Kid who went into the Transitus Form-room that morning.

But Roger was smiling and full of vim. Right at the end of the lowest desk in the Transitus sat the Duffer, and his smile was also fixed and bright as ever.

"Ready! Three points to a line!" rapped out Roger. "First question!"

Away they went in the well-known brain-brightening way that Jolly Roger loved. It left the Kid gasping, because last night he had been so amused at the calm cheek of the Duffer that he had never worried to swot up this morning's work.

"Finish! Collect the papers!" called out Roger; and as the Kid handed his in he realised that Roger would get a mild shock, anyway, when he saw his performance!

He also glanced down to where the Duffer sat, but the glad, calm smile of perfect content still rested on the face of the bottom boy of the Transitus.

They paid a visit to Mr. Gladridge for a pleasant hour's mathematics during the morning, but came back to their Form-room for the last hour.

As usual, Roger had wasted no time in marking their efforts of the early morning.

"Ah, Strong! Still a little weak in dates, Strong! Concentrate on dates, my boy. Seven out of ten. Bunting! A good paper, Bunting. Dobbin! You lose a point by an unfortunate slip, Dobbin; otherwise an excellent paper. Ah!"

He paused. The smile died on his face. His lips went into a straight, hard line, and he looked round the Form in a way they knew full well. Someone was going to get it hot and strong. You could feel it coming.

"Ah! Dexter!" Jolly Roger rapped out the name fiercely, and he held out a quarter sheet of foolscap as though it were some loathsome reptile. "Two marks out of ten, Dexter! Two! Eight answers hopelessly wrong! Eight wrong—two correct! What does it mean, sir?"

He blazed the last question out, and glared at the Kid just as though he meant to jump on him and pound him to pieces. At times such as these it was better to say nothing.

Roger raked Dexter fore and aft, pulverised him, squashed him, and held over him the most terrible threats.

"On this occasion I will be lenient with you, Dexter!" he said, towards the end of his fireworks display. "You will remain in this Form-room for the whole of the afternoon, and I myself will test you most thoroughly. Two marks! You will get ten before you have finished, Dexter! To-morrow—if you get below five marks to-morrow, Dexter, you will spend five afternoons in the class-room. You understand me, Dexter?"

"Yes, sir," said Dexter feebly, and took the terrible quarter of foolscap which had upset Roger so frightfully. The Kid felt crushed.

Roger passed on to others—quickly. He spoke quite calmly and gently to them all. No other fellow had outraged his feelings and insulted his intelligence as Dexter had done.

"And yours, Duff," said Roger, with a kind, playful little smile. "You are not progressing very rapidly, Duff. One mark! You must really try to do a little better than that, Duff!"

"Yes, sir," said the Duffer, and smiled a shade more brightly than usual.

But when they filed out after morning school the Duffer lounged alongside the Kid.

"Gee-whiz, Kid!" he whispered. "You nearly made a mess of things, didn't you? You ought to have been more careful!"

The Kid stared at him, amazed at his check.

"How many marks did you get?" he demanded.

The Duffer smiled. "But I'm different, Kid," he said gently. "I'm at the bottom of the Form, and the rust has settled, but you're a bright little lad, and if you start slacking Roger begins to wonder what the game is. Still, it passed off all right, only I'm sorry you're booked for this afternoon, because I'm going for another little run—far away from Roger's eagle eye."

In Study No. 10 both Bill Strong and Curtis slanged the Kid. What did he want to start acting the giddy goat for again with old Roger? It only meant he'd be down on the study and watch everything they did. It wasn't quite playing the game with them!

"There were one or two others only got two!" retorted the Kid. "And one fellow I know only got one!"

"The Duffer!" retorted Bill Strong. "But—My hat, kid! He never does anything! We've got one or two little ideas that we want to work without Roger getting wind of them, and you're giving the show away! And you're comparing yourself with the Duffer!"

"I'm not," said the Kid sadly. "He's got the afternoon off, and I'm going to spend a giddy two hours in hard swotting! That's just the difference. I'm not a Duffer!"

THE END.

(Another grand story of the chums of St. Katie's next week, entitled, "THE DANDY'S PROFESSION!" Order your copy EARLY!)

The Editor's Chat.

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

Next Wednesday's Attractions:

The title of our next grand story of the famous chums of St. Jim's is

"THE TYRANT TAMERS!"

By Martin Clifford,

in which the Third Form, led by Wally D'Arcy, declare war upon Mr. Selby, under whose tyrannical rule they have suffered so long.

As may be guessed, incident is plentiful in this lively yarn, which all my chums will greatly enjoy.

The next story of St. Katie's is called

"THE DANDY'S PROFESSION!"

By Michael Poole,

and it is one of those fascinating stories which have caused this famous series to jump into world-wide popularity. Dickie Dexter and Dobbin are the principals, together with a new friend whom they meet under peculiar circumstances.

There will also be an extra long instalment of the adventures of

"A NEW CHUM IN AUSTRALIA!"

By "Cooee,"

and many interesting contributions, paid for at the rate of half-a-crown each in

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

BEING GOOD COMPANY.

I have many letters from chums who say they do not feel at ease in company. I suppose this is simply self-consciousness. There is no need for sympathy in these cases. All the natural shyness and diffidence will vanish directly there is something which interests the victim to nerves. Then he shows himself as the fellow he really is, and he proves far better company than the over-confident individual who fancies that he shines when he is mixing with his fellows.

SHOWING OFF.

It is amusing to read of the desperate efforts made by the intellectual dandies of the bygone to win fame as tellers of good stories, and so forth. It was all so intensely artificial. The man who meant to make an impression looked up in a commonplace book a few tales he thought might prove suitable before he went out to dinner. Then he fired off his anecdotes one after another, monopolising the attention of everybody, and, it is more than likely, making himself a frightful bore.

CROWDED OUT!

The further adventures of the New Chum in Australia have been crowded out of our pages this week, but a further instalment will appear next Wednesday.

Your Editor

THE ST. JIM'S OVERALL CLUB.

(Continued from page 13).

will not be charged excessively for your school clothes."

"Bai Jove, that's weally wippin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, quite forgetting the drenching he had received in his enthusiasm. "We've won the day, so we may well congratulate ouahselves, deah boys. Let's give three cheahs for Lord Wickham. Hip-hip-hip—"

"Hurrah!" Lord Wickham smiled good-humouredly, and restarted his car.

Cheers arose for him as the two-seater moved swiftly down the High Street towards St. Jim's.

Mr. Snippe, looking extremely discomfited and humiliated, retired into the depths of his shop to hide his diminished head and brood upon his lot.

"I say, you chaps!" bleated Baggy Trimble, rolling forward. "What shall we do with these overalls? It's a shame to waste 'em. Let's sell 'em, and have a ripping feed with the money. I reckon that's a good wheeze, and I shall be only too pleased to superintend the arrangements for the feed. Hand me over the money, you know, and I'll buy the grub, and— Oh, is that you, Teddy? What do you want?"

Teddy Trimble of the Third, the sturdy minor of Baggy, strode forward.

There was a grim look upon the fag's plump face, and his eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

"You little worm, Baggy!" he said wrathfully. "I've had a letter from the pater this afternoon, telling me how you tried to do him out of eight quid. He's tumbled to your game, and wants me to settle with you, and I am trying to!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble went pale.

"I—I say, Teddy, old chap," he said nervously, "hold on a minute! What did dad say?"

Teddy Trimble snorted in deep disgust.

"You sent him on an old tailor's bill for him to pay, making out you'd bought a new rig-out!" he said scornfully. "But dad wasn't so green as you took him to be, and discovered that you'd altered the date on the bill. Besides, you don't think he'd trust you with eight quid, do you?"

"I—I—I—"

"He's asked me to settle with you, and I'm going to give you a jolly good licking!" said Trimble minor grimly.

"Baggy, you awful spoofer, put up your fists!"

Baggy Trimble backed hastily away as his minor advanced, pushing back his cuffs.

"I say, pax, Teddy!" he cried. "I didn't mean anything. I— Ow-ow! Yaroooooh!"

Thud!

Teddy's fist landed upon Baggy's nose with a resounding thud, and the fat youth of the Fourth emitted a piercing wail of anguish.

"Yerrrugh!" he roared. "Rescue, Fourth! Dragimoff, you chaps! Ooooooch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"Serves you right, Baggy; and if your minor doesn't give you a licking we shall! Pile in, Teddy!"

"Give your major socks, young 'un!"

Teddy "piled in" to Baggy, and proceeded to give him socks in a very liberal manner. He drove Baggy round and round, landing blows upon him that made him howl. Then Teddy grasped his major, got his head into chancery, and proceeded to pommel him heartily.

Not until his arm ached did Teddy Trimble cease to punish his major. By that time he was breathless, and Baggy was quite limp.

"Bravo, kid!" said Jack Blake, slapping Trimble minor heartily on the back.

"Baggy deserved a licking for that rotten trick on your pater, and you've given it to him properly."

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" moaned Baggy Trimble pathetically. "If it wasn't for a pain in my back, Teddy, I'd have murdered you— Oooogh! I'll pay you out for taking a mean advantage of me! Call yourself a brother? Yah!"

And Baggy Trimble, looking—and feeling—very much the worse for wear, staggered away, the seams of his overall split as a result of his encounter with his younger brother.

Teddy Trimble grinned, and also walked away, to join Wally D'Arcy & Co. at the other side of the road.

"Well, chaps," said Tom Merry chuckling, "I think we'd better liquidate the St. Jim's Overall Club. The best thing to do with these giddy overalls is to give 'em to the Cottage Hospital. I expect they'd find some use for them."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That's a toppin' ideah, Tom Mewwy. Our Ovevall Club has been a success, and, although wathah short-lived, we've had some fun while it lasted—haven't we, deah boys?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Back to St. Jim's, boys!" said Tom Merry. "Monty, old chap, I should get off that donkey if I were you. He's getting a bit restive, and you might share the same fate as old Baggy Trimble—your brother might go for you, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In high feather, the procession returned to St. Jim's, accompanied by Herries' cornet and the loud beating of the drum.

That evening a notice appeared on the notice-board, written in the Head's neat handwriting, to the effect that arrangements had been made with the school tailor to supply clothes at reasonable prices, and that no boy must appear in overalls in the future, as Lord Wickham did not deem the dress becoming.

Tom Merry & Co. read this notice quite cheerfully. They had succeeded in their protest, and therefore had cause to congratulate themselves upon the good results of the St. Jim's Overall Club.

THE END.

(Another grand, long, story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled: "THE TYRANT TAMERS!" by Martin Clifford. Avoid disappointment by ordering your copy EARLY.)

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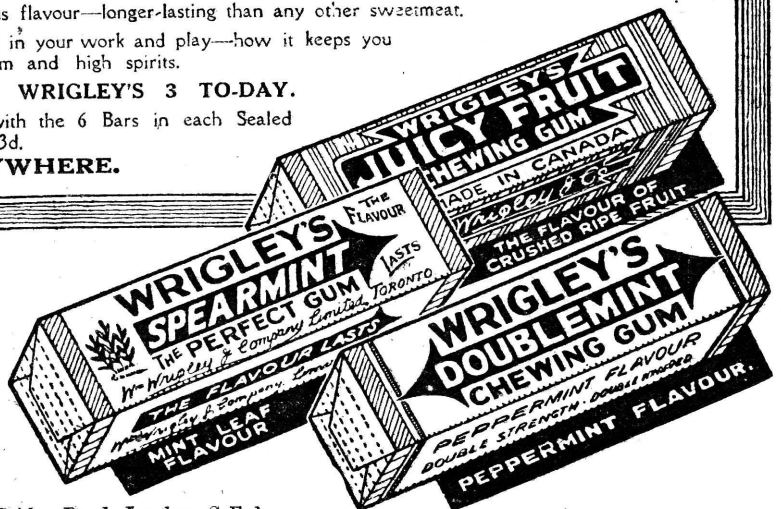
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